World News

EU leaders hail new charter as a 'gigantic step to integration'

By Ambrose Evans-Pritchard AND TOBY HELM IN PORTO CARRAS

EUROPEAN leaders hailed the European Union's draft constitution vesterday as a "gigantic step" in integration that would offer peace and stability to 450 million citizens for generations to come.

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the head of the drafting convention, called the text a "great leap forward" after handing leather-bound copies to prime ministers at the Aegean summit near Thessaloniki.

Brushing aside complaints from arch-federalists that he had gone too far to please the British, he said majority voting would be more than doubled, abolishing the national sion, energy, transport, and the takes the lead role in justice policy veto in 47 more areas of policy.

His claim that the document chooses not to act. would mean momentous change to the EU contrasted with claims by Tony Blair and British ministers who insist it will lead to no significant transfer of power to the EU and is full jurisdiction of the European

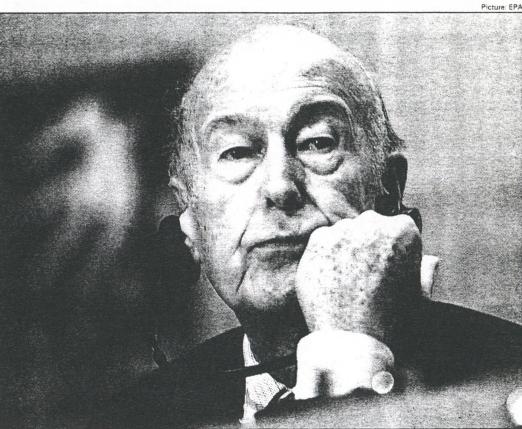
make Europe more efficient. Last night it also emerged that officials on the European Convention, which will continue its work until mid-July, are to table plans for a fullyfledged foreign ministry in Brussels.

The summit, in a hotel on the shores of the Aegean, was marred by demonstrations as 8,500 anti-globalisation protesters clashed with riot police.

The text creates a full-time European president, foreign minister, and public prosecutor, as well as a finance chief for the euro-zone.

It doubles the powers of the European parliament, and prohibits national parliaments from legislating in most areas - including justice, social policy, economic coheenvironment - unless Brussels

It gives the EU "legal personality" with sole authority to negotiate most treaties, and incorporates the Charter of Fundamental Rights under the merely a "tidying up exercise" to Court. The European Commission



Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the head of the drafting convention for the new constitution, at the summit yesterday

and economic management.

mission president, also called the text a "gigantic leap forward". world stage thanks to its legal per- state," he said. sonality," he said.

Romano Prodi, European Com- accept the erosion of the veto over controls. "What we want is a Europe

The French president Jacques Mr Blair said the document was a Chirac praised it as the "best possible

basis for further negotiations but synthesis" of the widely differing insisted that Britain would not views, adding that it required no more than minor tinkering before the final defence, tax, foreign policy or border approval by EU governments next spring. Germany insisted that the his-"Europe can now play its role on the of nations, not a federal super- toric text should be ratified virtually unchanged. Smaller states feared a concentration of power among larger