

PLATFORM

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What is Europe without its symbols?

Europe Day passed by on May 9 without attracting attention but by adopting EU symbols more interest might be generated

When the parliament in Pristina unanimously approved the independence of Kosovo on February 17, the chamber immediately made a decision on its national symbols of flag, coat of arms and anthem. The former Serb province of mostly Albanians identified itself with a flag inspired by that of the European Union, with its blue background and in the foreground a map of the 50th independent European state in yellow topped by six white stars. The national coat of arms has the same features as the flag and in the absence of a national anthem the European anthem has been provisionally adopted. Although, like Andorra, the Vatican City, Monaco, Montenegro and San Marino, the new state does not belong to the European club of 27 countries, it also adopted the euro as its currency. Ironically, the single currency is in official circulation in only 15 of the EU's member states and two of these – Denmark and the UK – have a clause that allows them to remain outside the Eurozone.

Many people are unaware that May 9 was Europe Day and nor are they aware that such a day, to commemorate the establishing of the entity that has become the European Union, even exists. The dropping of the article "Symbols of the Union" during the passage of the failed constitutional Treaty of Lisbon is a heavy blow to European identity. It is



Kosovans celebrate their independence by flying the new flag inspired by that of the EU / EFE

true that the treaty born in the Portuguese capital last December includes a joint declaration in which 16 member states affirm that for them Europe's symbols continue being "the symbols of a common belonging of the citizens of the EU and of their link to it". However, the whole declaration was diluted when France, a founding member, and soon to hold the European presidency, was not among the signatories. This fact is even more startling when the blue flag with the 12 stars can be seen alongside that of France in the official photograph of Nicolas Sarkozy as well as flying from official buildings and that the euro has been the official currency of France for

more than five years.

Without European symbols, the European sense of identity, if there is such a thing, comes under threat. The EU would save a lot of energy in promoting itself if it institutionalised its symbols. The best strategy would be for the symbols to become legally recognised throughout the 27 member states. The *Diada*, the *Día de la Hispanidad* or July 14 dominate the local media every year, while Europe Day is barely mentioned. Naturally, the feelings aroused by these national days cannot be compared to those that may be experienced on May 9. The European identity does not attempt – and nor should it – to supplant that of

nationality, but it should complement it.

In less than a year, European elections will be held and it is important that citizens of member states realise the importance of these elections: 80% of the laws passed in the Spanish parliament are mere transpositions of legislation previously adopted in Brussels. Based on the composition of the European Parliament, the European Commission will be more liberal or more interventionist, more centralist or more federalist. Basically, the lack of interest generated in these elections is nothing short of abysmal. The trend for lower turnouts in European elections in Catalonia has increased from the first European elections held here in 1987, when turnout was 70%, to those of 2004, when the turnout had dropped to 40%.

If we had a European constitution, May 9 would be a holiday in all of the member states. For the first time ever, Estonians, Cypriots, Irish and Portuguese, from one end of the European Union to the other, would share in a common day of festivity. If the Treaty of Lisbon had included the article on symbols, next year we would know that May 9 is Europe Day, if for no other reason than our buses would be adorned with the flag of the European Union. The EU lacks a common policy on the most recent independent state in Europe, Kosovo, and yet that new country shows more European spirit than many member states.

FRONT PAGES FROM HISTORY

BY JOSEP BOSCH. www.josepbosch.net

Democracia, Buenos Aires - Sunday July 27, 1952

What is it about Evita that throughout the years her name, her life, her image has caught the imagination of the people? Of course, the musical by Andrew Lloyd Weber, the movie with Madonna and Antonio Banderas and the song "Don't cry for me Argentina" contributed to keeping the myth alive by making her a star in popular culture. But in her country of origin, Argentina, Eva María Ibarguren, or Eva María Duarte, as she was later known, was a living legend long before we heard of her. Actress, campaigner for the political rights of women in a country full of chauvinistic laws, defender of the plight of the workers and underprivileged classes, *los descamisados*, wife of another Argentinean myth, Perón, and a charismatic, frail woman whose passionate speeches made her in reality a populist figure; all these contributed to her aura of sainthood. But nothing did more to transform her into an icon as her early death by cancer in her

prime, at the age of 33.

For days after her death on July 26, 1952, the Argentinean newspapers were filled with nothing but stories about her. Her life, her pictures, her speeches, the outpouring of grief... but no newspaper captured the passion of the moment like this, "Democracia" with a single word that was a nation's cry: Evita!

"The people weep at their great pain", said the paper announcing the "entry of Evita into immortality".

The language of the articles in the newspaper is amazing: "All the tears are not enough to weep for her! The motherland cries with unprecedented pain. Eva Perón is no more! The infinite happiness of her fabulous exploits is turning into deep sorrow! She was the sacred fire of the motherland, her purest exploit, her heroine, her happiness, her triumphal march and her people. She was our pride, our faith, our strength, our virtue and our love. Let the shredded and distressed hearts cry... Eva Perón is no more".

