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Θέμα : Αποστολή δημοσιευμάτων βρετανικού τύπου

Σας διαβιβάζουμε για ενημέρωσή σας σημερινά δημοσιεύματα των βρετανικών ε/φ 'THE TIMES', «THE INDEPENDENT», «THE GUARDIAN», «FINANCIAL TIMES», «DAILY MAIL» που αναφέρονται στις αντιδράσεις στην επιστολή των 8.

Επισυνάπτουμε σχετικό σημείωμα του Γραφείου μας στο Λονδίνο.

Ο ΠΡΟΪΣΤΑΜΕΝΟΣ ΤΗΣ Δ/ΝΣΗΣ

κ.α.α.

Λουκάς Πανούσης

μία πλευρά υπάρχει η «συμμορία» των οκτώ με επικεφαλής τη Μ.Βρετανία, την Ιταλία και την Ισπανία, και από την άλλη η «συμμορία της Γαλλίας και της Γερμανίας» που την ακολουθούν και άλλα μικρότερα κράτη της ΕΕ. Σημειώνεται ότι την επιστολή την υπέγραψαν 5 μόνο μέλη της ΕΕ, ενώ τα υπόλοιπα 10 όχι απλώς δεν εκλήθησαν να την υπογράψουν αλλά δεν ενημερώθηκαν καν εκ των προτέρων.

Αναφέρουμε χαρακτηριστικά ότι στο κεντρικό δελτίο ειδήσεων του *BBC1 (Ten on BBC)* αναφέρθηκε ότι τον Γαλλογερμανικό άξονα στη διαμάχη αυτή που έχει ξεσπάσει τον υποστηρίζει μεταξύ άλλων, η Ελλάδα και το Βέλγιο. Προστίθεται επίσης ότι όχι μόνο δεν υπάρχει κοινή θέση της ΕΕ στο θέμα αυτό, αλλά αντιθέτως για πρώτη φορά φάνηκαν οι πολύ «πικρές» διαφορές που χωρίζουν τα δύο στρατόπεδα, ώστε να μιλάμε για πλήρη διπλωματική κρίση και ιδιαίτερα πικρές διαφορές μεταξύ των δύο ομάδων. Επισημαίνουμε ακόμη ότι αντίστοιχο τόνο έδωσε στο σχετικό του τηλεοπτικό ειδησεογραφικό δελτίο ειδήσεων και το *BBC2 Newsnight*, που το είχε ως πρώτο θέμα. Και στο δελτίο αυτό αναφέρθηκε ότι μιλάμε πλέον για διπλωματική κρίση, βαθιές διαφορές ανάμεσα στα μέλη της ΕΕ. Μίλησε επίσης για επιθυμία των αγγλοαμερικανών να απομονώσουν τη Γαλλία ειδικότερα, τόσο στην ΕΕ όσο και στο Συμβούλιο Ασφαλείας.

Ανάλογος είναι ο τόνος που επικρατεί και στο σημερινό βρετανικό Τύπο, στα πρωτοσέλιδα του οποίου προβάλλεται η διαμάχη που έχει ξεσπάσει στους κόλπους της ΕΕ.

Η *INDEPENDENT* σε εκτενές πρωτοσέλιδο δημοσίευμα αναφέρεται στη «διάσπαση» της ΕΕ εξαιτίας της επιστολής των οκτών ηγετών. Αναφέρεται επίσης στη δήλωση του έλληνα πρωθυπουργού κ. Κώστα Σημίτη, ο οποίος επεσήμανε ότι «η επιστολή δεν συμβάλει στην κοινή αντιμετώπιση του θέματος». Σημειώνεται επίσης ότι έλληνες αξιωματούχοι ήταν εξαγριωμένοι, οι οποίοι τόνιζαν ότι ο έλληνας πρωθυπουργός είχε συζητήσεις τις τελευταίες ημέρες με τον βρετανό πρωθυπουργό Τόνι Μπλαιρ και τον Ισπανό πρωθυπουργό Χοσέ Μαρία Αθνάρ, αλλά κανείς δεν τον ενημέρωσε.

Η *TIMES* σε πρωτοσέλιδο δημοσίευμα αναφέρονται επίσης στην κρίση που ξέσπασε στην ΕΕ, διότι οι ηγέτες των υπολοίπων δέκα χωρών που δεν έχουν υπογράψει την επιστολή δεν είχαν ενημερωθεί. Αναφέρεται επίσης και στην αντίδραση της Ελλάδας ως Προεδρεύουσας χώρας της ΕΕ. Σε εσωτερικό ρεπορτάζ γίνεται συγκεκριμένη αναφορά στη δήλωση του έλληνα πρωθυπουργού κ.Σημίτη, σύμφωνα με την οποία η επιστολή των οκτώ δεν συμβάλλει στην αντιμετώπιση του θέματος».

Η *FINANCIAL TIMES* σε σχετικό δημοσίευμα χαρακτηρίζει την δήλωση Σημίτη «σκληρή»

Η *GUARDIAN* σε πρωτοσέλιδη ανταπόκριση που συνεχίζεται και στη δεύτερη σελίδα με τίτλο « Η 'συμμορία των οκτώ' προκαλεί διάσπαση της ΕΕ αναφέρει ότι ο Τόνι Μπλαιρ χθες προκάλεσε σοβαρή διαμάχη στους κόλπους της ΕΕ. Γίνεται επίσης αναφορά στη δήλωση του έλληνα πρωθυπουργού, με την οποία ασκείται κριτική στην πρωτοβουλία των οκτώ.

Σημειώνουμε ότι θα ακολουθήσει και δεύτερο αναλυτικότερο τηλεαντιγράφημα.

ΠΑΠΑΔΑΚΗΣ

THE TIMES FRIDAY JANUARY 31 2003

THE TIMES

Don't go it alone America, urges Blair

● Prime Minister confident that new UN resolution can be secured

From Philip Webster, Political Editor, in Madrid

TONY BLAIR will today urge President Bush to stick to the United Nations route to disarm President Saddam Hussein and to avoid the temptation to go it alone.

He will tell Mr Bush at their Camp David summit that he believes a second United Nations resolution can be secured, based on Iraq's failure to co-operate fully with the weapons inspectors.

The Prime Minister flew to Washington last night confident that world opinion could be rallied behind a second resolution, despite growing misgivings over the weapons inspectors' inability to find evidence that will incriminate the Iraqi leader.

But as Mr Blair was speaking to journalists on his plane, Europe was engulfed in recriminations over yesterday's article in *The Times* by the Prime Minister and seven other European leaders implicitly attacking France and Germany's opposition to US policy on Iraq.

It emerged that neither President Chirac of France nor Gerhard Schröder of Germany had been asked to sign the article. Its publication caused anger and dismay in Paris and Berlin. The Dutch Prime Minister refused to sign it lest he widen Europe's divisions.

Greece, the current holder of the European Union presidency, criticised *The Times's* article, describing it as a right-wing move to block EU efforts to forge a common position on Iraq. Last night, in an apparent

attempt to ward off war, Iraq invited UN disarmament chiefs to return to Baghdad for fresh talks on co-operation.

But in Washington Mr Bush made his impatience plain. He said that the diplomatic process could not be open-ended and that the issue of disarmament would have to be resolved in "weeks, not months".

Mr Blair, in a key test of his influence with the President, will use their few hours together today to urge him to stay with the United Nations, arguing that Resolution 1441 will open the way to a second resolution backing force.

Speaking before a stopover in Madrid for talks with José María Aznar, the Spanish Prime Minister, he appeared to concede that the inspectors might not find damning evidence of the Iraqi leader's chemical and biological weapons because of his "active policy of concealment". But Mr Blair said that Iraq's failure to comply with demands for co-operation with the inspectors would be enough.

Later, at a press conference with Señor Aznar, he pushed the message that force might be necessary to disarm Iraq — but with UN backing. He said: "The point I am making is that if the process of disarmament cannot happen through the UN inspectors then it should happen with the full authority and consent of the UN through force. That is the only alternative to a failed inspections route."

He emphasised that UN Resolution 1441 demanded full co-operation from Iraq. He added: "Obedience to that reso-

lution or the lack of it will determine any military action and the timing of it."

Mr Blair and Mr Bush will decide today how long they think the inspectors should be given to conclude that Iraq is not co-operating. Hans Blix, the chief UN weapons inspector, will report to the UN on February 14.

Mr Blair has been urged by Democrat leaders to persuade Mr Bush to show restraint.

Asked if that was the intention of his talks, he said: "It is not a question of leverage or of pushing the Americans to do something they do not want to do. We have an agreed strategy on this which is a strategy of getting a resolution through the UN laying down a clear commitment that if he breaches it we have a further discussion and a new resolution issues. I believe that the international community will follow through what was agreed in resolution 1441.

"We anticipated that if there was a breach we would come back and have a further discussion. The implication was that if Saddam Hussein was in breach, we act. And in the end that is where the international community should be."

Mr Blair said he was not setting an arbitrary time limit, but hinted that he did not think it should take too much longer. He restated Britain's view that Iraq was already in breach but said that this was a judgment for the UN.

World's future, page 16
Mandela outburst, page 17
European rift, page 18
David Brooks, page 24

Leaders' letter in support of war exposes increasingly deep continental rift

Iraq split redraws the map of Europe

THE INDEPENDENT

THE BROADER VIEW

FRIDAY 31 JANUARY 2003

www.independent.co.uk



TONY BLAIR headed for a council of war with George Bush yesterday with the backing of seven European countries but with EU policy towards Iraq disintegrating into bitterness and division.

The Prime Minister is confident that President Bush will agree to delay a war against Iraq for more than a month during their crucial talks over the timescale for military action at the President's Camp David retreat today. But Mr Blair's preparations were marred by a rift over an Anglo-Spanish declaration of support for the US over Iraq, endorsed by three other EU countries and three east European nations that will join next year.

The dispute advertised the continental divide described by Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defence Secretary, as pitting "old Europe" against the new.

For months, European diplomats have sought to paper over their differences and, as recently as Monday, EU foreign ministers signed up to a communiqué that concentrated on the limited areas of agreement over Iraq.

But yesterday's "gang of eight" declaration shattered any pretence of consensus. Four EU countries on the United Nations Security Council - France, Germany, the UK and Spain - are in two camps.

The letter was signed by Britain, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Denmark, plus Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, which will join the EU next year. In a significant departure, the former eastern bloc countries were brought in to support the declaration, underlining the Atlanticist credentials of many of the nations

BY STEPHEN CASTLE,
ANDREW GRICE
AND ANDY MCSMITH
in Madrid

that will join the EU next year.

Costas Simitis, the Prime Minister of Greece, which holds the EU's rotating presidency but was left out of the loop, declared that the letter signed by eight nations "does not contribute to a common approach". Greek officials were furious. "Prime Minister Simitis had talks with Tony Blair and [Jose Maria] Aznar [the Spanish premier] in the last few days and nobody informed him," said one official. Mr Simitis heard

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► Blair has chance to prove his influence over Bush
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about the Anglo-Spanish initiative only yesterday when he held talks with one of the signatories, Peter Medgyessy, Hungary's premier.

The declaration by the eight countries was seen as a direct challenge to France and Germany which, having revived their traditional alliance, have gone public with their doubts on American policy.

One British minister said: "France and Germany went very public over Iraq, so we shouldn't be afraid of doing the same. They may not like what we have done, but you can't have one rule for some and another rule for the rest."

After talks with Mr Aznar in Madrid, Mr Blair admitted

there were divergences between Europe and America on such issues as climate change and trade. But he stressed that "what unites the EU and America infinitely outweighs what divides them. When we stand together the world is a safer and more peaceful place."

Mr Blair expressed confidence that the European Union doubters would rally behind military action. He said the UN would agree a second resolution authorising action on the basis that Saddam Hussein had failed to co-operate with the inspectors.

Today Mr Blair will urge Mr Bush to stick with the UN route. One British source said: "We have to strike a delicate balance between giving the UN weapons inspectors more time, building an international coalition and not being strung along by Saddam Hussein."

Downing Street said the idea of the joint statement was suggested last Friday by Mr Aznar, although it was drafted by both Britain and Spain.

Mr Aznar told journalists in Madrid yesterday: "I don't remember who was the father of the idea of writing the article, but it's not a crime to have written the article."

In private, a senior EU official was overheard describing the idea of a common EU foreign policy on Iraq as a "complete joke". The declaration was, according to another EU official, a reaction to the "disingenuous self-congratulation" of the Elysée celebrations, which marked the 40th anniversary of a Franco-German friendship treaty. One diplomat added: "Apparently it has infuriated the French - all in all, a very good outcome."

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WHERE EUROPE DIVIDES

UK (Security Council veto)
Government believes Iraq is in further 'material breach' of UN resolution 1441 and that war can now be justified

IRELAND
Government officially opposed to war. Strong anti-war sentiment, but Prime Minister Bertie Ahern allowing US military to refuel

BELGIUM/LUXEMBOURG
Firmly in the French sphere of influence and disturbed that splits over Iraq have fractured EU attempts to forge a common front

FRANCE (Security Council veto)
President Jacques Chirac's renewed alliance with Germany and his opposition to war at this stage have deeply alienated US

PORTUGAL
Prime Minister Antonio Guterres signed open letter with seven other states supporting demands to disarm Iraq by force if necessary

NETHERLANDS
Caretaker Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende did not sign the open letter but The Hague indicated yesterday its full support for US

DENMARK
Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen also supports the Blair-Bush axis on use of force if Saddam does not comply fully

SWEDEN
Traditionally neutral but Prime Minister Goran Persson made it clear he would not have added his support to the letter if asked

FINLAND
Militarily neutral and opposed to US launching invasion without another UN resolution

GERMANY (Security Council seat)
Public opinion is steadfast against military action in virtually all circumstances, strengthening Gerhard Schröder's stance

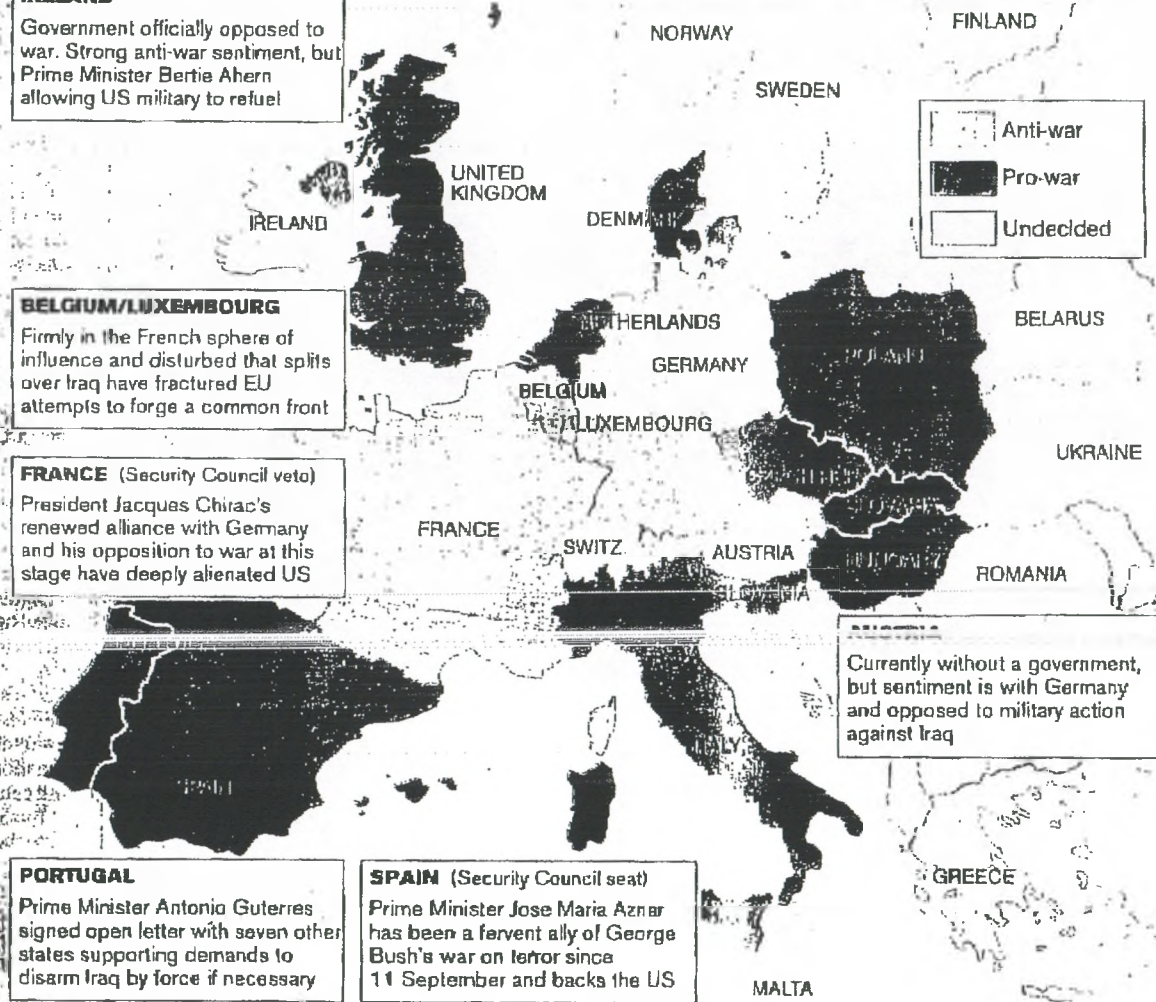
POLAND (Joins EU in 2004)
Prime Minister Leszek Miller is among Europe's most fervent admirers of George Bush

CZECH REP (Joins EU in 2004)
President Vaclav Havel, another Bush admirer, has given his full support before he bows out of public life

HUNGARY (Joins EU in 2004)
Prime Minister Peter Medgyessy is pro-military action and is host to 3,000 Iraqi exiles being trained to run the country after Saddam

GREECE
Spurred by pro-Arab public opinion, Costas Simitis, the conservative Prime Minister and EU president, is set against war

ITALY
Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi travelled to Washington to demonstrate total support for US policy towards Iraq



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Daily Mail, Friday, January 31, 2003

Europe is split over war letter

EUROPE was bitterly divided over war with Iraq last night as Tony Blair flew to meet George W Bush.

There was growing anger at the Premier's decision to lead a group of eight nations backing the President's stance.

France and Germany, which are opposed to military action, were not asked to join the group.

And the EU itself was left out of the loop. Greece, which currently holds the EU presidency, expressed outrage that it too

had not been consulted. The eight nations - Britain, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Denmark, plus future members Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic - published a letter urging all of Europe to stand united against Saddam Hussein.

EU chiefs complained that neither the community's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, nor its external relations commission, Chris Patten, were told of the letter.

They said only five of the 15 EU leaders signed the letter,

showing that Mr Blair had not won the argument.

Downing Street made it clear that French president Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder had not been asked to sign because Mr Blair does not think either nation should be able to speak for the whole of Europe.

Last week U.S. defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld dismissed France and Germany as 'old Europe' and claimed the vast majority of EU leaders were 'with the United States on this'.

The Guardian

The Guardian Friday January 31 2003

'Gang of eight' provokes EU rift

Michael White, Ian Black
in Brussels and
Patrick Wintour in Madrid

Tony Blair yesterday triggered a serious dispute within the inner circles of the European Union when he sided with Jose Maria Aznar of Spain in a pro-American initiative over Iraq without consulting France or Germany.

As the prime minister set off for Madrid and Washington, Downing Street admitted that the eight-nation EU statement published yesterday, calling

for Europe to stand united behind the US, had not been sent to all 15 member states because "they are in slightly different places" on the looming war with Baghdad.

The letter, which was initiated by Mr Aznar although its execution was shared with Mr Blair, prompted angry responses around key EU capitals, including Brussels.

"This is absolutely unnecessary," said one EU diplomat. "It is divisive. [Blair and Aznar] who have been tipped as future presidents of Europe should be

more in touch with the mainstream of public opinion and other governments."

Officials in Brussels were horrified at this latest outbreak of disarray in EU ranks just days after foreign ministers agreed a policy of demanding that Iraq disarm, backing the UN route and supporting weapons inspectors.

Speaking after an hour-long meeting with Mr Aznar, the prime minister pleaded with his European partners to avoid allowing tensions with America to develop into an open rift.

"The only people who will gain from Europe and America coming apart are those people who do not have the true interests of Europe or America at heart."

Mr Aznar repeatedly defended his joint article which was signed with Britain, Denmark, Italy and Portugal as well as three would-be members of the EU, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. He insisted it was in **Page 2**

Leader comment, page 25
More at guardian.co.uk/iraq

'Gang of eight' letter provokes EU rift

◀ **Page 1** line with the EU statement on Iraq as well as the position adopted by Nato at its summit in Prague.

He was responding to criticism from Greece, holder of the EU presidency, which attacked the "gang of eight" for undermining unity. "The way in which the initiative was expressed does not contribute to a common approach," complained Costas Simitis, the prime minister.

The letter was seen as direct retaliation for the anti-war positions adopted by France and Germany. But Paris and Berlin yesterday sought to paper over divisions. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's office said the letter "stressed points" important to Berlin. Dominique de Villepin, the French foreign minister,

called it a "contribution to the debate."

Mr Blair's spokesman also made conciliatory noises: "The prime minister values enormously the positive relationship he has with President Chirac and Gerhard Schröder."

But Downing Street added that Mr Blair "equally values the relationship he has with other EU leaders. Clearly Europe is no longer six countries, it is 15, shortly to be 25."

Mr Chirac yesterday underlined the gulf between his sceptical stance on war and the Blair-Aznar axis by discussing with the Syrian leader Bashar Assad a plan to coordinate "the next stage to prevent the circumstances from reaching the point that may lead to the war on Iraq".

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The Guardian

The Guardian Friday January 31 2003 25

Europe old and new

Divisions hamper response to Iraq crisis

As the Iraq crisis accelerates towards a fearsome dénouement, the leaders of Europe are playing their own dangerous games. On one level, Tony Blair's success in creating a European "coalition of the willing" may be seen as a poke in the eye for France's anti-war president, Jacques Chirac. His signature, along with that of Germany's anti-war chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, was notably absent from the round robin expressing solidarity with the US that was published yesterday by Mr Blair and seven other European leaders. This exercise was a sharp reminder to France that it should not presume to speak for Europe on Iraq or indeed on other issues. It sent a useful, though not totally credible signal ahead of today's Camp David war council, that Mr Blair, as an enterprising ally, can "deliver" European support to the Bush administration. On a more petty level, it might also be seen as Mr Blair's revenge for Mr Chirac's meddling over Zimbabwe and some other recent, irritating démarches.

The downside for Mr Blair and his co-author, Spain's prime minister, José Maria Aznar, is that, in point of fact, French and German scepticism about US policy is backed not only by anti-war majorities there and throughout the EU, but also in Britain and Spain. EU foreign ministers have been unable to formulate a clear position. The same goes for European-dominated Nato, which has twice failed to agree to US requests for war-related assistance to Turkey. Only yesterday, the European parliament added its voice to those insisting the case for military action is unproven. Mr Blair's hurried coalition-building has also produced some odd bedfellows. Most unappealing is Italy's rightwing prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, who has already declared war once this week — at home, over his forthcoming trial for corruption.

Europe's divisions on the Iraq issue were plain before this latest flurry. But the entry into the fray, on the pro-US side, of Poland, Hungary and the Czech republic further complicates a fraught inter-European dynamic. Here is an earnest of trouble to come as they, and the seven other new EU members, begin to challenge the predominance of the west Europeans. This is one reason why a successful outcome to the EU constitutional convention matters so much for Europe's cohesion. If a agreement is not reached on key issues such as creating a single European foreign minister, charged with forging unified EU foreign policy positions, repetitions of this damaging disarray may be expected in future.

As if these stresses and strains were not dangerous enough already, there is always Donald Rumsfeld to make a bad situation worse. The US defence secretary's division of Europe into "old" and "new", principally a jibe at France and Germany, hit home because it contains a grain of truth — although not in the way he intended. It is, as a rule, a standard US objective to divide and thereby dominate Europe, except when unity suits its purpose. It is the case, as always, that France and others suspect Britain of a Janus-like perfidy in cosying up to the US. In turn, Britain regularly seeks ad hoc alliances to put sugar in the Franco-German mortar. And there remain, as ever, the paltry rivalries of national leaders, spiced by envy, fear, and far too much history. But when an issue as critical as Iraq arises, and the dire consequences of an unbalanced and unheeding US pre-eminence come more sharply into focus, it is doubly evident that Europe as a whole must cast off its old ways of doing things. Europe can no longer afford these games of diplomatic Punch and Judy. It badly needs to find a common voice.

FINANCIAL TIMES

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Friday January 31 2003

Europe's cracks threaten to grow

Iraq presents EU leaders with their toughest choice

The European Union is approaching a choice that many leaders, not to mention citizens, hoped to avoid. Yesterday's declaration by the leaders of Spain, Britain, Italy, Portugal, Denmark and three candidate countries from central Europe, calling for unity with the US in forcing Iraq to give up weapons of mass destruction, raises the prospect of a deep rift with sceptics led by France and Germany. The outcome could affect EU foreign policy, and the path of integration, for years.

A schism is not yet unavoidable; nor does the looming divide apply to foreign policy issues beyond Iraq. On matters from the International Criminal Court to the centrality of resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict, EU members are united. They share common values, based on respect for multilateral institutions and international law.

The question of war or peace in Iraq is, though, stretching interpretation of those values to breaking-point. The decision whether to back US-led military action will be the hardest foreign policy choice Europe has faced, certainly since the Balkan conflict and arguably since the cold war. A divided response would undermine the credibility of its efforts to achieve a common foreign and security policy.

Yesterday's letter quashes any notion of a simple divide between the US and Europe. The picture was always more complex. It is equally true that the divide identified by Donald Rumsfeld, US defence secretary, of an "old" Europe around France and Germany and a "new" Europe centred on the candidate countries is superficial. The Atlanticism of the central European countries has been tempered as EU membership approaches; they supported the EU's stance on, for instance, the International Criminal Court. But the US is now calling on old loyalties.

A divided response has implications

for institutional changes being considered in the EU - notably a full-time president for the European Council and a "foreign minister" representing the Council and Commission. Faced with a split, how could they represent Europe? In these circumstances, they might have encouraged greater consultation before views hardened. Beyond Iraq, there are certainly other issues on which they could present a united front. The fissure does, nonetheless, underline the immensity of the task.

The present polarisation has arisen in part because broad stances for and against the US line, particularly by Britain's Tony Blair and Germany's Gerhard Schröder, were formed early and without consulting EU colleagues. Mr Schröder's stance upset many, not just because it was so hostile to Washington as to reduce European influence but because Germany had in the past sought to balance its own political interest with the broader EU good.

It is still possible a big rift can be avoided. The new US evidence against Saddam Hussein, promised next week, may prove convincing. Mr Blair - strengthened by the backing in the letter - may persuade President George W. Bush to seek a second United Nations resolution and give Hans Blix, chief weapons inspector, more time to demonstrate the extent of Iraqi non-co-operation.

Much would then depend on France. A circumstance in which the US and UK, backed by the signatories to yesterday's letter, launched a war after France had used its Security Council veto against military action would leave Europe hopelessly divided. President Jacques Chirac and other leaders face the unenviable task of balancing the case for war, the value of the transatlantic relationship, European unity and public opinion. There can be no greater test of their statesmanship.

THE TIMES FRIDAY JANUARY 31 2003

Paris and Berlin rocked by EU support for Bush

By Charles Bremner
in Paris,
Roger Boyes
in Berlin
and Rosemary Bennett

GERMANY and France sought yesterday to put the best gloss possible on the broadside delivered against their anti-war stance by eight European leaders.

Clearly taken aback, Paris and Berlin sought to suggest that the leaders' joint article in *The Times* was merely a variation on Europe's common desire to ensure Iraq's disarmament.

However, Downing Street rubbed in the sense of rebuff to "old Europe" by noting that neither President Chirac nor Gerhard Schröder, the German Chancellor, had been invited to sign the article, which urged Europe to stand united with America and rebuffed Franco-German attempts to speak in their name.

In Washington, President Bush declared himself "most grateful" for the article, but Greece, which holds the European Union's rotating presidency, criticised what it said was a right-wing move against the Union's efforts to foster a common position on Iraq. This "does not contribute to the common approach to the problem," Costas Simitis, the Greek Prime Minister, said.

A desire to limit European divisions caused Jan-Peter Balkenende, the normally pro-Atlantic Prime Minister of the Netherlands, to refuse to sign the article. Mr Balkenende refused to sign it because he did not want to exacerbate Europe's divisions.

"What we are aiming for is one European voice and we are trying to achieve that by bridging gaps and that is why the Prime Minister did not sign," the Dutch Foreign Ministry said.

The Spanish-drafted text was signed by Tony Blair and the leaders of Spain, Italy, Portugal, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Denmark.

Tony Blair's spokesman denied that the letter was designed to split the European Union, but said that there was no use in pretending that the

Union spoke with one voice.

"It is clear that the European Union is no longer six countries, it is 15 and will shortly be 25 ... No one country represents European foreign policy exclusively," he said. The Prime Minister's spokesman played down the differences on Iraq, saying France and Germany were "in a slightly different piece" from Britain.

Dominique de Villepin, the French Foreign Minister, described the article as "a contribution to the debate".

He told the French parliament: "We are not trying to set one Europe against another when everyone can see we are defending the same principles — firmness towards Iraq and a concern to find a solution to

Czech Republic and Hungary, all cultivated by Berlin, are being pulled out of the German orbit by their readiness to support the US Administration.

"Europe displays its divisions over Washington," *Le Monde*, which also published the article, said. The paper noted that all Mr Blair's EU co-signatories were "right-wing".

Commentators on the Continent saw the article as a well timed counter-offensive by the pro-Washington axis, which links Britain and its close EU allies, to the strongly pro-US former communist states that join the Union next year.

Philippe Moreau-Defarges, of the French Institute for International Relations, said the article had inflicted "a low blow on France and Germany which have been trying to play the strong-arm role and have not been taken seriously".

Spokesmen for President Chirac said that the eight-nation article contained no surprises. France agreed with its general aim, that the goal of the international community should be the disarmament of Iraq, they said.

French officials also tried to play down the weight of the nations now lining up against the Franco-German line. The pro-American rallying call had gleaned the backing of only 8 of the 25 states that will make up the EU from next year, they said.

The French and Germans also noted that a majority of members of the 15-member UN Security Council, which is chaired this month by France and next by Germany, were opposed to rapid military action and wanted to give the weapons inspectors more time in Iraq.

The leaders spoke in the article of the urgency of disarming Iraq and thanked the United States for "bravery and generosity" in ensuring peace in Europe.

In Brussels, the European Parliament called on the US yesterday not to take unilateral military action and urged the UN to find a peaceful solution to the emergency.



The *Times* article has exposed European divisions

the crisis in the framework of the United Nations."

In Berlin, where the article had the effect of a bombshell, a government spokesman said: "We see the declaration as sharing views that the German Government also holds important."

But their remarks did little to mask the sense of a widening gulf between the approach of Britain and its allies and the resistance, led by France and Germany, to the US drive for rapid military action.

The article was seen by the Germans as fresh evidence of growing Anglo-American influence in Central Europe at their expense. Poland, the