



EUROPEAN UNION URGES ASPIRANTS TO REBUFF U.S. ON WORLD COURT

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 13 — The European Union this week warned the 13 nations hoping to join the organization that they should resist signing any agreement, as requested by Washington, that would protect Americans from the reach of the new International Criminal Court.

That brought strong reactions from Washington today; a senior State Department official accused the European Union of using undue pressure to prevent countries from signing.

"We're not applying any pressure on countries to sign these agreements, and we don't think it is appropriate for the European Union to prevent other countries from signing them," John R. Bolton, under secretary for arms control and international security, said in an interview.

A senior European Union official, Romano Prodi, advised the aspirants for membership — including Poland, Hungary, Slovenia and Cyprus — to wait until the union reached a common policy on the issue, a European Union spokesman said today. The first meetings to discuss the American request for bilateral side agreements will be held later this month and in early September, but indications from Europe do not present an optimistic picture for Washington.

The Bush administration vigorously opposes cooperation with the court, fearing Americans will be unfairly singled out. Under an agreement reached with the United Nations in the spring, personnel of United Nations missions, including American peacekeepers, are exempted from court jurisdiction for a year. The administration is campaigning to persuade most countries to sign agreements not to extradite Americans to the court.

So far only Israel and Romania have signed. Today Switzerland said it would not sign, the first nation to formally reject an agreement. The Swiss foreign minister, Joseph Deiss, said his country refused to sign out of fear that "too extensive a use of exceptions may weaken the ability of the court to function effectively."

European Union nations and other close allies have said they refuse to be pushed into an immediate agreement. "We're not raising the profile on this issue; it is the United States," a European Union spokesman said here today, confirming that potential members had been approached. "We must study the legal implications."

The European warning to the candidate states was first reported today in The Washington Times.

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell appealed today to foreign governments to agree to those waivers and played down complaints from countries about the United States warning that it would withhold military aid to nations that refused. "We are not bludgeoning or threatening any of our friends," he said.

International human rights experts said the Europeans were stalling. "This is a smart move by the E.U. because there is greater safety in numbers should they decide not to accede to American wishes," said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch.

To Harold Hongju Koh, a law professor at Yale and an assistant secretary of state in the Clinton administration, this diplomatic sparring has come at an inopportune time in the effort against terrorism. "The first priority should be maintaining a coalition," he said. "Instead, the administration is creating a huge political issue with our closest political allies over a small legal problem."

A senior administration official said he believed that the European allies would eventually give Americans the waivers they request. "The reaction in Congress if they don't agree will not be good," he said.