

# Changing Partners?

Britain hoped to remake Europe in its own image. It has succeeded chiefly in alienating its allies.

BY WILLIAM UNDERHILL

**A**MBASSADORS ARE A CAGEY bunch. Publicly, they speak in the coded language of diplomacy. But what are the somber suits *really* thinking? Try this: the new members of the European Union are "rude" and "ungrateful." The bloc's Common Agricultural Policy is "the most stupid, immoral state-subsidized policy in human history, give or take Communism."

East, who have bought the idea of modernization but still believe in European solidarity—in the form of badly needed EU cash.

Let's skip the tawdry wrangles over money: Britain's reluctance to trim its cherished rebate versus France's equally sacrosanct agricultural subsidies. For Peter to pay Paul, the British suggested trimming the development aid that Europe's post-communist stragglers were counting on to update their economies. The president of the European Commission,

blooded economic liberalism that are now leading the newcomers toward prosperity? Britain, almost alone among the older members of the Union, opened its doors to job-starved workers from the East last year. And the Easterners followed Blair to Iraq. "There is a bit of disappointment here—and that's British understatement," says Eugeniusz Smolar, chairman of the Center for International Relations in Warsaw.

Partly it's a failure of leadership—Blair's. When Britain took on the EU presidency in June, he spoke of a dynamic and economically competitive Europe ready to take on the challenge of globalization, but still with a "strong and caring social dimension." The bossy Franco-German hegemony of yore, he suggested, would be replaced by a new European order, with the leaders in Eastern and Central Europe sitting at the table. But as old-guard



The notion of EU solidarity is "discredited, inefficient and socialistic." The union's bureaucracy is "bollocky" and the European Parliament "blathering."

Thank you, Charles Crawford. The British ambassador to Poland recorded those very private thoughts in an e-mail, leaked in mid-December to the British press. OK, they were intended as a joke, a spoof speech for Prime Minister Tony Blair, but they nonetheless played to the core issue at the European Union's latest summit in Brussels. Its near failure to reach agreement on a new seven-year budget reveals a new East-West divide in Europe. On one side: a British faction keen to see the Union remodeled as a loose association of nation-states, devoted to revitalizing their economies but with limited funds and a Brussels bureaucracy kept firmly in check. On the other: the old-timers, most notably the French, wedded to the ideal of an ever-closer Union and such costly causes as protecting its farmers. In the middle: the newcomers from the



**NEW DIVIDE:** Subsidies for farmers versus jobs for Polish immigrants (top); Blair and Chirac

José Manuel Durão Barroso, was moved to liken Blair to the "the sheriff of Nottingham," robbing the poor to reward the rich.

What hurts in Eastern Europe is Britain's apparent perfidy. Yes, the budget rumpus ended in smiles after the usual late-night compromise, but offense was already taken. Wasn't this the land of Margaret Thatcher, the scourge of communism and champion for extending the EU eastward? Doesn't London preach the same ideals of red-

Europe continues with age-old squabbles, short-selling the interests of its new members, the newcomers understandably feel jilted. "If Tony Blair couldn't solve all these contradictions, then he shouldn't have made the promises," says Dariusz Rosati, a Polish member of the European Parliament.

The upshot is an unexpected realignment of EU politics. With Britain now an uncertain ally, the Easterners have sought new friends, preferably with clout in the Brussels logrolling game. Thus we see a new Polish appreciation for French President Jacques Chirac, based partly on shared concern for subsidy-hungry farmers. Germany, too, is cozying up to Poland, the largest and most assertive of the EU's new members. "Astonishingly, we now see more trust between the British and Poles," says Matthias Wissmann, a Christian Democrat M.P. who chairs the EU committee of the German Parliament. The joke, in other words, is on Britain.

## COMPETENCE LINGUISTIQUE

(5 points)

Pour chaque question, vous devez choisir parmi les quatre éléments celui qui vous permet de constituer une phrase grammaticale correcte.

1. He hates ...

- a) that we make fun of him
- b) to be making fun of him
- c) to be made fun
- d) being made fun of

2. <sup>e</sup>His crashed but he ... get to safety before it caught fire

- a) could
- b) was able to
- c) might
- d) has been able to

3. Although she knew there was a meeting she didn't ...

- a) show
- b) turn
- c) show off
- d) turn up

4. The idea of a balanced diet is very difficult to ... to anyone who knows little about food values.

- a) put through
- b) take in
- c) put across
- d) make over

5. I could not ... dropping it because my hands were wet.

- a) abide
- b) stand
- c) bear
- d) help

6. The inflation rate ... new peaks last week

- a) reached
- b) has reached
- c) has been reaching
- d) is reaching

7. At last the young boy was quiet. He had cried ...

- a) himself to sleep
- b) him to sleep
- c) him sleeping
- d) himself sleeping

8. The line is busy. You can hang ...

- a) up              b) back              c) down              d) off

9. The strikers have agreed to discuss their grievances with the employers ... two days' time

- 1) for              2) since              3) during              4) in

10. I'm going to ... my eyes tested tomorrow

- 1) let              2) make              3) do              4) have

### COMPREHENSION ECRITE

(3 points)

**Find a synonym or a short definition for the following words extracted from the article**

1) cagey (l.1)

2) blathering (l.14)

3) a spoof speech (l.20)

4) rebate (l.40)

5) the budget rumpus (l.50)

6) the upshot (l.85)

**EXPRESSION ECRITE: COMMENTAIRE D'ARTICLE**  
(12 points)

**Essay** (approx.300 words)

You are expected to write a well-structured essay with an introduction clearly stating the problems involved. Please note that great attention will be paid to the **quality of your expression** and to your ability to produce a **relevant demonstration**. Please note that your essay should **NOT** be a paraphrase of the article.

What does this article tell us about the state of Anglo-French relations today ?