

# Power brokers of the hunting lodges turn their gun sights on Kohl

For the first half of my life I swotted for and, broadly speaking, passed examinations, the most pointless of which was the Combined Cadet Force Proficiency Certificate.

We learnt the basic life skills: the leopard crawl, how to calibrate a radio, how to blow up a bridge, the dismantling of a Lee-Enfield rifle. Some of these memories came marching back last week when Hans-Peter asked me to test him before he sits the *Jägerprüfung*, the obsessively thorough examination that a German has to pass before being admitted to the hunting fraternity. Some of

## INSIDE GERMANY



BY ROGER BOYES

the information in the 550-page textbook is useful: there is a great deal of gun lore, including advice on pistols such as the Walther PPK,

which I thought was used only by James Bond's enemies. There is common sense which in the German pedagogic tradition is not left to chance ("always point your gun away from yourself"). But by page 214 the text becomes arcane: seven types of wildlife excreta are illustrated and analysed. Tapeworms, rabbit tuberculosis, how to slit deer open: this is not an examination for those with full, sensitive stomachs.

The most intriguing part is the language to be learnt and the songs to be sung. There are 6,000 phrases. A hunter never says that an animal bleeds; it always "sweats".

Animals do not die, they "fall". Eyes are "lights", a boar's ears are "plates", the hide of an animal is a "blanket". The songs, blasted out by brass instruments, are martial. It becomes clear the exam is not really about shooting foxes. It is an initiation into a secret society. Every community, — even my Bonn suburb where the only excitement is the erratic behaviour of the dustmen — has its hunters' lodge.

Twice a week, more during the bloodiest seasons, the local hunters meet for a gossip. Who are they? Shopkeepers, a

baker, a pharmacist, two builders, all from families that are rooted for at least three generations in the district. They are the community power brokers. It is in the lodge, the *Schützenhaus*, that candidates for the council are earmarked, that resistance is hatched. The hunters' examination keeps out strangers.

In Central Europe, they used to say to be paranoid is to be in possession of all the facts. One does not have to be a crazed conspiracy theorist to see that Germany is run by such closed societies. For the most part they operate for the benefit of the community. Roman Catholic aristocrats

have a network, so do officers associated (past and present) with the Tank Corps or certain air force squadrons.

There are looser associations — of influential Germans linked with eastern Prussia — and more formal clubs such as the alumni of student duelling societies. Germans say to me: What about your old boys' networks? Oxbridge? The police Freemasons?

This seems to be a perfectly reasonable riposte. All modern democracies need such filters.

German networks, however, have a more uniform political agenda. You will not

meet champions of a multicultural society in the hunting lodge or the officers' mess. National conservatives' beliefs hold sway there.

Closed associations like these usually date back to the time when Germany was a patchwork of more than 300 principalities and duchies: the sense of German-ness, of unity of purpose, was forged behind closed doors.

A consensus society like Germany — where deals are worked out long before they are put to a vote — also lacks confidence and candour. It is a backroom democracy be-

cause the nation's political class is nervous that too much openness could derail the country. Helmut Kohl, the Chancellor, says that he refuses to consider a referendum on the euro because of the bad experiences of the Weimar and Hitler years. The roots of this closed-open society run much deeper than that.

The men (and a few women) in the hunting lodges are turning against the Chancellor exactly because he refuses to take the euro to the country. For the first time in 16 years, Herr Kohl has lost the support of national conservatives.

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# Athens clinches double victory at EU session

FROM CHARLES BREMNER IN EDINBURGH

GREECE was savouring a double achievement in its long-troubled dealings with the EU yesterday after the drachma was admitted to the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) and France lifted a block on the start of EU entry talks for Cyprus.

The deal on Cyprus, brokered by Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, at an EU session in Edinburgh, averted a Greek block on EU accession talks for five Central European countries later this month. However, it hands a future hostage to Athens in the EU's long-running quandary over how to handle Turkey.

The drachma move came with a painful 14 per cent devaluation, but it marked the EU's embrace of Greece, the Union's economic black sheep, as a likely member of the single currency in time for the launch of euro notes and coins in 2002. Two years' ERM membership is a condition for joining the euro, along with the other entrance tests set at Maastricht in 1992.

The stage is set for the fixing of future euro rates in May and the launch of the single currency among 11 states next January. "Europe is thus

ready for the euro," said Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the French Finance Minister. Praising Greece, which is the only state to fail to qualify for next year's euro launch, he said the drachma's entry into the ERM demonstrated "the credibility of the economic adjustment process that Greece has pursued with determination". A 12-member euro will mean that the currency covered the whole EU with the exception of Britain, Denmark and Sweden, which have all decided to stay out.

Trying to soften the impact of an unpopular devaluation, Constantine Simitis, the Prime Minister, told his country yesterday the drachma would join the euro in 2001: "ERM entry expressed the European Union's confidence in the prospects for our economy."

Greek officials were celebrating the French retreat from a threat by President Chirac, made in London last Thursday, to stop EU entry talks for Cyprus until the Turkish Cypriots took part in negotiations. France had argued that the EU would merely be storing up trouble and surrendering a vital lever in its efforts to promote a

settlement to the 24-year division of Cyprus.

The other states, led by Britain, the current EU president, said talks should start while keeping up pressure on the Nicosia Government of Glafkos Clerides to bring the Turkish Cypriot north to the table. However, there was widespread pessimism among foreign ministers over the prospects of any settlement as long as Greece and Turkey remained at loggerheads. Greece, they acknowledged, will have many future opportunities to disrupt EU enlargement over Cyprus.

Behind the quarrel lies the EU's agony over Turkey, which is nursing a bitter grievance over the Union's refusal to accept it as a member along with Cyprus and ten former communist states. Turkish anger has stiffened the refusal of Rauf Denktas, the Turkish-Cypriot leader, to accept an offer from Mr Clerides to take part in the EU talks. He said yesterday: "If they want to resolve the Cyprus problem, then let them treat both sides equally."

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Yevgeni Bosilkov's portrait hangs above the Pope at yesterday's ceremony

# Martyr of Stalinism 'selected' as patron saint of football

FROM RICHARD OWEN IN ROME

A BULGARIAN bishop who yesterday became the first victim of Stalinism to be beatified is being canvassed as the future patron saint of football.

Yevgeni Bosilkov, the former Bishop of Nicopoli in Bulgaria, was declared "blessed" — the penultimate step to sainthood — by the Pope at St Peter's. Two nuns were also beatified: an Italian, Brigida Morello, who lived in the 17th century, and the 19th-century Carmen Salles of Spain.

Bishop Bosilkov was condemned to death in 1952 in Sofia for opposing Stalin's anti-religious laws. He was charged with "subversion and espionage", tortured and executed at the age of 52, facing the firing squad "in the odour of sanctity", according to supporters. His body was thrown into a common grave, and it was only in 1975 that Todor Zhivkov, the Communist leader, admitted the killing to the Pope.

Bishop Bosilkov's beatification became "less problematical" after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Vatican officials say. But papal plans to visit Bulgaria to mark the step were obstructed by the Orthodox Church. The Pope said that the bishop had been "one of the many victims of atheistic communism... in its programme of annihilation of the Church".

Bishop Bosilkov is also remembered as a down-to-earth man whose main secular interest was football. According to his niece, Sister Gabriella, 80, a nun who attended the ceremony, he was a

man of "great personal charisma" who chain-smoked, entertained friends with funny stories and founded a hunting club.

His "passion for football" never went beyond the local level, but he played it "all his life", she said. What more fitting candidate, *Corriere della Sera* asked, to become patron saint of football, and possibly of hunting as well, although St Eustace already fills that role.

The response was enthusiastic, not least in the Vatican, which has its own football league, with teams for Vatican Radio, the Secret Archives, the Vatican Post Office and the Vatican Fire Brigade. There is also a Vatican five-a-side team, which is doing so well that its manager, Roberto Di Stefano, is thinking of fielding an 11-man team in the national league.

"Having a patron saint is a marvellous idea," said Signor Di Stefano. "Of course, we already have a bit of help from above here in the Vatican, but a few extra prayers could not do any harm." There are patron saints for athletics (St Sebastian), anglers (St Andrew), gun enthusiasts (St Barbara), huntsmen (St Eustace), dancers (St Vitus), for fliers (St Joseph of Copertino), mountaineers (St Bernard of Aosta) and yachtsmen (St Nicholas).

The Pope was a keen football player as a young man in Poland and is said to follow the fortunes of the Vatican teams closely.

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# AND THEN THERE WERE TWELVE

## One more reason not to take EMU on trust

The Government's imminent drive to soften up British public opinion for monetary union has to contend with one inconvenient factor. Membership of Europe's single currency club looks less enviable with every passing month. Last year, it still seemed conceivable that the German Government would listen to its voters' fears and question the readiness of Italy and Spain to join. Nobody now expects that, and even the Bundesbank, due to publish its verdict on March 25, is thought unlikely to roil the waters.

So what once seemed likely to start as a club of half a dozen relatively compatible core countries is now set to embrace 11 founding members. Now, in a remarkable *volte face*, Greece has joined the European exchange rate mechanism and sworn to be of the EMU number by 2001, before the euro is scheduled to supplant national currencies. With the zeal of a religious convert, the Government of Costas Simitis undertook yesterday to put Greeks on a crash diet of spending cuts, labour and social security reforms, privatisations and divestment of state assets — reforms that his Socialist Party has shirked for most of this decade.

It is hard to imagine Greece genuinely making the grade by 2001. Athens has devalued the drachma by 14 per cent as the price of joining the European exchange-rate mechanism. That will be inflationary, especially with Greece simultaneously reducing interest rates, as it must, towards Maastricht-approved levels. But the miraculous convergence discovered among the 11 prospective founder members of EMU suggests that, come the hour, Greece will also be given the benefit of the doubt. The small size of the Greek economy makes that the more likely, since its problems would

make a proportionately minor impact on the working of the single currency. It thus seems probable that, come 2002, the only party poopers in the European Union will be Britain, Denmark and Sweden.

There are two ways of looking at this from the British perspective. The first is the "bandwagon approach". The wider the club becomes, the louder advocates of early British entry into EMU will talk about Britain's risk of future isolation from the European economic and political, mainstream. The second approach is to subject the risks of joining an over-extended EMU to ever more rigorous scrutiny.

Take the economics first. For British exporters, the dream of a Greek-style devaluation, which would lock in sterling at, say, 2.80 marks compared with today's 3.03, would be enough in itself to make them love the euro. But this is a red herring; for if British rates could be cut without risking inflation, sterling would fall regardless of Britain's plans with respect to EMU.

The political fears of "isolation" are still more misplaced. The additional economies now heading towards EMU are not the wealthy countries of Europe, but the poor ones, such as Greece, Poland and Hungary. And as evidenced by the Edinburgh meeting of EU foreign ministers, weaker countries obsessed by single issues can hold the rest to ransom. Just as Spain always wins on fish, so Greece outflanked France on Cyprus by threatening to block the entire enlargement process. The European central bank could prove similarly vulnerable. The departure of Greece from the awkward squad of EMU "outs" makes membership of the "outs" more attractive — and after Greek membership, the single currency will be an even less compelling proposition than before.