

Frau Bundeskanzlerin

Three weeks after the German parliamentary elections, the SPD and the CDU have agreed to form a Grand Coalition with Angela Merkel as Chancellor. She is the first woman ever to lead Germany. The Social Democrats are to obtain eight important ministries: Foreign Affairs, Employment, Social Affairs, Finance, Development, Environment, Transport and Justice. The Christian Democrats will have Defence, Interior, Economy, Agriculture, Family Affairs and Education. It is likely that Edmund Stoiber, the Bavarian Prime Minister, would be the Economics Minister, and as a heavyweight he would be a formidable competitor to the traditionally stronger Finance Minister. It remains to be seen who will be Vice-Chancellor. Despite these early agreements, negotiations over the Grand Coalition are likely to prove extremely difficult and the situation remains extremely fluid and unclear. [*Die Welt*, 11th October 2005] Mrs Merkel has promised to realign Germany's foreign policy with Washington and Warsaw, and to pay less attention to Paris and Moscow than Gerhard Schröder did during his time in office.

Tusk in front

Donald Tusk, the leader of a small anodyne centrist party created in 2001, narrowly won the first round of the Polish presidential election on 9 October. Tusk combines a mixture of liberalism and patriotism with a policy of strict alignment on the European Union and NATO: his policies are essentially the same as those of his ex-Communist predecessor, Alexander Kwasniewski. The low turnout, however, was indicative of the cynicism with which most Poles seem to view elections: only 49.6% of Poles bothered to vote. The former President of Poland, Lech Walesa, expressed his strong disappointment and even anger at the turnout when he said, "When I fought for democracy I thought people would make use of it, but now I begin to wonder. We should have retained the Soviets, the communist system, the Militia, clubs - maybe it all lasted too short and now we see the result." [*Rzeczpospolita, Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10th October 2005]

In an unexpected move, Mr Tusk's rival, Lech Kaczynski, has called on Mr Tusk to clarify whether it is true that his grandfather fought with the Nazis in World War II. Tusk is from Danzig/Gdansk and allegations of collaboration with the invading

Germans are highly inflammatory in Poland. The allegations were vehemently rejected by Tusk's spokesman, who called them "a tasteless lie". The spokesman handed documents to journalists that show that both Tusk's grandfathers had been imprisoned in German concentration camps, as Tusk has always maintained. [*Handelsblatt*, 12th October 2005]

Hague Tribunal gives green light to Croatia

In a sudden reversal of policy, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, Carla Del Ponte, has said that Croatia is cooperating with her after all. Last March, she had declared that Zagreb's cooperation was insufficient, and this led to the indefinite postponement of the opening of accession negotiations with Brussels. At the time, it was said that Croatia's failure to find and hand over General Ante Gotovina, accused of war crimes during Operation Storm in 1995, during which at least 150,000 Serbs were driven out of the country. However, even though Gotovina has still not been handed over, Mrs del Ponte peremptorily announced on Monday that Croatia had been "fully cooperating for several weeks," and that the country was suddenly doing its best, after all, to arrest the fugitive General. She said that she expected him to be transferred to The Hague soon. Many people will be sceptical about the real reason for this sudden reversal in Mrs Del Ponte's report, which will mean that Croatia can join the EU after all: Austria, which had been uniquely difficult over Turkey (Vienna had demanded that other forms of relationship with Turkey be discussed) wants Croatia to join the EU. Many suspect that Croatia was given to Austria in order to make it change its position on Turkey, and that this is the real reason for the sudden change in the ostensibly judicial evaluation of Croatia's behaviour. [*Le Monde*, 3rd October 2005]

Prior to her volte-face, Mrs Del Ponte had attacked the Vatican of complicity in hiding General Gotovina. Her spokesperson said that she believed that Gotovina was receiving help from a network of Catholic monasteries in Croatia. Florence Hartmann, Del Ponte's spokesperson and a former correspondent for *Le Monde*, said, "If church leaders gave orders not to harbour war crimes suspects, it would assist justice, since fugitives would not find protection in monasteries." The Vatican refused to comment. The Croatian Government has always said

that it does not think that Gotovina is in Croatia at all, and a spokesman for the Interior Ministry said last year that reports that the General was hiding in a monastery were unfounded. Hartmann said that Del Ponte had sent letters to the Vatican and had met with top church officials this summer requesting that the church reprimand Croatian bishop Mile Bogovic, who had publicly called Gotovina a hero and said that his prosecution was politically motivated. Hartmann said that Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim leaders had "a responsibility to protect the weak, the victims. Glorifying killers is contrary to all religious teaching, as far as I remember." [*Associated Press*, 20th September 2005]

In a separate development, the former Russian Prime Minister, Yevgeni Primakov, has attacked the trial of the former President of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic, as biased. Primakov, who also served as head of the Russian intelligence services, and who is currently the head of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said at the launch of his latest book, which comprises transcripts of evidence given in Milosevic's defence at the trial, "It is hard to speak of the court's objectivity. The Tribunal is targeting a guilty verdict for Slobodan Milosevic." Primakov appeared as a defence witness in the Milosevic trial, along with Nikolai Ryzhkov, the former Prime Minister (President of the Council of Ministers) of the Soviet Union and General Leonid Ivashov. "Milosevic took action to defend his country, and he probably made some mistakes, but they are not subject to international legal proceedings since he did not commit crimes against humanity," Primakov said. [*Novosti*, 27th September 2005]

EU opens talks with Serbia & Montenegro

On the very day that objections were lifted to opening accession talks with Croatia, the EU decided to open negotiations with Serbia & Montenegro as well. This is a rich irony, since pro-EU Croats say that joining the European Union will seal their separation from the Serbs. In fact, the opposite is the case: the EU regards the "Western Balkans" as a single area, and clearly intends to bring the whole region under its remit. Negotiations with Serbia & Montenegro started on 10 October, and the Commissar for enlargement, Ollie Rehn, has said that the purpose of the negotiations is to lead to full membership of the EU for Serbia and Montenegro. The EU is therefore dealing with Serbia & Montenegro in exactly the same way as it is dealing with Croatia: Serbia is blamed for the fact that the Bosnian Serbs Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic are still at large, just as Croatia is blamed for Gotovina. Speaking in Brussels, the current President of Serbia & Montenegro, Svetozar Marovic, said that the Mladic case had to be "closed

in the interests of Serbia and Montenegro and its path towards Europe". [*Le Monde*, 10th October 2005]

In a related move, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, informed the Security Council on 7 October that he intends to open negotiations on the final status of Kosovo. The territory in southern Serbia has been under United Nations administration since NATO's war against Yugoslavia in 1999. Mr Annan said in his statement that independence for Kosovo was on the table; hitherto international leaders have been very coy about saying what they think the final status of the province might be. Although the Secretary General asked the UN Governor of Kosovo to report on the democratic credentials of the province, and although the Governor, Kai Eide, has admitted that there has been absolutely no progress whatever towards the strengthening of a multi-cultural society (the Serbian minority has been persecuted to the point of extinction, even including pogroms in March 2004 which killed 19 of them), the UN has nonetheless decided to press ahead with status talks. Eide said that it was time for the EU to take over the province, and that the influence of the UN was in decline. [Philippe Boloipon, *Le Monde*, 11th October 2005]

EU sanctions Uzbekistan

EU Foreign Ministers have announced that they will impose an arms embargo on the Central Asian republic of Uzbekistan in response to the refusal of the Government in Tashkent to permit an international organisation to investigate the events which occurred in Andijan in March. The EU and the US allege that the Uzbek authorities brutally repressed a popular uprising, while Tashkent insists that armed Islamic terrorists seized public buildings, took hostages, and that the authorities acted with the maximum possible restraint. [*Die Welt*, 1st October 2005]

A trial currently underway in Turkey has cast some interesting light on the Andijan violence. A man being tried for his role in the uprising has alleged that the United States funded it. Muidin Subirov, 42, pleaded guilty to charges that he participated in the unrest, and said that he and his co-conspirators had received funding from abroad and that they had been advised by foreign journalists. He confirmed that they launched their attack on the prison in Andijan to free 23 of their comrades, and that they had held a meeting in Freedom House, the American "non-governmental" organisation, shortly before the events in order to discuss them. Western media representatives also participated in the meeting. Sobirov said that if the conspirators had succeeded in liberating their comrades, they would have aimed at overthrowing the Uzbek administration as their next step. [*Cihan News Agency*, 22nd September 2005]

In a separate but related development, the Uzbek embassy in London has written a strongly-worded letter of protest to the Editor of Channel 4 News for broadcasting what it calls a highly tendentious and propagandistic account of what happened in Andijan. Uzbekistan has been unpopular in the West ever since the government tried in March to limit the use of the Khanabad air base, near the border with Afghanistan, which the United States has used since 2001: Tashkent has since formally told the Americans that they must leave Uzbekistan completely.

France tops Euroscepticism league

An opinion poll conducted in five EU countries (France, Germany, Poland, Spain, the United Kingdom) by Sofres, the French polling agency, between 24 August and 5 September, on behalf of the Franco-German TV channel *Arte*, has shown that many Europeans remains unconvinced that the EU has brought them any benefits. Surprisingly, the country which is the most anti-European is France. The poll asked people which factor most influenced their opinion on Europe, whether positively or negatively, and an average of 60% of people cited the euro as the main factor (81% in Spain, where pro-European feeling is the highest, and 78% in Germany). 51% said that the freedom to travel was a factor (although this has very little to do with the EU, since travel is free to most parts of the world for Western Europeans) while unemployment also a big issue, especially for people who have anti-EU responses. (In other words, the perception, across the board, is that the EU does not help the economy.) 47% of Germans said unemployment was the main issue, against 45% of Spaniards, 28% of French, 26% of Poles; the wasting of money was cited by 47% of Germans, 42% of Spaniards, 21% of British. Prosperity, which the EU claims it is supposed to promote, was cited by only 21% of those polled: 56% of Spaniards but only 17% of French people, 16% of Germans, 15% of Poles and 11% of British. When people were asked if they have the sense of living in a more prosperous country as a result of the EU, the French and the Poles answered No. 43% of French people (against 29%) said they had the impression that their country was poorer as a result of the EU. The most dissatisfied people are working class: 52% in France, 49% in Poland, 47% in Germany. 42% of British said they thought they lived in a more prosperous country thanks to the EU, as did 77% of Spaniards (10% said No). Most people said they did not think they lived in a safer country thanks to the EU. More Germans, Spaniards, French and Poles said they thought they had better social

protection thanks to the EU, but the British said they were not (36% against 33%). Perhaps the most striking result is that, by huge majorities, Europeans in these five countries are convinced that prices are higher than anywhere else in the world thanks to the EU:

83% of people in Germany, 82% in Spain, 80% in Poland, 72% in France and 56% in Britain said that they thought that their country's membership of the EU had pushed prices upwards. Do people think they live better thanks to the EU? 57% against 13% of Spaniards replied Yes, as did 33% of British (against 24% who said No). 41% of French said No, as against 22% who said Yes. 33% of Poles said No (18% Yes) and 34% of Germans said No, as against 33% who said Yes. 46% of German workers are dissatisfied, as are 58% of French workers. 41% of Polish farmers are unhappy. Women are generally more anti-EU than men. When asked whether they thought their identity was threatened or protected by the EU, 48% of Germans said they thought it was (as against 28% who said it was not), as did 48% of British (against 29%); 42% of French (against 26%); and 24% of Poles (against 21%). Only the Spanish thought their identity was protected (49% as against 32%). Only in France and Spain did people say they thought that their country was more powerful thanks to Europe, whereas in Germany, Britain and Poland people said they thought their country was less powerful. Majorities in four countries said that unemployment should be fought at the national, not European level (72% of British, as against 20% who said it should be dealt with at EU level; 56% of French, against 40%; 52% of Germans, against 44%; 47% of Spaniards, against 45%). Only the Poles said that unemployment should be dealt with by the EU (57% against 37%). For tax and social policy, most people also say they want their nation-state, and not the EU, to be in charge: 73% of British, 60% of Spaniards, 57% of Poles, 56% of Germans and 56% of French people said tax should be national, while the figures for social policy were 70% of British, 69% of French, 66% of Germans, 52% of Poles. Only the Spaniards said the opposite (48% to 46%). On the other hands, many people said that they thought foreign policy, environmental policy and immigration should be dealt with at the EU level, with only the British saying that these policies too should be nationally controlled. [Thomas Ferenczi, *Le Monde*, 4th October 2005]

France's prisons are the worst

The EU's Commissar for human rights, Alvaro Gil-Robles, has spent the last few months visiting prisons, detention camps and psychiatric institutions in thirty-two European countries. His conclusions

about France, where he spent sixteen days, were bitter: "With the possible exception of Moldova," he said, "I have never before seen such horrifying detention conditions." His conclusions were based on his visit to cells in the basement of the Palace of Justice in Paris, which are used exclusively for foreigners. People are crowded into cells there with no natural light. Gil-Robles concluded, "This place must urgently be closed down". An anonymous guard has told *Le Parisien* that Gil-Robles' views were right: he said that up to four people were crammed into single cells measuring 7 square metres. The hygiene conditions were catastrophic: inmates were allowed to defecate and urinate on the floor and rats were crawling out of the Turkish lavatories. Out of frustration and anger, inmates had cut themselves while shaving and smeared the walls with their blood. Gil-Robles also visited the Les Baumettes in Marseilles. He said that this "revolting" place was completely overpopulated. He said that detention there amounted to inhumane treatment, and that inmates would come out of it worse than they went in. He also said that it was incompatible with human rights that detainees in the police commissariat in the 18th arrondissement of Paris were forced to sleep on a bare floor without a mattress. The French Foreign Minister, Philippe Douste-Blazy, reacted politely saying that he would study the report carefully; the Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, cancelled a meeting with Gil-Robles. France has often been criticised for her appalling prison conditions. [Jochem Hehn, *Die Welt*, 12th October 2005]

PKK ends ceasefire

The Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) has ended a one-month ceasefire against the Turkish authorities, which it had unilaterally declared. The cease-fire followed several months of violence which had themselves been preceded by several years of peace. The cease-fire had been declared precisely in order to facilitate Turkey's accession to the European Union since, like the Government in Ankara, the Kurdish guerrillas are determined that Turkey join the EU. No doubt they recognise that Brussels is their ally: it is thanks to pressure from the EU that various minority rights have been awarded to the Kurds by the Turkish state. Now that the EU has indeed decided to open accession negotiations with Turkey, the PKK has declared that the Kurdish problem is also "a problem for the EU". The EU, meanwhile, sticks to its formal position that the PKK is a

terrorist organisation, although it has recognised Leyla Zana as principal interlocutor on Kurdish matters, whom the Turks accuse of being a terrorist herself and a supporter of the PKK. They say that her political party is simply the PKK under another name. Certainly, Zana's political ideas owe a great deal to the reformulation of Kurdish aims by the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan: Öcalan has said that he wants his ideas to serve as a model for the democratisation of the whole Middle East, which is of course also the aim of the Americans in Iraq. Öcalan often also says, like Zana, that the Kurdish problem is now a problem for the EU. Her colleague, Selim Sadak, has also said that he regards the EU as an unfriendly power precisely because it classifies the PKK as a terrorist organisation. In other words, the EU is probably being hypocritical when it claims that Zana is one thing and the PKK another. [*Die Welt*, 8th October 2005]

Hungary might not get euro until after 2010

The rising budget deficit in Hungary means that the country might not qualify for eurozone membership in 2010, as it had hoped it would. The Chairman of the EU Economic and Finance Committee, the German State Secretary for Finance, Caio Koch-Weser, said that the budgetary situation in Hungary was very worrying. Koch-Weser said that Hungary's failure to balance its books meant that it was highly likely that the country's adoption of the euro would be delayed. The deficit is expected to be between 5% and 6% of GDP this year and next. Hungary would have to get the deficit below 3% by 2008 if it was to be allowed to join EMU in 2010. The Commissar for monetary affairs, Joaquín Almunía, said after consultations in Luxembourg that he could already say that Hungary had taken no steps whatever towards the reduction of its deficit. Since it is not a member of EMU, Hungary is not subject to sanctions for its excessive deficit. But the EU might decide to punish the country by withholding money intended for regional development. The Hungarian Prime Minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány, said that he wanted to introduce the euro, but that he was not prepared to sacrifice social conditions for that goal. He said that Hungary could not bear the social cost of cutting the deficit to under 3% by 2008. Hungary has made itself unpopular with other EU Finance Minister by abruptly increasing its own predictions for the budget deficit for the current year from 3.6% to 6.1%. [*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11th October 2005]