

France Backs Greece in Macedonia Row

14 March 2008 Brussels _ French President Nicolas Sarkozy has confirmed he backs Greece in the row over Macedonia's name.

On the margins of the European Union summit, Sarkozy said it was "the right impression" to conclude that that Paris is on Greek side in the "name" dispute.

He also confirmed the issue is always raised during various meetings with Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis.

"I always stressed that we support the Greek position in the name issue. Greeks are our friends," Sarkozy said.

"I am confirming to you that we are in solidarity with the position of our Greek friends," the French president said.

Athens objects Skopje's use of its constitutional name, "Republic of Macedonia" saying it implies Skopje's territorial claims over Greece's own Northern Province of Macedonia.

Greece has vowed to veto Macedonia's bid to join NATO at the alliance's Bucharest Summit at the beginning of April if a solution is not found.

Meanwhile, the European Commission expressed its worry that Macedonia's government crisis might affect the pace of EU reforms in the country.

Late on Thursday, the Democratic Party of Albanians, the key partner in the centre-right government coalition lead by VMRO DPMNE, confirmed that it is withdrawing from the government.

"We expect the government to remain focused on the EU reform process. We believe that this is a moment when all parties need to put aside party interests, and work in a spirit of consensus and engage in continued dialogue in order to ensure success in reform processes," said Krisztina Nagy, spokeswoman for the EU's Enlargement Commissioner, Olli Rehn.



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