After Europe's pause for reflection a new slogan:
Picobelleuropa!
The referendum result is clear: the much-needed new élan begins with a new design

What is the verdict on communication and identity when you look at Europe in the first half of 2005? A disaster, you might say. Even though in France and the Netherlands the national referendum was pumped up with the customary hot air by both the government and the press, and the public was by no means apathetic. What we did see is Europeans putting the brakes on. And they've succeeded.

Virtually all the experts are in agreement: it is stupid, a shame, regrettable, ill-advised, we've lost momentum, we've lost ground.... However, we've got to get the issue of Europe back on track again. It's no lost cause – this is evident no matter which way you look at it. We've got to get down to it. Give it our maximum attention again. And fresh élan is needed.
Not only those who see European citizens as consumers are obliged to acknowledge that selling Europe has taken a nose dive. Even if you see them as residents of nations working together, it seems that people, all rationality aside, are afraid of losing their national identity and their grip on matters of everyday concern. Not only the Dutch with their "Act normal, that's abnormal enough" ethos, but the "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" French are of the same mind. And secretly, no doubt, many citizens from other member states, although during the summer of 2005 they were on the sidelines for the time being.
For the fact is, we're having an official pause for reflection.

What do organisations do when it's time to steer a new course? Well, you put the product and your image under the microscope. You make plans to rekindle the enthusiasm of your customers (or citizens, in this case) for your product and brand. Possibly you have the marketing department tinker with the product itself, but you also undertake market research, look at the competition and get your creative talents behind the drawing board.

In theory, Europe is a fine product. At first glance there doesn't seem to be any competition: you can't choose Europe 1, 2 or 3. However, in the minds of the people choice does exist, and also in different guises. On the one hand in the form of "the rest of the world", on the other in the form of "local concerns". As such, both are competing for the sympathy of our citizens. This manifests itself in a dual attitude. As consumers you want day-to-day living as cheap as possible, but as a citizen you're then putting local concerns aside in order to profit eagerly from cheap offers from far distant lands. Whether these originate from inside or, more likely, from outside Europe doesn't matter. "Taking advantage" occurs in all sectors and branches of society. That's simply how it is. The good, national and sensible middle way of such choices isn't straightforward and can't be

summed up in one understandable formula. And if a 30-year scientific study at Tilburg University, recently published in the *Atlas of European Values*, also demonstrates a lack of unity within European culture, then we know for sure: in Europe *you're together for yourself.*

However, let us leave the product design to the political designers. Undoubtedly they'll come up with something truly great after the official pause for reflection. Instead let's look at the *feeling* Europe evokes in us citizens/consumers/customers. Or could evoke. What's the score here? Never mind thinking rationally. Never mind advantage or disadvantage. Simply, how do we feel about it?
It's a remarkable fact, for instance, that in the referendum the rate of yes-votes for the EU constitution was far higher among older people than among younger ones. We can only guess at the exact reasons for this. The older and younger generations have a different mindset. Older people, for instance, are driven not only by present consumerism, but also by the history out of which the idea for the need of a stable Europe evolved. Europe as an organisation potentially capable of putting the bloodstained first half of the 20th century in Europe behind us. Just read Dutch author Geert Mak's recent 1,223-page tome *In Europa*. No post-war baby boomer knows what war was like, but it was dreadful. And preventing another war is one objective that Europe has achieved. For similar reasons, you can be sure the former Eastern Bloc is not just interested in a strong European economy, as we in Western Europe may think, but at least as much in European security and stability. If you have first-hand experience of war and occupation, perhaps you take a longer view. Looking both forwards and backwards.

What about young people? What does Europe evoke in them, sensitive as they are to images and brand thinking? If we only look at the symbols of Europe, at Europe's housestyle, then you have to be honest and say *No way*! The euro has not only bred discontent among its users, but the banknotes are downright ugly. Everyone agrees on that. So not a good feeling there.
What about the flags? All those national emblems cheerfully fluttering at points where there are tourists or companies eager to look international? In the Netherlands they're seldom seen, but Italy these days has two flags flying side by side on all government buildings – the national and the European. For every country, the flag is the ultimate emotional brand of national pride. Look at how in the 1960s the Union Jack, through pop culture, fed through to the fashion world of London's Carnaby Street and beyond. Look at how in Europe the American Stars and Stripes have come to evoke contradictory feelings of power, success, freedom yet also domination. It means liberation for the older generation; Vietnam for the babyboomers. Yet also a walk on the moon watched by the entire world!

Compare that to our European flag. Our emblem. Pathetic. You can already tell by the flag there's something not quite right. Not only outside in the wind, hard as it is to find one in the Netherlands, but also on car number plates and euro banknotes.

Something has to be done about the flag. That blue field with the small stars is emblematic of Europe's present tribulations. Europe will never amount to much with a flag like that. It doesn't evoke a strong image, a positive emotion, and is therefore old-fashioned and finished with. The concept by a Strasbourg artist was accepted by the then Council of Europe in 1955. In 1983 the European parliament adopted the flag and two years later the EC heads of state also reached agreement. No more whinging about the flag, just get on with it, they thought at the time. At that point, quite by chance, country number 12 was joining the club, so everyone thought that the flag was right. Now, however, 19 years and two NO referendums later, those who still believe in Europe are faced with the need for reform. The flag, too, has to communicate the feeling of today's Europe. As the French, the Dutch and others who have spoken out see it. Like any other design, the flag has to become a common household item, a symbol that's easy and cheap to make, that stands out and is easy to use, that sends out a message that we in Europe have got it and that something has changed. Or must change.

In short, a new élan begins with a new, okay flag.

Something can easily be done about this. Granted, the flag does have a couple of good points: the colours and the main form, albeit the blue could be a shade lighter. The necessary modification thus builds on the existing concept. Exactly in the same way Europe itself is evolving. We're not going to start from scratch. The colours and the main form, the blue background and the yellow circular shape – that's all fine. Distinctive from every other major flag in the world, plus the fact that no other European nation has anything similar to it. That concept is good, we'll keep that.

But then those little stars. They're wrong. Those 12 teeny-weeny stars. They must have thought at some point: folks, we've still got the flag to do. We've got that blue, we've got the 12 stars in a circle and there's just twelve of us. With the next batch of countries nine years later, they must have thought: don't change it anymore. Otherwise we'll be at it forever. Instead Europe maintains those stars don't have anything to do with countries. According to the EU's official explanation the number twelve is a symbol of perfection, completeness and unity. But surely you can't sell that story? What did they then say to number 13? Unfortunately we're no longer perfect, complete and united, and from now on it can only get worse! This is never going to work like the *Stars and Stripes*, which changed with the inclusion with each new state. No, the stars are a mistake for Europe. Not distinctive enough either. All the major powers do something with stars. The European circle is too puny and empty, plus the symbolism is too vague, with people still thinking: which is "our" star exactly? Now that there's twenty-five of us that doesn't even leave half a star for each country! And then major nations might think they have a right to two stars. Or, conversely, the poorer countries can be granted two to catch up. Yet something else to argue about. We've paid for our star just like everybody else and we want to keep it – at least that's how we feel at this point. Honestly, it was

problems like this that Europe was confronted with in the Spring of 2005. So the stars, even as a form, are too small and impractical. Put simply, they need a kick up the backside. On car number plates they're just like small disappearing dots. Stars that disappear like dots into the distance are wrong, see. That doesn't give anyone a good feeling. Imagine Europe as the Great Bear in the sky, an artificial constellation. Then at night you look up and don't see anything. What Great Bear? Oh, you mean those dots? You must be joking! You should take a look at the official EU website and see how they're at a loss at what to do with this official story. In addition to the distant dots they've simply placed a new, casual, Europe-is-quite-important type logo with one star. Hold on a minute. Is it that easy? (www.europa.eu.int)

So let's change those dots into a robust circular shape. You can really go to town with a form like that. Literally. Grab the yellow spray can and spray the underpasses. Do nice blue round traffic signs with yellow edges. Typical Dutch design, inspired by our ancestors, who reclaimed this country from the sea. Forget about the stars. We'll simply put a dike around them, a fine-looking ring canal, drain it, stars gone. That looks much better, a clear symbol, a beautiful round eurO, with a hole in the middle. A zero, yes, but who cares. Large amounts have lots of zeros. It simply looks good, nice and robust. It also contrasts well with those American stars and stripes. We don't want those, we're Europeans. No stars, they're nothing but trouble. And how about a circular gesture too? Something like Winston Churchill's Victory sign with his fingers, but then a thumb and forefinger in a circle meaning *picobello*. Now that's a sign you can put feeling into: Picobello Europe! The fact that the word picobello *is not* Italian but is instantly understood in virtually every European language (sorry, apart from Italian) is exactly why it's so perfect. It is associated with being good, pure and fresh. It has the same kind of ring to it that the French word "belle" has: Beautiful Europe. Tony Blair, a great admirer of Churchill, caught on the picobello gesture quickly as the new EU president, when he spoke in June 2005 of "an extraordinary opportunity to build a greater and more powerful union. But we need the support of member states and citizens in our member states for the enlargement of the European Union"… "to create our Picobello Europe" he did forget to say, but from now on speechwriters have to keep an eye on this.

So much for Europe. But now the national flags. National pride is something different, something you can't simply erase. The referendum votes have made that much clear. Europe isn't about one or the other, is it? No, it's about one *and* the other. So from now on hoist two flags. The national and the European one.

Or is there a better solution? It's all about our own country but against a European background. That is what the voters have said. So a national flag on a European one, in fact? Then you're sorted with one flag and thus, theoretically, at every protocol-appropriate opportunity you can hoist a celebratory national-euro flag depicting the correct emotional ratio. However, the burning question is, what should the ratio be? How much national pride? According to the referendums it's 55 per cent in France and as much as 63 per cent in the Netherlands. National governments could decide that for themselves. But they could also chop and change. Technically not a

problem. You have a national flag with a blue edge or, the other way round, a European flag with a small national flag on it. That's all possible nowadays and what is more, everyone can decide for themselves. That is much more personally satisfying, and more decorative. We can say, "this year, I'll make it this big". And next year perhaps sentiment will be different. Spain, for instance, is completely enchanted with Europe so they'll do a lot of European blue. And perhaps the Netherlands and France as countries will do less blue. But someone like Jacques Chirac, as an individual, would perhaps like a lot of blue. In this way we organically create a new, supranational, pan-European, individual growth model in which national flags are superimposed on the Union one, sending the message that this European integration business doesn't have to go too quickly. Indeed, that's how it all began for the Americans in 1777, with 13 stars of the states in a circle above the thirteen stripes of the then British colonies. And it wasn't until 1960 that the last star was added. Which just goes to show, we certainly don't want to be rushing things.

So when do we put out which flag? Here, too, you can decide for yourself. It is intended as one "pride" flag for use on any occasion. But you can alternate of course. For national historic matters, i.e. anything to do with European royalty or 14 July in France, historical sentiment can be preserved with your own national flag. However, for all other government occasions like the annual opening of parliament, which every country has, we can use the more Europe-oriented flag. And also for tourism of course, a sector in which member states can convey their openness to their neighbours, and which also offers plenty of opportunity for flag flying.

So from now on it's your own flag against a European background, please. For let's face it, that is the situation at the moment. We've made it clear that we want to remain as we are and that as far as we're concerned, there's no place like home. And let all those other nations also remain who they are, for goodness sake. But now is certainly the time to do something positive together for Europe. What we mean is: we're not against Europe, but things were going too quickly. On the whole. What we need first for Europe are 25 new flags, a positive gesture and some "Picobello Europe" copy.

The new flag can be viewed on the website www.picobelleuropa.nl. Design and download your own flag online in just the right ratio – with your national flag featuring large, small or not at all. Or even one of the other 24 member states. The choice is yours. It's the idea that counts. Let's party!

www.piccobelleuropa.nl