



Wednesday, 27 May 2009

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Papers across Europe turn their attention to the Korean peninsula and to North Korea's warnings that it may take military action after South Korea decided yesterday to become a full-member of the Proliferation Security Initiative, a US-led programme to intercept boats suspected of carrying weapons of mass destruction. *Libération* and *Le Monde* are among the French papers with reports. North Korea may be a rogue state, but it is highly dependent on its giant neighbour China, writes Austria's *Die Presse*. And China is not happy at all about North Korea's saber-rattling. North Korea's nuclear test, and its test launches of missiles, barely disguise the fact that its technology is obsolete and that the country's engineers have not yet managed to properly fit nuclear warheads on delivery systems, writes the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. *Der Standard* estimates that the country is two to eight years away from having a deployable nuclear weapon.

The Guardian leads its front page with a report on allegations that the intelligence service MI5 colluded with Bangladeshi intelligence officers in the beating of a British man, Jamil Rahman. Rahman plans to file a damages claim against Jacqui Smith, the home secretary. *The Times* of London writes that Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his Conservative opponent David Cameron have begun "a desperate race to shake up the political system in the wake of the expenses scandal" and the *Daily Telegraph* leads with a story that the scandal may result in ministers needing to pay some additional taxes. Generally, though, the expenses scandal features less prominently today in the British papers.

The front page of *Mladá fronta Dnes* shows the leader of the Czech Social Democrats, Jiří Paroubek, behind an orange umbrella. The reason is a campaign of egg-throwing that has accompanied Paroubek's public appearances for the past couple of weeks. The same story dominates the front page of *Lidové noviny*, though its picture is more sedate. Paroubek has accused his principal opponents, the Civic Democrats (ODS), of orchestrating the campaign and has asked the government for police protection. In the meantime, his minders have removed some would-be egg-throwers from meetings. Some have been readily identifiable, as they were dressed as Martians. The ODS rejects the accusations and is using its Facebook network to ask egg-throwers to desist (*Euro* is one publication with a report). *Právo* is among the papers which question the legality of the response by Paroubek's "musclemen". *Lidové noviny* writes that one man who wanted to give Paroubek a message on a piece of paper was taken away by police. *Mladá fronta Dnes's* report that eggs are cheaper than tomatoes is part of an undergrowth of articles dedicated to the phenomenon.

One of the Czechs' current crop of MEPs has criticised his peers' inability to set aside their differences. "We can't even do what the Slovaks do, to meet up before every Strasbourg session for breakfast," *Mladá fronta Dnes* quotes Richard Falbr as saying.

Several opinion polls have recently shown the ODS coming from behind to emerge as favourites to win the election. *Ceské noviny* has an update in English.

Berlingske Tidende writes that Eva Joly, the Norwegian judge who is seeking to be elected as a French Green MEP in next month's European Parliament elections, is doing so in order to keep French President Nicolas Sarkozy in check. In an interview with the Danish newspaper, Joly describes Sarkozy as dangerous and authoritarian, and refers especially to his intention to abolish France's system of 600 so-called investigational judges. She also said that Europe cannot function when two of its founding countries – France and Italy – are dysfunctional. Joly, who came to fame as a crusading judge against corruption in France in the 1990s (her most famous case involved Elf Aquitaine), has dual nationality and is therefore able to stand in next month's elections.

In Slovakia, coverage of the early days of the European Parliament elections has heavily featured a spat over a statement on 23 May by Viktor Orbán, the leader of

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Hungary's Fidesz party, that the next set of Hungarian MEPs will represent the interests of "Hungarians from the Carpathian basin". Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico has accused Orbán of questioning the territorial integrity of Slovakia and Romania. *Sme* writes that yesterday the leader of the Slovak Hungarian Coalition (SMK), Pál Csaky, who met Orbán on 23 May on a trans-Danube bridge, accused Fico of whipping up "hysteria" in order to divert attention from scandals such as a disadvantageous trade with emissions quotas, questionable tenders and the abolition of a special organised-crime court. Orbán himself was in Berlin yesterday to meet German Chancellor Angela Merkel, *Népszabadság* writes.

The politicisation of Poland's nominally public-service television has been a significant feature of the European Parliament election campaign so far. *Dziennik* looks beyond the elections and claims that the Law and Justice Party (PiS) of President Lech Kaczyński wants to secure influence.

The French daily *Libération* has examined different "Euro-tests" available online to help people decide how to vote in the European Parliament elections. The tests ask people questions and then tell them which party best represents their views. Its verdict is that euprofiler.eu is the most comprehensive in terms of the questions asked, even though it finds some of the questions perplexing, such as one that asks whether criminals should be "be punished more severely".

The Moldovan news agency *Moldpress* reports that Vladimir Voronin, the country's new speaker of parliament and acting president, said that an early parliamentary election would be bad for Moldova, which went through a four-month electoral period. The ruling Communist party failed to get its candidate for president of the country elected by parliament after the opposition boycotted the poll last week. If the Communist candidate for the presidency, outgoing Prime Minister Zinaida Greceanii, fails to get sufficient support in a second vote this week, Voronin will have to call an early parliamentary election. Parliamentary elections were held in April, but they led to widespread violence in the capital, Chisinau, after the opposition claimed the winner, the Communist party, rigged the vote. A re-count of the vote left the result unchanged.

Jyllands-Posten writes that Danes seem to be warming to Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who took over the post when Anders Fogh Rasmussen stepped down in April to become secretary-general of NATO. Løkke Rasmussen is now more popular than his Socialist opponent, Helle Thorning-Schmidt. Now, however, 48% of Danes believe that Løkke Rasmussen is the person most fit to run the country and steer it out of the global economic crisis.

Slovakia's *Sme* considers the – in its view – growing possibility of a grand coalition emerging between Smer, the party of Prime Minister Robert Fico, and the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ) of his predecessor Mikuláš Dzurinda.

In Italy, *La Stampa* speaks with the mother of the 18-year-old would-be model whose obscure relationship with Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has been the talk of Italy for weeks. *Il Sole 24 Ore* speaks with her former boyfriend, who says the relationship between Berlusconi and the girl, Noemi Letizia, is not based on connections between Berlusconi and her family. Berlusconi's relationship was with her, not her family, and began around last October.

Ahead of an election that will shape Bosnian politics for years to come, the mainly Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) Party of Democratic Action (SDA) confirmed Sulejman Tihić as its chairman, the Sarajevo daily *Dnevni avaz* writes. Tihić, a moderate, defeated a challenge by Bakir Izetbegović, whose main constituency is religious sections of the population and who was supported by the Bosnia's Grand Mufti, Mustafa Cerić.

The prime minister of the Bosniak-Croat Federation, one of Bosnia's two entities, is likely to step down today, writes *Dnevni avaz*. Nedžad Branković, a member of the SDA, is embroiled in a corruption scandal and the Federation has been teetering on the brink of bankruptcy for months.

Die Welt reports that German Chancellor Merkel has criticised the EU for interfering in issues which do not concern it, such as whether traditional German apple wine can be marketed as wine and on rules for bread and the salt content in foods.

The Czech Republic's *Lidové noviny* reports that a Czech school has abandoned its plan to establish two streams for new pupils, one of which would have been made up exclusively of Roma children.

The German newspapers focus on the final chapter of the saga on the future of Opel which should be decided today. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reports that Fiat's chances of winning the bidding race have improved following a critical assessment of a bid by Austrian car-parts maker Magna. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reports that Economics Minister Karl-Theodor Freiherr zu Guttenberg is keeping alive speculation that Opel could be allowed to go bust. The paper notes that Opel does

not have a car factory in Bavaria, Guttenberg's home state. *Die Welt* also covers the story. *Handelsblatt* reports that economists are warning the German government not to rush into a decision and that a fourth contender for Opel has emerged, Chinese car-maker BAIC. *FT Deutschland* also reports on the Chinese company's bid, saying BAIC is being advised by Deutsche Bank. Italy's *Il Giornale* also has a report.

FT Deutschland reports on strong consumer demand in Germany despite the recession.

Slovenia's two leading banks are still state-owned, writes the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, and doubts about the economic logic behind some of their credits persist. Disputes over who should receive credits have already caused the fall of the chief executive of Nova Ljubljanska Banka, which controls 31% of the country's banking business.

Gordon Bajnai, Hungary's new prime minister, is determined to see through a painful austerity programme, he tells Austria's *Der Standard* in an interview.

Despite the economic crisis, *Tyden* writes that few Czech politicians are currently interested in moving swiftly to swap the koruna for the euro.

Le Figaro reports on the announcement yesterday by French Prime Minister François Fillon that the government will accelerate the payment of EU subsidies to dairy farmers. Fillon said that direct payments which were to be made from 1 December would instead be paid out from 16 October. The European Commission has given its green light to the accelerated payments. Dairy farmers have been holding demonstrations in France over the past two weeks against falling milk prices. Fillon announced that the government has appointed mediators to try and end the dispute.

La Libre Belgique reports that Italian car company Fiat has committed not to close Opel's factory in Antwerp, should its bid to take over the company succeed. The German government is considering three rival bids for the company and is expected to take a decision before Thursday.

Dagens Nyheter writes that the European Commission is bringing charges against Sweden for failing to implement the EU's data-protection directive. According to the paper, the Commission has brought the case to the European Court of Justice on 14 April and Sweden could face day fines if the court agrees with the Commission. The directive should have been implemented in 2007, but Sweden has resisted following through as the sitting centre-right government regards the directive a violation of personal integrity.

Denmark's *Politiken* and the Czech Republic's *Lidové noviny* write that the European Commission has launched an online news portal covering the European Union – *presseurop.eu* – that will be the first in the world to cover EU-related news in all 23 languages of the Union. Margot Wallström, the European commissioner for communications, refuted the charge that the EU is entering the news market because it is unhappy with coverage of the EU. According to *Politiken*, news consortia from France, Italy, Poland and Portugal will carry out the daily management of the site.

The Belgrade daily *Danas* writes that the European Commission has positively assessed Serbia's preparedness for a lifting of EU visa requirements. The report says, though, that the country will soon need to confront the question of Kosovo residents, including many ethnic Albanians, who have applied for Serbian passports. Serbia insists that Kosovo remains in Serbia despite its declaration of independence, and the government continues to issue passports in Kosovo.

According to the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, anti-Russian insurgencies in the north Caucasus have changed their character and are no longer popular uprisings but rather Islamist campaigns for the establishment of an emirate. Moscow's policies in the region, meanwhile, play into the radicals' hands, writes the paper.

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