

## Iraq

# EU summit strives to show a united face

By AMBROSE EVANS-PRITCHARD  
IN BRUSSELS

AT THEIR emergency summit in Brussels yesterday, the EU's political elite was frantically trying to restore unity after weeks of bitter wrangling over Iraq.

Everybody seemed in shock at the speed with which their inter-necine quarrels had mushroomed into a strategic crisis, tearing the EU apart in what appeared to outsiders like civil war.

"We don't need the Americans to sow disunity among us: we're doing a pretty good job of it ourselves," said Louis Michel, Belgian foreign minister. Javier Solana,

the EU's foreign policy chief, spread balm among the sum-miteers, stressing that all 15 states agree on the key strategy of disarming Saddam, working through the UN, and backing the weapons inspectors. The dispute is merely over tactics and timing.

"Everybody agrees war may be necessary at a given moment but we are not at this point. We have to exhaust all the elements of diplomacy and all the elements of keeping inspectors working," he said.

The summit was given a boost by the Franco-German couple's acquiescence in a face-saving deal at Nato headquarters to allow Patriot missiles, Awacs surveillance

aircraft and chemical and biological warfare units to be shipped to Turkey.

That deal ended the nastiest dispute in the 54-year history of the Atlantic alliance. But even so, all day the pendulum was swinging back and forth between Old and New Europe.

Initially, it was the former who felt they had the "advantage" yesterday as the Franco-German core resisted the drift to war but later the language suggested that New Europe was fighting back.

If Paris and Berlin felt emboldened by the opaque report delivered by Hans Blix to the UN on Friday, they were almost rapturous

a day later at the sight of millions demonstrating for peace across Europe's capitals - most poignantly in London.

Chris Patten, the EU's external relations commissioner, said nobody would now honestly state that Europe was divided over Iraq.

But even so, France and Germany have been careful not to press their fragile advantage too hard. The aircraft carrier Charles-de-Gaulle docked at Nato facilities in Crete yesterday, poised for action in the Gulf, showing Chirac has kept his options very open.

Joschka Fischer, German foreign minister, signalled yesterday that his country would not block a

joint communiqué backing the use of force against Saddam if all else fails. "We are not standing in the way of a compromise," he said.

Turkey expressed satisfaction yesterday after Nato clinched a last-ditch deal to boost defences for the alliance's only Muslim country in a war against its neighbour Iraq.

"Of course we appreciate Nato's decision yesterday. In fact we were expecting this," Prime Minister Abdullah Gul said in Brussels. "It didn't damage confidence in each other. We need Nato, so Nato should continue strongly."

But the month-long refusal by France, Belgium, and Germany to

fulfil their treaty obligations to Turkey has already caused such disgust in Washington that there are fears in Brussels that the Bush administration may now turn its back on an alliance seen to cause more problems than it solves.

In the summit wings, the New Europe states of the former Communist bloc exerted their powerful pull on events even though they were literally "disinvited" from yesterday's dinner debate on Iraq, thanks to a last-minute manoeuvre by Chancellor Schröder who feared that these Anglophone, Atlanticist, pro-American states would transform the gathering.

The 13 EU enlargement coun-

tries were fobbed off with a post-summit chat scheduled for this morning. It was their punishment for signing the "Gang of Eight" and separate "Gang of 10" declarations in favour of American policy against Iraq.

By next spring, 10 of these new states will be EU members, with voting powers in the European Council and Parliament. Bulgaria and Romania will follow three years later, with Turkey close behind. Old Europe may regret the petulant decision to deny them a seat at last night's dinner.

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