



## News from the Nations

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### **GROWING ANTI-SEMITISM IN EUROPE**

*Anti-Semitism among intellectuals and opinion-formers in Europe is at its worst since the Second World War, sponsors of an international report on anti-Jewish activity said recently. The World Jewish Congress, which, in partnership with the Anti-Defamation League, brings out the annual survey of European countries, said the trend was being fuelled particularly by political and intellectual élites in Western Europe.*

### **Greek Orthodox delegation to Rome**

In March the pope welcomed the first Greek Orthodox delegation to the Holy See. It was sent by the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece. Representatives of the two churches expressed the desire to build "a bridge of communication, of reconciliation and confidence in the European Union, in order to offer a more influential Christian voice in society, which will enable Catholics and Orthodox together to offer a living witness to their common Christian inheritance. This will bring about a new evangelisation of Europe that will enable it to revive its deep Christian roots, the Eastern and Western traditions, that are both based on the one, great Christian tradition and on the apostolic Church, a bridge between the two traditions of East and West. We must organise our collaboration and work together to make the voice of the Gospel resound forcefully throughout the Europe that is ours, where the Christian roots of the people must be revived".

### **Israelis warn European Union not to impose sanctions**

Israeli officials recently warned that any sanctions by the Europeans would mark the end of the European Union's attempts to boost its involvement in seeking a diplomatic solution to the Middle East crisis. The warning was made ahead of the recent meeting of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg, at which Belgium and Spain wanted to consider taking tough measures against Israel for its military offensive in the Palestinian-ruled areas of the West Bank. However, the EU has thrown its full weight behind American efforts to defuse the crisis in the Middle East, sweeping aside calls for economic sanctions against Israel. The European Parliament recently called for a suspension of the free association agreement, but the parliamentary vote has little weight, as it is neither binding nor legal. The president of the Manufacturing Association of Israel attacked the parliament's decision as "hypocrisy", because Israel's actions were a response to deadly suicide bombings. "I don't think any other country would have allowed such events to happen without responding", he said.

### **Saudis warn US of rift on Israel**

*Saudi Arabia warned President Bush recently that he could rupture relations with his Arab allies unless he moderated his support for Ariel Sharon, the Israeli prime minister. Saudi sources described the meeting between Crown Prince Abdullah and Mr Bush at the President's ranch as "the last chance" to save the strategic alliance between the two countries, claiming that oil sales and military cooperation were at risk. President Bush urged the prince to stop funding the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas. Edward Walker, a former US assistant secretary of state and ambassador to Israel, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, urged Mr Bush to take such warning seriously. He told the Daily Telegraph: "If the US is going to be a friend of Sharon come what may, the Saudis are going to move in a different direction to secure their own base. America is in danger of an informal Arab boycott, including the withdrawal of private Arab investments in the US".*

### **Vatican figure plans Israel trip**

The President of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews has announced plans to visit Israel during May. Speaking during a two-day British trip, Cardinal Kasper said that his Jerusalem itinerary would include discussion with Israel's two Chief Rabbis on promoting Jewish-Catholic dialogue. Cardinal Kasper also unveiled plans for a London conference next year on the theme of "Theology of partnership the next step". He also said: "Jewish and Catholic people have a lot of common values, which would help to create a partnership between the two faiths".

**NATO and Russia sign deal**

*Russia and the NATO alliance, former adversaries, recently became partners in an expanded transatlantic alliance. Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, sat for the first time as an equal with leaders of the nineteen NATO countries at the inaugural meeting in Rome of the NATO-Russia Council. The NATO-Russian summit's venue, a giant tent at a coastal airbase, was transformed into a replica of Ancient Rome. In 1997 a NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council was formed, and in 2002 the NATO-Russia Council was launched by the Rome Declaration. Mr Bush said that "the accord, which covers cooperation in areas from terrorism to peacekeeping, and gives Russia a say in NATO decisionmaking, would offer the world the prospect of a more hopeful century. It has opened the way for a larger goal, a Europe free and at peace for the first time in history". NATO opened a delegation office in Moscow recently, and the Russians will have an office at NATO's headquarters in Brussels. Three Baltic states are expected to become the first former Soviet republics to be invited to join NATO this year, a move opposed by Russia. After the summit, Mr Bush went to the Vatican to a twenty-minute meeting with the pope.*

**Caspian states discuss resources**

Leaders of the five countries surrounding the Caspian Sea met recently in a pioneering attempt to breach divisions over the use of its rich resources. The meeting brought together for the first time the presidents of Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The issue of resolving the Caspian's legal status received added urgency last summer after the Iranian navy forced away at gunpoint an exploration vessel chartered by BP from an offshore site jointly claimed by it and Azerbaijan. Nursultan Nazarbayev, the head of Kazakhstan, stressed the need for peaceful negotiations to avoid turning the Caspian into a "conflict zone".

**Documents link Arafat to militants**

Israeli military intelligence recently released documents that they say establish a direct link between Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader, and official Palestinian payments to militants involved in attacks on Israeli civilians. Military officials said that the army hauled off two truckloads of documents from two offices inside Mr Arafat's besieged Ramallah compound. It is the first time in eighteen months of conflict that Israel has produced evidence to support its repeated assertions that Mr Arafat has directly supported attacks on Israeli civilians. Mr Arafat's Fatah movement requested financial aid for specific fighters. Israeli intelligence said that notes on the papers were handwritten and signed by Mr Arafat, who authorised payment in both cases. Earlier Israel released another document, on an Al Aqsa Brigades letterhead, found in the office of Mr Arafat's chief financial officer, Mr Shoubaki. This document included an itemised request for expenditures for several activities, including making bombs and procuring ammunition.

**Arafat teams up with Saddam**

At the time of Colin Powell's diplomatic visit to the Middle East recently, there were reports that Saddam Hussein and Yasser Arafat were planning to stage joint terrorist attacks in the region. Senior officials of Saddam's General Intelligence Agency are reported to have held talks with Mr Arafat's Palestinian Authority to identify potential targets, according to Western intelligence experts. They have been passed details of a meeting in Baghdad at the end of last month when an Arafat aide is said to have provided a list of strategic sites in Israel and Saudi Arabia that might be attacked in the event of American air strikes on Baghdad. Apart from agreeing to share intelligence, the Palestinians are said to have provided Iraqi security agents with thirty-seven blank passports, obtained from a variety of Arab countries, that might be used by the Iraqis when mounting terrorist attacks.

**SADDAM SPENDS MILLIONS**

*A Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Besharat, is handing out millions of pounds of largesse to Palestinians from Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi leader. Mr Besharat has just started distributing cheques for £17,000 each to the hundreds of people whose homes in the Jenin refugee camp were destroyed by the Israeli army in April. He is budgeting for a total expenditure of £5 million, a vast sum for poor refugee families. Saddam's bounty is all the more astonishing as refugee families will not have to use it to rebuild their homes. That expense is being taken in hand by UNRWA, the United Nations agency that provides schools, clinics and social services for the refugees, using £17 million promised by the United Arab Emirates. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has accused Iraq of fomenting the recent wave of suicide bombings.*