

Central European Update

Poland

On 20 May President Kwasniewski called for wider international efforts in pushing for democratic changes in Belarus. He appealed to the EU to back Poland and other neighboring countries in condemning the authoritarian policies of Belarusian President **Alyaksandr Lukashenka** and in supporting the nation's democratic opposition. Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine are trying to launch an independent radio station that would broadcast reports to Belarus. Kwasniewski's remarks come amidst deteriorating ties between Belarus and Poland. Deputy Foreign Minister **Andrzej Zalucki** said Poland would maintain its contact with Belarus for the sake of the Polish minority in Belarus.

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The Polish Interior Minister **Ryszard Kalisz** announced he would resign from his post if allegations about widespread corruption in the country's police force were confirmed. Reports published in the daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* have linked high-ranking officials at the police headquarters with organized crime rings and other criminal acts. The interior minister believes the allegations are false, but in the event they are true he will tender his resignation to Prime Minister **Marek Belka**.

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On 24 May the leaders of the Union of Ukrainians in Poland met with President **Aleksander Kwasniewski** to discuss the rights of Poland's Ukrainian minority and preparations for the Ukrainian Year in Poland. On 1 May Poland introduced a new minorities law, permitting the official use of minority languages in communities where minorities constitute at least 20 percent of the population. President Kwasniewski promised to watch over the enforcement of minority rights and the two sides discussed youth exchange programs between both countries.

Czech Republic

Czech Senator **Karl Schwarzenberg** was expelled from Cuba on 19 May. This is the latest in a series of diplomatic rows between Havana and Prague. Senator Schwarzenberg was to attend an unprecedented meeting of opponents of the Castro regime, but was deported beforehand. Schwarzenberg spoke in Paris about the deportation before he returned back to the Czech Republic and said "Cuba's 'exaggerated' reaction showed the nervousness of a regime visibly unsure of itself."

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On 23 May the Czech Prime Minister **Jiri Paroubek** met with his

British counterpart **Tony Blair** at the start of a two-day official visit to London. The two leaders discussed the ratification of the EU constitution, the further expansion of the EU, and the Czech military presence in Iraq. The Czech Republic operates a 100 strong military police force training base in southern Iraq and has a small team of surgeons in the country. Prime Minister Paroubek said he was prepared to extend the mission of the military police if necessary. Paroubek also decorated Czech war veterans at the Czech embassy in London.

Hungary

Hungarian Deputy Defense Minister **Imre Ivancsik** met his Greek counterpart in Athens to discuss the extension of a 1993 military cooperation agreement between the two countries. The extension, which is to be signed by the end of this year, aims to foster the exchange of security information and military personnel. The two leaders also expressed their support for Turkey's membership in the EU, once the country meets all requirements for admission.

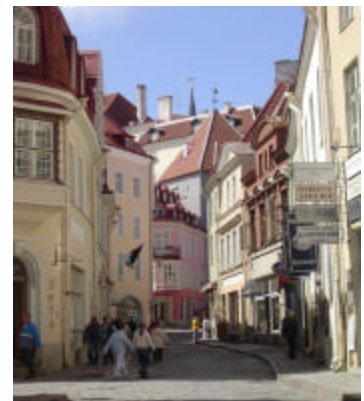
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Media experts of the U.S. Army paid a visit to Hungarian television channels, newspapers, and radio stations, assessing the quality of media operations in the

country. Professor **James T. Currie** of the Armed Forces' National Defense Higher Education College said that the media in Hungary should aim to be less partisan.

Slovakia

On 23 May Slovakia signed an agreement with Germany, Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania to create a EU rapid reaction force of 1500 troops. The group, which is expected to be ready for deployment in 2007, will be one of 13 such formations made up of troops from various EU member states. The rapid reaction force will be deployable anywhere in the world within five to ten days, and is mainly intended for use in humanitarian and peacekeeping roles.



Featured Photo: Tallinn, Estonia

Baltic States Update

Estonia

Estonian Prime Minister **Andrus Ansip** met Finnish business leaders on 23 May and expressed his hope that the successful Estonian income tax model will spread throughout the EU, because it is "simple, uniform and transparent." Ansip confirmed that trade relations between Finland and Estonia are excellent and added that Estonia expects the lifting of restrictions on free movement of labor next year.

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According to a recent poll conducted by BSN/Faktum, 68 percent of Estonians would like to have a referendum on the European Constitution, and half of them would like to see the

current version of the Constitution endorsed by all 25 members of the EU.

Lithuania

Lithuanian troops will be deployed in the Ghor province of Afghanistan at the beginning of June. The region is the fifth largest poppy producer in the country. The task of the reconstruction team is not to destroy the poppy plantations, but to help Afghans to cease their cultivation and use the land for other agricultural produce. As commander of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, Lieutenant Colonel **Gintautas Zenkevicius** said that in the initial stage his contingent will also aim to address security

issue, local government reform, and humanitarian efforts.

Latvia

Estonian Prime Minister **Andrus Ansip** met Latvian Prime Minister **Aigars Kalvitis** in Riga on 20 May. Ansip expressed his hope that Latvia manages to solve its border disputes with Russia. Moscow has refused to recognize the historical location of the Pytalovo district on the Latvian-Russian border, an area annexed by the Russian Federation during the Soviet occupation. The two Baltic leaders also discussed the EU constitution and agreed to cooperate on tax and energy issues.

Southeast European Update

Croatia

Defense experts met outside Zagreb on 20 May to discuss Croatia's Strategic Defense Review (SDR), a document that recommends wide-ranging reforms to make the armed forces smaller and more professional. The SDR, which calls for gradually phasing out the practice of conscription, was prepared with the advice and input of military experts from NATO.

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On 26 May **Vladimir Drobnyak**, Croatia's ambassador to the EU, complained publicly that his country was receiving unfair treatment during its EU accession process. Drobnyak said that despite successful reforms in other areas, alleged non-cooperation with The Hague tribunal is impeding accession talks. He noted that Croatia's economy is in better condition than that of Romania and Bulgaria, which will join the EU in 2007, but that his country is being unfairly blocked because of its inability to apprehend war crimes suspect Ante Gotovina.

Bulgaria

Bulgarian President **Georgi Parvanov** met his Estonian counterpart

Arnold Ruutel on 26 May and expressed his opposition to any changes to the EU accession process for Bulgaria and Romania. Parvanov's concerns are in response to a proposal by **Peter Hintze**, a German member of the European Parliament, suggesting a delay in Romania's and Bulgaria's accession if the 29 May French referendum on the European constitution rejects the document. Ruutel assured Parvanov that the Estonian parliament would ratify the accession treaties with Bulgaria and Romania.

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The Bulgarian interior ministry named veteran counter-intelligence chief Maj. Gen. **Ivan Tchobanov** to replace Lt. Gen. **Boyko Borisov** as the ministry's general secretary and national security chief. Borisov, who enjoys high public support due to his commitment to crack down on organized crime, will leave his post and become involved in campaigning for the general elections on 25 June 2005.

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The campaign for the parliamentary elections was officially launched on 25 May. A total of 22 parties and coalitions have been registered for participation in the ballot and have begun publicizing their platforms.

Economic growth and low unemployment rates represent the main goals for all party agendas, but factions have diverging views on the steps needed to stimulate the nation's economy. The center-right United Democratic Forces (UDF) has pledged tax cuts, especially for small business, to encourage strong annual growth of up to 10 percent. The Socialist Party proposes lower growth in exchange for more welfare. The ruling centrist National Movement for Simeon II (NMSII) is aiming to strike a balance by encouraging more foreign investment and equitably distributing the projected 4.7 billion euros in EU aid. Although the Socialists are leading in the polls, no single party is likely to gather the majority of votes. Hence, Bulgaria is likely to have a coalition government.

Romania

On 22 May three Romanian journalists returned home after being held hostage by insurgents in Iraq for 55 days. The hostage crisis absorbed national attention in Romania for almost two months. No ransom was paid, but Romania did credit Iraqi clerics with helping to secure the release of its citizens. Romanian analysts predict that the

successful resolution of the crisis will boost the popularity of President **Traian Basescu**.

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Mircea Geoana, leader of the opposition Social Democratic Party, called publicly on 24 May for the withdrawal of Romanian troops from Iraq. The government rejected Geoana's demands, with Prime Minister **Calin Tariceanu** stating that such a move could have "serious consequences for the commitment and credibility of Romania as a member of the Atlantic alliance." Defense Minister **Teodor Atanasiu** added that a premature pull out would not be feasible because the Iraqi military is not yet ready to take over responsibility for the country's security.

Slovenia

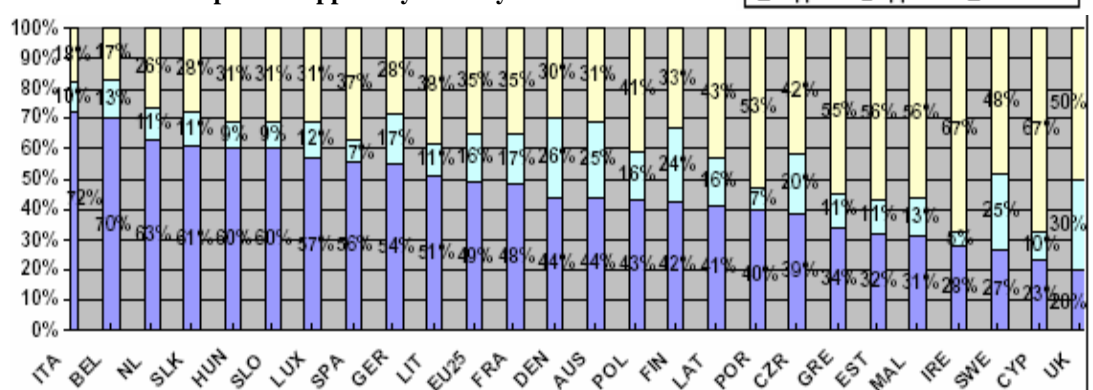
Defense Minister **Karl Erjavec** announced on 23 May that Slovenia would form a joint combat group with Italy and Hungary by 2007. In addition to contributing 128 soldiers to that endeavor, Erjavec also said that his government would consider taking part in the EU's mission in Sudan's Darfur region. Erjavec's announcements came during a meeting of EU defense ministers in Brussels.

Other Developments

EU Constitutional Treaty

Due to the uncertainty surrounding the result of the pending 29 May French referendum on the EU Constitutional Treaty, questions about the viability of the document have surfaced elsewhere in Europe. Eurobarometer, the public opinion polling unit of the European Commission, released a report in March 2005 assessing the level of support for the constitution within the individual member states. The survey also asked respondents to identify their reasons for approval or disapproval of the EU constitution. As the principle reasons for support, respondents identified the institutions' role in European construction and the smooth operation of EU institutions, its propensity to strengthen the sense of European

EU Constitution public support by country — Eurobarometer



identity, its task to manage the integration of new members, and its capacity to consolidate democracy. Opponents of the constitution stated that they object to the loss of national sovereignty (37 percent of

respondents) and the high bureaucratization of the institutions (9 percent). About 20 percent maintained that they disagree with the document because they do not have enough information about it, while

11 percent said that it is too complex. Another 11 percent criticized the treaty because it envisions further enlargement of the European Union, with which they disagree.

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