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DEAL WITH NATO MOVES CLOSER

March 11, 2004 The EUObserver reported: "NATO will only have a "residual role" in Bosnia once the EU takes over peace-keeping operations there, it was affirmed yesterday, following a dispute over who will run the show.

After what were reportedly tense negotiations on just how much say NATO would have over the EU-led operation, it emerged that NATO will only keep "a couple of hundred" people, mostly civilians in the former Yugoslav republic. The US has been keen to retain some control of the operation, something which has not gone down well in Brussels.

The mission is likely to be the EU's most taxing militarily and logistically, but will also provide essential know-how for future operations.

Speaking before the press in Brussels on Wednesday the NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, said that there would be a chain of command which is "good and transparent" according to El Mundo. Mr. de Hoop Scheffer was speaking after a meeting with the former secretary general and now head of EU foreign policy, Javier Solana.

"The chain of command should be very clear", remarked Mr Solana. He added that after the EU's takeover, which is expected towards the end of this year, NATO's force would be "some hundreds of people, many of them civilians, more looking into questions of intelligence and maintaining vigilance over possible contacts with other terrorist organizations". The group is also likely to pursue suspected war criminals along side the EU force.

Although competences, roles and numbers have not yet been finalised, it is expected that the UK will provide some 7,000 troops that will be under EU control. The mission is expected to have a mandate for an initial period of three years."



VAST MAJORITY OF ISRAELIS WANT TO JOIN 'ANTISEMITIC' EU

March 10, 2004 The EUObserver reported: "A new European Commission poll in Israel has shown that 85 percent of Israelis want to join the EU but that the majority believe the union to be anti-semitic. The poll, conducted by the Dahaf Institute for the Commission's representation in Tel Aviv, reveals that 60 percent support the idea that Israel should apply for membership of the EU and 25 percent "tend to support" this idea. And an overwhelming majority (90 percent) think that the EU is a "positive development for the world".

But, for Brussels, the good news ends there because 74 percent of Israelis said that the EU's attitude to Israel was "unfair" and that the EU sides with Palestine in the Middle East conflict. Moreover almost two out of three agreed with the proposition that the EU's attitudes towards Israel was "anti-Semitism disguised as moral principles".

Overall, the sentiment seems to be that the EU favors the Palestinians over Israel with 60 percent believing that the EU rarely or never denounces terror attacks and over half of those surveyed thinking that union aid to the Palestinian Authority is aimed at preventing its collapse.

Responding to the poll, the EU's ambassador to Israel, Giancarlo Chevallard, said, "the concern about anti-Semitic developments in Europe is absolutely legitimate". He added, "On this issue I just want to express the wish that the numerous initiatives taken by European leaders in the battle against anti-Semitism will be successful".

But, taken globally, Mr Chevallard said that the representation was "pleased with the results" because the results showed that "contrary to some deeply rooted preconceptions, the Israeli public perceives the EU and Europe in highly positive terms".

With this latest survey, the European Commission will be hoping to avoid the controversy that surrounded its last poll on Israel, which showed that 59 percent of Europeans believed that Israel is the biggest obstacle to world peace..."

IRAN CHIDES U.S. NUCLEAR 'BULLYING'

March 10, 2004 BBC News reported: "Iran has accused the US of "bullying" the UN's nuclear watchdog into drafting a resolution censuring the Islamic state over its nuclear program. Iran's foreign minister warned that Tehran may end co-operation with the IAEA if Europe did not resist the US. Kamal Kharrazi also insisted Iran would resume production of nuclear materials after resolving its case with the IAEA.

The IAEA is meeting in Vienna to decide how to deal with Iran's failure to fully disclose its nuclear activities. The IAEA's draft resolution on Iran reportedly compares Iran and Libya, saying both countries got nuclear equipment "from the same

foreign sources".

However, the body has praised Libya for scrapping its nuclear weapons program. The agency's 35-nation board of governors passed a resolution "applauding the decision by [Libya] on 19 December 2003" to renounce its weapons of mass destruction program.

Speaking to reporters after a cabinet meeting in Tehran, Mr Kharrazi said the analogy between Libya and Iran was "incorrect". "Libya has officially announced that it was pursuing nuclear weapons and this is a violation of the NPT, but Iran has not been pursuing nuclear weapons and [has] not violated the NPT," he said.

The United States has accused Iran of pursuing a clandestine program to develop nuclear weapons and wants the matter brought before the UN Security Council, which could impose sanctions on Iran. The BBC's Miranda Eeles in Tehran says in the draft, the United States has reportedly agreed to tone down its criticism in order to win European support for a demand that Iran divulge more about its nuclear program.

Iran's ambassador to the IAEA, Pirooz Hosseini, said the draft was "an act of [American] bullying and putting pressure on the others". Mr Kharrazi admonished Britain, France and Germany for backing the draft - which also praises Iran for its co-operation - after they signaled they would block a resolution in return for Iran's continued compliance with the IAEA. "We advise the Europeans to respect their obligations and to resist American pressure, otherwise there is no reason for co-operation to continue," he told reporters..."

AZNAR PLEADS FOR LEADERSHIP IN A EUROPE 'GOING BACKWARDS'

March 9, 2004 The EUObserver reported: "In a wide ranging interview with French daily *Le Monde*, Spanish premier José Maria Aznar criticizes the pace of several European initiatives, holds firm on the Constitution and tells his fellow leaders to stop complaining about America.



He said, "The EU has taken a series of very important decisions: deciding to reunify Europe, reform our institutions, launch the euro, aim to become the most competitive economy in the world, organize a system of defense and justice. And moreover, all of this has broken down. In these areas, Europe is even going backwards!"

But, according to Mr Aznar, these issues are not being thrashed out by leaders in summit meetings as one might expect. The Spanish leader asserts, "It has been a long time since the European leaders discussed these matters in depth. Recently, we hardly talk about anything".

Continuing in a similar critical vein, Mr Aznar says that enlargement has been seen more as a problem than an opportunity, that EU institutions are stuck, that the EU is in neutral gear when it comes to the economy and that the transatlantic link is being called into question. So his parting wish - he steps down as Spain's premier after elections this coming Sunday - is that "Europe will find again its ability to seal deals, that it will rediscover leadership and that certain decisions will finally be taken".

Mr Aznar is similarly downbeat on economic issues. Comparing the EU and US models, he says, "We cannot complain every day about the American system and have slower growth, be less flexible, less competitive and create fewer jobs than them. Let's stop complaining and let's do better". He regrets that the EU's Lisbon agenda - its ambitious aim to make the EU the most competitive economy in the world by 2010 - "is no longer observed" and believes that Europe has "missed a great opportunity" in this field.

If anyone was expecting Mr Aznar to soften his views on the Constitution before he leaves, they were wrong. Spain - along with Poland - shared the blame for the breakdown in talks over a new European Constitution because of their insistence that the current voting system - based on the Nice Treaty - be maintained.

Mr Aznar says he is determined to step down, despite his relatively young age - 51 - and the fact that many want him to stay. He says he is proud of the part Spain has played in Europe during his time as leader - Spain, he says, is in the front line on many European issues, such as the single market, the euro, the Schengen agreement on border control and defense.

He is also proud of Spain's economic achievements - "we have created the most jobs in the EU, we have a budgetary surplus, we have reduced our debt by 18 percent of GDP".

He finishes the interview by saying, "The EU is a great success and Spain has played its part" but warns that "contrary to certain ideas, what is good for Europe is not necessarily rooted in opposition to the United States".