

## U.S. Wants Sarkozy to Keep 'Open Mind' on Turkey, Official Says

By Celestine Bohlen

May 16 (Bloomberg) -- U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte said the U.S. wants French President Nicolas Sarkozy to keep "an open mind" on Turkish membership in the European Union.

Sarkozy, who was inaugurated today, opposes EU membership for Turkey, saying the country is in "Asia Minor" and not Europe. EU talks on Turkey's entry bid have stalled because of its ban on trade with Cyprus, an EU member.

Negroponte, speaking today in Paris, said the U.S. supports Turkey's entry into the 27-member EU because it would benefit stability in Turkey and the region.

"We know that President Sarkozy has taken a contrary view," Negroponte told a gathering of executives and government officials. "We would simply hope that in the weeks and months ahead, France would keep an open mind and consider discussing this issue with us and others."

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday that Europe should reject the "prejudice" against his mainly Muslim country by politicians like Sarkozy. Ending talks would require a unanimous decision by EU leaders, EU foreign-policy chief Javier Solana said on May 7.

In prepared remarks before a meeting of the French-American Foundation in Paris, Negroponte also said the U.S. was looking for lasting commitments from allies in Afghanistan.

The new French president raised questions about France's military commitment to a NATO force in Afghanistan, saying in the campaign that their presence wasn't open-ended. That comment as the U.S. was pressing NATO allies to increase troops in Afghanistan.

"It is important that all of the allies, including France, recognize the importance of staying in Afghanistan as one unit," he said, adding that commanders on the ground shouldn't be bound by "caveats" that limit their ability to send troops outside of prescribed sectors. France now has 1,000 troops in Kabul, the Afghan capital.

Negroponte later said his remarks were not intended as a hint to the new French government. "My understanding is that we have solidarity between us on Afghanistan."

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