

# EU leaders hold summit clouded by split on Iraq

By Elaine Sciolino

The New York Times

**BRUSSELS:** Torn apart by a deep and bitter split over Iraq, the leaders of Europe came together Thursday to struggle with how to restore unity among themselves and with the United States, even to the point of offering to participate in Iraq's postwar reconstruction.

While no one would have planned it this way, the 15 leaders of the European Union gathered in Brussels for a long-scheduled quarterly summit meeting on the very day that the war against Saddam Hussein was launched, and the Europeans were distracted by television reports that ground forces were moving into Iraq.

Never before in the history of the EU have its members had to grapple with two more different impulses on foreign policy. There is deep resentment among most of them that the United States waged war without the legality of international cover, despite their individual and collective appeals; at the same time, there is the sense that if the United States is the victor, the Europeans will have been on the wrong side of the war and as a group had better reposition themselves to be part of a postwar reconstruction.

Greece, which currently holds the rotating presidency of the organization, has had to change the summit agenda to begin with a debate about the war instead of a discussion of economic reforms designed to make Europe the world's most competitive knowledge-based economy by 2010.

Noting the profound splits caused by Iraq, Prime Minister Costas Simitis vowed that Greece "will do all it can so that we come to a common position to enable Europe to play a role at the next stage."

The European Commission chief, Romano Prodi, meanwhile, called on the member countries to pull together, saying, "We cannot rely on others to defend our richness, wealth and security."

In an indication of their determination to project a united front, officials of the 15 member states worked Thursday night on the text of a joint statement on Iraq that will underscore the centrality of the United Nations in the postwar era.

The draft statement noted the need for the UN to be involved in the political development of Iraq, its reconstruction and its humanitarian needs, diplomats said. The European leaders were scheduled to discuss the draft over dinner.

In the first indication that the European organization is poised to help postwar Iraq, the European Commission, the Union's executive body, Thursday asked that \$106 million in urgent aid for Iraq be taken from an emergency reserve fund.

"Please react immediately," Humanitarian Aid Commissioner Poul Nielson said in an appeal to member states and the European Parliament. "Somebody out there desperately will need our money fast," warning that half of Iraq's 25 million people could soon lack clean drinking water because of war damage to pipes and pumps.

Britain is particularly eager to enlist the support of the Continent in postwar reconstruction. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said that the British government had committed \$125 million for humanitarian operations in Iraq and wanted the EU "to come together and recognize that we have a common agenda working towards the humanitarian relief of Iraq and its reconstruction."

The decision to go to war has raised the question of who speaks for Europe. The decision by Britain and Spain to line up behind the United States to wage war and by France and Germany to align with Russia to avoid war has made a mockery of the efforts to forge a common foreign and defense policy for Europe.

The most serious rift that will have to be closed is that between Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain and President Jacques Chirac of France. In unusually blunt, even brutal language in recent days, Blair has blamed France for the failure of the world to unite against Iraq when he threatened to veto a UN that would have paved the way to war.

Chirac, meanwhile, has faced a rising chorus of criticism, even among politi-



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Demonstrations, overwhelmingly against the war, surged throughout the world Thursday. Some of the largest occurred in Athens, above, where more than 100,000 protesters rallied outside a heavily guarded U.S. Embassy, and in Cairo where similar numbers of people gathered. In Russia, President Vladimir Putin, left, condemned U.S. military action against Iraq and called for a rapid end to U.S. operations. "Military action can in no way be justified," he said. In Sydney, Australia, below, more than 10,000 protesters gathered in the central business district prior to marching. Thousands of Australians protested throughout the country's major cities just hours after US-led forces launched their assault on Iraq. In Paris, where the government along with Germany's has led the international anti-war movement, thousands of mostly young demonstrators massed in the Place de la Concorde, but were kept away from the U.S. embassy by steel barriers and the police.



Greg Wood/Agence France-Presse

cians in his UMP party, for going too far in opposing the United States and threatening European unity.

In a brief statement televised in Paris before his departure for Brussels, he expressed regret for the war and defended his position that international inspections to disarm Iraq were working, warning, "No matter how long this conflict lasts, it will have serious consequences for the future."

But Chirac also pitched his message forward, underscoring his belief in the need to repair relations with his fellow Europeans.

"France will not accept Europe remaining unfinished," he said. "Europe must realize the need to express its own vision of world problems and support

this vision with a credible common defense. France is calling on its partners in the European Union and those going to join it to fulfill this ambition, in the service of peace and prosperity."

The need to look forward was amplified by France's foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, who said Thursday, "We must take into account the suffering of civilians, of all the displaced and refugee populations. France intends to take its proper place in this international action, notably on the borders of Iraq where there could soon be hundreds of thousands of refugees in a state of distress."

Chirac was harshly criticized as contributing to disunity in the EU when he criticized soon-to-be member states that

signed two letters in January and February supporting the American threat of war in Iraq, saying that they had missed "a good opportunity to be quiet."

The EU leaders came together amid heightened security, with riot police positioned in and around the headquarters where summit meetings are held.

On Wednesday, the organization's officials disclosed that they had uncovered a spy operation involving the planting of listening devices of the delegations of France, Britain, Spain, Germany and Austria. A senior EU official said Thursday that the devices were planted during its construction in the 1990s, and that the internal investigation would include a look at the construction companies involved.