

Greek premier quits and calls snap election

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IN ATHENS

GREECE'S socialist prime minister, Costas Simitis, announced his resignation yesterday and called a snap election in two months' time.

The decisions pave the way for George Papandreou, his

popular foreign minister, to replace him to boost their party's flagging support.

Mr Simitis will remain in the post until the vote but is expected to nominate his successor as leader of the ruling Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok) at a meeting of its central committee today.

Pasok is currently trailing in the polls to the conservative New Democracy movement.

Mr Papandreou, 51, son of Andreas Papandreou, the maverick prime minister who died in 1996, is the sole candidate to replace Mr Simitis.

His accession to the post would mark a continuation of

a dynasty that has been of vital significance in Greek politics for 60 years.

His grandfather, who was also named George, was prime minister in the 1940s.

Thanks to his relaxed, diplomatic style, Mr Papandreou has made a success of improving relations with neighbour-

ing Turkey after centuries of tension.

Mr Simitis, 67, who was a co-founder of Pasok with Andreas Papandreou, said his decision was necessary to ensure that "the work of modernising Greece and its convergence with the European Union" continued.