



Portuguese prime minister Jose Manuel Durao Barroso / PAULO CARRICO/EPA

EU leaders anoint Portuguese Barroso

Javier Solana to become EU's future first foreign minister

REUTERS, BRUSSELS

European Union leaders were set to anoint Portuguese prime minister Jose Manuel Durao Barroso as the next European Commission chief yesterday, as a battle began over the orientation of the new EU executive. Ending a bitter two-week wrangle that pitted supporters and opponents of the US-led war in Iraq and of the federalist and nation-state visions of Europe against each other, they were due in Brussels for a brief special summit to approve a package of key personnel decisions, followed by an informal dinner.

As well as nominating the 48-year-old conservative lawyer to succeed Italy's Romano Prodi for five years, they will reappoint foreign

policy high representative Javier Solana of Spain and designate him as the EU's future first foreign minister. Early Tuesday afternoon, Barroso said he had accepted an offer from member governments to become EU Commission president. German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder made clear that Barroso had not been his first choice, regretting that Britain, Italy and others had blocked pro-integration Belgian prime minister Guy Verhofstadt, a key Iraq war opponent. "I don't go back on the fact that I was for Guy Verhofstadt. But I think that Europe is always about finding compromises," Schroeder told a news conference at a NATO summit in Istanbul. Diplomats said Germa-

ny and France were pushing Barroso hard to appoint a vice-president for economic affairs to promote growth as a counterweight to the strict free-market orientation of the bloc's monetary and competition authorities.

The European Parliament has to endorse the leaders' choice in a vote on July 21 or 22 after Barroso outlines his policies. "We expect Barroso to present his ideas on organising the European Commission tonight. Leaders need to know whom he will appoint before giving him their final support," a senior EU official said. "The Germans are certain to demand, and receive, a powerful portfolio of economic reforms overseer," he said.

US to transfer legal custody of Saddam Hussein to Iraqis

REUTERS, BAGHDAD

The United States military will transfer Saddam Hussein to Iraqi legal custody, but not physical control, today, two days after Iraq formally regained sovereign powers it lost when the dictator was deposed in April 2003. Interim prime minister Iyad Allawi said Tuesday that Saddam, with up to 11 others, would appear before Iraqi judges to be charged Thursday, a day after the legal transfer.

"This government has formally requested the transfer of the most notorious and high profile detainees," he told a news conference. "These people...will face justice before the special Iraqi court created in January to try members of the former regime for crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes."

Saddam, accused by Iraqis of ordering the killing and torturing of thousands of their compatriots during 35 years of Baathist rule, has been held as a prisoner of war since US forces found him hiding in a hole near Tikrit in December.

Allawi said the US-led multinational force would keep physical custody of Saddam and the other 11 until Iraq's nascent police force was capable of detaining them securely. The special tribunal would give them a fair and open trial, but it would not start for several months, Allawi said.

Once Saddam is in Iraqi legal custody, he will cease to be a POW. The formal end of US-led occupation Monday also marked the end of international conflict in Iraq. At

that point international law says POWs must be released or charged. International conflict may be over, but there was no let-up in the violence gripping Iraq. Three US Marines were killed and two wounded in eastern Baghdad in a roadside bomb blast that wrecked a Humvee vehicle escorting a convoy carrying engineering equipment.

"I don't know why the terrorists want to kill us. We just want to help Iraqis," said a Marine at the scene. Since the start of the war last year at least 632 US soldiers have been killed in action in Iraq and at least two have been captured by guerrillas. An Arabic television station aired a video tape Monday showing what militants said was the execution of a US soldier.

While uncertainty shrouded his fate, three Turkish hostages walked free after their release by a group led by Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a suspected al Qaeda ally.

His group had previously threatened to behead the Turks on Tuesday unless their government told companies to stop dealing with US forces in Iraq. Ankara had rejected the demand.

"Jama'at al-Tawhid and Jihad announces the release of the Turkish hostages for the sake of Muslims in Turkey and their demonstrations against (US president George W.) Bush," a masked man said on a video tape aired by Arabic Al Jazeera TV. A three-day visit by Bush to Turkey for a NATO summit has been met by widespread protests against his policies in Iraq.

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