

We can learn a lot from Europe

■ The union of nations that shed old divisions has become a world power player — with lessons for America

BY WOLF SCHAFFER

Considering Europe, it is a mistake to think that nothing is new under the sun. A potent new Europe is emerging, and Americans are hardly paying attention.

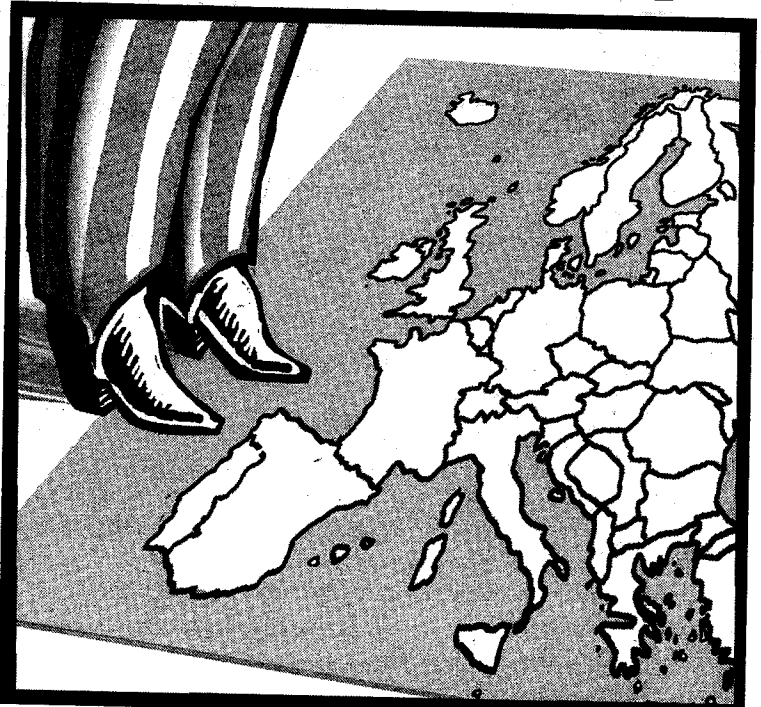
We noticed the brouhaha when Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld called France and Germany the "old Europe," but we would be hard-pressed to name the countries of the "new" Europe. We shook our heads or nodded in agreement when the House cafeterias changed "French fries" to "freedom fries" and ignored that the word "frank" meant free in the language of the "Franks" who formed the historic core of both France and Germany. Why should we care about such distinctions?

Size matters. The European Union has a strong currency and the world's largest inter-

nal market. Thus, its current 25 nations can trade with each other quite successfully, and they do. Yet, there is more to it. European traders have learned how to do business with other countries and cultures. This is an asset in a globalizing world.

Population matters. With 456 million people, the EU has 161 million more people than the United States and the world's third-largest (and rather well-educated) population after China and India. Although the population growth rate is falling in the advanced countries of Europe, the European Union will continue to grow: Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Macedonia and Turkey are eagerly waiting to join the club.

Language skills matter. Many Europeans speak English, but we are not speaking foreign languages. The common language of the EU is English (to the dismay of a few "Europeanists"), but this is an asset again. Think about it: Only 6 percent of all the



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books translated worldwide are translated into English, but 50 percent are translated from English. What does that mean? The world knows more about us than we know about the world.

Helping others matters. The European Union is the world's leader in development aid. Everyone owning real estate in the New York area is extreme-

ly well off compared to the billion people now living in urban slums, mostly in countries of the less developed world. That horrendous number is expected to double in less than 20 years. "Slurban" poverty is a global problem waiting to explode, but we can learn from the EU how to

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The U.S. can learn a lot from Europe

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make friends by helping developing countries thrive.

Keeping the planet healthy matters. The European Union is the world's leader in alternative energy development and "green" politics. For example, the United Kingdom has the fastest-growing wind power movement in the world, and Germany (the world's leading producer of renewable energy) has a foreign minister who is a politician from the Greens, a radical party in American terms. The EU seems to care about the Earth, but by not signing the Kyoto Protocol (about controlling greenhouse gases) Americans have told the world we do not care. The

whole story is, of course, more complicated — but that is the bottom line in terms of global perception.

History matters. The future Beatles were listening to American rock and roll records in Liverpool in 1955 when Geoffrey Barraclough, an eminent British historian, spoke at the local university about "The End of European History." The historian was right; Europe lost its "historical significance" in the cataclysms of the two World Wars and the Holocaust. But the Beatles made new history as the first global band; the European Union has steadily advanced the region toward what Winston Churchill called in 1946 a "kind of United States of Eu-

rope." And very old and very bitter enemies such as France and Germany have learned to join forces.

Life after empire matters. After the end of the Cold War and the implosion of the Soviet Empire, it fell to the United States to have "historical significance." This was the easy part. Now one question is on everybody's mind throughout the world: How are the Americans going to handle this significance?

From the European Union we can learn that there is life after empire and that it can be good. Quite a few EU member states have a history of empires gained and lost, and they are all trying to tell us: Do not repeat our mistakes.