

EU DEMANDS MOROCCO END TAKEOVER

Brussels, July 16, 2002

The administrative body of the European Union warned Morocco that its relationship with the bloc would suffer if it does not bring its occupation of Spain's Perejil island to a "quick diplomatic solution."

"Obviously, we support our Spanish friends. This concerns EU territory," European Commission spokesman Jonathan Faull said, using tougher language than last week

The EU has shown Spain "unwavering support," Faull added.

"We're doing everything to restore international legality," Spanish PM AZNAR told Parliament at the beginning of his state of the nation address. But he added that "Spain will not accept such fait accompli acts."

He said it was imperative that "the status quo prior to the occupation is restored." He added that the occupation only "made relations worse."

On Sunday, in a brief but emphatic communique, Denmark, which currently occupies the EU's rotating presidency, expressed its "full" support for Spain in the Perejil crisis and called on Morocco to withdraw its small security force from the islet "immediately."

In Brussels, Spanish Agriculture Minister Miguel Arias Cañete said the incident could hurt negotiations of an agricultural accord between the EU and Morocco.

In a telephone conversation on Saturday, European Commission President Romano Prodi conveyed to Moroccan Prime Minister Abderrahmane Youssoufi the EU's "grave concern" over the Perejil dispute and urged him to "arrive at a quick solution."

Twelve Moroccan soldiers bearing their nation's flag arrived Thursday on the barren island, which Rabat says it will use as a surveillance post to curb immigrant smuggling and terrorist activities.

Morocco claims the island, known as Leila there, as its own, citing a 1956 deal with Spain, which says Perejil has been under Spanish sovereignty for centuries.