

Pending trade war worries European Community



BRUSSELS, Belgium (AP) — European Community negotiators said Wednesday they will meet with their U.S. counterparts within a week to try to avert a trade war that could damage struggling economies on both sides of the Atlantic.

The announcement signaled the 12-nation bloc has at least temporarily bridged differences over dealing with U.S. demands for further cuts in subsidies paid to EC farmers. Britain, Germany and others have urged compromise, while France has pressed for retaliation.

The Bush administration has given the EC until Dec. 5 to resolve the dispute or face import taxes on \$300 million worth of European products, mostly French white wines. The United States and other nations argue the subsidies keep European farm prices unfairly low in world markets.

Community leaders say they will respond with punitive duties on a similar amount of U.S. goods. That might bring further action by the United States and trig-

ger a tariff war that would cut sales of goods from both sides and could affect thousands of jobs.

Although farm lobbies are strong in most of the European Community nations, particularly in France, influential British and German industrial groups, which fear a trade war would further slow economies, apparently had the last word.

"What the world economic situation requires at the moment is calm discussion and not saber-rattling," said British Prime Minister John Major, who currently holds the community's rotating presidency.

"There is an urgent need to come to terms with the Americans," said EC spokesman Nico Wegter. "There is a very good reason to believe ... that a deal can be made," he added.

But there was no sign the EC had changed its bargaining position of resisting going beyond the subsidy cuts adopted last spring.

However, officials said chances for an agreement improved after EC Farm Commissioner Ray MacSharry agreed to resume his role in the negotiations.

MacSharry, an Irishman, quit last week and accused EC Commission President, Jacques Delors, of interfering to protect French interests. Delors, a French Socialist, has appeared conciliatory in recent days.

Germany also seemed to pressure France into a more accommodating position, raising the specter of a loss of trade if no deal can be made.

"If we withdraw into Fortress Europe and the Americans withdraw into the United States, that would be an idiotic form of politics," German Chancellor Helmut Kohl said Wednesday after a meeting with Major.

MacSharry and EC Trade Commissioner, Frans Andriessen, hope to meet soon with their U.S. counterparts, Agriculture Secretary, Edward Madigan and Trade Representative, Carla Hills.

The meeting could come as early as this weekend, but most likely will be early next week, officials said. EC agriculture ministers, traditionally the toughest in refusing concession on subsidies to their 9 million farmers, are to meet in Brussels next week.

Mexicans protest election fraud

MATAMOROS, Mexico (AP) — Angry protesters on Wednesday sacked and burned the state electoral commission office in this border city after guards beat demonstrators protesting alleged vote fraud.

Opposition party leaders were trying to enter the building when they were

pushed back by truncheon-wielding guards, said Isidro Canales, who witnessed the confrontation.

The demonstrators became enraged after a woman was badly beaten, witnesses said. Ignoring tear gas, they attacked the building and set fire to it.

Opposition supporters,

who started a sit-in Tuesday in the city hall across the Rio Grande from Brownsville, Texas, said they would continue to protest until the results of Sunday's election in Tamaulipas state were declared fraudulent.

"This is only the beginning," said opposition supporter Alejandro Blaz.

Police posts bombed

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — The government blamed leftist rebels for bombings that killed one person and wounded more than 30, and said Wednesday that it might offer large rewards for the capture of guerrilla leaders.

President Cesar Gaviria's administration already has promised \$1.4 million for information leading to the arrest of drug lord Pablo Escobar.

The national police chief, Gen. Miguel Gomez, said rebels set the nine bombs that went off at police posts Tuesday and Wednesday — eight of them in Medellin. He suggested two rebel groups may be working with the Medellin cocaine cartel.

The bomb in the southern city of Cali during rush hour Wednesday morning injured about 25 people, three seriously.

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