

I. EU, Iraq, enlargement

Polish Government founders on Iraq

Osama bin Laden may have offered a truce to Europe in his latest broadcast, but the Iraq war continues to cause ructions in European politics. In Poland, for instance, Iraq is at the centre of that country's political crisis. Following the resignation of the Polish Prime Minister, negotiations are taking place in Warsaw to form a new government. The Polish President, Alexander Kwasniewski, has asked Marek Belka to be Prime Minister but a small party, the Party of Labour, which is a potential coalition partner, is saying that it will support a government under him only if Polish troops are withdrawn from Iraq by the end of the year. Poland currently has 2,400 soldiers in Iraq, but it is at the head of a multinational contingent of some 9,000 soldiers in total. The Polish sector includes the holy Shiite towns of Kerbala and Najaf, as well as Kut. In all three towns, there has been serious trouble recently, with the Americans re-taking control of Kut only after considerable difficulty. Leszek Miller, the former PM, has said that pressure could indeed build up on the new government to pull troops out. The daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* has attacked the notion that Polish troops might be withdrawn, especially at the moment. [Christophe Châtelot, *Le Monde*, 10th April 2004] President Kuchma of Ukraine has recently arranged for the Ukrainian parliament to increase the pay of its soldiers in Iraq. Other former Soviet Republics with small contingents of troops in Iraq include Georgia, Azerbaijan, Latvia, Lithuania, Kazakhstan and Moldova.

Italy mourns hostage

The Italian Government has vowed to stay in Iraq despite the recent murder of Fabrizio Quattrocchi, a 36 year old Italian man taken hostage by a group called the Green Brigade of the Prophet. His murder was filmed by Al-Jazeera, which said the scenes of his death were too bloody to screen. The hostage takers have threatened to kill the other three Italians they hold, but the Italian Government has said that it will not bow to such pressure. Rome has also rejected Bin Laden's "proposal" for peace with European states. [*Corriere della sera*, 15th April 2004]

France and Germany order citizens out of Iraq

The French Foreign Ministry has issued a formal

warning to all French citizens to leave Iraq, and those who were planning trips there to cancel them. [*Agence France Presse*, 13th April 2004] The German Government has also told its citizens they should leave the country, and has increased the security alert even for Kuwait. German aid workers have now left Iraq. [*Die Welt*, 13th April 2004]

German parties disagree over Iraq

Faced with the death of its citizens, Germany's Social Democratic-Green Government has said that there are no circumstances, not even a UN mandate, under which German soldiers would be sent to Iraq. The Christian Democrats do not support sending troops either but it is attacking the Government for making all action by the international community impossible with its absolute refusal to contemplate sending troops. The FDP liberals have said that there should be a new UN resolution so that the British and American forces are no longer tarred with the brush of being "the occupiers". A spokesman for the ruling SPD said that even a UN resolution would not change Germany's mind, because the present fighting in Iraq would not change as a result, and because that fighting was what Germany had warned would happen. But Wolfgang Schäuble, the leader of the CDU parliamentary party, said that the Government's refusal to take part even in an international mission made the international community incapable of acting. The Greens have said that no military solution exists for Iraq, and that the solution is certainly not to get NATO to run the country, as some have proposed. [*Frankfurter Rundschau*, 13th April 2004]

France blows cold on Turkey

France appears to be about to blow cold on the idea of Turkey joining the EU. Alain Juppé, the chairman of the presidential party, the UMP, has said that he does not want the EU to start negotiations with Ankara by the end of the year. This was the deadline which Turkey has been more or less promised if she proved to be co-operative over Cyprus. The new French Foreign Minister, Michel Barnier, a former commissar in Brussels, told the National Assembly shortly before Easter that, "There is no question of Turkey entering the EU in the short or medium term, in the present circumstances," although he later, rather oddly, claimed that France's position on the

matter (which was ambivalent) has not changed. It seems obvious that these two statements have been authorised by President Chirac. The majority of French people are opposed to Turkish admission to the EU. Following the disastrous results for the right-wing Government in the recent regional elections, it seems inevitable that Chirac is determined to avoid a drubbing in June's European elections. Chirac seems to have comprehensively changed his position on Turkish admission. While Juppé is now saying that Turkey could not enter the EU, Chirac was saying in November 2002 that Turkey "has its place in Europe". The official spokesmen are trying to square the circle by insisting that France's policy remains one of neutrality. "France is neither supporting nor blocking Turkish membership," is the official line. For the time being, Paris says it is waiting for a "report" by the Commission which is due to be published at the end of the year. This report is supposed to decide whether or not Turkey respects the so-called "Copenhagen criteria" on human rights and other matters. France is trying to hide behind this allegedly technical report. [Anne Fulda, *Le Figaro*, 9th April 2004]

Croatia lobbies for EU admission

The Croatian president, Stjepan Mesic, is in Paris trying to persuade France to support its application to join the EU. Mr Mesic says he hopes that Brussels will soon issue a favourable report about Croatia's "progress" and he said, following a meeting with Jacques Chirac, "We believe that Croatia will be ready to join in 2007." He claimed that Croatia has passed laws on minorities, that it had speeded up the return of refugees and the restitution of property. He also said that Jacques Chirac had expressed appreciation for the fact that Zagreb was cooperating well with the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague. Mesic said that all individuals who had been called to The Hague as witnesses or defendants, with a single exception, had gone there. That exception is the hugely popular young general Ante Gotovina, who is in hiding. Britain and the Netherlands are making his delivery to The Hague a condition for establishing better relations with Croatia. Mesic tried to turn the tables slightly by saying that France was just as guilty of the fact that Gotovina was not in The Hague because Gotovina has a French passport. (He is a former member of the foreign legion.) Croatia says that it has been simply unable to find Gotovina, but that he has probably travelled abroad on his French passport. Mesic claimed that 90% of the Serbs who wanted to have now returned to Croatia (although how he arrives at this figure is very mysterious: the total number of Serbs ethnically cleansed from Croatia is in the hundreds of thousands, and they

have certainly not returned to the Krajina, which is in ruins anyway.) Mesic also expressed his satisfaction at the fact that the change of government in November has not changed any of the fundamental orientations of Croatian foreign policy, especially its commitment to joining the EU. Mesic promised that, unlike Serbia, Croatia would continue to cooperate with The Hague. [Claire Tréan, *Le Monde*, 10th April 2004] Meanwhile, a video has appeared showing General Gotovina furiously reprimanding his officers for the fact that Serb civilians were massacred during the 1995 Operation Storm, during which the biggest ethnic cleansing operation of the Balkan wars was committed (some 250,000 Serbs were chased out of Krajina). The Croat Minister of Justice, Vesna Skare-Ozbolt, has said, "I regret that – and I wonder why – this video was not released earlier." The general's lawyer, Ivo Farcic, has said, "I am sure that the indictment would have been formulated differently if the ICTY had had this video in its possession." [*Le Monde*, 11th April 2004]

Trans-Balkan pipeline project soon to be signed

According to the former Macedonian Economics Minister, Boris Rikalkovski, an agreement is shortly to be signed on the long-planned trans-Balkan pipeline which is to link the Bulgarian port of Burgas with the Albanian port of Vlore. The idea is to provide a conduit for Caspian oil which will bypass the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. The AMBO (Albania-Macedonia-Bulgaria Oil Corporation) is expected to sign the final agreement with the governments concerned within two or three months. The project is supported by Exxon and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. [*Radio Free Europe Newsline*, 8th April 2004]

Lithuanian President impeached

Rolandas Paksas, the President of Lithuania, has been removed from his post following a vote to impeach him. Although no evidence has ever been produced of any wrongdoing, and although there were not impeachment hearings, his political enemies have repeatedly accused the President of wrongly helping a friend and political donor to obtain Lithuanian citizenship. The president of the Parliament will take over the functions of head of state until a successor can be elected. Paksas won in the presidential elections in December 2002, when he beat the US citizen, Valdas Adamkas. Adamkas may now try to stage a return to power. Paksas has always protested that the charges against him are politically motivated, and has said that his impeachment is nothing other than revenge for his fight against corruption. [*Die Welt*, 7th April 2004]

II. Other European News

Villiers publishes electoral list for June poll

Using the slogan, "Let us change Europe to protect France," the conservative French sovereigntist Philippe de Villiers, who leads the *Mouvement pour la France*, has announced that he will lead his own list for this June's elections to the European Parliament. Last time, he had a joint list with Charles Pasqua but the former Interior Minister's career was scuppered over a year ago over a corruption scandal. Villiers is still trying, though, to gather together people from all strands of the sovereigntist movement. Paul-Marie Coûteaux, the prominent writer and polemicist, has announced that he will lead the Villiers list in Ile-de-France: at the last euro-elections, Coûteaux stood for the party led by the former socialist minister, Jean-Pierre Chevènement. Coûteaux himself has called for right-left unity on the question of national sovereignty, and he has put out feelers to the few sovereigntists who remain in the presidential UMP. One of these, Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, hopes to find some support within the majority party and will turn to Villiers only if he fails. The hunters' party – *Chasse, pêche, nature et tradition* – led by Jean Saint-Josse, which did badly in the regional elections, may also find themselves gravitating towards Villiers. Overwhelmingly conservative and rural like him, they are also generally sovereigntists. One of Saint-Josse's former advisers has already joined Villiers' team, while one of the CPNT MEPs will stand this time for Villiers' party. One of Villiers' big campaign themes will be against the admission of Turkey to the EU. Villiers says that Jacques Chirac and Lionel Jospin, the former Prime Minister, gave their approval to the idea of Turkish membership at the Helsinki summit in December 1999. Villiers calls the idea of Turkish membership "political nonsense". He says, "Turkey is not European, neither by its territory nor by its cultural universe." Villiers points out that Turkey would have more MEPs than either France or Germany, being more populous. Villiers is also arguing for customs protection to be given to European products, for a community preference in agriculture, and for the right of member states to keep their national veto over immigration. "National sovereignty is an idea of the future," says Villiers. Unfortunately, the polls suggest that Villiers will get only about 4% of the vote, while pro-EU lists will get some 56%. At the last European elections five years ago, the Villiers-Pasqua list received the largest vote among the right-wing parties, beating the party led by Chirac and Juppé. Now the strongest sovereigntist party is the *Front National*, whose poll rating stands at

some 12%. [Sophie Huet, *Le Figaro*, 8th April 2004.]

France to sell 500 tonnes of gold

For the first time since May 1968, France is to sell gold held in its central bank reserves. The new Finance Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, has said that the proceeds from the sales will go either to investments or to debt reduction, but not to ordinary government spending. The sales could reach 100 tonnes a year from 2004 to 2009, a total of 500 tonnes or one sixth of France's total stocks of 3,024 tonnes worth 31 billion euros. The figure of 100 tonnes a year is limited by international treaty, the Bank of France being bound by its agreements with the other central banks of the EU within the European System of Central Banks. A part of this agreement obliges the signatory states not to exceed a certain level of gold sales. The Bank of England has promised not to sell any more gold until 2009, having sold 400 tonnes since 1999. 100 tonnes a year will bring in just over 1 billion euros, or one thousandth of the French national debt. Apparently, therefore, the gesture is mainly symbolic: to show that the state is ready to activate all its otherwise dormant assets in order to deal with the gravity of the country's financial situation. [*Le Figaro*, 12th April 2004]

Berlin and Frankfurt at loggerheads

The German Government and the Bundesbank are embroiled in a row which the central bankers say is designed to attack their independence. The Government has called for the resignation of the Bundesbank president, Ernst Welteke, for having accepted an invitation to spend a weekend in a luxury hotel in Berlin (the Adlon) on the expenses of a commercial bank (Dresdner Bank). Bundesbank officials have said that the Government's demands are an infringement of the Bundesbank's traditional independence, although many admit that Welteke made a mistake and that he should apologise for it. The bank has said that it will immediately adopt as its own the ethical code for the members of the council of the European Central Bank, and that it might even appoint an "adviser for ethical matters". Members of all political parties have criticised Welteke, and many from the opposition ranks have called for his resignation too. Last Wednesday, the Bundesbank directors rejected a call to sack Welteke. He has, however, temporarily laid down his post while investigations are continuing. But people are already being mooted to replace Welteke, should he eventually be forced out. The Government has said

that the whole affair has greatly damaged the Bundesbank and that Welteke should “draw the necessary consequences”. There is speculation that the demands for Welteke’s resignation are connected with the Government’s desire to sell some of the Bundesbank’s gold reserves, in order to “invest” the proceeds in education and research. The Federal Finance Ministry has denied there is any connection. [*Die Welt*, 10th April 2004]

Tower of Babel

When the EU expands to 25 member states on 1 May, the language problem will become even more horrendous than it already is. Because most EU citizens speak only their mother tongue, and because the EU is determined to maintain access to its documents and decisions to everyone, everything has to be translated into all the EU languages. The EU of 15 states had 11 languages: English, German, French, Danish, Finnish, French, Greek, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese and Swedish. The EU of 25 will have nine more: Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Slovak, Slovenian and Czech. If Cyprus is reunified before 1st May, Turkish will also become an official EU language. Even this leaves out regional languages like Catalan, Irish and Welsh. To interpret into 20 languages requires 60 interpreters, each interpreter costing 660 euros per day. This will bring the language budget to over one billion euros a year. It is currently some 700 or 800 million euros a year. 20 languages implies 380 possible combinations but in fact practicality will require that some of the stranger combinations – Maltese to Latvian, for instance – will pass through a common language like English or French. It is obvious that this will lead to a game of Chinese whispers. [Luc de Barochez, *Le Figaro*, 13th April 2004]

UNDP warns about Eastern European poverty

A report issued on the eve of EU enlargement has found that growing poverty is threatening to engulf four of the supposedly most prosperous accession states, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary. The sectors of the population which are the worst affected are gypsies, long-term jobless, families with more than three children and single mothers. (Gypsies often fall into all these categories.) The danger is said to be the greatest in Slovakia, where long-term unemployment is a massive problem. But the Czech Republic and Hungary also come in for criticism, especially where their Roma minority is concerned. In the Czech Republic, there has been “an alarming increase” in the number of

households relying on social benefit, and where the number of single mothers has tripled since the fall of communism. [The report, dated 7th April 2004, should be published online by the UNDP by the end of the week, www.undp.sk, under “Publications”.]

Klaus attacks Czech Government’s EU policy

The President of the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus, has attacked a policy paper written by the Czech Government on relations with the EU between now and 2013, calling it “poorly written”, “ambiguous”, “monochromatic” and “socialist”. President Klaus asked Prime Minister Vladimir Spidla, to re-write the document and said that he was willing to help with the elaboration of a better formulation of Czech aims in Europe. Klaus said that the draft lacked a specifically Czech perspective on the future of European integration, and that it did not set concrete tasks for Czech diplomats, or give them proper guiding lines for their relations with the EU. Spidla replied that he would invite Klaus to participate in the cabinet meeting which will discuss the text. On the occasion of a visit to the Czech Republic by the Romanian President, Ion Iliescu, and following a question by a Romanian journalist whether he would describe himself as “a euro realist”, Klaus replied that euro-realist was a better way to describe him than “eurosceptic” or “euro-pessimist”, but that he would certainly reject the label “euro-naïve” or “euro-optimist”. [*Radio Free Europe Newslines*, 8th April 2004]

MEPs turn on Martin

MEPs from all parties have closed ranks and attacked their colleague, Hans-Peter Martin, who claimed to have documented thousands of instances of MEPs fraudulently claiming their *per diems*. Martin, a former editor of the magazine, *Der Spiegel*, who has been expelled from the Austrian Social Democratic Party for ratting on his comrades, confirmed in an interview on Monday that he had documented thousands of cases of corruption. MEPs signed on for their daily payments without then attending any debates or even necessarily remaining in Brussels or Strasbourg. With astonishing *chutzpah*, the chairman of the German CDU MEPs, Elmar Brok, said that Martin was suffering from a fundamental misunderstanding, namely that the *per diems* were not payments for taking part in debates or sittings. MEPs get €262 a day for doing whatever they like, it seems. [*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30th March 2004]

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