

## Voices from Europe

# Europe's big 'NO' to war

### Le Monde, France

Europeans are saying 'no'. A big 'NO' to a war against Iraq, as things stand now. Neither Tony Blair nor Jacques Chirac - whose armed forces would likely participate in an operation - can flout the polls taken day after day. Nearly 60 percent of Britons and more than 70 percent of French people say war against Iraq would not be justified - with or without a green light from the UN.

Europe is not convinced of Saddam Hussein's dangerousness. It is up to (Bush) to establish the existence and the dangerousness of Iraq's arsenal before making a decision as drastic as war. If the proof is indeed crystal clear, as Mr. Bush and Mr. Blair say, why hasn't it already been produced?

If Washington finds it possible to 'contain' Pyongyang with diplomacy, isn't it conceivable to do the same with Baghdad? If the United States stigmatizes - quite rightly - a regime as cruel as Saddam Hussein's, why do they treat the criminal tyranny of Kim Jong-il with kid gloves?

### The Independent, UK

Not for the first time, (Cabinet minister) Clare Short has spoken with admirable clarity. She is quite right to strip the Prime Minister's recent statements of their evasions and say that "the logic of the position" is that, if the United States decides to take unilateral military action against Iraq, the British government should not support it.

The problem is that Mr. Blair has never set out the conditions under which British forces should go to war. We know a lot about what a terrible man Saddam Hussein is, and how he has defied U.N. resolutions in the past. But we do not know what has to happen to make the use of military force necessary in Mr Blair's eyes. All we know is that sticking with the U.S. was an article of faith with him, and that he does not regard a single country's veto on the U.N. Security Council as a bar to action.

### Corriere della Sera, Italy

The main declared reason for a war in Iraq is defusing the "Saddam bomb," although many people claim that (US President) George W. Bush may have other reasons.

Experts of advanced military technologies say that Washington

adolescents have been sentenced to death. At the same time, the number of death sentences have significantly dropped in the past two or three years.

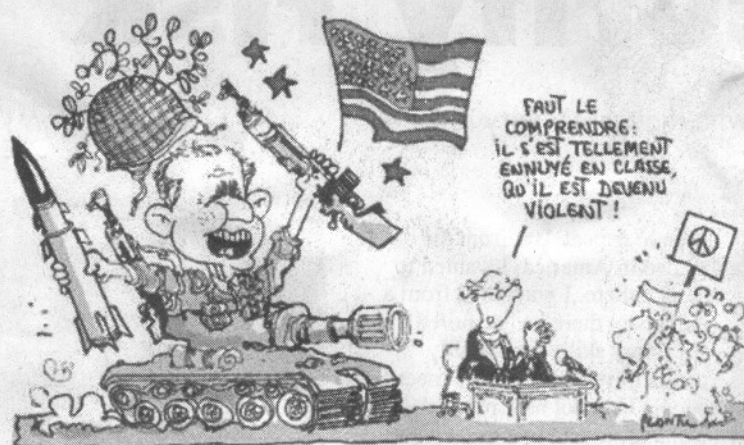
Crime demands punishment, but it is not the duty of the government to kill its citizens - that in itself is actually a crime. If this recognition spreads in the United States at the beginning of the 21st century, it is a satisfying development that Gov. Ryan has promoted with his mass pardon.

### Le Monde, France

European opinion is "resolutely opposed to a military intervention to disarm Saddam Hussein".

"This may not carry much weight with the United States but it does reflect a reality which cannot be ignored by Washington's main European allies." "European scepticism is reinforced by America's attitude to North Korea's open nuclear threats," it adds. But if Washington thinks it possible to "contain" Pyongyang by diplomatic means, could it not conceivably take the same attitude to Baghdad, the paper asks.

America has rightly condemned



Le Monde - "You must understand him, he was so bored at school that he became violent" (allusion to a symposium about boredom at school that took place in France last week)

terrorism.

"It is not only the impending concrete, relatively small war against Saddam Hussein which is at issue. It is mainly the ongoing undeclared war of the globally organised terrorism against our civilisation what imports. It will most probably escalate in years to come, and it is far from improbable that we will experience an 11 September of our own," the paper says. "In such a situation we should have a president who is capable of shouldering the risk and the responsibility as a commander," the paper says.

Le Monde, France, says the plan for a dual presidency of the EU heralds "the revival of French-German co-operation as the motor of Europe" and "fresh evidence of the capacity of the two countries to find compromises to advance the construction of Europe". But the paper points out that other EU members are "ambivalent" about the relationship. "They note with regret that when there is lack of understanding between Paris and Berlin, Europe stagnates. But when Paris and Berlin agree they are denounced as a 'directorship' which confronts the rest with ready-made decisions," the

published in Berlin showing that economic growth was down to 0.2% last year, its lowest since the 1993 recession. The figures, the paper says, confirm Germany's status as "the sick man of Europe" and show its economy "in a state of extreme debility". The French Government, it adds, "is concerned at the threat" this situation "may pose to the euro zone". But it is German emigration and not the economy that bothers the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung today. "More and more Germans are thinking of leaving the country," the paper notes.

According to an advice bureau for would-be emigrants, it says, the number of inquiries about jobs abroad "has risen considerably" since the September elections. "Those leaving Germany are searching for a better life... a better job, better company, better attitudes and better weather." The inquiries, the paper rues, come "especially from well-trained Germans with university degrees" who "see no future for themselves in Germany" and "want to go as far away as possible". "The impact of the current pessimistic mood in Germany should not be underestimated," it warns.

Compensation precedent in Russia? - In Russia, attention is fixed on what has become known as "The Nord-Ost Trial": the Moscow city authorities are being sued by citizens who were held hostage by Chechen guerrillas in the theatre where the musical Nord-Ost was playing.

It is a unique event, the mainstream *Trud* points out. "In all the history of Russian jurisprudence," it says, "this is the first situation where citizens have demanded compensation from the authorities like this."

There's big money at stake, the government paper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* writes. "The total claimed is over \$59m. That amount is probably not final, as a few more victims arrived at the hearing wanting to put their own cases." There is no way of telling where it all might end up, *Trud* concludes recalling the Moscow apartment building blasts that killed dozens. "A precedent could be set," it says, "and victims and relatives of those killed in the explosions in Moscow, Buynaksk and other towns could sue. "It is impossible even to guess what the costs of those lawsuits could be."



Le Monde - "What about saying that Saddam Hussein has gone already and I am one of his doubles?"

Experts of advanced military technologies say that Washington could use the possible conflict to experiment the Pentagon's most recent weapons and many economy experts claim that Bush believes that Pentagon's war expenditure will help US economy.

The question is if the dollar can bear the costs of the war. One of Bush's possible reasons (for wanting the war) is his candidacy in the next presidential elections, which involves gathering consensus from lobbies linked to Israel.

As war becomes a realistic possibility in the Middle East, a conflict in Kurdistan could also begin and Iran can stir up a rebellion. Islamic fundamentalism could get worse in Saudi Arabia and the war could help Al Qaeda in recruiting terrorists. The danger of a nuclear conflict in North Korea also becomes a worrying perspective.

(Secretary of Defense) Donald Rumsfeld recently warned that the U.S. could even face two conflicts at the same time. A conflict against Saddam Hussein in Iraq and another against Kim Jong Il in North Korea?

#### Berlingske Tidende, Denmark

In Illinois and several other states, investigations have shown that there are too many errors in sentencing people to capital punishment, that the wrong people have been condemned and that the death penalty proportionally hits black people more.

This has, gratefully, sparked a debate in the United States about this irresponsible sentencing and has created a legitimate doubt about the tough stance, which has led to instances where retarded people and

Saddam Hussein's "cruel regime", the paper notes. So "why the velvet glove approach to Kim Jong-il's even more criminal tyranny?" it wonders. "Until these questions are answered, European opinion will continue to question the real motivations of Mr Bush's Iraq policy," it concludes.

The Berliner Zeitung (Germany) describes German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's call for a second UN resolution before any military action is taken against Saddam Hussein as "essential". It rejects the criticism that the government's anti-war stance has led to its international isolation. "It's a strange world in which insisting on the law rather than sovereign contempt for it should mean isolation," it says.

Czech presidential choice - Papers in the Czech republic focus on the presidential election. For the first time in the Czech Republic's history, deputies and senators will really elect a new president. Nothing has been agreed upon beforehand and none of the four candidates is a favourite, Martin Zverina writes in the Lidove Noviny, (Czech Republic).

But each of the candidates seems to be problematic in some respect and no matter which one of them is elected, they will never enjoy influence and position comparable to the outgoing President Vaclav Havel, the writer concludes.

The Pravo (Czech Republic) daily underlines the importance of the presidential role and the country's contribution in the coalition against

paper says.

Berlin's Die Tageszeitung (Germany) believes French President Jacques Chirac "has had his way". In a front-page editorial entitled "Paris leads the European Union", the paper concedes that, under the proposal, the president of the Commission would be strengthened. "But who is interested in what Romano Prodi has to say about a war against Iraq," it asks, "when the future super president of the 27 heads of government - be it Blair, Chirac or Aznar - intervenes in the debate?"

"A French president who is today stronger than ever has taken over the leadership of the EU," the paper concludes.

Vienna's Die Presse (Austria) agrees. In a commentary entitled "the leader of Europe", it says President Chirac used "the ruse of a dual presidency" to win Berlin over to his own plan for a powerful European president.

It argues that the proposal regarding the head of the Commission doesn't change much because such a president already exists. "He does not have much of a say - and probably never will," the paper concludes.

And the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany) wonders whether the debate might not turn out to be just hot air. "Perhaps the EU is building castles in the air" the paper suggests. "Enlargement to eventually more than 30 states," it argues, "would entail changes which it would not be possible to control with a constitution."

In Spain, Madrid's ABC says it is obvious that "the cohabitation of two presidents on a supposedly equal footing would not be viable" because "an institution as complex as a 25-member European Union will need a visible and recognized leadership."

El Pais, however, takes the opposite view and believes that the plan "deserves to be discussed in depth". Two coexisting presidents at the head of the Council of Ministers and European Commission could help "maintain a basic institutional balance in the construction of this new political structure of a different kind that is the European Union", the paper says.

"Germany threatened by recession," says the front page headline in the French Le Figaro. The gloomy outlook is prompted by figures

costs of those laws...

Across Europe, Iraq continues to be a subject of concern and comment. Prague's Lidove Noviny notes that the Czech parliament failed to endorse a government proposal to contribute troops for any eventual military action against Iraq. The odds were poor at the outset, it says, as most Czechs are against an US-led intervention without a clear UN mandate. But the government did not help matters, it adds, by its use of what the paper calls "evasive tactics" and "verbal balancing tricks". The proposal, it notes, used expressions like "a set of measures" or "peace action", but said nothing about war. There is an American saying, the paper recalls: "when the going gets tough, the tough get going". Poland, which has already undertaken to contribute troops, it says, is doing just that. "But in Czech politics when the going gets tough, everyone looks for an excuse".

Romania's Evenimentul Zilei believes that "there is something in the air about the inevitability of war". "The chasm created between Europe and the United States over the Iraq issue", the paper says, "is so profound that it has already doomed any consensus within Nato." Despite Washington's informal request for Nato support, the paper concludes, "the alliance's reluctance means America must start operations in Iraq without Nato's assent".

Madrid's El Pais argues that what it perceives as the Spanish Government's unconditional support for the US "is contributing to denying the UN Security Council its legitimacy precisely at a time when Spain has a seat in the Council". "Never before," the paper declares, "has democratic Spain been so embroiled in an international conflict with such global implications, nor - a unique case in Europe - with such a lack of information and explanation of the government's position on the crisis".

In Le Monde, we follow the investigations of the peace volunteers, a group of french nationals including researchers, former soldiers, and scientists who are presently in Iraq, who are doing the same investigations as the UN inspectors, but this in order to denounce what they call a huge espionage scenario organised by the United States. ■

-Compilation and translation  
by MARIE VALLET



Le Temps (Geneva, Switzerland) - "I don't have weapons of mass destruction! - prove it! - I have! - prove it!"