

tion. The response of the EU's leaders to these realities may yet be statesmanlike, or opportunistic. But it is politics, not technicalities, that will finally decide Turkey's fate.

And the politics will be tough. All the arguments against incorporating the Turks seem obvious and, to some politicians, tempting. The case for keeping the doors open has to be reasoned through more carefully. The onus is on politicians to convince voters that making western Europe a sort of up-market gated community would be worse than useless: it would not protect existing job-holders, or keep desperate labour migrants out, or stem Europe's relative decline in the world economy. If politicians are responsible, they will also point out that trying to toughen the rules unreasonably for Turkey will not make that country go away, or reduce its importance, or slow the pace at which it is changing: it will simply increase the chances that Turkey will evolve in an unhappy direction, towards Muslim fundamentalism or militaristic nationalism.

The right sort of scepticism

At the same time, politicians should accept that one ground for Turco-scepticism is, in its own terms, perfectly sound. To the delight of some and the dismay of others, Turkey's presence will make it harder for any country or axis to play a dominant role in Europe. With 15% of the total population, the Turks will hardly take over the Union themselves; but their membership

will deny preponderance to others.

So France's ex-president, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, is right to say that an EU including Turkey will be a looser grouping than some people desire. The Turks may well wreck things for any state or pair of states which still hope the EU as a whole will act as a mouthpiece for their own political, or geopolitical, ideas; or that the Union will turn into a super-state with one or two of its current members in charge.

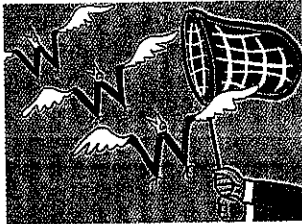
But in fact, those dreams have been dashed already, and it was not the Turks, or even the party-pooping Brits, who destroyed them. Among the many messages delivered by French and Dutch voters when they rejected the Euro-constitution, one was certainly this: that there are still some fundamental questions—such as how to mix efficiency with fairness, or tolerance with responsibility—that cannot be settled by pan-European edict alone. And many would rather see a somewhat looser EU than have choices they abhor imposed on them from above.

So as politicians consider the arguments in favour of embracing Turkey, they might try this one: the Turks' aspiration to be "European but different" may yet give heart to people in other parts of the EU who are willing to participate in the Union, and abide by commonly-agreed rules, but not to sacrifice their own nations' distinctiveness. Such people are quite numerous, and Europe is the stronger for it. ■

Internet governance

America rules OK

Plans for global management of the internet are a threat to its future



WHY should America control the internet? A growing number of governments are asking this apparently reasonable question. At a diplomatic meeting last week in Geneva, the European Union unexpectedly dropped its support for

the current arrangement, and sided with America's critics (see page 70). America could now find itself isolated as negotiations over future regulation of the internet continue.

The critics' point of view seems quite understandable. The internet is not just a hugely important tool of global communication but also an engine of economic growth. Other countries quite understandably balk at American hegemony over something that matters so much to their future. Yet although America's exercise of power in the bricks-and-mortar world may not always have been flawless, its oversight of the internet, which it invented (Tim Berners-Lee, a Briton, is sometimes credited with the feat, but he created the world wide web) has been remarkably benign. That's probably partly because politics has been kept out of it. The longer it stays that way, the better.

Benign neglect

Most people think of the internet as decentralised and thus uncontrollable. That's largely true; nevertheless, its infrastructure requires some co-ordination, so it needs a bit of governance. This is currently done by a non-profit group called the

Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). This organisation operates under a contract from the American government, and consults private-sector firms and groups of techies and users.

Much of ICANN's work is boringly technical. It co-ordinates such features as domain names (like .com or .net), routing numbers and technical standards. But small technical details can sometimes have big political ramifications, and ICANN has often found itself embroiled in controversy. For example, many countries were outraged when ICANN considered creating a .xxx domain name for pornographic websites. (It diplomatically put the idea on hold.)

Nevertheless, ICANN's stewardship has succeeded because its focus has been not on politics, but on making the network as efficient as possible. The sometimes fierce debates that break out among techies have been conducted transparently. The result has been an internet open to innovation and free expression, led mostly by the private sector and relatively free from government interference.

Yet because the system runs under American auspices, other countries are unhappy with this arrangement. Many of those who want to relieve America of its control think ICANN's job should be taken over by a United Nations agency.

To anybody who has spent much time observing the UN at work, this sounds like a poor idea. It is no accident that the world's telephone systems remained so expensive and static for so long. They have been heavily regulated nationally and their international links have been controlled by the International Telecommunication Union, a UN body which once re-

jected the idea of the internet in favour of a more controllable and less efficient system. That standard never amounted to much. The ITU's approach reflected the interests of state-run telecom monopolies, which themselves are now being shaken to their foundations by the internet.

It is also no accident that many of the countries loudest in their demands for the internet to be taken out of American hands are those, such as China, Iran and Saudi Arabia, that are keenest on restricting its use by their own citizens. These and many other countries are hoping to use the lead-up to the UN's World Summit on the Information Society to begin to wrest control away from America. By changing its position last week the EU had hoped to act as a "bridge" between America and

other countries. Instead, it has simply isolated America, with potentially damaging results.

America has offered olive branches to its critics. This summer, it acknowledged that other countries have sovereignty over their national addresses, and said it would never disrupt the system (ie, kick France's .fr address offline). And, at the meeting last week in Geneva, it supported the idea of a forum in which all governments can discuss these matters in an "evolutionary process". That sounds like an excellent scheme: just as startling as the speed of technological development is the slowness of decision-making in international forums. If this move works, it should succeed in parking the issue harmlessly for many years. ■

Illegal immigration

Decapitating the snakeheads

How governments could beat the people-smugglers at their own game



IN AMERICA, they are called "coyotes"; in China, "snakeheads". Whether they be wild dogs or serpents, people-smugglers are a thriving species with no shortage of prey. They herd Mexican hopefuls over the parched expanses of the Arizona desert; they pack Chinese immigrants into airless crates on transpacific container ships; and they ferry Africans across the Mediterranean, evading Italian coastal patrols. Thanks in part to their efforts, up to 350,000 illegal immigrants steal across America's border from Mexico each year, and as many as 800,000 enter the European Union.

This week the Global Commission on International Migration, set up in 2003 by Kofi Annan, secretary-general of the United Nations, delivered its report on the movement of people around the world (see page 84). The 19 worthies on the commission, drawn fairly evenly from countries that import and export labour, roundly condemned illegal immigration. The illicit flow of people across borders is a challenge to a country's sovereignty, they concluded, and gives migration in general a bad name. It is also dangerous for the immigrants themselves. Last year a record 464 people died crossing from Mexico into America, and each year around 2,000 people drown in the Mediterranean on their way from Africa to Europe.

Damaging and dangerous it may be, but illegal immigration is also good business. Smugglers rake in around €4 billion (\$4.7 billion) a year from the EU alone, reckons Michael Jandl, of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, an intergovernmental think-tank, based in Vienna. Smugglers charge €3,000-8,000 to convey people from Pakistan to Europe. But that is not all they can do. They will fix a British marriage for £5,000 (\$8,800); and falsify an Italian residence permit for €4,500. Some outfits even offer warranties (if the first attempt to cross the border fails, the second one is free) and money-back guarantees. Smuggling, Mr Jandl says, has evolved into a sophisticated service industry. He has an intriguing idea of how to defeat it.

The best way to do this, he argues, is not just to ban it, but also to undercut it. Governments, he suggests, should sell

temporary, two- or three-year visas in the smugglers' best markets. The visas should be priced to compete with the smugglers' rates. One-third of the visa fee could be returned to immigrants when they depart the country, and anyone who had bought a visa in the past would be free to buy another one, provided they did not break the rules. These features would be powerful incentives not to overstay. Some fraction of the fee could also be refunded to immigrants who pay social-security taxes, giving them a reason to keep out of the underground economy.

The new visas need not increase immigration rates overall, Mr Jandl insists. Rather, they aim to muscle in on the smugglers' market share, steal their best customers, and snatch their illicit profits. Smugglers might slash their prices to compete. But a successful smuggling ring can be a costly undertaking. And if governments invest in tighter border controls and better fraud detection they can push smugglers' costs up, even as they drive demand down.

Put it to the test

Would it work? The demand for legal permits is a big unknown. There are probably many law-abiding people willing to pay for a legitimate visa who would never pay a smuggler. The price Mr Jandl takes as his benchmark—the smuggler's fee—does not reflect this latent demand. On the most controversial border of all, between the United States and Mexico, Mr Jandl's scheme might attract far more custom than it could possibly handle. The price of the visa could of course be raised to keep sales down to whatever level the government desires (or, Mr Jandl says, a cap on the number of visas could be introduced). But high prices or strict rationing would push more people back into the arms of the smuggling industry.

Many of the questions raised by the scheme can be answered only by trying it. Mr Jandl suggests a small pilot effort between the EU and a country such as Albania. Whatever the results, the spirit of the proposal and others like it is commendable. Border crackdowns and mass deportations have populist appeal, but they are clumsy, costly and cruel. Mr Jandl's proposal relies on economic logic, not bureaucratic brawn. At the very least, it would make the snakeheads hiss and the coyotes howl. ■