

Greece cooks up a diplomatic dinner to soothe Europe

From Rory Watson in Brussels

THE credibility of the European Union will be put to the test today at crisis summit called by the Greek prime minister, Costas Simitis.

Given the enormous gulf between EU leaders, bringing them together to bury their differences and thrash out a coordinated strategy over dinner is a huge gamble which threatens to highlight divisions, not unity.

The past weeks have seen any vestige of a common EU foreign policy torn to shreds as existing and future members issued conflicting statements. The absence of any harmony has been all the more embarrassing because it comes at the time the EU is drafting a constitution designed to give a legal foundation for greater coherence in its relations towards the rest of the world.

A senior Greek diplomat said: "Our aim is to find some common ground. This is not an easy task and it might be a long dinner, but it is up to us to try and achieve it."

If Mr Simitis is to succeed, he will have to find a formula which can bridge the differences between America's two European allies on the UN Security Council, Britain and Spain and its critics, France and Germany.

Just three weeks ago, EU foreign ministers managed this feat by rallying unanimously behind a joint policy statement. This papered over the

Costas Simitis

Birth: June 23, 1936, in Piræus, Greece
Education: Law at the University of Marburg, Germany, Economics at the London School of Economics
Career: 1965: Co-founded the political research society "Alexandros Papanastasiou" October 1981: Appointed Farm Minister 1985: Became National Economy Minister 1993: Appointed Industry Minister June 1996: Prime Minister of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement

cracks, but only by ignoring key issues such as the status of a second UN resolution or the need to set Saddam Hussein a deadline. Senior diplomats were working late last night on a new text, which stressed the EU's full support for UN resolution 1441. This will be handed to foreign ministers this morning and will provide the basis for this evening's discussions.

Greek officials admit that they are not sure if they will succeed. "I am not sure if there is going to be a paper and less sure if there will be a common

position," said one. The summit is being held at a time when personal relationships between EU leaders are near their lowest. There was a distinct frostiness at last week's bilateral Spanish-German summit between José-Maria Aznar and Gerhard Schröder.

The two premiers are in opposing camps over Iraq, but the differences go deeper. After the meeting, Berlin indicated that Germany, the EU's main paymaster, might no longer be willing after 2006 to pay for the regional and social cohesion funds from which Spain has been the major beneficiary.

Veteran EU diplomats confide that they have never known a period when there has been so little behind-the-scenes direct contact between prime ministers and heads of state to defuse tensions.

"EU leaders are just not speaking to each other as they used to in the past. Ambassadors may do, but that is not the same thing," said one top official. At the very least, tonight's dinner offers a chance for leaders to renew those contacts, demonstrate that more unites than divides them, and calm the rhetoric of the past few days.

Absent from the dinner will be the ten countries joining next year. The Greek government had planned to include them — supported by the UK, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and Denmark — but changed its mind after protests from France and Germany.

WHERE EU COUNTRIES STAND ON IRAQ



UNITED KINGDOM

Believes Iraq is in material breach of Resolution 1441 and that military action does not require a further vote. Has reserved right to follow US into war without fresh UN resolution fearing some Security Council members would block it. Signed letter of support for US-led invasion of Iraq



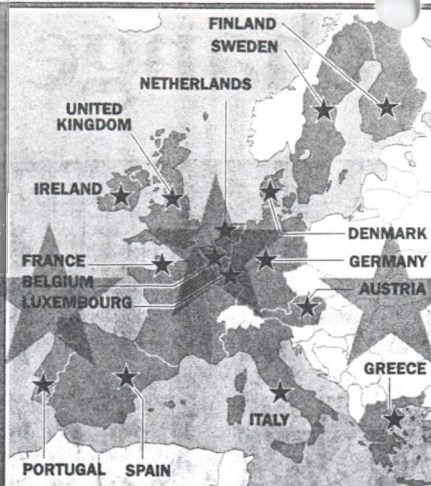
SPAIN

Believes military action does not require a further UN vote. Signed letter of support for US policy. Working with Bush to muster support for resolution authorising use of military force. Would allow the US to use bases to support strike



ITALY

Believes military action does not require a further UN vote. Signed letter of support for US. Has told the United States that transport planes bound for the Gulf can use military bases for stopovers and refuelling



PORTUGAL

Believes military action does not require a further UN vote. Signed letter of support for US. Has made an air base in the mid-Atlantic Azores available to US military aircraft



NETHERLANDS

Favours a second resolution but says that it is not a prerequisite for backing an American-led intervention. Will push for a second UN resolution and more time for Iraq to disarm



DENMARK

Believes military action does not require a further UN vote



SWEDEN

Doubts US reports and wants inspection strengthened. Blocked plans for the defence of Nato ally Turkey against possible retaliation by Iraq for fear it would seem an act of aggression towards Iraq



AUSTRIA

Believes that weapons inspectors should be given more time and that Iraq is not yet in material breach of UN Resolution 1441



LUXEMBOURG

Believes the weapons inspectors should be given more time and that Iraq is not yet in material breach of UN Resolution 1441



FINLAND

Anti-war. Neutral; opposes military action without a Security Council mandate



SWEDEN

Anti-war. Neutral; opposes military action without a Security Council mandate



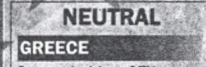
FRANCE

Doubts US reports on Iraqi arms build-up, wants strengthened UN inspections. Opposed to having a new UN resolution while arms inspections continue



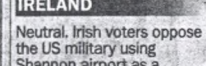
GERMANY

Wants strengthened inspections with UN-approved force to continue for as long as necessary. Opposes a new resolution as long as inspections continue. Will not participate in any UN-approved attack on Baghdad



GREECE

Current holder of EU presidency is holding a position of neutrality



IRELAND

Neutral. Irish voters oppose the US military using Shannon airport as a stopover for troops flying to the Gulf

INTELLIGENCE

'In our Labour movement we have a proud and honourable history of standing up to murderous dictators ... if only that determination had prevailed over Hitler's invasions, then we may have prevented World War Two and millions of deaths ... the same issue faces us today over Iraq'

John Prescott
Deputy Prime Minister

Number crunching

99.96%

The number of Iraqis who voted for Saddam in 1995

100%

The number of Iraqis who voted for Saddam in 2002

£2.3bn

Libya's going rate for accommodating Saddam's family and leading regime members if he loses power

11,807

The number of pages in Iraq's dossier listing its weapons of mass destruction

0

The number of weapons of mass destruction that Iraq claims to possess

IRAQ FACT

The number of Iraqis with access to the internet is 0.05 per cent.

Diplomatic Decoder: 'Serious consequences'

The phrase is a clear threat of the use of force, although somewhat less explicit than the authorisation of "all necessary means" that preceded the Gulf War.

France snubbed in move to give Turkey military aid

By Michael Evans
Defence Editor
and Roger Boyes
in Berlin

FRANCE was snubbed yesterday by the 18 other members of Nato, which proceeded with discussions on how to help to protect Turkey against a possible Iraqi attack in the absence of the French Ambassador.

In an move calculated to bring Nato's impasse over Iraq to an end, alliance ambassa-

dors convened a meeting of the Defence Planning Committee to approve the deployment of Patriot missiles and Awacs early-warning aircraft to Turkey. France is not a member of Nato's integrated military structure and is thus not represented on that committee.

The meeting was made possible after Germany and Belgium, which had sided with France until then against the rest of Nato, appeared to swap allegiances after a week of be-

ing condemned to inaction by their alliance colleagues.

However, Belgium was accused of obstruction last night, when its Nato ambassador said the resolution being worded in a specific way before approving Ankara's request for military help to defend itself against Iraq.

France then had little choice but to allow the decision, in which the issue of going to Turkey's aid is referred to the Defence Planning Committee.

Ironically, most of the big Nato decisions have been taken by the North Atlantic Council rather than the Defence Planning Committee in recent years, as a result of the wish to involve the French after hints in 1994 that the country might return to the alliance's integrated military structure, which it left in 1969.

Germany's position on the Nato dilemma was exposed yesterday by Der Spiegel, which released tape-record-

ings of a verbal showdown between Gerhard Schröder and a senior defence expert from within his Social Democratic Party. "You should be ashamed of yourself," the German Chancellor told Hans Ulrich Klose last week when Herr Klose, one of the SDP's most outspoken champions of the Atlantic Alliance, criticised Herr Schröder for supporting France and Belgium.

Although the German leader has adopted a strong public

anti-war stance, which matches the mood in Germany, the consensus against war among senior politicians is beginning to crack. Herr Klose, once tipped to be a Defence Minister, has accused the Chancellor of muddled foreign policy. Herr Klose said: "It cannot be that the discussion is made to revolve around the idea that some (in Nato) are in favour of peace while others are against"

General Klaus Naumann,

who was, until recently, Chief of the General Staff and the chairman of Nato's Military Committee, has also exposed divisions within Germany.

He said that the crisis facing Nato had been caused by France, which "has never understood the Nato planning system and which would prefer to turn back the clock and make Nato into a regional defence alliance". Germany, he said, was simply plodding along in the wake of Paris.