

F-T 14-15/12/02 p. 2

Greece and Turkey under pressure on Cyprus

By Judy Dempsey in
Copenhagen and
Leyla Boulton in Ankara

Diplomats were last night piling the pressure on Greece and Turkey to resume talks over the divided island of Cyprus despite a failure to clinch a deal at the European Union's Copenhagen summit.

Alfaro de Soto, the United Nations special envoy to Cyprus, as well as British and US diplomats, spent yesterday in the Danish capital shuttling between Greek and Turkish diplomats.

Diplomats said they were determined to restart talks, possibly as early as next week.

During the summit, Greek and Turkish Cypriots had failed to issue any agreement in principle over the UN plan drawn up by Kofi Annan, UN secretary-general.

Diplomats said Turkey had failed to apply sufficient pressure on Rauf Denktash, Turkish Cypriot leader, who is in Ankara, where he has been under medical observation following heart surgery.

They added the onus was

on Recep Tayyip Erdogan's governing Justice and Development party to restart the talks and deliver a deal over the island.

Turkey had earlier hinted it would clinch a deal over Cyprus at the summit provided it had received a firm and early date for starting EU accession negotiations.

Having failed to secure an early date - EU leaders will meet in December 2004 to review Turkey's implementation of the EU's Copenhagen reform criteria - hopes of a Cyprus deal this weekend evaporated.

In Ankara, the government, business community and the media moved to present the EU offer as something that Turkey could live with.

"The government is busy feeling resigned and trying not to see this as a disaster for Turkey or a political failure for them," observed a senior western diplomat in Ankara.

Mr Erdogan, whose ban from politics was yesterday lifted by parliament, clearing the way for him to become prime minister, had previously dismissed as unacceptable

a Franco-German proposal for talks to start in 2005 after a review in 2004.

However, mainstream pro-EU media were on balance inclined to agree that the date - albeit later than that sought by the government to prevent its EU bid being tied to 10 new entrants who join on May 1 2004 - marked a step forward. "Turks are very good at depicting their success as failure," said Yalim Eralp, a retired ambassador and TV commentator.

For some Turks, the more disappointing result of

Copenhagen was the failure of Turkish Cypriots to sign the preamble of the UN plan for reuniting Cyprus.

Mr Erdogan, meanwhile, has managed to turn disappointment over the later-than-expected "date for a date" to start accession talks into success, persuading Turkish public opinion that the EU date was very positive. He also started moving on the stalled EU's European Security and Defence Policy, close to lifting Ankara's long veto over giving the EU access to Nato's assets and planning.