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Greece plans anti-terror law

By Kerin Hope in Athens

Greece's justice minister, Michalis Stathopoulos, yesterday presented an anti-terrorism law to parliament that introduces DNA testing for suspects, witness protection schemes and plea-bargaining.

The long-awaited legislation comes in response to EU and British pressure over Greece's poor record on fighting terrorism and organised crime. A stormy debate in parliament is likely, as hard-left deputies in the governing Panhellenic Socialist Movement claim some of the bill's articles violate civil liberties.

The law will help ease fears that Greece may not be doing enough to ensure security measures at the Athens Olympics in 2004 are up to international standards.

But it is specifically aimed at helping police arrest and convict members of November 17, a leftwing Greek

group that has claimed responsibility for more than 20 political assassinations since 1975. None of its members has been arrested.

The group said it was responsible for the killing last year of Brigadier Stephen Saunders, military attaché at the British embassy in Athens, as he was driving to work. The killing shocked Greek public opinion, but there has been little response to appeals by Brig Saunders' widow for witnesses to come forward.

Witnesses of terrorist attacks have claimed they were intimidated by threatening telephone calls. Judicial officials have also been threatened, according to justice ministry officials.

Western analysts said the law appeared broadly in line with anti-terrorism legislation elsewhere in the EU. It also permits electronic surveillance of suspects and provides for holding trials without a jury.