

I. Dissatisfaction with EU eats away at Europe's heart

Chirac's popularity lowest since 2002

As the French referendum on the European Constitution approaches, the popularity of the man who called it has reached a significant low point. He currently gets 44% of favourable responses in polls, with 52% against him. The figures are now lower than they were in April 2004, when the centre-right lost badly in cantonal and regional elections. The latest poll figures also show that dislike of Chirac is a big factor in the referendum, in the sense that the people who will vote 'No' are hugely (79%) anti-Chirac. Perhaps even more significantly, only 43% of those who either do not know what they will vote, or whether they will vote at all, support Chirac. This low figure means that they are unlikely to vote 'Yes' or to vote at all. The Prime Minister, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, is even more unpopular, with only 31% of people saying they approve of him. 65% say they have no confidence in him. [*Le Monde*, 28 April 2005]

Rebellion against Constitution in CDU

Two dozen or more members of the German Bundestag are expected to vote against the ratification of the treaty creating a Constitution for Europe. The vote takes place in the Bundestag on 12 May, the date having been brought forward to before the referendum in France to encourage the French to vote 'Yes'. The CDU deputies know that they pose no serious threat to the Constitutional Treaty, but they want to publicise what they see as the danger from cheap labour coming West. But some CDU *Länder* governments have demanded the right to veto EU laws reached by qualified majority even in areas which do not concern the rights of the *Bundesländer* alone: were they to stick to this position, then the ratification of the constitution would indeed be jeopardised. There is also support within the CDU for the Bavarian Deputy, Peter Gauweiler, who has submitted an appeal, together with the Professor of constitutional law at the University of Erlangen, Karl-Albrecht Schachtschneider, to the Federal Constitutional Court, in an attempt to prevent the ratification of the Constitution. The European spokesman for the CSU, Gerd Müller, has said that he welcomes the Gauweiler-Schachtschneider appeal and that he is going to vote against the Constitution because it "takes away the powers of the Bundestag".

Müller has said that if the Constitution is ratified, then the Bundestag need meet only four times a year. Even those Christian Democrats who are in favour of the Constitution – the vast majority – say that the Government has greatly damaged support for the EU by hollowing out the Stability Pact and by calling for the admission of Turkey. [*Die Welt*, 26 April 2005]

New Czech PM

President Václav Klaus has appointed Jiri Paroubek, 52, a Social Democrat, to succeed Stanislav Gross, 35, as head of the centre-left Government in Prague. Gross was forced to resign over a personal financial scandal: he was unable to explain where he got the money to buy his flat in 1999. Paroubek has been a minister only since August 2004 and is therefore little known in the Czech Republic. Few expect the change at the top to change the Government much. The main ministries will all remain in the hands of the men who ran them in the Gross administration. The new PM has to win a confidence vote in the Chamber of Deputies but the coalition has the tiniest of majorities (101 seats out of 200). If he fails, then the President will call early elections, but this is relatively difficult to organise because of the rules of the Czech Constitution. Elections are not normally due until June 2006. If elections are held early, this would undoubtedly benefit the Eurosceptic right-wing opposition, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS). It is currently scoring 35% in the opinion polls, against a disastrous 10% for the Government itself. The coalition parties, who have signed a new agreement for the Paroubek government, have said that their priority is to ratify the European Constitution. But the ODS and the Communists are against the Constitution, as is President Klaus himself. The Czech Republic is the only country in the EU which has not yet decided how it will try to ratify the Constitution (i.e. whether or not there should be a referendum). The future of the new government, which is as precarious as its predecessor, will therefore have a direct impact on the ratification. If the Czech Government falls, the Constitution might fall with it. [*Le Monde*, 25 April 2005]

Romania and Bulgaria accepted

One of the main reasons for the unhappiness with the EU in France and Germany is the sense that the

enlargement process is out of control. The Treaties on the accession of Bulgaria and Romania were signed in a formal ceremony in Luxembourg on Monday. The two countries are to join the EU on 1 January 2007. According to the terms of the Treaties, the accession can be delayed by up to one year if either country is judged not to have implemented the reforms which are necessary for accession. The heads of state and government of the two countries, plus the twenty-five foreign ministers of the existing member states, took part in the ceremony. The Treaties run to some 800 pages and there are plenty of get-out clauses which will allow the EU to exert maximum pressure on the two candidate states. The main areas of concern are corruption and organised crime – as if these two phenomena were not rampant in the existing EU itself. There are also concerns about environmental protection and economic reform. The Commissar for enlargement, Olli Rehn, said that he would not hesitate to recommend a year's delay if necessary. There is significant opposition to Romanian and Bulgarian membership in the ranks of the German Christian Democrat Members of the European Parliament, most of whom voted against their accession. The Bavarian Prime Minister, Edmund Stoiber, is said to have written to Chancellor Schröder to ask him to limit the number of workers allowed to come to Germany once the countries have joined. According to *Der Spiegel*, Stoiber has said that the two countries' accession might have to be delayed. He also said that if France failed to ratify the Constitution, then the whole enlargement process would have to be reviewed. [*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 April 2005]

Speaking at the ceremony, the Romanian President, Traian Basescu, said that the Treaty of Luxembourg effaced the memory of “the treaty of Yalta” (in reality he meant the informal agreement to divide Eastern Europe between Western and Eastern spheres of influence). “Today, sixty years after Yalta,” he said, “we have finally returned home.” He also spoke of his desire to establish “a privileged partnership with the United States and Great Britain”, an odd thing for a Romanian to say, whose country has traditionally been closer to France than to any other Western power. Basescu has indeed broken with tradition by not visiting Paris first: he has instead been to London, Washington, Kiev, Moscow and Berlin. While in the White House, Basescu made a big play of his plans for the Black Sea region, which apparently greatly impressed President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Basescu has been irritated by Paris' support for the man he beat in the presidential elections, Adrian Nastase: the French say Romania should be more “European” and less pro-American. [*Le Monde*, 26 April 2005]

New agreement signed with Serbia-Montenegro

As if this were not enough, the 25 Foreign Ministers of the EU have given the go-ahead for negotiations to begin on a stabilisation and association agreement between the EU and Serbia-Montenegro. The main reason for this new friendliness towards Belgrade is that Serbia-Montenegro has been handing over lots of senior people to The Hague. The Serb Prime Minister, Vojislav Kostunica, said that Europe had sent Serbia-Montenegro some good news and that this decision was the first important consequence of their collaboration. He said that Belgrade was working towards full membership for Serbia-Montenegro. But the EU clearly still wants Belgrade's cooperation in the arrest of the two Bosnian Serb leaders, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, even though they are citizens of a country governed by the West (Bosnia-Herzegovina is under the tutelage of Paddy Ashdown, the “High Representative”). [*Le Monde*, 25 April 2005]

ICTY negotiates with Croatia

The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Carla del Ponte, stated on 26 April in Luxembourg that Croatia was not cooperating fully with her organisation. But she said that she was optimistic that General Ante Gotovina would soon be handed over to The Hague. “It is my great hope that this will happen before my next report to the United Nations Security Council on 13th June.” (Mrs del Ponte often expresses similar “optimism” about the deliverance of the remaining Bosnian Serbs indicted, but there seems no evidence that either they or Gotovina will be transferred.) Del Ponte has said that she will report that Croatia is “cooperating fully” only when Gotovina is handed over. “All our information says that he is still in Croatia and that he occasionally goes to Bosnia-Herzegovina.” Carla del Ponte's statement means that the visit of the Croatian Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader, to Luxembourg, where he negotiated with her on Gotovina, was in vain. After the meeting, the Luxembourg Foreign Minister, Jean Asselborn (Luxembourg is current EU President) said that the EU would be ready to open accession talks with Zagreb as soon as the ICTY reported full cooperation. The British Foreign Secretary called on Croatia to imitate Serbia, which is now the more popular country of the two in the EU because of its cooperation with The Hague and in particular after General Nebojsa Pavkovic, the former head of the Yugoslav army, was handed over. Straw's statement will have infuriated pro-Europeans in Zagreb, who hoped that Europe would admit Croatia before Serbia and thus reinforce the separation between the two states. [*Le Monde*, 26 April 2005]

Anaemic growth and Angst in Germany

The six leading economic institutes in Germany have issued their predictions for growth this year: 0.7%. This means that unemployment will rise even further beyond the record levels at which it currently stands. This figure is half the 1.5% prediction which they made last autumn for 2005. So the German economy is growing even more slowly than it did last year, when it reached just 1.6%. The strong euro (weak dollar) is said to be the main cause of the slow-down. Although there is an export boom, it is not sufficient to make up for the weakness of the domestic economy. The economists say that there might be an upturn in the second half of next year, and that unemployment might then start to come down. The average unemployment figure for 2005 will climb, they say, by 463,000 to 4.844 million before dropping again to 4.5 million. [*Die Welt*, 26 April 2005]

Despite these gloomy predictions, an unexpected drop in unemployment has brought the headline figure down to below 5 million. The

number of people out of work in Germany now stands at 4.967 million. The Minister for Employment, Wolfgang Clement, has said that he does not think it will go back over 5 million again. He also hinted that the Government's growth predictions for 2005 would not be below 1%, as was the case for those of the economics institutes. [*Die Welt*, 27 April 2005]

The latest figures will do little, however, to correct the basic malaise in German society. A survey conducted by McKinsey shows that the Germans are full of Angst. A mere 28% think that in five years it will be possible to live well in Germany. Germans in those parts of the country where people are generally satisfied with life are becoming noticeably less so. 42% of Germans are worried about their jobs. 60% think that their personal financial situation is getting worse. [*Die Welt*, 28 April 2005]

II. Other European News

Euthanasia kit on sale in Belgium

One of the main chains of chemists in Belgium has started to market a euthanasia kit, containing the poisons necessary for killing people. The initiative, taken by the pharmacist Multipharma, has caused some controversy in Belgium and the Order of Pharmacists has protested. But the controversy does not concern whether or not it is right to sell such a kit. Multipharma is being attacked not because it has infringed the law on euthanasia, adopted in 2002, which does not forbid "euthanasia products" from being sold in chemists. Instead, the oversight commission created by the 2002 law has said that Multipharma is breaking the regulations because its "kit" contains only three phials of poison whereas the law says that you cannot sell less than ten. There is currently one act of euthanasia per day in Belgium, 60% of which take place in hospital. The commission has said that it is very difficult for doctors to obtain the necessary substances. The Order of Pharmacists has accused Multipharma of seeking publicity by selling packs of three phials, instead of the prescribed ten. Multipharma claims that it is simply trying to facilitate doctors' access to the substances. The "kit" costs €45 and is delivered in 24 hours. (The cost is not reimbursed by Social Security!) Doctors have to collect the kit in person from pharmacies and they are supposed to bring back any unused phials. [Jean-Pierre Stroobants, *Le Monde*, 26 April 2005]

Belgium balances budget

Belgium claims to have brought its budget deficit under control, notwithstanding the quarrels between Walloons and Flemings which cause permanent institutional tension in the country. For the sixth year running, Belgium's budget will be balanced, putting it in second place after Finland, which had a budget surplus in 2001. The Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, has said that his country will try to imitate Helsinki by 2007. Any budget surplus will be good for reducing the Belgian national debt, which is massively more than the so-called rules allow. It currently stands at 140% of GDP, even higher than Italy's. The Belgian Finance Minister, Didier Reynders, has said that the debt should be brought down to 84% of GDP in 2008. The average national debt of eurozone countries is 80%, in spite of the fact that no eurozone country is supposed to have debt of more than 60% of GDP. Belgian growth is 2.7%, which puts it above the eurozone average. [Jean-Pierre Stroobants, *Le Monde*, 26 April 2005]

Was Papal ally Communist spook?

Fr. Konrad Hejmo, a Dominican in charge of Polish pilgrims at the Vatican and a close friend of the late Pope, John Paul II, was accused on 27 April of having collaborated with the Polish secret services. He has rejected these accusations as "absurd" but admitted that people had come to see him and ask questions. He also admitted that he had been contacted for information by the Polish secret

services and that all Polish priests had a “tutor” within the force. The accusations came from the Institute for National Memory (IPN), which investigates Nazi and Communist crimes. “The IPN has a file which shows that Fr. Konrad Stanislaw Hejmo collaborated secretly in the 1980s with the security services of Communist Poland,” the president of the IPN, Leon Kieres, declared. Kieres claims that Hejmo used a pseudonym for his communications from Rome to the secret police back in his native Poland. He had been sent there by the Polish primate, Cardinal Wyszyński, and was put in charge of Polish pilgrims to Rome. IPN says that its file on him runs to 700 pages. Hejmo knew Cardinal Wojtyła before his election to the Papacy and had access to his closest collaborators. The IPN announced last week that it has information about other links between close allies of Karol Wojtyła and the Polish secret services. [*Le Monde*, 26 April 2005]

Persecuted Nazis

The Austrian Senator, Siegfried Kampl, has said that former Nazi activists were subject to “brutal persecution” by the Allies after 1945 and that deserters from the Wehrmacht were “their comrades’ murderers”. On 1 July, Kampl is to become President of the Senate. His remarks have embarrassed the Austrian Chancellor, Wolfgang Schüssel, because they will re-ignite the old controversy surrounding the flirtation of supporters of Jörg Haider with the extreme right. Mr Kampl has, like all the ministers and half of the deputies from the Freedom Party, left that party and joined the new Alliance for the Future of Austria which Mr. Haider has just founded – precisely in order to marginalize the ultra-nationalists within the Freedom Party. Kampl’s remarks will severely set back the new party’s attempt to become more *salonfähig* than the Freedom Party. Another Senator, John Gudenus, had to resign from the Freedom Party because he expressed doubt, for the second time in his career, about the existence of the gas chambers and the reality of the genocide of the Jews. Kampl said that he had personally lived through the brutal persecutions when his own father was arrested in 1945. Kampl added that he thought that “over 99%” of Austrians belonged to the Nazi Party. Kampl senior had joined the Nazi Party in 1934 and had spent two years in a British internment camp: he had been convicted under a provision of the laws of war for denouncing a female neighbour to the authorities of the Third Reich. Austria celebrates in May the 60th anniversary of its liberation by the Allies but many

Austrians agree with Kampl that Wehrmacht deserters were “traitors”. The Greens and the Social Democrats have said they think it is “intolerable” that Kampl should now assume one of the highest positions in the Austrian state after what he has said, especially since Austria is to take over the presidency of the EU in six months. [Joëlle Stolz, *Le Monde*, 28 April 2005]

Russia withdraws from Georgia

Moscow and Tbilisi have signed an agreement on the closure of the remaining Russian military bases on the territory of Georgia. The troop withdrawal could start this year and is supposed to provide the basis for a new treaty of cooperation between the two countries. The Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, said, “We have made substantial progress in our negotiations, and our positions have moved closer on the length of the troops’ stay and, therefore, on the withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgia.” He was speaking after a meeting with his Georgian opposite number, Salomé Zourabichvili. In Georgia, the Prime Minister, Zourab Nougaideli, called for Russian troops to leave by 2007, saying that the withdrawal could technically occur in six or eight months. The agreement concerns bases in Batumi and in Akhalkalaki. In 1999 Moscow signed an agreement on the closure of four bases and said that it would come up with a timetable for the closure of the last two. The Russians originally said they would need three years before the bases were closed altogether, but the Georgian Parliament has demanded they leave by 1 January 2006. Georgia also wants to negotiate away Russian “support” for the separatists in Abkhazia. [*Le Monde*, 25 April 2005]

‘Slave ring’ broken up in Portugal

Portuguese police have broken up a gang that was keeping numerous people as “slaves” working in agriculture in Spain. 23 persons were apprehended in Northern Portugal and several weapons were seized. The fifteen men and eight women have been accused of slavery, money-laundering, hostage-taking and criminal conspiracy. They are believed to have tempted people with promises of €500/month salaries and then placed them in agricultural exploitations in Rioja in Spain, where they worked for no money. Many of the slaves were mentally handicapped. They were beaten during work and kept in captivity after it. Slavery has been a specific crime in the Portuguese criminal code since 1982 but no one has yet been convicted for it. [*Die Welt*, 28 April 2005]