



## [Comment] Blend it like Beckham

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EUOBSERVER / DEBATE - Not content with helping his former club to the Premiership title, David Beckham now strikes a blow for European integration when he joins Real Madrid. Moving abroad in pursuit of work is as natural these days as moving about at home.

The culture is different, the weather better, but for a new generation growing up, Europe is a natural extension of the way we now live.

More foreign travel has increased our desire for food from other European countries and the single market has brought it to the nearest supermarket shelf. The singles charts bring music from many different countries. And the natural aim of any successful sports team is to "get into Europe".

Much has been written about the influence of Ryanair and Easyjet - once there was the Interrail generation, now their younger brothers and sisters travel by air.

Culture, fashion, business, sport: we look naturally across borders in Europe for inspiration, for enjoyment, for jobs.

But what has this got to do with the European Union? Why should what is essentially a political institution depend, one way or another, on the employment prospects of England midfielders? It is possible surely to be culturally interested in Europe without welcoming the prospect of European federalism.

### Europe is uniting before our eyes

The answer is very simple. Think about the major criticism made of the idea of European democracy; nice idea, but it can't work, say its opponents, because the people of Europe do not have enough in common. Democracy needs not only a system - the cracy - but also a people with a sense of shared feeling - the demos. And the demos is what Europe hasn't got.

Well, not until now. Amid all the fuss about the Beckham move to Madrid (would it be Milan? Or Barcelona?) no-one expressed any surprise. No-one thought that moving to Spain was a step into the dark. It was a perfectly normal career move. Moving abroad is no longer anything to fear for anyone.

Opponents of the European Union might not welcome the fact, but Europe is uniting before our eyes. It is not being caused by the institutions of the EU: it is happening of its own accord. There are social, commercial and cultural forces to bring the different nations together. As Jean Monnet said, "We are not forming coalitions among states, we are uniting peoples."

### How to govern Europe as it unites?

The political question therefore becomes not whether to govern Europe but how to govern Europe as it unites. What kind of political system can take European decisions in a democratic manner without intruding into the essential affairs of the member states? The answer of course is federalism.

The experience of recent years shows that intergovernmental cooperation on its own does not work. National capitals cannot be the place to decide questions of Europe-wide consequence without a sense of leadership to express the common European interest. Either the system grinds to a halt, or it excludes and alienates the ordinary voter. Neither of those outcomes is acceptable any longer. We need something more efficient and more accountable.

The future success of the European Union depends on its ability to give its citizens a voice in Brussels. That is a truth which, like a David Beckham free kick, can't be stopped.

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