



PROPHETIC TIMES

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ENLARGEMENT TO HELP EU CATCH US ON PRODUCTIVITY

February 26, 2004 The EUObserver reported: "The entry of ten new EU states in May will boost EU productivity to levels only just below that of the US, according to a new report by an influential US business group. The study, published yesterday by the New-York based Conference Board, shows that EU productivity growth at 0.8 percent lags far behind the US at 2.6 percent.

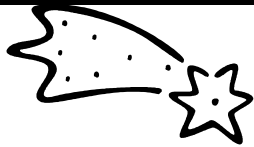
However, the ten new member states have far higher productivity growth levels - with an impressive average of 4.2 percent over the last eight years. Productivity growth is a key measure of economic success and a boost in productivity from new member states will go a long way to help the EU fulfill its goal to be "the most competitive, knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010" (the so-called Lisbon Agenda).

One of the co-authors of the report, productivity expert Bart van Ark, said, "Productivity growth in the enlarged European Union will be just slightly below U.S. growth rates", adding that "Cost savings on labour and continued restructuring, especially throughout manufacturing" will be the main cause of the gains.

Despite the generally upbeat report - which provides a welcome boost to the beleaguered Lisbon process - the EU has a long way to go, warn the authors. The US continues to outstrip the EU in terms of research and investment in new technologies, which always keeps them one step ahead of the Union.

Robert McGuckin, Director of Economic Research at The Conference Board, said, "The U.S. has outpaced Europe in productivity growth by profitably exploiting new information and communication technologies". "The lack of a fully integrated EU market also makes it more difficult to take advantage of new market opportunities", added Mr McGuckin..."

EARTH ALMOST PUT ON IMPACT ALERT



February 24, 2004 The BBC News reported: "Astronomers have revealed how they came within minutes of alerting the world to a potential asteroid strike last month. Some scientists believed on 13 January that a 30m object, later designated 2004 AS1, had a one-in-four chance of hitting the planet within 36 hours.

It could have caused local devastation and the researchers contemplated a call to President Bush before new data finally showed there was no danger. The procedures for raising the alarm in such circumstances are now being revised.

At the time, the president's team would have been putting the final touches to a speech he was due to make the following day at the headquarters of NASA, the US space agency. In it he planned to reset the course of manned spaceflight, sending it back to the Moon and on to Mars, but he could have had something very different to say.

He could have begun by warning the world it was about to be hit by a space rock. Bush would not have known where it would impact - only somewhere in the Northern Hemisphere. Experts would have been bouncing radar signals off the huge rock as he spoke in order to get more information about its trajectory.

At about 30m wide, the asteroid was cosmic small fry, not the type of thing to wipe out the dinosaurs or threaten our species, but still big enough to cause considerable damage after exploding in the atmosphere. Potentially, the loss of life could have been much worse than 11 September.

In the end, Bush made no such announcement, but astronomers have admitted they were on the verge of making the call. And 2004 AS1? It turned out to be bigger than anyone had thought - about 500m wide. It eventually passed the Earth at a distance of about 12 million km - 32 times the Earth-Moon distance, posing no danger to us whatsoever."

PALESTINIANS WANT CHEMICAL WEAPONS, ARTILLERY

February 24, 2004 The Jerusalem Post Reported: "The Palestinian terror groups and PA security organizations are working to "upgrade" explosives to include chemical agents and are also investing efforts in producing weapons that can avoid the security fence, Shin Bet head Avi Dichter said Tuesday.

The weapons threat from Gaza could "hasten a Defensive Shield operation," there, Dichter warned in a meeting with the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. He was referring to the 2002 operation in which the IDF entered deep into Palestinian cities to rout out terrorists and confiscate weapons.

In 2003, 210 Kassam rockets were fired from populated Palestinian areas. The groups are also investing efforts to obtain Israeli weaponry, Dichter said in his bi-annual briefing to the committee.

The importance of a Jerusalem fence is "clear" he said, adding that if he could "push a button" to make the fence he would. Since September 2000, 22 percent of all Israeli victims have been killed in Jerusalem, compared with 39 percent for the rest of Israel. The remainder were killed in the territories.

According to figures presented by Dichter, since April 2002 the number of suicide bomb attacks in areas with a fence

dropped from 17 to 5, compared with a rise from 5 to 13 where there is no fence..."

BUSH REJECTS MILITARY PRESSURE ON SYRIA

February 24, 2004 Middle East Newslite reported: "The Bush administration has rejected a proposal by the U.S. military for increased freedom of action along the Iraqi-Syrian border in an attempt to halt the flow of Muslim fighters into Iraq.

U.S. officials said the White House rejected a plan by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff that would permit U.S. forces that operate along the Iraqi-Syrian border to pursue Al Qaida-aligned fighters into Syria and attack insurgency way-stations inside Syrian territory. They said the plan identified Iran and Syria as the leading sources of Muslim volunteers who seek to enter Iraq and join the insurgency against the U.S.-led coalition.

The military plan was endorsed by the Defense Department, officials said. The Pentagon warned the White House that without U.S. military pressure Damascus would continue to facilitate the flow of Muslim volunteers into Iraq. They said Syrian officials have been bribed to allow the insurgents to cross the border.

Officials said the Pentagon concluded that the flow of Islamic insurgents from Syria has become a key difficulty in stabilizing Iraq. They said Syria has been used by Islamic insurgents to infiltrate Iraq and join Al Qaida suicide squads."

RUSSIA: 'A DIFFICULT PARTNER', SAYS EU

February 23, 2004 The EUObserver reported: "Russia may be a difficult partner but the EU has to learn to speak with one voice, according to an internal EU policy paper. The document - drawn up by the Irish presidency of the EU and discussed by foreign ministers today in Brussels - offers a candid assessment of the EU's failings when it comes to relations with its largest neighbor, Russia.

"While Russia may be a difficult partner, it is clear that the EU has not been able to define clearly its objectives, nor to promote its values or effectively defend its interests". This harsh self appraisal comes after the EU suffered various setbacks in its relations with Moscow last year, most notably a disastrous EU-Russia summit which saw President Putin deftly capitalize on very public EU divisions.

"The ability of all EU institutions and member states to speak with one voice will always remain a decisive factor determining whether the EU's policy towards Russia is successful in achieving results", reads the document. But the neighbors could be more helpful, according to the EU. "A willingness to engage in a constructive spirit by the Russian side remains a pre-requisite for the success of the relationship".

The EU and Russia are embroiled in a series of disputes ranging from Russia's reluctance to ratify the Kyoto Protocol on climate change to its refusal to extend a bilateral agreement to cover the eight new EU member states from central and eastern Europe in the mutual neighborhood.

As anticipated, the ministers today agreed to wield the threat of sanctions over Russia if it does not agree to cover all 10 new member states in the so-called Partnership and Co-operation Agreement - which sets out the political, economic and trade relationship between the EU and its partner countries..."

U.S. CALLS ON SYRIA TO SHED WMD

February 22, 2004 The Middle East Newslite reported: "The United States has urged Damascus to follow Libya and dismantle Syria's weapons of mass destruction programs. In the most direct appeal, the Bush administration called specifically on Syria to allow international inspections of suspected WMD facilities as well as dismantle weaponry. The administration said Syria's WMD program has become a major obstacle toward better relations with the United States.

"We hope other governments, too, like Syria, will realize that chemical weapons and other WMD programs won't make their countries safer," Secretary of State Colin Powell told an audience at Princeton University on Friday, "their people more prosperous, or their own hold on power more secure. To the contrary. It goes in the other direction."

Officials said Powell's warning was part of the administration's effort to revise Syria's policy before President George Bush reports to Congress on compliance by Damascus to the Syria Accountability Act. The bill, signed into law in December 2003, warns of a virtual U.S. trade embargo on Syria unless it withdraws troops from Lebanon, ends support for groups termed terrorist and dismantles its WMD. Bush is expected to report to Congress by May."

*L. Jim Tuck, Pastor
UCGIA Oakland, San Jose, Stockton, and Santa Rosa
ljtuc@msn.com*