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Blair urges Germans to spurn Chirac's EU plan

TONY BLAIR last night urged Germany to put a brake on France's drive for a two-speed Europe when he met Chancellor Gerhard Schröder for a private dinner in Berlin.

Today Mr Blair is expected to tell a conference in Germany that Europe must be a union of nation states and not move towards becoming a federal superstate.

Although Downing Street played down the prospect of a two-speed Europe with Britain confined to the slow lane, ministers are alarmed by the French President's speech to the German Parliament on Tuesday calling for a two-tier Eu-

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rope in which France and Germany would lead a "pioneer group" of member states pushing ahead with common policies.

Arriving in Germany last night Mr Blair sought to play down the differences. "There's absolutely no problem whatever with the speech [Jacques] Chirac gave," he said. Urging the British media to "grow up" he added: "I believe we in Britain should start having a little more confidence."

Over dinner, Mr Blair and Mr Schröder held what British of-



Tony Blair: 'We should have more confidence'

ficials described as "a wide-ranging discussion" over the future direction of Europe. The

Prime Minister conceded that decision-making in the EU would have to be made more flexible to allow it to expand from 15 to about 28 members, and described enhanced co-operation between countries as "perfectly sensible".

However, he made clear that Britain would strongly oppose a Franco-German push to create an EU with a first and second division. He insisted that the "centre of gravity" among EU members was for a "Europe of nation states" co-operating rather than further integration which gave more power to EU institutions.

Mr Blair also expressed con-

cern about Germany's plans for the EU to embark on a fresh review of the EU's governing treaties as soon as its current review is concluded.

Meanwhile, Mr Blair faced fresh Tory claims that his ministers were divided over the sin-

gle currency after Robin Cook told Japanese businessmen in London that Britain would not "stay out" if it meant losing out. "We will not let that happen," he said. The Tories claimed this put the Foreign Secretary at odds with the Chancellor.