

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### NATO 'unity' achieved through isolation

One of the stranger phenomena at the March 2-3 NATO summit in Brussels was the complete lack of interaction, outside the heads of government meetings themselves, between public officials either with each other or with the press of the 16 nations in the alliance.

You would think this would be a golden opportunity for officials and the press of the various countries to get to know each other better. No one needs more exposure to other nations' points of view than the tunnel-visioned U.S. press corps.

Therefore, this reporter went to Brussels expecting many opportunities to be briefed and ask questions of foreign spokesmen or to engage in discussions with foreign journalists. I was in for a big surprise.

Each nation's official delegation stayed at a different location, holed up with the press from that country.

The U.S. press corps was briefed on only what President Reagan had to say during the first day of the summit, for example. Most U.S. journalists had to wait to read the London newspapers to find out what British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said. This made it easy for the United States, in particular, to insist that virtually flawless unity was the watchword of the summit.

I found out from a press liaison person at the U.S. embassy in Brussels that the isolation was routine and intentional. Similar procedures apply to almost every gathering of NATO, no matter at what level, he said. If they want to display unity, they keep everyone apart. If someone wants to

make an issue out of a difference among them, then they will send someone over to the press of a different country to brief them.

They keep everyone apart because they don't want reporters prying open strong differences that may lie just below the surface between many of the countries—as is the case now.

The situation reached its extreme at the end of the one-and-a-half day summit. Only the press conference in the cramped main room at NATO headquarters by NATO Secretary Lord Carrington had any kind of international press representation.

Starting with the statement read by President Reagan and the handful of questions taken by U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz, all the other press conferences were open only to the press of the country involved. Only British press were allowed into Margaret Thatcher's press conference, only West German press into Helmut Kohl's, and so forth. Most of the government heads gave their press conferences simultaneously, to their nations' press corps in tiny conference rooms at the NATO facility.

The lone exception to this pattern came 24 hours after almost everyone else left town. As a result of separate bilateral talks between Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal and Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou that followed the summit, the two held separate press conferences open to all press the next day.

There was great confusion at first whether or not they would hold a joint press conference, but the deep and abiding differences between 'auÖzal and the pro-Soviet Papandreou prevented this. They came before the press only to read a 10-point statement which contained almost no significant progress in their relations; then each held his own press conference—first, Papandreou at the European Economic

Community press room, then Özal down the street at the International Press Center.

This reporter was the only American-based journalist at either press conference, it turned out.

I found out, by asking Papandreou, that he still considers Turkey a greater threat to Greek national security than the Warsaw Pact. I then asked him how much he continued to be influenced by Michel Raptis, also known as Michel Pablo, the well-known Trotskyite head of the KKE, the Greek Communist Party of the exterior. Papandreou's aide interjected that the premier would not answer that question because it was not on the subject of the press conference. But Papandreou couldn't help but comment. He said the question was "tasteless," and left it hanging.

Predictably, this resulted in my being deluged by other journalists, mostly Greeks, after the press conference, wanting more information. "He didn't deny the relationship, did he?" I reminded them. "He could easily have denied any connection and removed all doubt. But he failed to do so."

Later, at Özal's press conference, I asked the Turkish premier if he would accept a question about his impressions of the NATO summit as a whole, since if he did it would be the only question taken by a NATO head of state from an international audience of journalists. Özal's comments on the summit were not profound—other than to confirm that the basis of the summit was the desire of the Europeans to receive reassurances from the United States. However, they came as a breath of fresh air to this reporter, who finally got to do what he came to Brussels for—to talk to my foreign press colleagues and to question foreign heads of state about matters of urgency on their minds.