



# Briefs & Updates

## **Cyprus federation proposal rejected; EU membership approved**

A proposal for Cyprus by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was rejected by the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders in The Hague on March 11. Plans for a federal solution for Cyprus (see *Federations* Vol. 2, No. 5) have been put on hold. Both sides failed to compromise on two issues: a Turkish Cypriot proposal that their breakaway Cypriot state win full recognition and a Greek Cypriot proposal that refugees be allowed to return to their homes in northern Cyprus.

However, on April 14, the European Council of Ministers approved a statement to allow the signing of a treaty admitting Cyprus and nine other states to the EU next year.

## **Serbian prime minister victim of assassin's bullet**

After the assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic on March 12, the Serbian government put the blame on an organized crime group, the so-called Zemun Group. Djindjic's determination to crack down on organized crime was cited by the government as a move that sealed his fate. The late prime minister was instrumental in the replacement of Yugoslavia by the union of Serbia and Montenegro in February (see *Federations*, Vol. 2, No. 3 and pages 11-12 of the current issue). Djindjic was a former philosophy professor who led demonstrations that toppled the government of Slobodan Milosovic in October 2000. On March 13, Zarko Korac, Serbia's deputy prime minister was named as Djindjic's temporary replacement.

## **Québec voters replace Parti Québécois with Liberals**

On April 14, the Liberal Party defeated the secessionist Parti Québécois to form a new government led by Jean Charest in elections in the predominantly French-speaking Canadian province of Québec. Though only in his forties, Charest has had a long career in politics. He started as a Progressive Conservative member of the federal parliament while still in his twenties. Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney named him to a number of important cabinet positions, including Minister of the Environment. In 1993, at the age of 34, Charest contested the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party. He was the runner-up, but later led the party after it had suffered a disastrous election defeat. He took over leadership of the Québec Liberals after the 1995 secession referendum in Québec which came within a few thousand votes of splitting up



*Jean Charest, new Premier of Québec, led his Liberal Party to victory in recent elections.*

Canada. In 1998, Charest's Liberals failed to unseat Lucien Bouchard's Parti Québécois in the provincial election, though the Liberals won the popular vote. After Charest's recent victory, he promised to put an end to threats of separation while vigorously pursuing Québec's interests within the Canadian federation, particularly on the question of fiscal arrangements (See *Federations*, Vol. 2, No. 5 and Vol. Swiss Conference).

## **New Austrian government reduces role of far right**

On February 28, Austrian Federal President Thomas Klestil swore in a new government following long negotiations between the conservative People's Party and the far-right Freedom Party. Wolfgang Schüssel, the big winner in the elections (See *Federations*, Vol. 3, No. 1) heads the new government. The Freedom Party was reduced to one-third the number of seats they held in the last parliament. In the new government, they were given only three of nine ministries and three of five state secretary positions.

## **Pakistan opposes Iraq war**

On April 8, shopkeepers in Peshawar and other cities in northwest Pakistan closed their stores in protest against the US-led war in Iraq. The shutdowns were organized by business groups and backed by some Islamic groups. The same day, Najam Sethi, editor of the independent weekly newspaper *Friday Times* in Lahore, was quoted as saying that if a poll were held today, "... more people would be more inclined to vote for religious parties than six months ago."

On March 10, nearly two weeks before the war began, Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali (see *Federations*, Vol. 3, No. 1) told parliament, "... Pakistan will not become a party to any decision which leads to bloodshed in Iraq". During the war, Pakistan's government refused to join the US-led coalition and remained critical of the war.

## **Kashmir slowly showing signs of peace**

The election of Mufti Mohammed Sayeed as Chief Minister of Kashmir promised changes and a new chance for peace (see *Federations*, Vol. 3, No. 1). On April 14, BBC correspondent, Jill McGivering, reported that life was "less tense" and "people feel more easy to move about the streets."

However, on April 11, Pakistan claimed that four Pakistanis were killed in shelling by Indian troops across the line of control in Jammu and Kashmir, and an Indian newspaper reported a massacre of Hindus at Nadimarg.

Despite the uncertainty, Bollywood filmmakers were considering shooting films in the state as a choice location that was "better than Switzerland", according to award-winning

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