

# Face up to it – most Europeans feel left out

From Heleen Mees and Damaso Reyes

Decades ago the architects of what today is known as the European Union knew that their idea of creating a Europe free of war, boundaries and national identity would be best accomplished if done piecemeal, bit by bit in increments so small that it would be difficult for anyone to object too strenuously. While this approach has been key to the success of the European project, it is also at the root of the problems the Union is in today.

Now that ordinary Europeans, in the past rarely consulted as treaties were negotiated and ratified, have the opportunity to speak directly to the question of whether or not they desire to be part of a more integrated Europe it seems that many of them are fully prepared to say 'Non'. Many of its citizens think of the European Union as a lumbering bureaucracy better suited to regulating the size of condoms than creating a genuine union to bring diverse peoples together.

It may not come as a surprise that the EU constitution engenders few warm feelings in European citizens. The document, which recasts previous treaties and charters and runs at more than 500 pages, is a wondrous mixture of high moral principles and profane practicality.

The preamble does not begin with 'We the People', like the US constitution does, but starts listing the 25 heads of state and government. Do we actually wonder why people feel that the EU constitution is not so much about them, but about their leaders?

For the highly visualised era we live in, it is amazing how little imagery exists of Europe. The few photographs we see often depict the talking heads of politicians. Though all the debate about rules and procedures is clearly vital for creating a European political order, it is unlikely to capture the hearts and minds of average people.

The problem at its heart is one of ideas, ideas that images are uniquely suited to spread. As the world witnessed during the Abu Ghraib scandal, the tsunami disaster and most recently the passing of Pope John Paul II, people are clearly capable of caring passionately

about, and feeling solidarity with, those who live more than a stone's throw away. But the reality is that without graphic imagery we would not have seen similar outpourings of empathy.

In the words of the late Susan Sontag, photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about but doubt seems "proven" when we're shown a photograph of it. Without an attempt to create an actual image of what Europe is about, it will not become a true union of people, but will remain the elitist club that it is right now.

If ideology tells us what is worth photographing, the lack of imagery in Europe is not simply the result of negligence. Maybe those who hold the EU dear don't want to let the cat out of the bag: namely that they hope to create a union that will slowly dissolve the boundaries



Image conscious: a French citizen displays rare pro-EU fervour

both physical, political and ultimately cultural that currently separate Europe.

Europe has many faces and

it is time that Europe starts to acknowledge those faces. One way of doing so is to photograph ordinary

Europeans in a Union-wide campaign, which could be called 'One Europe, Many Faces', showing the citizens of Europe united in all their variety. At its heart, the project would spread images of every corner of Europe to every other corner so that, when a German or a Cypriot thinks about the Irish or the Dutch, he or she can put a face to the name.

Through images, the merits of a united Europe, one which brings peace and prosperity to its peoples, will, to borrow a phrase from the American Declaration of Independence, become self evident. The 20th century has shown us the power of imagery to divide. Perhaps the 21st century can reveal its innate power to bring us together.

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## Is supplying cleaner energy good for business?



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