

13/12/02 KATHY MURPHY

Cyprus in final push for accession

UN envoy will conduct shuttle diplomacy as long as necessary on sidelines of EU summit

The leaders of EU member states and candidate countries yesterday kicked off a series of meetings in Copenhagen that will determine Europe's future. Aside from the crucial last-minute negotiations preceding the expected invitation to 10 new members (including Cyprus), the summit is the scene of intensive diplomacy aimed at reuniting Cyprus and giving Turkey a date for the start of its own accession talks.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had shelved plans to fly to Copenhagen, diplomatic sources at the United Nations told reporters, after Turkish Cypriots said that no deal would be reached on the basis of his proposal for Cyprus. Annan's envoy for Cyprus, Alvaro de Soto, was involved in intensive shuttle diplomacy at Copenhagen. "I hope to shuttle until the last moment, whenever

that is," he said after a meeting with Cyprus President Glafcos Clerides.

Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis was pessimistic regarding a deal. "The situation indicates that we will probably not reach a solution to the Cyprus problem here in Copenhagen," he told a news conference. But Foreign Minister George Papandreou held out some hope. "It may need some more time," he said. "If not now then in a few weeks."

Greece's three aims, Simitis said, are to ensure Cyprus's unconditional EU accession, a deal aimed at solving the island's division, and the granting of a date for the start of Turkey's EU accession talks. The first mission appeared to be going smoothly, but Greek officials were still wary in case some country tried to tie Cyprus's accession to its prior solution. Turkey's EU accession

hopes appeared to be stumbling on the unrealistic demand by Ankara that accession talks begin within 2003, when major EU countries like Germany and France had suggested 2005 on condition that Turkey meets the necessary criteria.

Simitis held what he called "a very friendly discussion" with Turkish Prime Minister Abdullah Gul and ruling party leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The main items of discussion were Cyprus and a date for Turkey. "I repeated to the Turkish prime minister that it is necessary for the political problem of Cyprus to be solved... This is a truly serious problem in relations between Turkey and Greece and between Turkey and Europe." Gul responded, "Let us enter the house of the EU and when we are inside all problems will be solved automatically."

At his later news conference, Simitis said the Cyprus issue could not wait for its solution until Turkey joined the EU. But Turkish-Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş, in hospital in Ankara, repeated the Turkish demand, saying Cyprus should join the EU when Turkey does. His representative, Tahsin Ertugruloglu, was due in Denmark later yesterday. Leaving Ankara, the Turkish-Cypriot official had said, "In our opinion there is not a document ready to be signed. The document in front of us has not been negotiated by the Turkish- and Greek-Cypriot sides."

Cyprus President Glafcos Clerides, however, reportedly told de Soto, "I am here, I have come and I am ready. I said I accept the text as a basis for negotiations. What has the other side done?" Clerides met with Simitis yesterday and also with

Britain's Cyprus envoy, Lord David Hannay. The US envoy for Cyprus, Thomas Weston, was also adding his weight to the effort. "Although there remain unsettled issues in the proposal on the table (and) there remain significant differences of view between the parties involved, the possibilities remain very good" for a settlement, he said. "Do I believe it's possible? Yes."

De Soto, too, said he hoped a deal could be reached. "I do devoutly hope so, but the ball is still in the air, the game is still on. I think on the substance we should be quite close, within striking distance," he said. "But decisions are required and they are difficult ones... In order to grab the opportunity, an agreement is needed before the EU takes enlargement decisions. That way, a reunified Cyprus can go into the EU."

Turks insist on 2003 talks

Turkey's insistence on being given a date for the start of accession talks in 2003 showed that it set its prior expectations so high that it could only be disappointed today. Even Greece's push for a date in 2004 (rather than 2005 as France and Germany propose), could not satisfy Ankara. "Greece has a very positive attitude toward the need for ties between the EU and Turkey," PM Costas Simitis said after his meeting with Turkish PM Abdullah Gul. "The Turkish government has taken good, positive steps in the past few weeks with regard to the Copenhagen criteria... So we believe negotiations can begin within 2004." He added that the Cyprus problem must be solved. Gul repeated his demand "for a fixed date in 2003."

Insistent US lobbying for Turkey drew criticism. "I often say that America is very generous in offering Turkey membership in the EU, but America is not yet a member," EU External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten said. (Page 2)



PM Costas Simitis (c), his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul (l) and Turkey's ruling party leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan (r), are swamped by reporters after a 90-minute meeting that Simitis described as "very friendly." They discussed a date for Turkey's EU accession talks and efforts to reunify Cyprus. "Let us enter the house of the EU and when we are inside all problems will be solved automatically," Gul said.