

Russia on their mind

Following the interview given by the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, on 14th September 2004 [<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/36177.htm>] and the Open Letter published on 29th September by one hundred leading politicians and academics, [http://www.aei.org/news/newsID.21294/news_detail.asp] both of which attacked President Putin for rolling back democracy in Russia, the European Union has added its pennyworth. The new commissar for foreign relations, the former Austrian foreign minister Benita Ferrero-Waldner, has expressed her concerns about the state of democracy in Russia and called for an open and frank dialogue with Moscow. She told the European Parliament on Tuesday, during the “hearing” which will confirm the new Commission team, that it was “obvious” that there was currently a negative development in Russian democracy. She repeated the demands made by the US administration for a “negotiated” settlement in Chechnya. [*Handelsblatt*, 5th October 2004]

Brussels to send positive signal to Sofia and Bucharest

As part of its report recommending that negotiations open with Turkey, the European Commission has recommended that Romania and Bulgaria join the EU in 2007. On the other hand, as with Turkey, it has included a get-out clause in its report, which will enable Brussels to delay a final decision until the last moment. The two countries still have to implement “administrative” and economic reforms before being allowed in. Brussels has already ruled, however, that Romania has “a market economy”, which is a key criterion and one on which the Commission refused Romania last year. The report, which will be studied by the European Council in December, also proposes that accession negotiations be opened with Croatia next year. But the get-out clause here is even stronger: the process will be suspended if Zagreb “violates the principles of freedom, of respect for human rights, and of fundamental liberties.” What this actually means is that Croatia must co-operate with The Hague tribunal and turn over its generals for trial there, especially Ante Gotovina whose whereabouts are a mystery. Croat leaders say they want to join in 2007 but many admit that 2009 is more realistic – even though Croatia’s standard of

living is incomparably higher than that of either Romania or Bulgaria, both of which (especially the latter) are in a simply catastrophic economic state. (In private, indeed, Commission officials admit this, one of them describing the situation in Romania as “dreadful”. [Pierre Avril, *Le Figaro*, 5th October 2004] Brussels has expressed its concern that corruption infects “practically all sectors of society in Romania” (probably true) and bemoans the lack of judicial action against it. Failure to make progress on this could delay accession by a year, says the report. But on the whole the report says that the two countries have made great progress with their “reforms”. [*Le Monde*, 5th October 2004]

Green light for Turkey

As predicted in the *Digest*, the European Commission has recommended that accession negotiations be opened with Turkey. But it has written very strong get-out clauses into the report, saying that negotiations could be broken off at any minute if Turkey does not make the right “reforms.” The intention is obviously to obtain the maximum possible leverage over Ankara. It seems probable that the strong words addressed to Zagreb, however, (see above) were intended to take the edge off the conditions imposed on Ankara, making it possible for Turkish politicians to save face and say that they are not alone in having such terms. The Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, says that negotiations might last until 2019 and the earliest date by which they might be concluded would be 2015. [*Le Monde*, 6th October 2004]

The Commission has said that the EU would want to be convinced over the long term that Turkey had made an irreversible commitment to democracy. It was especially concerned about the torture which it claims is still practised in Turkish police cells. It clearly also wants the Turkish government to “talk to” – i.e. obey – non-governmental organisations, which are of course not elected. It says that the results of the negotiations cannot be known in advance, i.e. that Turkey might not be admitted at the end of the process. The Commission has also made special provisions for stopping the negotiation process if human rights are systematically violated. But it also says that it wants Turkey to be integrated into European structures whatever the outcome. In

other words, it is keeping open the possibility of a “privileged partnership” which is being eagerly discussed as a substitute for full membership in the French and German centre-right parties. The Commission has also said that Turks might not enjoy freedom of labour within the EU: this exemption has already been obtained in respect of the new Eastern European member states, whose citizens cannot work in most other EU countries. Many countries have expressed the fear that there may be a huge influx of immigrant workers if Turkey joins. The Commission also seems to suggest that Turkish agriculture might not be integrated into the CAP. It says nothing about the Cyprus question: Turkey does not recognise the Republic of Cyprus but it would presumably have to do so if it starts to negotiate with the EU, of which Cyprus is now a member. [Arnaud Leparmentier, *Le Monde*, 6th October 2004]

Despite approving the opening of negotiations, the European Commission still does not think that the Turkish economy is ripe for membership. The Commission says that there is still too much state interference in the economy, and it has called on Ankara to adopt subsidy policies which are more in line with EU norms. Agriculture is obviously an issue, but the Commission also wants to see more privatisation, especially in the banking sector. Brussels also wants to see the state sell off Turk Telecom, Turkish Airlines and the electricity company TEDAS. The Commission has said that the present government, led by Mr. Erdogan, is showing greater readiness to comply with this than its predecessors. [*Handelsblatt*, 17th October 2004]

Hans-Werner Sinn, the President of the Ifo economics institute in Munich, has said that he is opposed to Turkish accession. He thinks it will cause the collapse of the European labour market. Sinn said that the main problem was not that Turkish accession would cost tens of billions of euros, but instead that Turkey was too big: the population of Turkey is already 70 million, and in 10 or 15 years it will have become more populous even than Germany, currently the largest EU state. He also said that wages in Turkey were well below those in Eastern Europe, and that this would therefore have a huge impact on German jobs.

The Turkish papers were euphoric at the EU's decision to open negotiations. They had headlines like “What a beautiful day!”, “May your way be free, Turkey!” and “41 years of work have born fruit.” One newspaper just had “Yes!” The media class is evidently delighted at the prospect of “reform” really setting in in Turkey. [*Handelsblatt*, 7th October 2004]

Chirac promises referendum on Turkey

The French president has said that there will be a referendum in France on Turkish accession to the EU, which is highly controversial there. Indeed, polls show that a clear majority of French people oppose Turkey joining the EU. This is presumably a device intended to draw the sting from a referendum on the European Constitution: in the absence of one on enlargement, voters might have been tempted to vote against the Constitution instead. During a meeting with the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, in Strasbourg, Chirac said, “I can reassure the French people, they will have their say.” He added that the vote on the Constitution had “nothing to do” with Turkey. Chirac said that a referendum on Turkey would not happen for 10 or 15 years, the time it is going to take for the negotiations to be completed. But Chirac did say that it was in the interests of everybody to “have Turkey with us” because it was a way of keeping the peace in Europe. Schröder agreed that having a “connection between a non-fundamentalist Islam and the values of the European enlightenment” would help European security. This is the widely held view – that having Turkey in the EU will strengthen the relationships between the West and Islam. Chirac said that there would probably not be referendums on the accession of Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia, arguing that their accession negotiations were “practically concluded”. France has voted on enlargement only once before, in 1972 when it voted in favour of the accession of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Denmark and Norway. (The Norwegians then subsequently voted against – very sensibly.) [Jochen Hehn, *Die Welt*, 2nd October 2004]

The Turkish Prime Minister seemed to get rather ratty at this promise of Chirac's. Erdogan said that, “Those who question the fact that Turkey might become a full member state of the EU are not respecting the procedures,” by which he meant that Turkey had had an association agreement since 1963 and had been accepted as an official candidate in 1999. “We have fulfilled our duties,” he said on a short trip to Berlin on 3rd October. “Now it is up to those who have given us these duties to keep their side of the bargain.” He said, “For the time being, something like a referendum is completely out of the question. The principles and conditions for becoming a member of the EU, and for starting the accession process, are clear.” Erdogan also said, “If it is an agreement you want and not a clash of civilisations, then Turkey must take her place in the EU.” In this, he was repeating the well-worn argument that Turkish accession is necessary to build a bridge between East and West. Erdogan added, falsely, that, “To date, no referendum has been held

on a country which wanted to become a member state of the EU.” He accused those opposed to Turkish membership of double standards, “especially since some countries which already belong to the EU are less developed than Turkey” – by which he evidently meant the new EU member states. [Nicole Pope, *Le Monde*, 7th October 2004]

According to sources, there was intense lobbying before the publication of the report, and the enlargement commissar, Günter Verheugen, was kept up all night fine-tuning the terms and strengthening the get-out clauses. Various governments intervened, as well as at least eight other commissars. France, in particular, wanted to put off the beginning of the negotiations for as long as possible – at least until after the referendum on the Constitution, which is planned for October 2005. But the terms agreed at Copenhagen in December 2002 say that negotiations should open “immediately” after the heads of state and government give the green light in December, i.e. spring rather than autumn 2005. The eight commissars who expressed their opposition were: Franz Fischler, Frits Bolkestein, Jacques Barrot, Pascal Lamy, Loyola de Palacio, Olli Rehn, Jan Figel (Slovakia) and Marko Kyprianou (Cyprus). People laughed out loud, especially the German Christian Democrat MEPs, when Günter Verheugen said that there was no systematic torture in Turkey. [Katja Riddersbusch, *Die Welt*, 7th October 2004]

Italy and Poland to pull out of Iraq

Two of the USA’s closest allies in Iraq have been discussing ways of bringing their military presence there to an end. Italy has said that it might withdraw its troops after the parliamentary elections there in January, and Poland has said that it will withdraw its at the end of next year. And if the left wins the election in Australia on 9th October, the 850-man Australian contingent will be withdrawn immediately. That would leave only the USA, the United Kingdom, and 2,400 troops from South Korea (apart from other minor contingents fulfilling secondary roles). Poland’s defence minister, Jerzy Szmajdzinski, said yesterday that it would be logical for the foreign troops to leave within the timeframe for the creation of a democratic Iraqi state set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1546, i.e. by December 2005. Poland has 2,500 troops in Iraq and it commands a multinational division of 6,000 soldiers. The deputy prime minister of Italy, Gianfranco Fini, said that Italian troops could leave by January, by which time elections are supposed to have been held in Iraq. Italy currently has 3,000 troops in Iraq. [Boris Kalnoky, *Die Welt*, 5th October 2004]

Why Wales?

There was much amusement when a Eurostat publication put a map of Europe on its cover which did not include Wales. The British Isles had been truncated, and Herefordshire and Shropshire acquired a coastline. Few people, however, seem to have asked how such a mistake could have been made. The answer is that the United Kingdom is the only country in Europe whose “internal borders” are clearly displayed on EU maps. The enlargement website, for instance, shows France, Germany, Italy, Spain etc. as integral states, while the United Kingdom is shown divided up between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. [See: http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/index_en.html] So it is not difficult for one of the component parts of the UK to have been left off. The only equivalent “internal border” in the whole of Europe, according to the map, is the one between Serbia and Montenegro. Such maps are illustrative of the regionalist assumptions of the EU. But why divide Wales, Scotland and England but not Bavaria and Saxony or Galicia and Catalonia?

Struck: Kosovo status should be resolved quickly

The German defence minister, Peter Struck, has repeated his desire to see the status of the Yugoslav province of Kosovo resolved quickly. He blamed the 17th March pogrom against the Serb minority, during which 19 people were murdered, on the fact that “the status remains up in the air”. Struck said that the pogrom had led to a change of heart in European chancelleries. He said that Kosovo had to move towards some kind of autonomy, and that the international community should not wait unduly for democratic conditions to be established there. In other words, the official position of the German government is that the powers which govern Kosovo should acquiesce in the demands of a murderous mob. [*Handelsblatt*, 4th October 2004. For an account of the 17th March pogrom, see the report by the British Helsinki Human Rights Group, <http://www.oscewatch.org/CountryReport.asp?CountryID=20&ReportID=218>]

Schuman and Gasperi next?

The Holy Father John Paul II has beatified the last Emperor of Austria, Charles I. He said that Karl von Habsburg (1887-1922) was a model for all those who wield political power in Europe today. The Pope said that Charles’ political action had been guided by his Christian faith. According to *Le Figaro*, he resembled in this respect Alcide de Gasperi and Robert Schuman, two of the founding fathers of the original European Community ... whose cause for beatification is already being examined. [Hervé Yannou, *Le Figaro*, 4th October 2004]

Spain to legalise gay marriage

The Spanish government is submitting a bill to the Cortes at the beginning of 2005, according to which same-sex couples will have the same rights as heterosexual ones, including for the adoption of children. This is a considerable change for Spain, considering that homosexuality was outlawed until 1978 there. The Prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, said that he wanted “to end the discrimination from which homosexuals have suffered for centuries”. In addition to having the same family rights as married people and as non-married heterosexual couples, including over adoption, gay couples would also have the same pension rights, inheritance rights, residence rights and citizenship rights as those accorded to married people. The same provisions on maternity leave and holidays would also be ensured. Gay marriage already exists in Belgium, the Netherlands and France – as well as in parts of Canada - but Spain is in the vanguard by proposing that gay couples have the right to adopt children. People living together in Spain, including same-sex couples, already have the right to adopt children in certain Spanish regions (Navarre, the Basque Country, Aragon and Catalonia). According to polls, 62% of Spaniards are in favour of gay marriage. But the spokesman for the bishops’ conference, Juan Antonio Martínez Camino, said that the legalisation of gay marriage would “introduce a virus into society”. The Church has already sharply attacked a bill facilitating divorce and the proposed suppression of obligatory religious teaching in schools, a measure which had been introduced under the Aznar government. [Martine Silber, *Le Monde*, 2nd October 2004]

No sanctions against Greece

The European Commission has decided that there will be no sanctions against Athens for providing false statistics on the country’s economy and budget deficit. A spokesman for the monetary commissar Joaquín Almunia said on Wednesday in Brussels that the new Greek government was making considerable efforts to correct the mistakes of its predecessor. Because of this, the Commission saw no reason to impose a fine on Greece for having overstepped the budget deficit rules by such a large margin. (The real deficit is nearly 5%, not under 3% as the previous government claimed.) But the Bavarian prime minister was less indulgent. Edmund Stoiber attacked the Greek book-cooking as “a grave violation of European solidarity” and said that

Athens merited an exemplary punishment. Stoiber said that the payments to Greece from the cohesion fund should be withheld. [*Handelsblatt*, 4th October 2004]

EU and US fight over aeroplanes

The EU has lodged a complaint against the US with the World Trade Organisation, following the same move by the US against the EU. Both suits are over state subsidies to aircraft manufacturers. The US trade secretary Robert Zoellick announced the move on Wednesday, and Pascal Lamy, the outgoing EU trade commissar, retorted by saying – albeit in diplomatic language – that if the US wanted a fight they could have one. According to the EU, Boeing has received some \$23 billion in state aid since 1992. The EU alleges that Boeing’s subsidies come in a hidden fashion, because the company uses grants for research, which it obtains from the Pentagon and NASA, for use in its civil aircraft construction. The US accuses the EU of unfair subsidies of about \$1 billion. Robert Zoellick said that Europeans used to justify these subsidies by saying that Airbus Industry needed help when it started up. But that argument, he said, no longer applied since Airbus sells more civil planes now than Boeing does. According to the US, Airbus’ market share is now over 50%. Following the lodging of the suits, there will be a 60-day period in which the WTO will try to find a compromise between the two parties. [*Handelsblatt*, 6th October 2004]

Building of US embassy starts in Berlin

The centre of Berlin has been a huge building site for years now but one last project has just commenced, which was supposed to start in 1931 – the US embassy near the Brandenburg Gate. It should be finished by the end of 2007. The original plans were interrupted by a fire, the war and then the Cold War. Even after the ‘changes’ in Germany, there have been six US ambassadors who have tried to deal with the project. The delay was due to the fact that the city authorities in Berlin thought that a US embassy in such a prominent place would be a security risk. Finally the city agreed to move two adjacent streets. The Americans, for their part, are using special building materials. The US Ambassador, Daniel Coats, said that the central location of the embassy symbolised America’s support for the reunification of Germany. [*Die Welt*, 7th October 2004]