

I. Britain isolated

Putin, Schröder and Chirac line up against Blair

Meeting in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad (the former Königsberg) the Russian, French and German leaders have called for energy questions to be put at the top of the agenda at the G8 summit. They said that there was too much uncertainty and instability on the oil markets. They also lined up against the suggestion made by Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, that a 100% increase in aid to Africa should be financed by loans. Schröder and Chirac made the point that such loans would only have to be paid back again. According to a report in the news magazine, *Der Spiegel*, the German Chancellor and the US President, George Bush, are making common cause against the suggestion to finance the €50 billion/year aid package with an extra tax on air tickets. The three-state summit was the culmination of celebrations to mark the 750th anniversary of the founding of Königsberg. The Russian President ruffled the feathers of the Presidents of neighbouring Poland and Lithuania (the two countries between which Kaliningrad is sandwiched) by not inviting them to the fun and games: the Polish President said publicly that he thought it was a snub. Mr. Putin justified his decision by saying that the German leader had been invited because Kaliningrad University has just been re-named after Immanuel Kant, who lived all his life in the city. (Moscow is in any case furious with the Lithuanian President, Valdas Adamkus, a former American citizen: like the Estonian President, Adamkus refused to attend the celebrations in Moscow to mark the end of the Second World War because he wanted Russia first to apologise for the Soviet “occupation” of the Baltic States.) [*Handelsblatt*, 4th July 2005]

Both the German and the Russian leaders evoked the memory of Kant (1725-1804) during the visit, trying thereby to find common ground over a city which was founded by the Teutonic Knights in 1255 and which became Russian only when the Red Army swept into East Prussia at the end of the Second World War. Mr. Putin said that Kant was “our common citizen”. The German Chancellor said that Kant stood for the dignity of the individual, and that he had developed the concept of the modern and humane state. Putin mentioned Kant’s commitment to freedom and his opposition to the use of force to resolve conflicts. Both men laid wreaths at Kant’s grave and visited the city’s newly re-built cathedral.

The city has seen astonishing economic growth rates of 9.7% on average since 1999, and is a bustling and busy metropolis. There has been much rebuilding for the anniversary. The city gate has been rebuilt, and it sports statues of three of the city’s German rulers: Ottokar II, who founded the city, Friedrich I of Prussia under whose reign it became great; and Duke Albrecht of Brandenburg who in the early 16th Century allowed the city to mint its own coins, and who founded the university. [Manfred Quiring, *Die Welt*, 2nd July 2005]

The actual summit was held in the former East Prussian sea resort of Rauschen, now called Svetlogorsk. It was the first time that a German leader had visited the territory since the Second World War, and Chirac was only the second French head of state to “visit” the territory since Napoleon. It was while having coffee on the terrace of the Hotel Rus in Svetlogorsk, looking out onto the Baltic Sea, that President Chirac made his rude remarks about the British and their food.

The three men agreed on their plans for the reform of the United Nations, in particular saying that they wanted Germany to have a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. They three men also said that they thought an agreement on climate was possible at the G8 summit in Gleneagles. The German Chancellor and the French President said that the present crisis in the EU would not affect the strategic partnership with Russia. The meeting was the third trilateral meeting between the German, French and Russian leaders since they united in opposition to the Iraq war in 2003. [Manfred Quiring, *Die Welt*, 4th July 2005]

Barroso criticises Blair

The President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, has attacked Tony Blair for his “nationalist rhetoric” over the budget rebate which, he says, will make a compromise on the 2007-2013 budget very difficult. Barroso said that such nationalist rhetoric would “get Europe nowhere”. Most European leaders, indeed, think that there is not much chance of an agreement being struck on the budget during the British presidency of the EU, which started on 1 July. “The atmosphere has been poisoned,” said one EU diplomat, and most European officials hold Blair responsible for the failure to reach an agreement. The diplomat told *Die*

Welt that Britain's rejection of the deal proposed at the Brussels summit at the end of the Luxembourg presidency had reduced "to almost zero" the willingness of the small and new Member States to compromise. Britain wants not only to find an agreement on the budget, but also to liberalise the

service sector and to open negotiations with Turkey on 3rd October. Both these measures are extremely unpopular with the French electorate, and they go some way to explaining why the Constitution was rejected. [Katja Riddersbusch, *Die Welt*, 4th July 2005]

II. Other European News

Election campaign starts in Germany

Following the deliberately engineered loss of a no-confidence vote in the German Parliament, an early general election is to be held in Germany on 18 September. Chancellor Schröder's decision to force the issue by losing the vote has been hotly contested, because German Parliaments are supposed to run for a fixed term. Elections were not due until 2006. There will be appeals to the country's constitutional court on the legality of the vote. A former judge of the Federal Constitutional Court, Karin Grasshof, has said that she was "doubtful" that the procedure for calling the early poll had been constitutional, even though the Court found in favour of a similar procedure used in 1983 by Helmut Kohl. The Federal President, Horst Köhler, will give an initial ruling on the matter on 21 July.

Political parties expect the poll to go ahead on 18 September. The election campaign is therefore now underway. On 1 July, Chancellor Schröder attended his first election meeting, in his hometown of Hanover, where his message was "There is no reason to throw in the towel." However, polls indicate 27% support for the Social Democrats, 8% for the Greens, their coalition partners, 44% for the Christian Democrats and 8% for the FDP liberals who governed in coalition with the Christian Democrats for eighteen years under Helmut Kohl. An unknown factor is, however, the extreme left: the ex-Communist PDS could manage to slip in above the 5% barrier with an assorted group of left-wing allies with which it is trying to unite. The Christian Democrats, meanwhile, have yet to publish their policies and some wags in the media have wondered whether they have any. It seems unlikely that the Germans will really vote for a woman who is likely to demand even more sacrifices than they have already made under the current Government. [Pierre Bocev, *Le Figaro*, 4th July 2005]

Italians protest at CIA operation on their territory

In February 2003, an Egyptian man was kidnapped in the streets of Milan and bundled into a car, in which he was then taken to Egypt where he was tortured. The kidnapers were undercover agents of the CIA and the fact that the operation occurred on Italian territory, apparently without the knowledge of the

Italian authorities, has caused outrage in Italy. The Minister for Relations with Parliament, Carlo Giovanardi, has formally told the Senate that the Government was not informed about it. He explicitly ruled out that authorisation had been given, or that the Italian secret services had participated in the operation. The Government was thereby denying allegations that had been made in the *Washington Post*. The former head of the CIA in Rome was quoted saying that he had informed the head of the SISMI, the Italian secret services, and the Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, promptly summoned the US Ambassador to Italy to demand an explanation.

The events occurred on 23 February 2003, when Hassan Mustapha Ossama Nasr, known as Abu Omar, was captured by a commando in the centre of Milan. He had been the imam at the mosque on Jenner St. in the city, which the police had been watching closely after the events of 11 September. The man was initially taken to the US air base at Aviano, before being sent to Egypt for interrogation. A Milanese judge, Chiara Nobili, has just issued an arrest warrant for thirteen people suspected of being involved in the kidnapping. Several of them have been identified as CIA agents, in particular a former US consul in Milan.

Parliamentarians have reacted very sceptically to the Government's insistence that it knew nothing about the affair. A spokesman for the left-wing DS party said that if no one knew about the affair then it showed that security was dangerously lax in Italy. The press has also reacted sceptically. Reports have claimed that the CIA was not particularly discrete in the nine days the operation took to complete. This affair comes on the heels of the huge anger felt by many Italians at the shooting dead of the Italian secret agent, Nicola Calipari, whom US soldiers in Iraq killed as he was freeing Giuliana Sgrena, an Italian journalist who had been taken hostage. Italian experts refused to sign up to a report published by the US army which exculpated the members of the patrol who killed Calipari. The kidnapping of Nasr also recalls the kidnapping of the Israeli nuclear scientist, Mordechai Vanunu, whom Mossad seized in 1986 while he was on a trip to Rome. Vanunu was

then imprisoned in Israel for eighteen years. [Jean-Jacques Bozonnet, *Le Monde*, 2nd July 2005]

Greek PM to visit Turkey

The Prime Minister of Greece, Costas Caramanlis, is to visit his opposite number in Turkey. This will be the first official visit by a Greek leader to Turkey since 1959 – when Mr. Caramanlis' uncle was Prime Minister. One of the subjects under discussion will be a gas pipeline which will transport gas from Azerbaijan across Turkey and parts of Greece, and maybe Italy, from 2006 onwards. When discussions started on the gas pipeline, the Turkish Premier, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said that his “friend” Mr. Caramanlis had given invaluable help to Turkey over its plans to join the EU. Erdogan calls Caramanlis his “friend” because Caramanlis was a witness at the wedding of Erdogan's daughter in Turkey in 2004. A previous attempt at a visit by a Greek leader to Turkey was made in 2000, when Bülent Ecevit invited Costas Simitis to Ankara; the visit never materialised. Mr. Erdogan, however, has been to Greece: he visited Athens in May 2004, the first visit by a Turkish leader in 16 years. [*Le Monde*, 3rd July 2005]

Continuing row over Le Monde article

Emotions are still running high following a ruling against the French paper of record, *Le Monde*, found guilty in May of “racial defamation” for an article which criticised Israel's policies. The three co-authors of the article – the sociologist Edgar Morin, the Member of the European Parliament Sami Naïr, and the writer Danièle Sallenave – and the editor of *Le Monde*, Jean-Marie Colombani, were all forced to pay symbolic damages of €1 by the Court of Appeal in Versailles at the end of May. The offending sentences read thus: “It is difficult to imagine how a nation of fugitives, which has grown out of the most persecuted people in the history of humanity, has been able to transform itself, in two generations, with the exception of an admirable minority, into a contemptuous people which takes pleasure in inflicting humiliation”; “The Jews of Israel, descendants of the victims of an apartheid known as the ghetto, are now ghettoising the Palestinians.” These sentences were deemed to have gone beyond fair criticism of the state of Israel, and to have included the Jewish people as such in the attack. But the ruling has outraged numerous people. On 24 June, the left-wing daily, *Libération*, published a “testimony of solidarity with Edgar Morin”, initiated by the writer Jean-Claude Guillebaud, who is Morin's publisher. The article expressed the concern of its signatories at the judicial condemnation of the original article which, “using an equitable and complex argument, was clearly pleading in favour of

peace and fraternity between the protagonists in the Israeli-Palestinian tragedy.” Numerous luminaries of French literary and intellectual life signed the open letter, all of them from the mainstream of the intellectual establishment. But tensions rose nastily when a colleague of Edgar Morin, who was one of the signatories, said that she and the 84 year-old sociologist had received death threats. Danièle Sallenave also said that she had received anonymous letters. Morin commented, “The perspective of a withdrawal from Gaza must have provoked a reaction from radical Jewish circles which have been radicalised even further by the fact that they saw numerous Jewish personalities signing the open letter in support of me.” This in turn caused the lawyer who obtained the conviction, Maître William Goldnagel, to imply that Morin was again being racist. “Just because some idiot threatens Mr. Morin does not mean that we can draw general conclusion about the immoderation of the Jewish community, because after all there is no proof that the people making the threats were Jewish.” Goldnagel added that the fact that Morin is himself Jewish was of no interest to him: “What counts is that his writings are dangerous.” The plot thickened even further when certain controversial names were inadvertently included in the list of signatories of the *Libération* article, which caused some of the original signatories to withdraw their signature: a new list is to be produced shortly. [Nicolas Weill, *Le Monde*, 3rd July 2005]

Crosses removed from Checkpoint Charlie

On 5 July, police in Berlin removed more than 1,000 wooden crosses which had been placed on the site of the former crossing point between East and West Berlin, Checkpoint Charlie. The crosses had been placed there in memory of those killed by the Communist regime in East Germany; many victims of that regime chained themselves to the crosses as a protest against the police action. Representatives of the Christian Democratic party in Berlin, including the General Secretary of the party, protested against the removal of the crosses, laying wreaths at the private memorial site. The instigator of the memorial, Alexandra Hildebrandt, had refused to take down the crosses in spite of the fact that the bank which owns the land had terminated its lease. [*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5th July 2005]

Austrians gunning for Iranian President

Just as the Americans are trying to show that the newly elected Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was one of the hostage-takers at the US Embassy in the Islamic Revolution in 1979, so a Green member of the Austrian Parliament has affirmed that Ahmadinejad belonged to an Iranian

terrorist commando which shot dead three Kurds in a Vienna apartment on 13 July 1989. Peter Pilz, who speaks for the Austrian Greens on security issues, says that Ahmadinejad procured the weapons for the attack, and that he was the substitute man who was due to take over if one of the three killers backed out. Pilz says his proof comes from an Iranian journalist who now lives in Paris, whom he interviewed before passing the information onto the Austrian security services. Pilz also claims that Hashemi Rafsanjani, then head of the presidential staff who controlled the Ghods-Pasderan, an elite military unit within the 'Guardians of the Revolution', ordered the assassination. The chief victim was the leader of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan, Abdullah Ghaderi, and a translator, Fadzal Rassul, who was a friend of Pilz's. The killers were spirited out of Austria following massive pressure from Iran. Pilz now wants the Austrian authorities to issue an arrest warrant against the new Iranian President. The prosecuting authorities have not made any comment on this eventuality, but they have said that the documents Pilz has provided are "very credible". [Petra Stuiber, *Die Welt*, 4th July 2005]

Berisha returns

Although the final results remain unclear – the results of elections in post-Communist countries take an uncommonly long time to be published – the Democratic Party of the centre-right former President of Albania, Sali Berisha, seems to have won the elections. Berisha was overthrown in a violent uprising in 1997 (2,000 people were killed in what was hailed at the time as a great outburst of popular anger against his 'dictatorial' regime) having been elected Albania's first non-communist President in 1992. The President is elected by Parliament and the DP seems to have won 53 out of the 100 seats. International observers said the poll went off well: they seemed not to mind that one observer was shot dead while performing his duties. [Christophe Châtelot, *Le Monde*, 7th July 2005]

Achtung! The Germans are coming

The European Court of Justice has ordered Austria to give equal access to students from all EU countries. The case has arisen because Austrian universities are in danger of overflowing with students from Germany. In Germany itself, admissions to certain popular disciplines like medicine are limited in numbers to the best students: since Austria allows

everyone to study whatever they like, Germans would like to study there as well. According to the Austrian Ministry of Education, up to 80,000 German students (out of a total student population of 210,000 in Austria) would want to enrol for courses in Austrian universities. Until now, Austria has required that students from abroad show that they have been accepted by a university in their own country for the subject they want to study, precisely in order to limit the number of Germans flooding in. It is this rule which the European Court of Justice has found discriminatory, and therefore incompatible with the EU Treaties. The ruling means that universities will have to introduce entrance examinations, for Austrian citizens and for everyone else. This is likely to be very unpopular. Tuition fees were introduced five years ago and now another sacred cow – free access to university – is about to be sacrificed. [Joëlle Stolz, *Le Monde*, 7th July 2005]

Malta votes for Constitution

The Maltese Parliament voted unanimously on Wednesday evening, 6 July, in favour of the European Constitution. This is the first time that a national Parliament has voted unanimously for the new Treaty. Malta, which joined the EU last year, is now the thirteenth EU Member State to have ratified the Constitution. Luxembourg is due to vote by referendum on the Constitution on Sunday.

Israel refuses extradition

Poland has announced that it will give up its attempts to extradite an 87 year-old man living in Israel who is accused of committing genocide against German prisoners in 1945. The Polish Justice Minister, Andrzej Kalwas, has said there is no chance of trying Salomon Morel, who was the commandant of a prison camp for Germans. Morel's family was killed by Polish Nazi collaborators and he then took command of the Swietochlowice camp in Upper Silesia. Some 1500 people died there, nearly all Germans, from typhus and ill treatment. The events in the camp were documented in a book by John Sack, *An Eye for an Eye*. The Israeli authorities have justified their refusal to extradite Morel by saying that the statements of Germans cannot be trusted "in a time of rising anti-Semitism". In 2000, the Polish authorities prosecuted the Polish commandant of another camp, Lambinowice (Lamsdorf) for murdering 48 Germans. [*Die Welt*, 7th July 2005]