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United in diversity

By Wesley Trobaugh



On the 9th of May, 1950, Robert Schuman, a former prime minister of France, proposed the creation of an organized, cooperating Europe. What started out as a proposal to join the coal and steel industries of France and Germany became the European Union that we know today. As the Schuman declaration is considered to be the beginning of that Union, we celebrate two birthdays today: the European Union's and mine!

I love Europe. I always have. Don't get a big head; it's just a personal preference. Every country and every continent has its positive points and its negative points. But Europe has appealed to me since before I can even remember.

Europe is the epitome of compactness. 712,000,000 people live on 10,180,000 square kilometres. There are some 50 countries on that surface where 230 languages are spoken. I like that. I like the fact that I can speak several languages without moving from where I'm sitting. I like the fact that I can get in my car, drive for fifteen minutes and be in a place where a completely different language is spoken. I grew up in Iowa. To get to a place where anything other than English is spoken, you have to drive for 20 hours.

The U.S. is so huge and yet in so many ways so uniform. This makes life easier in lots of ways but also makes life much more boring. Sure, life

and culture may be a little different, but essentially an Iowan lives the same life as someone from Washington or Vermont, and we speak the same language, with only slight variations. General American English is spoken from Nebraska to Ohio and even further. Basque, for instance, changes from house to house!

American cuisine exists. Deny it if you may, but it does exist. And we have some good things to eat, too. But, it doesn't compare to the variety of food that each region of Europe has. We eat cheddar and a couple of others; France alone has one for each day of the year! Think of the Protected Designation of Origin. We have Idaho potatoes and Iowa corn and Virginia Ham, but few bother to guarantee that those products are truly from those places. Europe tends to demand higher quality in food, though recently this is changing. I hope it doesn't ever change completely. On that note, I have heard that this is because of the American influence. You can't blame Americans for your laziness. If you buy precooked foods or eat fast food, it is no one's fault but your own.

One drawback of Europe is that its long history has caused its people to be quite intransigent when it comes to changing certain things. It's easier to do things as they have always been done than to change our ways. I don't mean social issues, as Europe is far ahead of any other continent in that respect. I mean simple, everyday things, like doing the shopping or renewing your passport. Europeans are not quick to change processes, to modernizing them. Europeans welcome social change and quickly adapt to it. But don't try to change habits. This is the way we do things. This is the way we've always done things. We were doing it this way before your country even existed. Clearly our way is better.

That said, maybe I don't want Europe to change. Maybe I can revert to the way I was taught as a child to like people "just the way they are."

Happy Europe Day!