

Voices from Europe

'NO' to any activity beyond UN

This weekend's anti-war demonstrations take up large parts of the European press.

Newspapers across the continent debate whether the protests will succeed in averting an attack on Iraq. Several papers analyse the prospects for Monday's European Union summit, called to discuss the crisis caused by divisions over Iraq. "The world demo" reads the headline on the Paris daily *Liberation*, which shows protesters in London's Trafalgar Square holding a banner reading simply: "No!"

Germany's *Tageszeitung* is equally upbeat as it notes a change in public mood following the protests. "Suddenly millions of people in Europe and the world can nurture the hope that they themselves can do something - by taking to the streets," it says.

Spanish *El Mundo* thinks that after this weekend "governments will find

citizens, as if the latter were unable to hold opinions," it adds.

The Russian liberal daily *Vremya Novostey* believes that Britain's Tony Blair has indeed taken heed. "The demonstrations were so striking that Mr Blair in essence for the first time admitted the possibility of disarming Iraq by peaceful means," it says.

The front-page of the Paris daily, *Le Figaro*, shows a photo of New Yorkers standing behind an anti-war banner on which the words "Merci la France" are visible. But *Liberation* suggests that President Jacques Chirac may become uncomfortable with his new role as "global hero of peace".

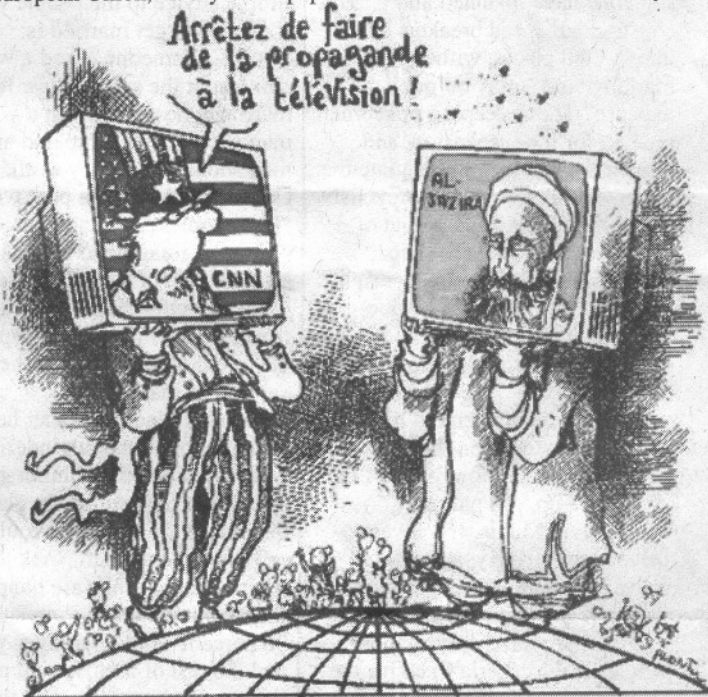
"He has always maintained simultaneously that he is opposed to the American juggernaut and that he is ready to jump on the bandwagon at the last minute," it observes. But his opposition to war has been so successful that Mr Chirac will

the EU members up against a crisis of extreme gravity," it observes. But the paper is disappointed that the 10 central European countries due to join the EU were not invited to the meeting. The majority of these states are aligned with Washington's policy. "One gets the feeling that the Greek presidency is acting in favour of one of the two stances over which the Fifteen already seem divided," it comments.

France's *Le Monde* says Wednesday's statement issued by 10 central and eastern European countries backing America's stand on Iraq is yet another sign that "the Iraq crisis continues to cause division in Europe". "The statement shows that the continent's eastern nations are more attached to America than to the European Union," it says. The paper

internal split which the Iraq crisis has caused on this side of the Atlantic". The European Union, the paper warns, "can only function in unity and not if it turned against itself". With their rejection of military action against Iraq without a further UN resolution "Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and, to a lesser extent, his French counterpart, Jacques Chirac, have forced European Union countries to pledge allegiance either to Washington or to Brussels," the paper says. It worries that a shift in the French policy will inevitably spell troubles for the German chancellor. "If Chirac caves in to US pressure, as it seems possible, Schroeder will stand alone in a hostile Europe." On the other hand, "a retreat from his antiwar position... could cost him the chancellorship on a

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Le Monde (France) - "Stop making propaganda on TV!"

recalls that a similar declaration published last week by the leaders of another eight European countries called on Europe "to rally behind the American flag".

The European Commission "has so far chosen to play down the scale of the differences and not to demand that everyone plays by the rules", it says. But "privately its leading members make no secret of their discouragement over these initiatives", it adds. In Germany, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* says the Franco-German partnership or "the European engine" is to blame for precipitating the split. After France, Germany and Belgium were told on Thursday that they have until Monday to decide if they want to continue blocking the deployment of Nato equipment to Turkey, the International Herald Tribune quotes Nato Secretary General George Robertson as confirming that "there is continuing disagreement" within the alliance on the issue. "Lord Robertson has set in motion a special procedure that would require the three countries to state their objections publicly in order for the assistance package to be blocked," the paper explains.

Ankara, it recalls, asked for its Nato allies' assistance last month "in light of the threat of a war in Iraq".

vote of no-confidence".

In Spain, another European leader is criticised for his stand on Iraq. Barcelona's *Avui* says Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar's support for the US policy makes him, too, look increasingly isolated. Of all the Spanish state institutions, only the prime minister "advocates... unconditional support for the intervention against Saddam being prepared by the Bush administration", the paper says.

Right-winger French *Le Figaro* has American Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, trumpeting, as only he can, "Saddam must go!"

Trendy *Liberation* gives pride of place to the latest Franco-German peace proposals, already denounced by Washington as a "mirage". The front page of Catholic *La Croix* also features "The new initiatives to avoid war", partly Paris-Berlin, but also mentioning the Pope's special envoy, Cardinal Etchegaray, who has been sent to Baghdad. The Catholic daily also reminds us that Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi number two, will be meeting Pope John Paul II in Rome on Friday. That meeting was specially requested by Baghdad. Communist *L'Humanite* headlines with the pacifist counter-attack, a global movement against military action which is expected to bring



L'Espresso (Portugal)

it harder than before to ignore the public".

This view is echoed in the Russian government mouthpiece *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. It says that the world doesn't want a war and the "unprecedented scale" of the protests proves this. "Politicians will be obliged to consider public opinion because when millions take to the streets it's a serious matter."

The Madrid daily *El Mundo* feels that the demonstrations are a lesson to governments which support the US stance - such as that of Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar. "The prime minister must learn some kind of lesson from the massive

require "enormous agility" to perform the latter feat, it says. "Some people are prisoners of war. As for Chirac, he is a prisoner of peace."

The British prime minister and German Chancellor Schroeder also come in for some criticism. The two leaders are guilty of "one shameful thing," says the Berliner *Zeitung*. That is they set out their Iraqi policy unilaterally rather than coordinating with the rest of the European Union. It calls for today's emergency EU summit to oppose this unilateralism. "This is demanded not only by millions of demonstrators but also by the EU Treaty and UN Charter." The Spanish daily *ABC* also welcomes

US stance - such as that of Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar. "The prime minister must learn some kind of lesson from the massive rejection of his policy," the paper argues. "It is not the task of democratic governments to place themselves above the wishes of their

"This is demanded not only by millions of demonstrators but also by the EU Treaty and UN Charter." The Spanish daily *ABC* also welcomes Greek EU presidency's decision to call the summit. "For the first time the lack of definition of a common foreign and security policy has put

the paper explains. Ankara, it recalls, asked for its Nato allies' assistance last month "in light of the threat of a war in Iraq". "There are great differences between the European Union and Nato", says the Spanish daily *La Razon*, "but both organisations reflect... the

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*-Compilation and translation
by MARIE VALLE*