

I. Turkey is in

Commission gives positive signal to Turkey

The commissar for EU enlargement, Günter Verheugen, has indicated that Brussels is ready to begin accession negotiations with Turkey, even though the official position remains that the commission is awaiting a report which is to be submitted at the beginning of October. After talks with the Turkish Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Verheugen spoke of the “impressive progress” which Turkey had made in its “reforms”. He claimed that there were still human rights violations in Turkey but said that there was no systematic torture there as before. Verheugen’s remarks follow a statement by the Dutch Foreign Minister, Bernard Bot, the previous week, that it was probable that the EU would open accession negotiations with Turkey. Bot is the current president of the European Council. Verheugen said that there was now a critical mass for “a clear and firm decision”, which will be taken on 6th October. But the veteran German CDU MEP, Elmar Brok, said that Turkey should not be too sure of its chances. He attacked the plans of the ruling AKP party to make adultery into a legally punishable crime, and to allow female students to wear headscarves in universities. [*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6th September 2004]

Verheugen said that nothing should delay the final decision being taken by the Council of Ministers in December. He promised that the Commission’s report, scheduled for October, would be “equitable, objective and honest” and that it would take into account the progress Turkey had made without

turning a blind eye to the problems. The sub-text is clear: the continuing so-called human rights issues will be used precisely as a reason for opening negotiations, on the basis that a rejection will only aggravate the situation. The Commission seems a bit taken aback, however, by Ankara’s desire to criminalise adultery. Verheugen has apparently told Erdogan, the Turkish premier, that he had better drop the planned bill, but Verheugen’s apparent indulgence towards Turkey has started to irritate those in the Commission who are opposed to Turkish entry. It is said that the Spanish and Austrian commissars, Loyola de Palacio and Franz Fischler, are the strongest Turkey-sceptics. Fischler, the agriculture commissar, has said that Turkish accession would drive up the EU’s costs and he has predicted a wave of referenda on the country’s accession.

A group of formerly leading politicians under the chairmanship of Martti Ahtisaari, the former Finnish Prime Minister, has called for negotiations to be opened rapidly with Turkey. The group includes the former French premier, Michel Rocard; the former Italian commissar, Emma Bonino; the Polish politician, Bronislaw Geremek; and the Spaniard Marcelino Oreja Aquirre. Their report, which calls for Turkey to join, has been financed by the British Government which, together with the German Government, is one of the strongest supporters of EU membership for Turkey. [*Alexandrine Bouilhet, Le Figaro*, 7th September 2004]

II. Other EU news

Waffen SS monument removed in Estonia

A small monument to soldiers who fought on the German side, i.e. in the Waffen SS, during the Second World War has been removed on the orders of the central Government in Tallinn from a small provincial graveyard in the village of Lihula. Hundreds of people protested when the builders turned up to take the monument down. [*VOA News*, 3rd September 2004] The monument had originally been erected in a town park in the southern port city of Pärnu but it had been removed from there after only a few days. At that stage, SS symbols were clearly visible on the uniform of the soldier depicted on the

monument, but these had been removed, and the inscription changed, by the time the monument reappeared in Lihula. The Mayor of Lihula, Tiit Madisson, is a polemicist who was imprisoned in the 1990s for allegedly opposing Estonian independence. Ostensibly the forced removal of the monument is supposed to show that Estonia has no truck with nostalgics for the Hitlerite struggle against Bolshevism, but in central Tallinn there is a major museum, which recounts the horrors of the Soviet “occupation” of Estonia from 1945 to 1990 while hardly mentioning the fact that Estonia was similarly occupied by Nazi Germany from 1941 to 1944.

[\[http://www.okupatsioon.ee/english/index.html\]](http://www.okupatsioon.ee/english/index.html) In that museum, indeed, Estonian flags can be seen in old newsreels being carried in the streets of Tallinn next to Nazi swastikas. In other words, the removal of a small monument in a village graveyard makes no sense when the capital city hosts this huge museum which essentially turns a blind eye to Nazism. Meanwhile, in neighbouring Latvia, there is an enormous US-style military cemetery devoted to the memory of the thousands of Latvians who fought and died in the Latvia Legion of the Waffen SS. It is massive, on a totally incomparable scale to the little slab in neighbouring Estonia. Both Latvia and Estonia, of course, have been member states of the EU since 1st May. Their Presidents have been invited to Moscow next year to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the victory over Hitler but there is some question over whether they will attend. Their own pro-EU propaganda has been so virulently anti-Russian that the Estonian and Latvian Governments seem not to regard the defeat of Nazism as a good thing. The Presidents may therefore decide that they, uniquely in Europe, cannot attend the commemoration of an event which, they say, led only to their occupation.

Another Polish-German squabble over the War

A group of politicians from the League of Polish Families, the Catholic party which campaigns against European integration, has unearthed documents in the archives of the city of Warsaw which it is using to pursue a claim against Germany for having destroyed Warsaw in 1944. Earlier this year, municipal councillors from the League succeeded in getting the mayor of Warsaw to create a commission to study the destruction of the Polish capital. In its research, the commission discovered documents from an identical commission which had sat from 1946 to 1948 but which was dissolved as the communist regimes were set up across Eastern Europe, including in Poland and East Germany. That commission had asked some 60,000 families to fill in questionnaires and, on the basis of the information obtained then, the head of the present commission says that the value of the destroyed property is between 20 and 40 billion dollars today. Even this figure is probably not the total sum. The committee has commissioned a legal opinion on the possibility of launching a suit against Germany, and it is expected in November. Some international lawyers say that it has no chance of success because reparations have been dealt with by international treaties between Germany and Poland, but there is some chance that the punitive destruction wrought on Warsaw after the 1944 uprising might still merit compensation if it was deemed to have violated the laws of war (as it doubtless did). On one level, the mooting of a suit is a way of responding to

German demands for property restitution for Germans expelled from Silesia and Prussia after 1945. [Christophe Châtelot, *Le Monde*, 8th September 2004]

Bundesbank rejects EU proposals on Stability Pact

The German central bank has said that it thinks that the European Commission's proposals for reforming the Stability Pact would weaken the present treaty arrangements. The Bundesbank has issued a statement saying that the proposals would make the conditions worse for monetary policy in European Monetary Union. There would be fewer incentives for countries to pursue solid budgetary policies. The Commission had suggested a more flexible interpretation of the rules laid down in the Stability pact, which limit state deficits to 3% of GDP but which have been ignored by many major EMU states, especially France and Germany. The Commission has suggested that countries be allowed to exceed the 3% barrier in times of low growth, and not only in times of serious recession. The Bundesbank warned against changing the rules in the way. The bank said that it thought the exceptions provided for already in the Pact should remain unchanged. It said that low state deficits were a prerequisite for low interest rates.

The German Finance Minister, for his part, has said that he thinks that the debate stimulated by the Commission is "useful and sensible". He said that he thought the proposals stood a good chance of being supported by a majority of EU member states. In a speech to the German Bundestag, Eichel seemed to lend support to the Commission's proposals by saying that the interpretation of the Stability Pact ought to be "sensible". This is of course the standard government euphemism for saying that it does not need to be respected to the letter. Eichel said that he supported the phrase used by the monetary commissar, Joaquin Almunia, who had said that the interpretation of the Pact needed "more economic logic". But he criticised the fact that people had started to say this only after half the eurozone members ignored the Pact's rules and exceeded 3% of GDP. Eichel had a dig at the Dutch Government, which attacked Germany strongly when it overran the 3% limit but which has now done the same thing itself, and so now supports Germany's new demands for flexibility. [*Handelsblatt*, 7th September 2004]

Monetary commissar demands Germany reduce deficit

Joaquin Almunia, the commissar for monetary affairs, has called on Germany to reduce its budget deficit. In an interview with *Die Zeit* Almunia said that he was in favour of a more flexible interpretation of the Stability Pact but that exceptions for Germany were

quite unacceptable. He said that since Germany was growing at some 2%, a better performance than in the recent past, it should be able to cut its budget deficit. But he admitted that political pressure might be ineffective, or counterproductive. Almunia's proposals for a more flexible interpretation of the Stability pact also contain provisions for a stricter surveillance of national budgetary policies. The commissar also said that the Pact should have been applied more intelligently over the last three years, when growth was extremely low. He said that the Pact had actually made things worse. He said that in future there should be greater incentives on countries to save (i.e. borrow less) in times of economic upturn. In 2004, both Germany and France are expected to exceed the 3% limit for the third year running. Several other EU states will do so too. [*Handelsblatt*, 8th September 2004]

Commission permits genetically modified crops

In spite of protests by environmental campaigners, the European Commission has authorised the use of genetically modified seed throughout the EU. The decision was taken on Wednesday that the American biotechnology company Monsanto can use its maize seed MON 810 in all states of the EU. The commissar for consumer affairs, David Byrne, said that 17 different kinds of GM maize had already been planted in Spain with no problems. Greenpeace protested, saying that the decision would harm consumers and farmers. To date, GM crops could be grown (in France and Spain) only because national legislation permitted it. Byrne said that the crops would be clearly marked as GM. [*Handelsblatt*, 8th September 2004]

III. Other European News

Russian Foreign Minister and patriarch attack US

Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, and Patriarch Alexei II have attacked the US State Department for saying that Moscow should continue to negotiate with moderate Chechens following the Beslan hostage outrage. "We consider such statements inappropriate," Lavrov said. "Similar statements do not contribute to the process of development of relations between the USA and Russia, or to the unity of the anti-terrorist coalition." Lavrov said that if the State Department meant that Moscow should negotiate with people actually involved in terrorism, then this was out of the question. He said, "We have already expressed our attitude with regard to the court in Boston, which granted a status of political refugee to Ilyas Akhmadov, whose involvement in the terrorist activity is well known to them." The press spokesman of the State Department had said that he would meet those who support "the independence of Chechnya" and that he would seek political solutions to the issue: Lavrov said this statement was incompatible with the current level of Russian-US cooperation. "As for our internal problems we will solve them ourselves. There is no need for the Americans to look for ways of the political settlement in Chechnya," Lavrov added. The Patriarch, Alexei II, said that he shared the Foreign Minister's position. [*Russian Information Agency (Novosti)*, 8th September 2004] The spokesman of the Foreign Ministry used even stronger language: "We have repeatedly told the American side that any such contacts [with Chechen rebels] are utterly impermissible, because the persons

in question were behind sanguinary attacks by terrorists in Russia, which have aroused condemnation around the civilized world. The world community has angrily condemned the latest boundlessly cruel attack by international terrorists against Russia. In stark contrast to this are the duplicitous statements – to put it mildly – about the need to distinguish between 'bad' and 'good' terrorists. We shall never agree with attempts to portray outright henchmen of international terrorism in Chechnya as 'freedom fighters' and to put them forward as some alternative to current efforts by the Chechen Republic and the federal authorities to restore life in that region of Russia to normal. As for the statements by the Department of State spokesman to the effect Washington is exploring ways of achieving a political settlement of the Chechen problem, we regard them as out of place. The process of restoration of normal life in Chechnya is an internal affair of Russia, it is supported by the Chechen people and will be continued with consistency." [*Itar-Tass*, 8th September 2004]

Paper alleges British spying in Croatia

A Croat paper has alleged that Britain has blackmailed Croatia over EU membership in order to obtain the right to conduct espionage operations on its territory. *Nacional*, which was celebrated in the West for its critical stance towards the former President, Franjo Tudjman, wrote, "Though nominally a sovereign state, Croatia has lost a part of its sovereignty even before joining the European Union ... and has again fallen under occupation. Unlike ten years ago, when a third of Croatia's

territory was under the control of rebel Serbs, now Britain is controlling some of the key processes in Croatia through its intelligence agencies.” The paper alleges that Britain’s secret intelligence services, SIS (MI6) have been moving throughout Croatia, wiretapping and keeping tabs on Croatian citizens whom it considers “interesting in security terms”. This, the paper says, is with the agreement of the Croatian Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader, and the head of the counter-intelligence agency. Bedford vans are being driven around the country, each containing millions of euros’ worth of listening devices and other surveillance equipment. The paper claims that Britain demanded this unusual right, ostensibly to look for a fugitive Croat general wanted by The Hague, but that other Croatian citizens are being spied on too. (The demand that General Ante Gotovina be extradited to The Hague has caused huge political controversy in Croatia, where he is regarded as a hero for having re-taken the Croatian Serb-occupied Krajina region in 1995, and for expelling hundreds of thousands of indigenous Serbs.) *Nacional* alleges that the Prime Minister agreed to this extraordinary interference in the internal affairs of his country because Britain said that otherwise Croatia would not receive a favourable opinion on its application to join the EU. The positive *avis* (opinion) was delivered on 20 April, and it was ten days before this that the British spies were allowed in. It claims that the Minister for Europe, Denis MacShane, had initially said that Britain would not support Croatia’s application even if the *avis* was positive, unless Gotovina was arrested, and that this position suddenly changed when the agreement on the spies was obtained, and when the previous head of Croatian counter-intelligence, Franjo Turek, who had opposed the demand, was sacked. *Nacional* also claims that the Prime Minister himself and the President of the Republic, Stjepan Mesic, have not used their own mobile phones for any serious conversations because, knowing about the British, they fear that they might be being listened in to themselves! [*Nacional*, 24th August 2004]

Ryzhkov boycotts Hague

Nikolai Ryzhkov, who was Prime Minister of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev from 1985 to 1990, has issued a statement saying that he refuses to appear as a defence witness in the trial of the former Yugoslav President, Slobodan Milošević, because the International Criminal Tribunal has decided to impose a defence lawyer on Mr. Milošević, something the defendant has always refused to accept. Ryzhkov said in his statement that the ICTY’s decision was

illegal and that it violated the terms of the Tribunal’s own statute. He also said that impartiality of the lawyer chosen to represent Milošević, Stephen Kay QC, is doubted by Russian public opinion. Ryzhkov said that he had accepted an invitation by Milošević to appear as a defence witness but that he would now come only when the ICTY once again acted in accordance with its own statute.

The defence has now started, albeit in the surreal circumstances in which the defendant is “represented” by a lawyer who does not represent him. Milošević has refused to meet Kay to discuss the case. When Milošević tried to protest that his right to defend himself had been violated, the presiding Judge Patrick Robinson simply cut off his microphone. Kay pressed on with cross-examining the first defence witness, who claimed that Milošević had always tried to preserve Yugoslavia and that he had always called for tolerance. But Milošević himself refused to participate in the proceedings. [*Le Monde*, 7th September 2004]

Struck says it is not worth protecting Serbs

The German defence minister Peter Struck has criticised the United Nations’ strategy in Kosovo and in particular asked whether there is “any sense” in rebuilding Serb villages to which no young people are returning because there are no prospects there. He received support from a Christian Democrat “expert”, Christian Schmidt, who said that the strategy of protecting minorities in Kosovo had failed. Struck and Schmidt both said that efforts needed to be intensified to find a political solution to the Balkans’ problems. The two men cited the anti-Serb pogrom in March as evidence of the failure of the UN’s policies. On 17 March, an Albanian mob killed 31 Serbs, wounded more than 800, drove 1,000 Serbs out of Kosovo, and burned a number of important historical monuments especially monasteries and churches. According to reports, it was precisely the German troops who allowed this pogrom to take place, especially when they gave the mob free passage to burn down buildings in Prizren, which is the capital of the German sector. [See British Helsinki Human Rights Group, <http://www.oscewatch.org/CountryReport.asp?CountryID=20&ReportID=218>] The Bundestag is currently looking into allegations that the German army suppressed information about a Serb man who had been soaked in petrol and burned to death. [Thomas Kröter, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 7th September 2004]