

The Metrosexual Superpower

The stylish European Union struts past the bumbling United States on the catwalk of global diplomacy.

By Parag Khanna

A

According to Michael Flocker's 2003 bestseller, *The Metrosexual Guide to Style: A Handbook for the Modern Man*, the trendsetting male icons of the 21st century must combine the coercive strengths of Mars and the seductive wiles of Venus. Put simply, metrosexual men are muscular but suave, confident yet image-conscious, assertive yet clearly in touch with their feminine sides. Just consider British soccer star David Beckham. He is married to former Spice Girl Victoria "Posh"

Adams, but his combination of athleticism and cross-dressing make him a sex symbol to both women and men worldwide, not to mention the inspiration for the 2002 hit movie *Bend It Like Beckham*. Substance, Beckham shows, is nothing without style.

Geopolitics is much the same. American neo-conservatives such as Robert Kagan look down upon feminine, Venus-like Europeans, gibing their narcissistic obsession with building a postmodern, bureaucratic paradise. The United States, by contrast, supposedly carries the mantle of masculine Mars, boldly imposing freedom in the world's nastiest neighborhoods. But by cleverly deploying both its hard power and its sensitive side, the European Union (EU) has become more effective—and more

attractive—than the United States on the catwalk of diplomatic clout. Meet the real New Europe: the world's first metrosexual superpower.

Metrosexuals always know how to dress for the occasion (or mission). Spreading peace across Eurasia serves U.S. interests, but it's best done by donning Armani pinstripes rather than U.S. Army fatigues. After the fall of Soviet communism, conservative U.S. thinkers feared a united Germany vying with Russia for hegemony in Central Europe. Yet, by brandishing only a slick portfolio of economic incentives, the EU has incorporated many of the former Soviet republics and satellites in the Baltics and Eastern Europe. Even Turkey is freshening up with *eau d'Europe*. Ankara resisted Washington's pressure to provide base rights for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. But to get backstage in Brussels, it has had to smooth out its more

Parag Khanna is a fellow in global governance at the Brookings Institution.

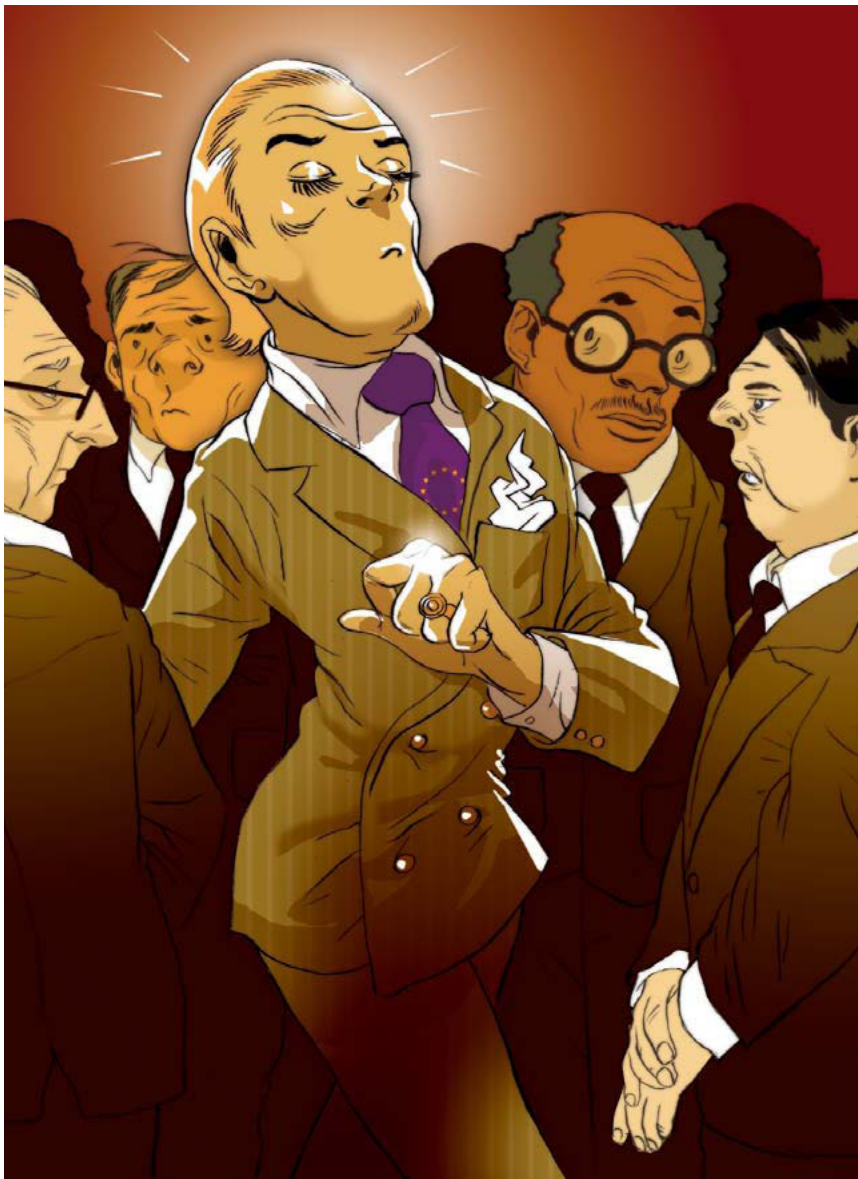


ILLUSTRATION BY TOMER HANUKA FOR FP

unseemly blemishes—abolishing the death penalty, taking steps to resolve the Cyprus dispute, and introducing laws to protect its Kurdish minority.

Metrosexuals may spend a long time standing in front of the mirror, but they never shop alone. Stripping off stale national sovereignty (that's so last century), Europeans now parade their "pooled power," the new look for this geopolitical season. As a political, economic, and military union with some 450 million citizens, a \$9 trillion economy, and armies surpassing 1.6 million soldiers, Europe is now a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Indeed, Europe actually contributes more to U.S. foreign policy goals than the U.S. government—and does so far more fashionably. Robert Cooper, one of

Britain's former defense gurus now shaping Europe's common foreign policy, argues that Europe's "magnetic allure" compels countries to rewrite their laws and constitutions to meet European standards. The United States conceives of power primarily in military terms, thus confusing presence with influence. By contrast, Europeans understand power as overall leverage. As a result, the EU is the world's largest bilateral aid donor, providing more than twice as much aid to poor countries as the United States, and it is also the largest importer of agricultural goods from the developing world, enhancing its influence in key regions of instability. Through massive deployments of "soft power" (such as economic clout and cultural appeal) Europe has made hard power less necessary. After expanding to 25 members, the EU accounts for nearly half of the world's outward foreign direct investment and exerts greater leverage than the United States over pivotal countries such as Brazil and Russia.

As more oil-producing nations consider trading in euros, Europe will gain greater influence in the international marketplace. Even rogue states swoon over Europe's allure; just recall how Libya's Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi greeted British Prime Minister Tony Blair during a recent meeting in Tripoli. "You are looking good," gushed Libya's strongman. "You are still young."

Brand Europe is taking over. From environmental sustainability and international law to economic development and social welfare, European views are more congenial to international tastes and more easily exported than their U.S. variants. Even the Bush administration's new strategy toward the "Greater Middle East" is based on the Helsinki model, which was Europe's way of

integrating human rights standards into collective security institutions. Furthermore, regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Mercosur, and the African Union are redesigning their institutions to look more like the EU. Europe's flashy new symbol of power, the Airbus 380, will soon strut on runways all over Asia. And the euro is accepted even where they don't take American Express.

But don't be deceived by the metrosexual superpower's pleatless pants—Europe hasn't lost touch with its hard assets. Even without a centralized military command structure, the EU has recently led military operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Macedonia, and it will increase troop deployments to support German and British forces in stabilizing Afghanistan. European countries already provide 10 times more peacekeepers to U.N. operations than the United States. In late 2004, the EU will take over all peacekeeping and policing operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina from NATO, and Europe's 60,000-troop Rapid Reaction Force will soon be ready to deploy around the world.

In the fight against terrorism, Europe also displays the right ensemble of strengths. Europeans excel at human intelligence, which requires expert linguists and cultural awareness. French espionage agencies have reportedly infiltrated al Qaeda cells, and German and Spanish law enforcement efforts have led to the capture of numerous al Qaeda operatives. After the March 2004 terrorist attack in Madrid, Spain's incoming prime minister immediately declared his country would "return to Europe," signaling his opposition to the Bush administration's war on terror. Indeed, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's "New Europe" is already passé, shorter lived than the bellbottom revival.

To some observers, the EU may always be little more than a cheap superpower knockoff with little substance to show but a common multilingual passport. But after 60 years of dressing up, Europe has revealed its true 21st-century orientation. Just as metrosexuals are redefining masculinity, Europe is redefining old notions of power and influence. Expect *Bend It Like Brussels* to play soon in capital cities worldwide. **FP**

FederalNewsRadio.com

Your source for federal news...now!

GET THE LATEST ON:

technology

management

PROCUREMENT

PAY & BENEFITS

politics & policy

security

Plus, the only place to READ and HEAR Mike Causey every day!

FederalNews



Radio.com

www.FederalNewsRadio.com

How will the new constitution of Iraq satisfy demands for **fair representation** for Shiites and Kurds?

Which of the languages spoken in Afghanistan should the new constitution recognize as the **official language** of the state?

Will the French legislature **ban headscarves** and other religious symbols in public schools?

How will the Nigerian federal court deal with a Sharia law ruling to **punish adultery by death**?

Do Hispanics in the United States **resist assimilation**?

Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World

argues that states must devise multicultural policies



to prevent discrimination on cultural grounds—religious, ethnic and linguistic. The expansion of cultural freedoms, not suppression, is the only sustainable option promoting stability, democracy and human development.

In its 15th year, the annual *Human Development Report* continues to frame debates and provide new strategies and measures for enabling people to live full and creative lives.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORTS What matters for people

**Available from
Oxford University Press
1-800-451-7556 or
www.oup.com/us**

Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World

The freedom to choose one's identity and to exercise that choice without facing discrimination or disadvantage is vital to people's lives. Governments rich and poor face new challenges to recognize cultural differences and respond to the claims of ethno-political movements.

Commissioned by
the United Nations
Development Programme



*Millennium Development Goals:
A compact among nations
to end human poverty*



*Deepening Democracy in a
Fragmented World*



*Making New Technologies Work
for Human Development*



*Human Rights and
Human Development*