

A PERSONAL VIEW: Communicating Wallstrom's Europe

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There could be no better politician to handle the Communication Strategy of the European Union than European Commission vice president Margot Wallstrom. Charismatic, vigorous and open, she epitomizes all that is positive about her own country Sweden and all that should be positive about the European Union but isn't showing: Dynamic, innovative and reliable, socially sensitive and environmentally conscious. It's just not coming across.

Despite her blog being as genuine and as interesting a communication tool as one can expect in an otherwise faceless European Commission, the Union remains out of touch with its disenchanting citizenry. At least Mrs Wallstrom's followers are reading her and venting their irritation in comments they post on her web. Better than being ignored.

One does not need to study the Eurobarometer survey results or read between the lines of Mrs Wallstrom's blog interlocutors to sense that all is not well with the Union. Not that it is all the Commission's fault. For all the technocratic harmonizing successes that the Union has achieved in recent years it has failed to generate the momentum to rally Europeans behind a meaningful cause. There is no longer a single currency to pursue, no Germany to unite, no enlargement to push for. The Union finds itself without a grand plan, stuck in pre-Maastricht type legislative initiatives.

So it is not surprising to find money wasted on drab campaigns which incorrectly claim that we have been 'Together since 1957'. Mrs Wallstrom's communication team needs to find a new cause. Now that the 25th of March has gone by she should stop romancing the dates and look elsewhere. Jean Monnet, who had brought us all 'Together' on 9 May 1950 and then in 1952

would be betting his francs on Al Gore. A convenient cause is staring us all in the face. It is Mrs Wallstrom's previous portfolio. Yes it is difficult to deal with Commissioner Verheugen's polluting reservations and the indifferent whims of 27 Member States but if Al Gore can do it, she can too.

Wallstrom's inconvenient truth is that the Union is suffocating not only from pollution but from an absence of any original ideas. If we fail in this there wont be anyone around to celebrate being "Together since 1957 (sic)".

Arnold Schwarzenegger, the governor of California, who has predictably espoused an environmental agenda said recently 'Come on, we're from California, we've always been number one. Let's show the rest of the world that we can come up with the best ideas. Let's kick some butt here''. He is actually thinking that setting a green agenda can create huge new markets. Gunther can be convinced too. To paraphrase Arnold; We're all Europeans; let's kick start something.