

I. Scenes from New Europe

Polish Government collapses

On the eve of its accession to the European Union, Poland has been plunged into crisis with the resignation of the Prime Minister, Leszek Miller. The Government has suffered a vertiginous collapse in its popularity, and has suffered a split. The Eurosceptic campaigner, Andrzej Lepper, now leads in the polls, although elections are not due until 2005. Lepper's Self-Defence party now has some 29% in the polls, as against less than 10% for the governing socialists. But the liberal "Civic Platform", which has also increased its score, has declared war on the "barbarians" of Self-Defence. Lepper is mainly famous for his hostility to the Common Agricultural Policy, to tax breaks for foreign-owned companies (especially supermarkets) which destroy local jobs, and to the dumping of EU-subsidised agricultural produce in Poland, which drives Poles out of business. He has organised numerous demonstrations, few of which have ever been reported in the mainstream media. He says that the last fourteen years have been disastrous for Poland, and that it has been led to the brink of the abyss. He attacks previous governments for having enriched themselves by selling off Poland's assets to foreigners. He has said that if he is elected to power he will verify the holdings of politicians and review the legality of previous privatisations. He calls the EU "the Union of bankruptcy and unemployment" and he has suggested that Poland could revise its own accession treaty if he is elected. In particular, he has promised to renegotiate quotas for agricultural production and for the free movement of workers. [Christophe Châtelot, *Le Monde*, 30th March 2004]

The President of Poland, Alexander Kwasniewski, has appointed the former Finance Minister, Marek Belka, to succeed Miller as Prime Minister. Belka is currently in charge of economics in the Coalition Authority in Iraq. Belka does not belong to any political party. The left-wing Workers' Party has said that it would support a Belka government if a timetable was given for withdrawing Polish troops from Iraq, but this is unlikely to happen. The SDPL social democrats under Marek Borowski, who have broken away from the governing socialist party, have said they would support a government composed of their former comrades, but only if early elections are held in the autumn, a demand which has also been made by the "Civic

Platform". [*Handelsblatt*, 29th March 2004] Some have suggested holding new elections as early as 13th June, the date of the European Parliament elections, but the Polish President has said that he strongly opposes this idea. [*Radio Free Europe Newslines*, 31st March 2004]

Greek Cypriots appalled at Annan proposals

Negotiations on the reunification of Cyprus have come to a head in a hotel near Lucerne, and the agreement leaves leading figures on all sides opposed to the proposed agreement. Greek Cypriots have watched in horror as the Turkish side seemed to sweep the board in gaining concessions, but the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktash has, like his Greek Cypriot opposite number, said he will campaign against the plan. The agreement, drawn up by the Turkish and Greek Cypriots, Turkey, Greece and the UN, is due to be put to a referendum in both parts of Cyprus on 24th April, but opinion polls currently show that some 95% of Greek Cypriots oppose it. The "plan" is over 200 pages long with nearly 10,000 pages of annexes. The European Commission has been deeply involved in the process. [Jean Christou, *Cyprus Mail*, 31st March 2004] Whatever agreement is reached, there will be massive upheaval in Cyprus after it is signed, because it involved the return of a large chunk of territory from the Turkish side to the Greek, and the resettlement of tens of thousands of Anatolian Turks who have moved to Cyprus.

The Turkish Cypriot President, Rauf Denktash, has said that he will campaign against the plan, as has the Greek Cypriot President, Tassos Papadopoulos. Indeed, Rauf Denktash – whom the Austrian newspaper, *Der Standard*, calls the Turkish "Volksgruppenführer" – has attacked the EU for its bias towards the Greek position. Denktash singled out the role of Günter Verheugen, whom he compared to a Nazi officer. "He tries to get what he wants by shouting at our people like a Nazi officer," Denktash told the Turkish news agency *Andalou Ajansi*. "He is exercising unbelievable pressure on the Turkish Cypriots in the interests of the Greek Cypriots. He is trying to impress the UN representatives." These latter have been accused by the Greek Cypriots of favouring the Turks. [1st April 2004]

Russian Duma denounces NATO expansion

The Russian parliament has expressed its unease at the fact that three former Soviet Republics and several members of the former Warsaw Pact are about to join NATO. Many Russians argue that NATO's primary enemy is international terrorism, and that the alliance's eastward expansion cannot be understood as having any strategic logic other than to intimidate Russia. [Russian Information Agency, *Novosti*, 31st March 2004] The Russian parliament has therefore expressed its concern at the admission to NATO of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Slovakia. According to the statement, the expansion of NATO "does not promote the consolidation of stability and security in Europe." The resolution was passed by 305 to 41 with one abstention. "A joint response of the two parties to the present-day global threat does not call for military build-up on the territory of the countries, bordering on Russia, as a result of NATO's expansion, the patrolling by AWACS planes of the air space of Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and the deployment of the NATO air force and the anti-aircraft defence force on the territory of those countries," the document continued. The Russian parliament also accuses NATO of seeking to establish a presence "in all parts of the world," in order to "influence the situation there through the use of force, by-passing the UN." The Duma has also denounced NATO and Western pressure on Russia to withdraw its troops from Transdniestria in Moldova, when the West is at the same time increasing its own military presence in neighbouring

Romania. [*Itar-Tass*, 31st March 2004] However a stronger version of the statement, proposed by members of the Communist and Liberal Democratic Parties, was rejected. [*Interfax*, 31st March 2004] The commander of the Baltic fleet in Kaliningrad, Admiral Vladimir Valuyev, has said that none of the Baltic states has ever complained about the presence of the Russian fleet in the Baltic, and that these states will soon discover that NATO membership is more expensive for them than cooperation with Russia. The admiral expressed concern at the likelihood that NATO will establish a permanent military, naval and air force presence in the Baltic states. Kaliningrad, where the Russian Baltic fleet is based, is sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania, now both NATO members. [*Rosbalt news*, 31st March 2004]

Lithuanian president about to be impeached

The Constitutional Court of Lithuania has voted that the state President, Rolandas Paksas, 48, elected in December 2002 in a surprise victory against the incumbent Valdas Adamkas, an American citizen. This sets the stage for a parliamentary vote to impeach Paksas, something his opponents have been trying to do for months. The Court ruled that Paksas had violated the Constitution when he arranged for Yuri Borisov, a Russian businessman, to obtain Lithuanian citizenship. Borisov, who is accused of links to the Russian Mafia but who denies all wrongdoing, donated \$400,000 to Paksas' electoral campaign.

II. Scenes from Old Europe

Constitution back on track

Supporters of the European Constitution have said they now hope to get agreement on the text by June. Meeting in Brussels, the heads of state and government of the fifteen current EU member states, and the ten accession countries, have undertaken to reach agreement on the treaty by the European Council at the end of the Irish Presidency. Commentators say that the bombs in Madrid have helped things along, because the new Socialist Government is favourable to the treaty, and because public opinion thinks that "something must be done". Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who wants to go down in history as the father of the Constitution, has said that the way is now open for its adoption. Agreement is likely to be reached that votes in the European Council must reach 55% of the votes cast, and represent 55% of the EU's population, for laws to be adopted. [Michael Stabenow, *FAZ*, 27th March 2004]

More than 7,000 cases of MEP fraud alleged

An Austrian MEP has caused intense fury in the European Parliament by alleging that he has proof of massive fraud committed by his colleagues. Hans-Peter Martin claims that he has been monitoring his 625 colleagues for three years, and that he had documented them signing on for their *per diem* payments – and then immediately leaving the Parliament. He claims to have documented 7,200 "problematic cases" of this cheating. 57 out of the 99 German MEPs stand accused of receiving the payments without doing any work. Each *per diem* is worth 262 euros. The total fraud amounts to several million euros. All the usual Euro-grandees are naturally furious, and Martin has been vividly denounced by Ingo Friedrich and Elmar Brok. Martin is not standing for re-election in June. [Martin Halusa, *Die Welt*, 30th & 31st March 2004]

Only 76 MEPs against Commission

76 members of the European Parliament have called for a no-confidence vote in the European Commission over the Eurostat affair. They want Brussels to take responsibility for the financial irregularities discovered within its own statistical office, which has been involved in extra-budgetary payments. The leading name on the list is Jens-Peter Bonde, the Danish Eurosceptic. Hans-Peter Martin, the Austrian MEP who has accused his colleagues in the Parliament of corruption, has also signed the motion. In order for a vote of no confidence to be held, 10% of the MEPs must sign a motion. This means 63 signatures. But two-thirds of the MEPs have to vote for the motion to be carried. [*Der Standard*, 1st April 2004]

Eurozone growth still anaemic

The EU commissar with responsibility for monetary affairs and the economy, Pedro Solbes (who has accepted his appointment as Minister of Finance in the new Spanish government) has admitted that the economic “upturn” in the eurozone will remain “relatively moderate” this year. This is something of an understatement. The Commission is always revising growth predictions downwards, usually to around 0%. Growth of between 2% and 2.5% is now predicted ... but not until 2005. The prospects for this year, by contrast, which were earlier somewhere around these figures, are now described as “uncertain”. This weak growth rate makes a mockery of the EU’s promise to become the most competitive region in the world by 2010. The famous “Lisbon strategy” which was intended to realise this goal has simply never got off the drawing board. On 25th March, Romano Prodi said, “I think it would be more honest to admit that we cannot catch up with the United States and Japan by the end of this decade.” [Philippe Ricard, *Le Monde*, 31st March 2004]

Musical chairs in Paris

Following the devastating defeat inflicted on right-wing parties in France’s regional elections, the French President, Jacques Chirac, has reappointed his Prime Minister, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, who has in turn reshuffled his cabinet. Nicolas Sarkozy, the former minister of the Interior, is now minister of Economics, Finance and Industry, and is elevated to the rank of “Minister of State”. Dominique de Villepin, the Foreign Minister, is promoted to minister of the Interior to replace Sarkozy. Other ministers have remained in their place, such as the defence and agriculture ministers. Sarkozy is now very much the number two in the Government, and commentators have compared him to previous number twos who went on to become Prime

Minister, like Edouard Balladur and Pierre Bérégovoy. In the longer term, Sarkozy and Villepin are now the chief contenders for succession to Chirac himself, the previous dauphin, Alain Juppé, having been ruled out of the running by his conviction for corruption. The new Foreign Minister is Michel Barnier, an arch pro-European who is currently an EU commissar. Barnier’s departure brings to three the number of senior commissars who have left Brussels recently to become ministers in their national governments. The other two are Pedro Solbes and Anna Diamantopoulou. [Guillaume Tabard, *Le Figaro*, 1st April 2004]

Pot calls kettle black

The European Parliament has said that the fight against terrorism does not justify infringing civil liberties. It has expressed its opposition to the American plan to screen all passengers travelling to the USA. In a resolution adopted by 229 votes to 202, MEPs have asked airlines not to give their files on passengers to the American authorities, saying that such access infringes European and national rules protecting people’s privacy. The resolution was opposed by right-wing MEPs, supported by the British Labour Party. Although this resolution has no binding power, it puts the Commission and the member states into a delicate position. The Parliament has said that it will appeal to the European Court of Justice if its demands are ignored. According to one European official, “Every day that passes constitutes a violation of the law”, especially of an EU directive from 1995 which deals with the use of files containing personal information. Most civil liberties groups have attacked the transfer of this information to the US authorities. In the US, there is no law protecting information of a private character, unlike in Europe. Therefore, once the information has been given to the American authorities, there will be no control over it, or possibility of redress against it, by the persons concerned, especially not if they are foreigners. A person could therefore easily be classified “dangerous”, and forbidden to enter the US, without any possibility of appeal. This information will be kept by the US for 3 ½ years, and for 8 ½ if the names of non-US citizens are the object of a manual search, even a routine one. People judged to be a risk will be classified for 50 years. But the US is not the only body which has sought to infringe civil liberties and privacy in the name of the war on terror: the EU itself wants to monitor people entering the European Union, and EU interior ministers decided on Tuesday ... that airlines should send them information about their passengers. [Jean Quatremer, *Libération*, 1st April 2004]

Anti-Semitism on the rise

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia has published a 344-page report which documents a sharp increase in anti-Semitism in the EU. Not surprisingly, it calls for “effective action” taken by “the EU and member states working

together” to combat the problem. It says that all EU states suffer from the problem, and openly states – oddly, for a Centre devoted to tolerance – that the main culprits are Muslim immigrants.

<http://eumc.eu.int/eumc/as/MR-194-06-04-03-31-EN.pdf>

III. Notes from the Caucasus

Allegations of electoral fraud in Georgia

The President of the autonomous region of Adjara in Georgia, Aslan Abashidze, has accused the national Government in Tbilisi of deliberately not delivering enough voter registration forms in order to prevent people in his region from voting. Speaking on 30 March, Mr. Abashidze said that the central Government had tried to predetermine the outcome of the elections by delivering less than half the required forms to the autonomous region before the poll. He claimed that, as a result, 52.5% of voters had been unable to participate in the poll. Abashidze’s press secretary said that the regional Government was considering holding a re-run of the vote to prove that the results from the region had been rigged. Other members of the opposition also claimed that the results had been rigged: Gogi Topadze and David Gamkrelidze, the co-leaders of the Industrialists-New Rightist election alliance, claimed that the Government was planning to annul the vote in regions where they had done well. (This is in spite of the fact that that party was in alliance with the governing National Movement in the region of Adjara.) Meanwhile, the Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission alleged in return that there had been voting irregularities in Adjara, although they seemed to be of a technical nature (such as not signing certain documentation). Although the poll took place on Sunday, the votes have still not all been counted, which arouses suspicion that the whole process is flawed. As things currently stand, the governing National Movement appears to have won nearly all the seats available in Sunday’s poll, with only one party (the Industrialists-New Rightists alliance) achieving a score above the 7% threshold. [Central Electoral Commission of Georgia, <http://www.ccc.gov.ge/eng/pub/index.shtml>; RFE Newsline, 31st March 2004] In other developments, Vladislav Ardzinba, the president of the unrecognised Republic of Abkhazia, which declared independence from Georgia in 1992, said on 30 March that he fears another attack against his territory by the central Government in Tbilisi. Reports say that the

Georgian population of Abkhazia’s Southern district, Gali, are fleeing in panic at the prospect of new fighting. [*Rezonansi*, 31st March 2004]

Is NATO to expand into the Caucasus?

Russian sources report on an agreement on the deployment of mobile units by the US army in Azerbaijan, and on an agreement to upgrade airfields in the country. The purpose of this would be to deploy American fast response mobile forces. The Azeri Defence Minister, Safar Abiyev, is visiting Washington this weekend on the invitation of Donald Rumsfeld. It is expected to be announced that Azeri soldiers will be trained by the Pentagon in the same way as the Georgians already are. Details of the cooperation treaty being prepared between Azerbaijan and NATO will be published during the visit. The treaty is supposed to be another rung on the ladder leading to eventual Azeri membership of NATO, something which has already been mooted for Georgia. [*Neftegaz.ru*, 26th March 2004] In a related development, the NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, has met the Azeri ambassador to NATO, Mirhamza Afandiyev. They discussed the status of cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO and NATO’s future role in the Caucasus. Mr. De Hoop Scheffer expressed gratitude to Azerbaijan for its cooperation with peacekeeping activities in Kosovo, Afganistan and Iraq. [*Azernews.net*, 25th March 2004] One commentator with close links to the military and political establishment in Washington, Vlad Socor of the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies in Washington, says that NATO must renew its focus on the Black Sea-Caucasus region and integrate Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia into the “Euro-Atlantic security system”. Socor points out that the Caucasus is a transit route for Caspian energy and that, as such, it is strategically important to the West, as well as an access corridor for Western forces into central Asia and the Middle East.