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Greek bombing raises fears of EU diplomats

Athens accused of dragging its feet on security

Michael Howard in Athens

European Union diplomats in Athens complained vesterday that the Greek authorities are stalling on requests for security changes to protect embassy employees, made in the wake of the murder of Brigadier Stephen Saunders.

The delays are doing little to rorism ahead of the 2004 Olympic Games in the capital.

Greece has long been regarded as a weak link in the international fight against terror- been a frequent target for the ism. But foreign diplomats in group, which espouses an ex-Athens have become increas- plosive mix of Marxism and exingly nervous since Sunday treme nationalism. night, when a remote-controlled bomb injured Vassilios have also borne attacks by Greek number plates, which Michaloliakos, a rightwing other, less lethal, anti-western would make their vehicles less til arrests are made, no amount member of parliament.

No group or person has

explosion, which left the op- businesses are regularly the position MP with facial and target of firebombs; the Italian chest injuries. But police were embassy has had eight cars set yesterday investigating the alight in the past two years. possibility that it was the work European diplomats cite of November 17, the elusive ter- "bureaucratic foot-dragging" rorist group responsible for and "a lack of attention" by the the Greek government's politthe murder of Saunders, the Greek authorities in dealing British military attache in with their safety concerns. Athens, on June 8.

There have been no arrests spell of bombings, rocket attacks and shootings by the November 17 group, which has killed 22 people and injured more than 100.

The murder of Saunders on political violence and ter- prompting western and European embassies to begin an urgent review of their security measures.

or anarchist fringe groups.

claimed responsibility for the those belonging to western guidelines on extra police the fight against terrorists.

The British embassy, for example, is pressing for the nor firm leads during a 25-year relaxation of rules which limit the number of armour-plated cars permitted for personal protection; the car that Saunders was driving when he was murdered was not reinforced.

The Greek government alassuage growing doubts about sent a shock-wave through the lows one armoured car for Greece's ability to crack down diplomatic community here, every three diplomatic staff. Britain is thought to have asked for an extra three cars to add to their pool. Foreign embassies in London, by contrast, Diplomats in Athens have are allowed one armoured car for each diplomat.

Other embassies, including those of Germany, Belgium and Italy, have been frustrated by Foreign missions, however, the progress of applications for Diplomatic vehicles and plexed by the lack of clear them that Athens is winning

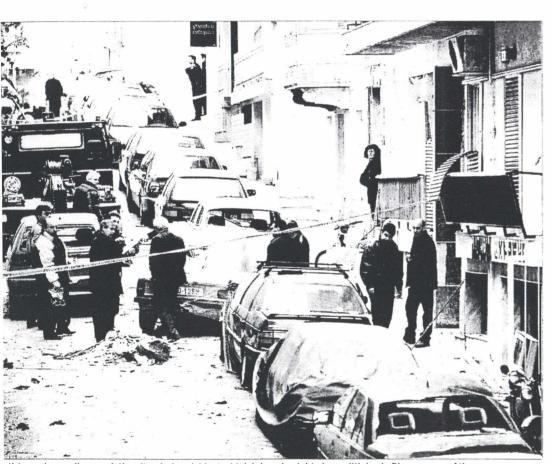
guards for senior embassy staff

"It does not give a good message," one EU diplomat said. "Security and safety is supposed to be the government's top priority. We don't doubt ical will to fight terrorism, but they don't seem to be able to get their notorious bureaucracy moving. And that could be very dangerous for us."

Another European diplomat complained about Greek double standards. After the arrest of the Kurdish rebel leader. Abdullah Ocalan, in February 1999, Greek embassies in several European capitals were stormed by angry Kurds.

"Following that, we did everything we could to enhance the security around Greek embassies," he said. "But that helpfulness doesn't seem to have been reciprocated."

The Greek government has promised that a new law to fight terrorism will go before parliament next month. But anxious diplomats say that unof a target. They are also per- of legislating will convince



nti-terrorism police comb the site of a bomb blast which injured a rightwing politician in Piraeus, near Athens