

GREEK PRIME MINISTER IN HISTORIC TURKISH TRIP

Istanbul, 23rd January 2008 - Costas Karamanlis, Greek Prime Minister, has arrived in Turkey in the first official visit there by leader of Greece for almost five decades.

Karamanlis has made informal trips to Turkey in the past, but this is the first official visit by a Greek Prime Minister in almost 50 years, as the last official visit to Turkey by a Greek leader was made in 1959. The trip's symbolic importance is clear.

Before departing Athens, Karamanlis told reporters he would reiterate Greece's support for Turkey's membership in the European Union, and said it was the right time to take action to boost bilateral relations.



The landmark three-day visit is being seen by both sides as an important step towards improving relations.

Those include the status of the divided island of Cyprus, and territorial disputes in, and over, the Aegean which brought the two countries to the brink of war just over a decade ago.

Though some disagreements remain, the two countries have stepped up economic co-operation recently, as the opening of a joint gas pipeline, and economic ties are likely to feature high on the agenda of this visit.

The key sticking point for bilateral relations remains the divided island of Cyprus.

While in theory, the two countries have established a dialogue on these matters, in practice, that dialogue is frozen.

There is some hope Mr Karamanlis' visit may breathe life into that process.