

Voices from Europe

Strange bedfellows

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The press in Europe commented on the possible international and domestic political repercussions of the Iraqi crisis in France, Britain, and Turkey. Several papers also analysed the implications of the Maltese vote in favour of EU entry.

"USA threatens France with 'serious consequences' if it vetoes the attack," reads the front-page headline in Spain's *El Mundo*. France's *Le Figaro* says US Secretary of State Colin Powell has "upped the tone against France" by warning Paris against using its veto in the vote on the US-backed resolution later this week. The US is frightened by the idea that a few gentlemen from the old Europe could, shoulder to shoulder, call George Bush to account.

Germany's *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* is not surprised that the Americans have rejected France's proposal to invite the leaders of UN Security Council member states to an emergency summit on Iraq in New York. "They are frightened by the idea," it says, "that a few gentlemen from the old Europe could, shoulder to shoulder, call George Bush to account in front of the whole world." With French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin on a lightning tour of Angola, Cameroon and Guinea, the paper says, Paris is trying hard to win over African countries on the Security Council to prevent a majority in favour of the new resolution. "Only if that succeeds... will Paris not have to use its veto against its most important ally," it concluded.

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dum will not spell the end of the Maltese debate on EU membership. According to the paper, even though the result of the referendum is not binding, it has bolstered Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami's chances of being re-elected. "The result provides Malta's first European," the paper says, "with the reassuring prospect of winning this year's elections, together with his [Mr Adami's] Nationalist Party."

Berlin's *Der Tagesspiegel*, on the other hand, interprets the closeness of the result as a sign of problems ahead. According to the paper, celebrations on the Mediterranean island or in Brussels are uncalled for. "The close result shows once again that the birth of a united Europe... will be painful and slow," it warns. The paper adds that the economic gloom and divisions within Europe over Iraq will make the process of unification even more laborious.

Most of the papers discussed Europe's "strange bedfellows", rising unemployment in Germany, France's cash-flow problems and Russia's heroes.

The French *Le Monde* calls France, Germany and Russia a trio of "strange bedfellows" in their opposition to America's line on Iraq. The paper stresses that what unites the trio "is a point of principle above and beyond the debate on the best way to disarm Baghdad".

America, the paper believes, "has declared itself in a permanent state of legitimate defence" and believes it has "the right to name its enemies and wage war against them". The European trio, it says, "are right to challenge this stance... even knowing that America's war against Iraq is inevitable".

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total ever recorded in Germany in February was announced. "While over 4.7m people who want to work find themselves out on the streets," the paper says, "the railwaymen want pay rises of between three and five per cent."

"Nothing shows the complete absurdity of the situation in the country more clearly," it adds, "than this contrast between those who have work and those who would like nothing better than to work." The paper accuses the unions of taking 1.5m passengers hostage just to prove its credentials in a wages dispute.

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States has not reacted as strongly as they have. They have created the impression that they are more royalist than the king."

The left-leaning *Cumhuriyet* believes the "ineffective approach" of Prime Minister Abdullah Gul was the main reason for the bill's failure. "Washington is convinced AKP leader Erdogan, who will definitely take over as the new prime minister after 9 March, will solve the problem in accordance with US expectations."

Turkey's Islamist press is far more approving of the bill's rejection. For *Yeni Safak* this amount to a "Turkish barrier to war". It concedes that a second bill



economy almost 40 years ago," it says, and "in so doing they made themselves almost meaningless".

Munich's *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* sees the answer to unemployment in a better education system.

A report in Russia's popular tabloid *Komsomolskaya Pravda* headed "Have a drink yourself, but lend your comrade a hand" tells the story of two residents of Novyy Oskol, in Belgorod Region in south-west Russia. On their way back from the allotments they decided to "take a slight short cut" via a stream covered with treacherous spring ice. One of them fell through and began to drown. The second heroically hurled himself into the icy water and dragged out the drowning man.

A serious argument ensued. The trouble is that the heroes of the hour were "pretty sozzled" and each is now claiming that he was the drowning man's rescuer. The local authorities are willing to confer a For Saving the Drowning medal but to whom?! Both men say that they have dreamed of some sort of award all their lives, and therefore are prepared to go to court and even to take part in a forensic reconstruction. "As the saying goes, you won't sort things out without a bottle of vodka," the tabloid concludes.

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may be possible, but says there are certain "serious obstacles" facing such a move. "It is very difficult to persuade many ministers to endorse such a memorandum."

Milli Gazete writes: "Yankees waiting for new memorandum". Its columnist Mehmet Bekaroglu claims that unless the AKP pushes through a new bill, a US-led military operation against Baghdad will be "shelved for the time being."

All shades of opinion consider the financial implications of the vote. The US has ditched a \$15bn loans and aid package to Turkey, leading the Erdogan government to disclose price increases, spending cuts and tax rises.

Under the headline "These guys are traitors", the Islamist paper *Vakit* slams the head of Turkey's businessmen for predicting economic chaos if the bill was rejected.

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The paper blames "unilateralists in Washington" and "adherents of the status quo" for the divisions in the UN Security Council and argues that there is now more at stake than the best way of dealing with Iraq. "The real issue," it says, "is America's power in the world. This is why the debate is being conducted with such intensity."

Switzerland's *Tages-Anzeiger* says Turkey's prime minister-in-waiting, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, will probably seek to reverse the decision not to allow the deployment of US troops. "Erdogan will be tempted to do this because of Washington's financial incentives," the paper believes, pointing out that he needs US funds to fulfil his promise of a better future for his country. But it describes a new debate in the Turkish parliament as "a risky manoeuvre, even for Erdogan."

"If Turkey holds another vote on US troops, it won't be able to hide behind a new UN Security Council resolution any more," it warns, since in the paper's view the resolution currently under discussion at the UN is likely to be vetoed.

Another Swiss paper, *Le Temps*, sees it as "an irony of fate" that "the man elected by an overwhelming majority as the symbol of a Turkey which is modern, independent and rooted in the Muslim world finds himself forced to start his term of office under the Star-Spangled Banner to preserve financial aid and his country's role as a mainstay of Nato".

The main front-page headline in Switzerland's *Neue Zuercher Zeitung* speaks of a "narrow Maltese vote for EU entry" but notes "continued divisions" on the Mediterranean island. Under the headline "The first yes", a commentary in Germany's *Frankfurter Rundschau* agrees that the referen-

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Cumhuriyet reports that the government expects to raise 3.6 quadrillion Turkish lira from state employees, retired people, farmers and workers. The centre-right *Star* mentions the same figure being raised though new taxes. The paper is pessimistic, claiming that "people do not want any bitter medicine". ■

-Compilation and translation by MARIE VALLET



that it was not the foreign ministers of three very different states speaking, but one man. "And his name could be Joschka Sergeyevich de Villepin," it concludes.

Hungary's *Magyar Hirlap* sees some good coming out of the Iraq crisis. The paper says the crisis "has brought about in Europe an unexpected unity between the voice of the people and the elite politicians", and raised "the possibility of Europe emerging as an independent geopolitical player".

But it warns that those EU members and membership candidates who align themselves with America and choose to participate in what it calls "an illegitimate war". The daily believes they will automatically "exclude themselves from the joint European foreign and defence policy currently taking shape".

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Berlin's *Der Tagesspiegel* is not best pleased with the strike action launched by German train drivers on the same day, it stresses, that the third highest unemployment

Saturday's vote in parliament rejecting the deployment of US troops in the country. Secular papers are agreed that a new authorisation bill will be presented soon, but the Islamist press is sceptical that such a move will succeed.

The mass circulation daily *Hurriyet* carries the headline: "Signal for second bill". It quotes the leader of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) Recep Tayyip Erdogan who warns that Turkey cannot adopt an approach similar to that of Australia or Norway. "The developments that will take place after the operation against Iraq will not affect them. However, they will directly affect us." The paper is convinced this means the government will seek a new vote on the authorisation bill.

Hurriyet's commentator Ertugrul Ozkok says that Turkish and US officials have already resumed their talks. "I hope we can overcome the hysterical situation... reconsider the developments, and take logical steps required by our country's interests to rectify our mistake."

A column by Fikret Bila in *Milliyet* criticises the strong reaction in the Turkish media to the bill's rejection. "The Uni-