

France and Germany celebrate 'victory'

Paris

FRENCH politicians and commentators swung behind President Chirac yesterday, saying that he had helped to preserve European Union unity at the summit without making substantial concessions to Tony Blair (Adam Sage writes).

But there was concern that he had overstepped the mark with his tirade against future members of the EU over their support for US policy on Iraq.

Denouncing their decision to voice backing for Washington as "childish and irresponsible", M Chirac suggested that Bulgaria and Romania might jeopardise their chances of joining the EU if they continued to adopt a pro-American stance.

Le Monde said: "By attacking, in a highly undiplomatic manner, candidate countries who have yielded to pressure from Washington to sign a message of support for George Bush's policy, the French President has confirmed that the crisis in the EU goes well beyond the Iraqi affair."

"M Chirac was wrong to treat pro-American regimes in the same way as their electorates, which are just as opposed to the war as those of the old Europe."

M Chirac's outburst largely overshadowed the result of the summit itself, which commentators and politicians described as an agreement based

on the lowest common denominator. *Le Monde* said Britain and France had given a little ground to find a compromise with Gerhard Schröder, the German Chancellor, making the greatest concessions.

Berlin

HERR SCHRODER pronounced the EU summit a triumph for his peace policies and boasted that he had thwarted attempts by Britain to give a more martial ring to the declaration on Iraq (Roger Boyes writes).

It was, he said, a "classic compromise"; the German Government has not abandoned its fundamental position. Britain, by contrast, had been forced to drop phrases such as "time is running out for Iraq".

Across the political spectrum German politicians and commentators agreed that Mr Blair had conceded more than the Chancellor. "Tony Blair had to drop his hard line," said commentators on the NTV news channel. "It is above all the British Government that has had to rethink its policies to make this compromise possible," said Winfried Nachtwei, the defence affairs spokesman for the Green Party, junior partner in government.

But for Germany's Christian Democratic opposition and the peace movement, the Chancellor had in fact caved

in by accepting the possibility of war even as a very last resort. The chief foreign policy expert of the Christian Democrats, Wolfgang Schaeuble could barely conceal his glee.

"The Chancellor has abandoned one of his key policy positions but that is really something to be welcomed," he said.

Barcelona

UNLIKE Britain, Spain is not accustomed to being at loggerheads with its European partners and the press, rarely overtly critical of the Government of the day, has been unsure how to deal with the bellicose stance adopted by the prime minister, José Maria Aznar (Stephen Burgen writes).

In an editorial, the left-leaning *El País* said that Tony Blair and Silvio Berlusconi appeared to have softened their stance in response to last Saturday's massive protests. Señor Aznar however was "imminent", even though more people took to the streets of Spain than any other European country.

The right-wing *El Mundo* saw the EU arriving at "a consensus sufficiently ambiguous and vague to satisfy all its members" but added that "it was impossible to hide the tension, as was shown in the way Belgium and Germany reproached Aznar and Blair for their support of the US".

Making his mark on history

By Adam Sage

NEVER, in the course of a political career that began in the Brezhnev era in the 1960s, has President Chirac felt as powerful as he does now.

At home, he has scarcely any opponents; and in Europe, he has no rivals. He is the Continent's elder statesman and, for the time being, its dominant force, buoyed by public support, by a constitution that affords him an almost monarchical aura, and by the difficulties faced by those such as Tony Blair.

He is pre-eminent in a country that has suddenly rediscovered what it believes to be its pre-eminent position in Eu-

rope, and he is not afraid to say so.

In Brussels on Monday, he delivered an extraordinary attack on the European Union's future members over their support for the American stance on Iraq, treating them like naughty schoolchildren.

"It is not well brought up behaviour," he said. "They missed a good opportunity to keep quiet." His comments left officials dumb-struck, but were in keeping with the sort of language that M Chirac has been using since his re-election as President last spring.

Mr Blair received similar treatment when he dared to contradict him at another EU summit. As always with

M Chirac, the outbursts are driven by a combination of calculation and emotion.

For years, he has had to listen to the jibes of his critics, with his predecessor, François Mitterrand, once predicting that he would become the laughing stock of the world.

When M Chirac was forced to cohabit with a left-wing government, from 1997 to 2002, his role was little more than ceremonial. But a French Fifth Republic constitution that sidelines the head of state during cohabitation, restores power when parliament and the government are on his side.

Now, at 70, M Chirac is striving to prove Mitterrand wrong and make his mark on history.

The thoughts of Jacques Chirac

'Et mes couilles?'
Implying, "Does she [Margaret Thatcher] want my balls too?", at a 1988 EU summit in Brussels, after a dispute about Franco-British agricultural policy

A few irresponsible people thought it their duty to whistle at La Marseillaise. This is unacceptable. I will not tolerate an attack on the values of the Republic

May, 2002, when supporters of Bastia football club, from Corsica, shouted down the national anthem before their game against Lorient

In life, you know, one must not confuse friends with sycophants... It's better to have only a few friends than to have a lot of sycophants. And I'm telling you that France considers itself one of the friends of the Americans, not necessarily one of its sycophants

September, 2002, expressing France's refusal to submit to US policy on Iraq

You have been very rude and I have never been spoken to like this before

October 2002, to Tony Blair, at the EU heads of government summit in Brussels, in a row over the postponement of reforms to the common agricultural policy until after 2006.

Chirac's outburst met with disdain by EU applicants

From Rory Watson in Brussels

THE 13 states seeking European Union membership endorsed its new compromise policy on Iraq yesterday. But even as that rift was papered over, another gaped open.

The applicants from Central and Eastern Europe rounded on President Chirac of France for accusing them of speaking out of turn, and of rushing to support the United States in the crisis over Iraq.

After an ill-tempered dinner of EU leaders in Brussels on Monday, M Chirac maintained that the 13 should have consulted the Union before issuing joint statements backing the US, and complained that they had "missed a great opportunity to shut up".

Michèle Alliot-Marie, France's Defence Minister, went further, saying the applicants should be cautious about antagonising public opinion in countries like France. "I'm worried, and I say it very clearly, because the entry into the EU has to be ratified," she said.

But "New Europe" hit back

Main points in communiqué

- War is not inevitable. Force should be used only as a last resort. It is for the Iraqi regime to end this crisis by complying with the demands of the Security Council
- We reiterate our full support for the work of the UN inspectors. They must be given the time and the resources that the Security Council believes they need
- Inspections cannot continue indefinitely in the absence of full Iraqi co-operation

yesterday. Tony Blair said that the incoming countries had as much right as France or Britain to speak up for what they believed in, especially given their recent experience of tyranny and of the value of transatlantic ties in defeating it.

In Brussels, where the 13 applicants met to consider the new EU declaration on Iraq, reactions ranged from anger to disdain. The most outspoken

came from Romania which, with Bulgaria, is still negotiating EU entry. They were singled out by M Chirac for special criticism for signing a statement backing US policy.

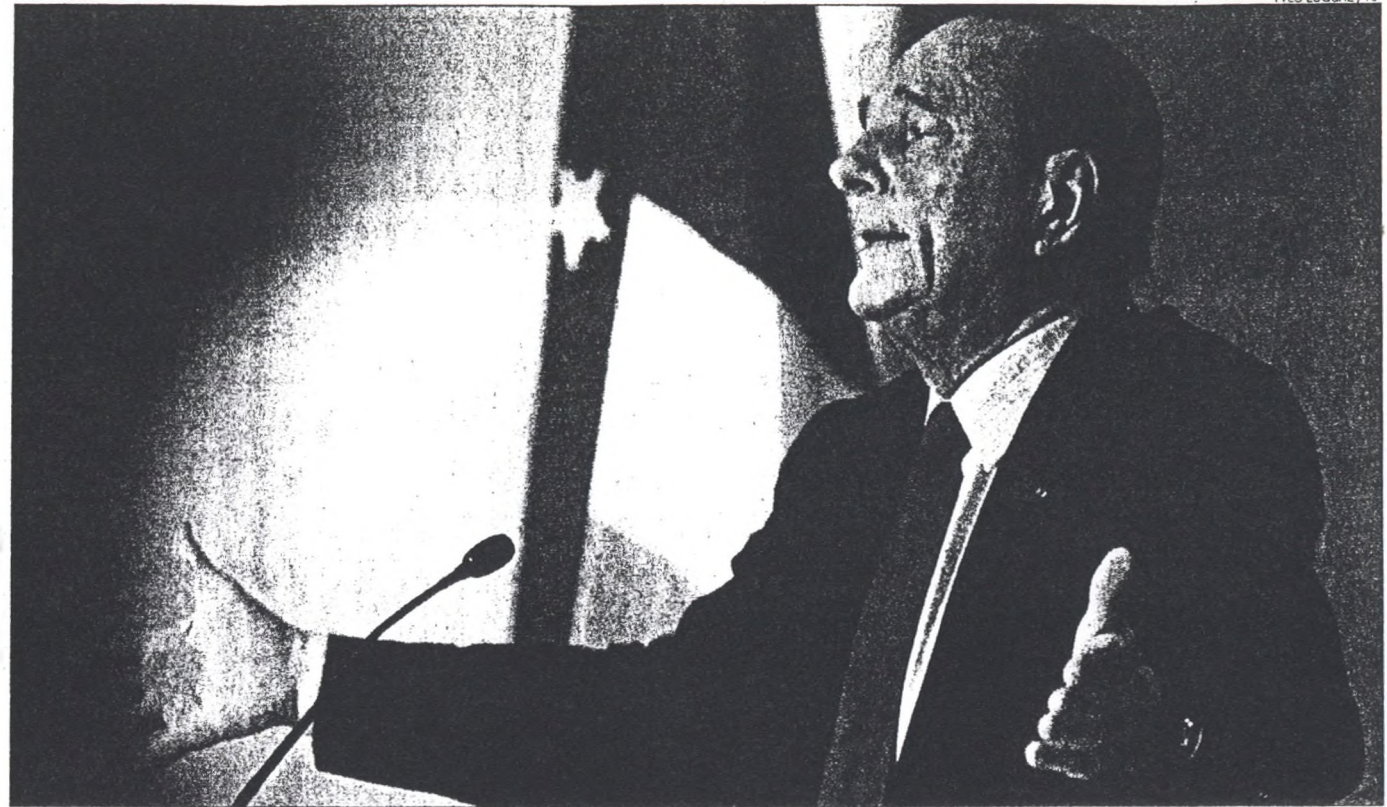
"If they wanted to reduce their chances of entering Europe, they could not find a better way," M Chirac said.

Refusing to be cowed, President Iliescu of Romania said: "Even M Chirac should regret such expressions. It is not in the spirit of the bilateral respect between our countries."

Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Poland's Foreign Minister, said: "That kind of rhetoric leads us to nothing." He added: "Emotions are not the best advisers to politicians."

Kristiina Ojuland, Estonia's Foreign Minister, said that her country should not be seen as "a punchbag" and insisted that it based its decisions on its national interests.

Peter Medgyessy, Hungary's Prime Minister, suggested that M Chirac might have been under some pressure. "I am too well brought up to respond. We all have a right to express our opinion: I under-



Diplomatic appeal: President Chirac addresses the media in Brussels yesterday, but his fellow EU leaders were not won over by Monday's histrionics

stand his declaration came after a difficult evening. It can happen," he said.

Earlier M Chirac had upset leaders of the EU's existing

members, and diplomats said that he had inadvertently assisted Mr Blair in his efforts to secure a strongly-worded communiqué on Iraq. M Chirac

told his fellows that he was "worried about the lives of thousands of people far away in Iraq who would be affected by the decisions they took."

His words infuriated Silvio Berlusconi of Italy, José María Aznar of Spain and Bertie Ahern of the Irish Republic. "As if he has a monopoly on

caring about people getting killed," a senior diplomat said.

The anger and frustration had been building after M Chirac and Gerhard Schröder, the German Chancellor, had presumed to be speaking for Europe over Iraq. So by the time the EU leaders came to discuss the communiqué over

dinner, many were ready to cross swords with M Chirac. A Scandinavian diplomat said: "Quite simply, Chirac overplayed his hand, and played into Blair's hands."

Anger at M Chirac's remarks against the future EU members was also visible in the European Parliament yes-

terday. Graham Watson, the Liberal Group leader, was applauded when he said that M Chirac's "gratuitous and condescending comments" had soured attempts to heal EU divisions. Gary Tittley, the leader of British Labour MEPs, lambasted him for being "bloody outrageous and arrogant".