

# Swiss Red Cross cuts blood supply to broke Greece

February 26 2013, by Frank Jordans

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(AP)—The Swiss Red Cross is slashing its supply of donor blood to Greece because the financially stricken country has failed to pay its bills on time, the head of the group's transfusion service said Tuesday.

Rudolf Schwabe confirmed Swiss media reports that Greece had run up debts of several million Swiss francs (dollars) in the past. While those debts have since been repaid, the nonprofit SRC has decided to halve its blood shipments to Greece in the coming years in order to limit its financial risk, he said.

Greece's international creditors have demanded the government cut spending on pharmaceutical products as part of bailout agreements.

The Swiss blood sent to Greece comes from unused emergency stockpiles and is designated for humanitarian use. In the past, the SRC charged Greece 5 million Swiss francs (\$5.4 million) to cover its costs for supplying 28,000 blood packets a year.

The Swiss blood shipped to Greece helps meet demand from the country's thalassemia sufferers. An estimated 3,000 people in Greece with a severe form of this genetic disorder—also known as Mediterranean anemia—need regular transfusions amounting to some 130,000 packets a year.

"That's why we had long talks with the Greek Health Ministry," Schwabe said. The Swiss will gradually reduce their shipments to Greece to

14,000 packets a year by 2020, while at the same time providing the country with expertise to develop its own blood donor system, he said. "That way there will be no humanitarian problem."

Greek Health Ministry officials insisted that Greece had always fulfilled its side of the deal with the Swiss, and the reduction of imports was part of a plan to boost domestic donations, which currently amount to some 670,000 packets every year.

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