

Voices from Europe

Will Chirac succeed where de Gaulle failed?

A variety of stories, political and economic, dominate the editorial pages of the continent's dailies this week - the crisis over Iraq is the common thread running through them all.

While French and Spanish papers comment on the position their respective countries now occupy on the world stage as a consequence of their leaders' decisions over Iraq, an Austrian daily considers the economic consequences of a war in Iraq for Europe. And a Bucharest paper notes that Romanian authorities are seeking five-star hotel accommodation for US troops arriving in the country.

Germany's *Frankfurter Rundschau* says that the UN weapons inspectors' demand that Iraq destroy its missiles that exceed the UN-permitted range by 1 March is by far the most precise instruction given to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein so far.

The paper argues, "It puts the Iraqi dictator on the spot" and compliance with this demand "can be verified". Should Saddam co-operate, it would be extremely difficult for the US to gain a second resolution at the UN Security Council legitimising war, the paper believes.

But, the paper warns, if Iraq fails to comply then Germany - whose foreign minister, Joschka Fischer,

gave his full backing to the UN inspectors - will find it very hard to vote 'no' on a second UN resolution authorising force.

With French President Jacques Chirac still holding out against a US-led war on Iraq, the Paris daily *Le Monde* sounds a note of caution to those who liken him to his towering forebear, Charles de Gaulle. Will Jacques Chirac succeed where de Gaulle failed? Will he stand up to Washington?

The general was not afraid of defying Washington, the paper concedes, and Chirac does not object to the comparisons. But de Gaulle's legacy is ambivalent, it argues.

"Under his reign, France remained a medium-sized power, incapable of influencing the geopolitical situation of the time."

"The Yalta system still prevailed," the paper continues, "the world did not cease being bipolar, and - from Vietnam to Latin America - Washington continued to do as it pleased."

"Will Jacques Chirac succeed where his predecessor failed?" it asks. "[Will he] stand up to Washington without adding to the divisions in Europe and NATO?" That, the paper believes, would really be "squaring the circle".

In Spain, it is Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar whose importance on the international stage is assessed by the Madrid papers. They comment on his

US visit and, in particular, his proposal to US President George Bush for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In an editorial headed "Aznar tries to save relations with the Arab world", Madrid's *El Mundo* says that Mr Aznar is trying to soften Spain's image as an out-and-out US ally.

"The Spanish prime minister," it points out, "believes that a change of regime in Iraq must be accompanied by a solution to the Palestinian problem." Another daily, *La Razon*, is impressed by Mr Aznar's overture: "The Arab League meeting set for 1 March could benefit from the new position put to Bush by Aznar."

Mr Aznar's initiative, the paper believes, increases his status in what it calls "the select club of statesmen

support".

The economic consequences for Europe of a war in Iraq concern Vienna's *Der Standard*. The paper believes that what it calls the EU's weakness in foreign policy is matched only by its failure in economic reform. In the paper's view, the question is not whether a war in Iraq would spark a recession but whether recession can be avoided even if there is no war.

With economic gloom abounding, especially in Germany, the paper sees only degrees of doom in the weeks and months ahead: "The extent of a war in Iraq, and of potential terrorist attacks linked to it, will merely determine the depth of the recession."

"The world demo" reads the headline on the Paris daily *Libération*, which shows protesters in London's



Le Monde (Paris, France)

who have a say in international affairs". It is the apparent status of US soldiers in Romania that attracts comment from Bucharest's *Evenimentul Zilei*. The paper welcomes the arrival of the first US transport aircraft over the weekend at Mihail Kogalniceanu airport on the Black Sea coast.

"The airport has been transformed overnight into a fortress", the paper notes, before adding: "The 600 American soldiers already at the base are looking for better rather than more secure accommodation in the nearby Mamaia beach resort."

"In order to ensure the American officers are well treated," the paper says, "a team from the Romanian Defence Ministry is selecting a number of five-star hotels in Mamaia able to provide luxury accommodation."

Another Romanian daily, *AZI*, is more concerned by the security implications for Romania of hosting US forces. "Now, at a time when Romania has opened a Nato base for the first time," it says, "the country needs more security guarantees."

The paper disagrees with Prime Minister Adrian Nastase who said that Romania should not ask Nato for security guarantees. "Because the war against Iraq is inevitable", the paper argues, "[Romania's] National Defence Council should take measures, based on Romania's alliances, to obtain the necessary

Trafalgar Square holding a banner reading simply: "No!"

The paper hails Saturday's worldwide anti-war demonstrations as an "unprecedented mobilisation".

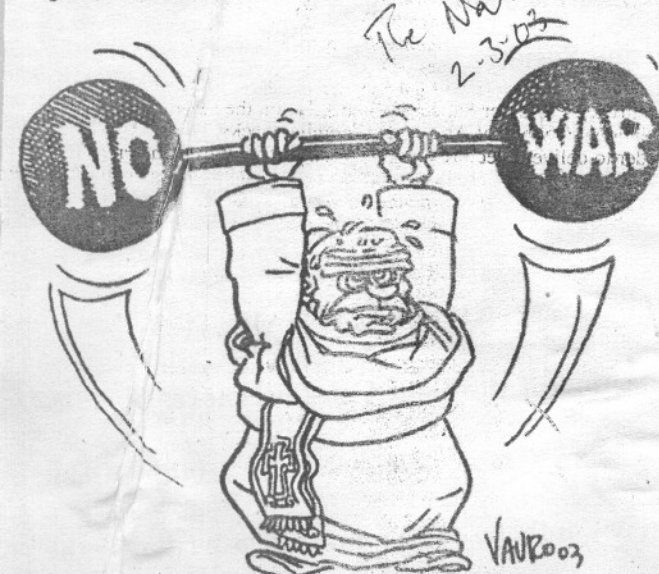
Germany's *Tageszeitung* is equally upbeat as it notes a change in public mood following the protests. "Suddenly millions of people in Europe and the world can nurture the hope that they themselves can do something - by taking to the streets," it says. The paper thinks that after this weekend "governments will find it harder than before to ignore the public".

Ukraine's tabloid *Segodnya* is rather pessimistic about Nato's agreement: "Having agreed a plan to assist Turkey, Nato has indirectly confirmed that war is inevitable," it says.

In Romania, *Adevărul* believes Mr Chirac's "harsh criticism of Romania and Bulgaria for 'bad behaviour and recklessness' because of their support for the US on Iraq is unprecedented". "During the Gulf War Romania was criticised for supporting Iraq and it is now criticised for supporting the US", the paper notes. President Chirac, it adds, "has no right to impose his views on the other EU candidate countries". "The candidate states have demonstrated", the paper concludes, "that their positions cannot be ignored".

-Compilation and translation by MARIE VALLET

PACE: SI INTENSIFICANO GLI SFORZI DEL VATICANO



Il Manifesto (Rome, Italy) - "Peace: the efforts of the Vatican intensified"