

030201 Happy Spring Festival

From what I understand, the expansion of the European Union which is scheduled for 2004 did not get much play in the US. I won't talk much more about it other than to point out the huge significance which may have been lost with the lack of coverage. For the first time in a very long time, all of Europe will once more be unified. The East-West split which occurred in the 1940's has ended with the addition of most of countries which lay behind the Iron Curtain. With the exception of a few countries such as Switzerland (which just joined the UN in late 2002) and Norway holding out from membership and others which are still being considered for future expansions, Europe will once again be whole.

There is not yet a European army, but one might think it is a matter of time. There is, however a rapid reaction force under development. Under an agreement with NATO made last December, NATO will share intelligence with the new rapid reaction force. The new force is expected to take over peace keeping missions in the former Yugoslavia (which just got even smaller) in the near future. The move in the former Yugoslavia can be seen as an important one. Europe will now be policing itself and the US will no longer have the same role in Europe.

Almighty . . . Euro?

I don't know whether you follow the status of the world currency exchange, but the almighty dollar is no longer so almighty. When I first arrived in Denmark, one US dollar could buy more than 8 Kroner. As of today, the exchange rate is a measly 6.89 Kroner for one dollar. The Kroner is pegged to the Euro which rose above the 1 to 1 exchange with the dollar and has been rising in value ever since. It is currently €1.07 to \$1. There are some students here from the US who have been watching their cash reserves dwindle without even spending a dollar. My income is paid in Kroner and so it does not affect my day to day life, but my money for travel is still in banks in the US which is a bit unsettling. However, I also have a friend who is married to a Dane and now lives in Copenhagen. She is excited about the exchange rate because it now costs her far less Kroner to make her student loan payments to the US banks.

One would think that the strong Euro would be a good thing in Europe. However, for countries like Germany which have been struggling with a recession, the higher cost of selling its main exports such as BMW's in the US, coupled with a stagnant domestic market is having a negative impact. Likewise, the weak US dollar can not be very good for a country which is currently trying to portray an image of strength. Since the US imports far more than it exports, the currency advantage will most likely not be taken advantage of immediately. Rather, I imagine the costs of goods on the shelves of Target will be a bit more expensive in the future.

Overpriced Bugs

Speaking of German cars, I am currently sitting in on a Ph.D. course in sound and vibration being offered in the acoustics department at DTU. The instructors and students of the small class are from all over Europe which has been interesting. One of the students is a Ph.D student from TU Berlin and is also working for Volkswagen. During one of the coffee breaks yesterday, we were speaking about cars and she asked me if there were a lot of VW Bugs in the US, which I replied that there were. However, you do not see any here in Europe. The other students voiced the

opinion that the Bugs are too expensive, especially since the Bug is simply a modified VW Golf. The woman from Germany told us that when VW was designing the new Bug, they spent a lot of time trying to figure out what made the old Bug sound the way it did. They eventually figured out that the length of the exhaust pipe was such that it allowed for a standing wave to be produced in the pipe which created the "ba ba ba ba" sound. Another student from the Netherlands told us that he had been in one of the early prototype Bugs. He told us that the prototype had a switch which allowed the sound of the exhaust to be changed electronically from the traditional Bug sound to a variety of other cars including that of a Ferrari. I guess that in the end, VW just settled for the Bug sounding like the Golf.

The woman from Germany also told us that VW-Audi will be moving down the Passat in the lineup by reducing the size of the body as the Audi line will then take its position as the high end line. The change will set the Audi A4 above the Passat in the lineup. However, the highest end car will be the new VW Phaeton which will be produced at the Gläserne Manufaktur in Dresden, Germany. The name of the manufacturing facility was chosen because the building will have glass walls which will allow people to observe the cars being made. The people who purchase the Phaeton will be invited to go to the plant to watch during critical times of their cars birth such as the instillation of the engine or the painting of the frame. Once the car is "born", the new "parents" will be asked to have their picture taken with the Phaeton before they take it home. Within half an hour of leaving the plant, the new owners will be given a call by their personal consultant at VW to answer any further questions that they might have since taking the car from the plant. Sound a bit too much? Well, when you pay €500,000 for a car, you expect to be pampered. Needless to say, at that price, I have not seen too many on the road here in Lyngby.

One other point of interest from the class was an experience that my professor, Morgens had with one of the yachts that he was a consultant on during the 1980's. Apparently, Saddam Hussein had a yacht built at a Danish ship yard. He wanted to have a pool installed at the back of the yacht, near the four powerful engines which were to propel the craft up and down the Tigris River. Saddam specified that the sound at the pool must not exceed 45 dB and so my professor was called in to advise during the design. Besides the stringent sound requirements, the only thing that my professor found odd at the time was that all of the windows were to be made of bulletproof glass.

The London Times

Since day one of my arrival in Denmark, friends and strangers have been asking me what the people in the US think about the war with Iraq. It weighs heavily on most peoples minds and it takes little to spark a conversation about the US policy. The news which I saw made it sound like the Bush administration was surprised at the joint German-French declaration against the war made last week. However, if the US administration was paying any attention to their people in Europe, they would have known that most Europeans are against the war. One Dane I know described Bush as "a spoiled child who always gets his way." I think that most people agreed that Saddam is a bad man. However, some have expressed their doubts as to the credibility of the claims that he has weapons of mass destruction based on the findings of the weapons inspectors so far. Most are just not as eager for blood to be spilled and want to give the inspectors more time before committing actions that will lead to the deaths of a lot of people.

So, it was a great deal of surprise that six European leaders including Anders Fogh Rasmussen of Denmark declared their wish for an undivided US-European policy in the London Times on January 29. Tony Blair also signed the letter, which was no surprise, as did the outgoing

government in the Czech Republic. Schroeder and Chirac were not even asked if they wished to join and Greece has since stated its opinion against military action, giving the appearance of a widening gulf in European opinion.

Needless to say, the eyes of the world will be on the US next week to see if it delivers on its promises to deliver proof of its claims in the UN Security Council. One might think that only evidence on the scale of the U2 pictures of Cuba could adequately sway the world opinion.

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