



## News from the Nations

### Pope visits Ukraine

The pope's recent visit to Ukraine, during which he celebrated mass in front of 90,000 people, has highlighted tensions between the Vatican and the Orthodox Patriarchate in Moscow. The pope called on Eastern Orthodox and Catholic communities to rediscover the unity they enjoyed before the Great Schism that divided the Christian world a millennium ago. The Ukraine has a sizeable minority of some six million Catholics, mostly living in the west of the country around the city of Lvov. Otherwise its churches are predominantly Russian Orthodox, acknowledging the authority of the Moscow-based patriarch, Alexei II. Despite the pope's call for unity, the visit has been marred by bitter protests from the Orthodox Church. The patriarch said, "The visit of the Pontiff to Ukraine will not, as many expect, introduce peace to interfaith relations in Ukraine but will only generate a new confrontation". He referred to the papal visit as a "challenge" from the Vatican. While the Moscow Patriarchate has condemned the pope's visit, the breakaway Kiev Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church, created in 1993, welcomed the pope.

### WORLD LEADERS PRESSURE ISRAEL

*The world's leading industrialised countries (known as the G-8 nations) increased pressure on Israel, prior to their recent summit in Genoa, to admit international observers to help to restore the collapsed ceasefire with the Palestinians. This marks an important change in American policy; until recently America has opposed European attempts to deploy monitors to try to damp down the recent Palestinian uprising. Israel immediately rejected the call for observers. "As long as there is continuing violence and terrorism it would be useless to deploy monitors in the territories", said Mr Gaussian, spokesman for Ariel Sharon, the Israeli prime minister. Under a peace plan proposed by an international commission headed by the former US Senator George Mitchell, Israel and the Palestinians are supposed to stop fighting and then make a series of confidence-building gestures. Israel is meant to put a freeze on building more Jewish settlements.*

### No joint plan on US missiles

Russia is not planning any "joint response" with China if the US goes ahead with a national missile defence system that breaches the 1972 antiballistic missile treaty, Russian President Vladimir Putin said recently. "Theoretically, it is possible", he said. "In practice, Russia is not planning joint actions in this sphere with other states, including China. Russia has enough strength and resources of its own to react to any change in international and strategic security".

### Israel's water shortage continues

Israel's Health Ministry recently banned the drinking of unboiled tap water in the Dan region due to a contamination scare. Within twenty-four hours officials lifted the restriction on the area's roughly two million residents after tests showed that the water was safe to drink. A report states that the scare came as Israeli- and Palestinian-ruled areas faced a severe water shortage due to extraordinary low rainfall levels and years of mismanagement. Water levels in the Sea of Galilee are low and sinking further. Negotiations have been under way between Israel and Turkey over the possibility of importing water by tanker from the River Manavgat, but cost and other details reportedly have been holding up the prospects for such a deal.

**Ex-king takes over in Bulgaria**  
Simeon Saxe-Coburg, formerly King Simeon II of Bulgaria, was recently sworn in as the country's prime minister, becoming the first former monarch to return to power in post-Communist Eastern Europe. After being approved, Mr Saxe-Coburg took the oath of loyalty to the republican constitution in the presence of Patriarch Maxim of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. He has appointed two young Western-educated financiers to his coalition government, and has said that the new government's priorities would be membership of the European Union and joining NATO at its summit next year with a view to membership in 2004.

**Caspian oil rivalry erupts**

Amoco, the British oil group, suspended oil exploration in the southern Caspian Sea recently after an Iranian naval vessel threatened its contractors. The confrontation came just days after Iran warned it would prevent foreign companies working with Azerbaijan from developing offshore regions Tehran claims as its own. The incident is the worst so far in a series of disagreements among the Caspian littoral states on how to divide the sea's riches. Azerbaijan has accused Iran of gunboat diplomacy and of raising tensions in the southern Caspian. The state's press agency reported that an Iranian military jet had spent two hours overflying the two research vessels before the gunship approached them. Earlier, Iranian officials summoned Azerbaijan's chargé d'affaires in Tehran to protest at plans to work in the disputed area. Iran's oil ministry and "relevant bodies" would prevent any activity. Baku and Tehran are unable to agree where to place a dividing line between their two offshore sectors. Azerbaijan holds that the sea should be divided along a middle line, which would give Iran about fourteen per cent. Iran says each of the five states bordering the Caspian should have twenty per cent.

**Vatican snubs enquiry into Holocaust**

A Panel of Catholic and Jewish scholars appointed to examine Pope Pius XII's wartime response to the Holocaust has suspended its work, blaming a lack of co-operation from the Vatican. The World Jewish Congress said that the panel of historians had informed the Vatican of its decision in a letter recently, after being told that they would be unable to consult unpublished wartime archives.

**EU-Turkey dispute worsens**

European Union (EU) foreign ministers and Turkey are set on a collision course if Ankara continues to veto unrestricted and guaranteed access by Brussels to NATO's assets for autonomous missions carried out by the EU, diplomats are warning. According to a report from Brussels, "the souring relationship has been complicated by negotiations to enlarge the fifteen-nation union. Cyprus—over which Turkey and Greece (an EU member) are bitterly divided—is determined to join the EU by 2004, which Turkey opposes". After a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels recently, Louis Michel, foreign minister of Belgium, insisted that Turkey would not stop the EU in developing its European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). The report states: "Desperate to prevent ESDP from being held hostage by Ankara, the issue will top the agenda at a meeting of EU foreign ministers in September. Brussels is heavily reliant on NATO's planning assets. A key to the relationship between NATO and ESDP is that the EU initiative would not lead to duplication of assets of any planning structures independent from the alliance. If Turkey continues to block our access to NATO's planning and assets, then the logic is that we will be pushed to go down the road of duplication, and develop ESDP without Turkey—is that what Turkey and the US really want? . . . Turkey has threatened to veto any access to NATO assets unless the EU granted it the right to participate in any decisions, etc., which EU diplomats read as Turkey trying to enter the EU by the back door".

**EUROPEAN UNION TO REGISTER ALL CHURCHES**

According to a recent report in the English Churchman, the prospect of all religious organisations throughout the EU having to be registered, and unregistered groups being proscribed or subject to penalties, was brought a step closer at a conference in The Hague on 24-25 June organised by the EU in conjunction with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The aim of the conference was to discuss the registration and regulation of religious and 'faith' groups throughout the EU, and it aimed to consider 'best practice' in this area in EU and neighbouring states. According to one of the papers, a detailed registration plan was put forward at the conference. Every religious organisation, independent church or 'faith group' would have to register with a new 'Faith Commission'. Cults and sects considered to be using 'mind-altering' techniques would not receive registration and would be subject to as yet undefined penalties and restrictions. France has recently passed legislation that would make it a crime to use 'mind-altering' techniques. Some say that evangelism designed to convert members of other 'faith groups' to faith in Christ could be regarded as a crime under the ill-defined wording of the legislation.

**Israel, US and Turkey in joint air exercises**

A large-scale exercise by the air forces of the US, Turkey and Israel from June 17-19 was intended to send a signal to Iraq, Iran and Syria of a joint capability to respond to attacks, said the head of the Centre for Strategic Studies at Israel's Bar-Elan University.