

47 per cent of Italians. It is not the 15 nationalities or the 10 political groupings that make it difficult to report a proper debate, but the fact that it is not really an executive chamber. No government will fall if it loses a vote, taxes are not raised, no patronage is at stake, you cannot end up a minister.

Yet there are moves to increase its role. Labour would like MEPs to have the right to elect the president of the European Commission and gain increased powers to initiate legislation. The Parli-

men and they were based in Westminster. They like things being done by consensus — through building cross-party and international alliances. "I got £50 million written into the budget to promote democratic institutions in the eastern Mediterranean," said Edward McMillan-Scott, a Tory MEP. "I couldn't have got that done back home."

Alan Donnelly, Labour MEP for Tyneside, agreed. "It is simply a fact of life that you have much more influence being an MEP."

But in a chamber without

and undervalued at home. True, they earn decent salaries, in line with those of their own national parliaments. This means British MEPs earn about £34,000 a year and Italians more than £70,000.

But there are also big allowances: £155 a day for official meetings, £2,131 a month for office costs, £5,826 a month for staff costs, and travel. They have free office accommodation in Brussels and Strasbourg.

A lot of MEPs do not turn up. But there must be something in it. Graham Mather, Tory MEP for North Hamp-

regional and local governments and 180 specialist firms in Brussels alone.

With prolonged delays in securing rulings from the European Court of Justice, it pays companies to try to influence the framing of the law before it is introduced.

Many lobbyists bear gifts. When Turkey was lobbying for a customs agreement last autumn, more than a third of MEPs and their partners received free trips. Those who voted in favour received 10 compact discs of Turkish folk-singing.

Next: Inside the Council of Ministers

## Western diplomats and politicians have welcomed the election of Mr Simitis. "He is young, dynamic and committed to Europe in short, a break with the past," one European diplomat said.

Since the second world war, and especially since the Socialists' first electoral victory in 1981, Greek political life has been dominated by ger-than-life personalities, such as the charismatic Mr Papandreou. Simitis is everything Papandreou is not. He's low-key and very steady in convictions," Michalis Yiannakis, a prominent MEP, said. "He's the man for the job. Greek politicians have undoubtedly red with his election."

Simitis's priorities are expected to be improvisations with the EU; the festering name of Macedonia; and bringing up the economic stability programme.

The prime minister, who advocated teaching in Greek schools, keen to end old disputes with Ankara over and other issues.

Mr Simitis's appointment of the former EU minister, Theodore Pappas, as foreign minister, is believed to redefine its moderate tone. Pappas may have updates in the past," a diplomat, referring to "a giant with strength and a clever and well and has proved to be quite pragmatic on issues," Cyprus and government will t big test next n Greece and esume negotia-York.

# Russia's navy flies the flag despite disarray

David Fairhall  
Defence Correspondent

**R**USSIA'S brand new aircraft carrier, Admiral Kuznetsov, has appeared on the high seas in a signal that, despite mounting troubles, Moscow's armed forces are still struggling to sustain the remnants of a superpower armoury.

The 67,000-ton Kuznetsov is a symbol of the former Soviet navy's ambitions to match the United States navy's power, to create a "blue water" navy instead of a defensive force. The Kuznetsov was extracted just in time from the Ukrainian shipyard where its sister ship Varyag lies unfinished, to become the prime asset of Russia's northern fleet.

The Kuznetsov is being deployed in the Mediterranean to show the Russian flag along the north African coast and in the Nato ports of Piraeus and Naples. The message is two-fold: it shows the world that the Russian navy is still in business, even if the rest of its carrier fleet is being scrapped or sold; while, back home, it may help to persuade Moscow that what remains is still worth funding.

In spite of drastic cuts in manpower, equipment and activity since the end of the cold war, Russia's forces were still allocated about a fifth of the federal budget in 1994 and 1995 (although much was clawed back by the finance ministry, and eroded by inflation).

Organisationally, they are in turmoil, of which the Chechen disasters are only one symptom. The Soviet Union's disintegration has opened huge gaps in the Russian air-defence system, stranded semi-derelict equipment in newly independent republics — especially Ukraine, from which Moscow is buying back nuclear missiles, strategic bombers and warships — and intensified the problems of cutting military manpower when the civilian economy is also in collapse.

In the next 10 years, manpower is eventually forecast to decline from the 1.9 million quoted last year by the defence minister, General Pavel Grachev, to 1.2 million.

Separate strategic rocket and air-defence forces are to be merged with the rest of the air force. In Moscow, the defence department is supposed to acquire a civilian minister instead of a general.

As the three services are rebuilt, the army — always the senior service in Russia — will probably have least difficulty justifying its budget. It need only point towards the Caucasus. Russia has already demanded changes in its Conventional Forces in Europe arms control treaty with Nato, to allow for more ground forces on its southern borders.

The navy — notwithstanding the Kuznetsov deployment — is heading for rough waters. The air force has the advantage — as does Britain's RAF — of relying on hi-tech equipment which, once produced, can also be exported to earn hard currency.

The emerging re-equipment programme includes a long-range subsonic Stealth bomber to replace both the ageing Tu-95 Bears and the unreliable supersonic Tu-160 Blackjacks, many of which are standing idle in Ukraine. Tu-22 Backfires and Su-24 Fencers are to be replaced by an intermediate-range Sukhoi design known as the Joint Continental Bomber.

The air force is also waiting for Mikoyan's multi-role fighter fitted with a new generation of "smart" weapons.

## Chechen Wolf 'to fight on'

Salman Raduyev, the "Lone Wolf" leader of the band of Chechen hostage-takers who escaped four days of bombardment by Russian troops in the southern village of Pervomayskaya, promised yesterday from a mountain hideaway to fight on against Moscow.

As he mocked Moscow for its failure to kill him and other rebels, the International Commission of Jurists in Geneva accused Russia of blatant violation of international law in its actions in and around Chechnya. — Reuter.

## Refugees barred

The Tanzanian army has shut the border with Burundi, turning back 17,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees fleeing ethnic violence, Seamus Dunne, head of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies at Tanzania's Ngara camp, said yesterday. The border was shut overnight after more than 14,000 Rwandan Hutus crossed into Tanzania last week. — Reuter.

## Pizzeria deaths

Three people were killed and two seriously injured in a bomb explosion outside a pizzeria in the centre of the Bul-

garian capital Sofia, police said yesterday. Two men threatened to blow up the pizzeria on Sunday night unless they were given about £8,500 by the owner. — AP.

## Suspect killer held

Police in Argentina have arrested a suspect in the 1974 assassination of a former Chilean army commander and his wife in Buenos Aires, President Carlos Menem announced yesterday. — AP.

## Son seeks jail

An Italian confined to house arrest has begged police to jail him so he can escape his nagging mother, newspapers reported yesterday. — Reuter.