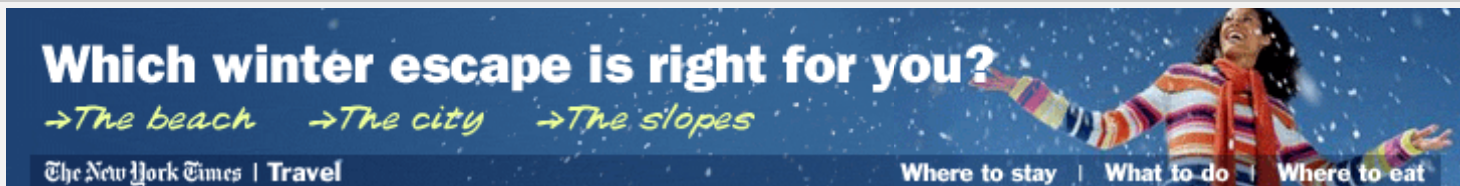


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Continent Is Divided, Though Views Soften

By ELAINE SCIOLINO

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NAPLES, Italy - In an unadorned classroom at the NATO military base here, 18 European and 3 American officers came together recently for an intense orientation on how to train the Iraqi Army's new officer corps.

Many in the room came from "new" European countries - Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Slovakia, Estonia - and were clearly grateful to take part. "You can't be a NATO member and just sit back and do nothing," said Maj. Rudolf Jeesser of Estonia, who, like his fellow officers, volunteered for duty in Iraq. "For me, it's important to pay back NATO for what it has done for my country."

Notably absent were officers from America's major and longstanding European allies - France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Greece - countries that still contend that the American-led war in Iraq is wrong and refuse to send a single soldier there.

This is the Europe that President Bush will find when he lands in Brussels on Sunday, Feb. 20: a continent still deeply divided over how much to bend to the will of Washington on issues of war and peace, and how warmly to support the Bush crusade to spread its definition of freedom around the world.

The success of elections in Iraq and recent visits by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld have helped soften European opinion. But in interviews across the Continent, officials warn that the antagonism generated in Mr. Bush's first term will not be healed in a day.

A partnership will be created when compromise can be reached issue by issue, particularly in areas important to Europeans.

"The right tone between the United States and Europe has been restored, a tone of normalcy that replaces one of distrust," said Javier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy chief. "Now we have to hope that the new tone is going to lead to a change in substance, to lead to concrete agreement. Obviously we are not going to solve all the problems with one meeting. But we are hopeful that the new tone is going to lead to a change in substance, to lead to



Yves Herman/Reuters

Several hundred people in Brussels protested the president's visit on Sunday.

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U₁ S₁ O₁

E₁ A₁

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concrete agreement."

The European public is hungry to believe the Americans when they say that a new era of friendship with Europe has begun, but also deeply suspicious that the soaring language will never translate into action.

A poll published this month by the German Marshall Fund, for example, indicates that only 11 percent of French and Germans approve of Mr. Bush's handling of foreign affairs. Europe remains frustrated that the United States has refused to hear its voice on issues as wide-ranging as the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, the standing of the world criminal court, engagement with Iran and structural change in the United Nations Security Council.

Other, more philosophical, differences persist as well. The Europeans tend to regard poverty and the dismal failure to bring peace to the Middle East as the root cause of terrorism; the United States tends to blame the absence of democracy. In discussing national security, the Europeans emphasize the word "stability," the Americans the word "liberty," even if it borders on what the Europeans might consider adventurism. Washington's strident statements about liberating Iran, for example, have spread concern across the Continent that America may try to use military force there.

The European Union is poised to lift its 15-year arms embargo on China this summer; the Bush administration opposes such a move. Washington wants the union to declare Hezbollah, the Syrian- and Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group, a terrorist organization; many European governments, including that of France, note that it is also a recognized political party in Lebanon.

While some officials and analysts of the trans-Atlantic alliance were dazzled by the charm-infused, fence-mending performances by Ms. Rice and Mr. Rumsfeld on their trips to Europe, others remain unimpressed.

Mr. Rumsfeld's speech in Munich was aimed at bridging gaps. But he ended by saying that the United States would continue to intervene militarily without NATO when necessary. That language did not convince even the Americans present that a new day in relations had dawned.

"The tone was different," former Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen said at the conference. "The tune was the same."

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Claudio Palmisano for The New York Times

Capt. Jeff Gradeck trained officers Feb. 11 at NATO Allied Forces Southern Europe headquarters in Naples.




Ahmad Masood/Reuters

French soldiers from the International Security force with Afghan children late last year on patrols in Kabul.

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