

# A Heart for Europe

★ *The Case for Europatriotism* ★

Dick Pels



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For my granddaughter Yasmine, who will  
grow up in Europe

Come tonight and tell your stories  
About how the war has disappeared  
And repeat them a hundred times over  
Every time I'll be in tears

Leo Vroman, *Peace*

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# 1: Europe's Embattled Soul

## Love Lost

We are Europeans, for better or for worse. If we talk about art, architecture, literature, landscape, football, music or travel, we all seem to love Europe in our own particular way. In his book *Made in Europe*, subtitled *The Art that Ties Our Continent Together* (2014), Dutch journalist Pieter Steinz has collected a wealth of pan-European assets that we may proudly call our own, ranging from Asterix to Swan Lake, from the fado to the femme fatale, from Bach to The Beatles and from Kafka to Monty Python. In this brilliant pointillistic tableau, the Greek tragedy and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony enjoy equal rank with 'total' football, Harry Potter and Mary Quant's miniskirt.

Steinz' collection suggests an unmistakable coherence, without claiming a monumental, cast-iron unity. European culture is a supermarket for all tastes, whose casual togetherness aptly illustrates the Union's motto *in varietate concordia*: unity in diversity. Everything is within reach. Everything is 'our own'. Each of us has some knowledge about it and feels attached to it with various shades of intensity. What woman of my generation did not fall a little in love with Marcello Mastroianni, what man did not have a crush on Sophia Loren or Catherine Deneuve?

But as soon as we mention the European Union: the market, the mint or the might of Brussels, such love is suddenly far away. Few are still bold enough to say: 'Europa, wir lieben dich!' – as Matthias Strolz, leader of the left-liberal Austrian NEOS party, recently did. The mood of European citizens has increasingly become one of concern, distrust and anxiety. At the very best, they share the pragmatism of the current British Minister for Europe, who was asked if his compatriots might one day come to love Europe: 'I don't



think we will ever will feel emotional involvement. Love for Europe as an idea, no. But a pragmatic attachment, yes' (*NRC Handelsblad* 13.12.13). A spokesman for the Dutch conservative liberal party was similarly standoffish: 'Europe is not an ideal but a means to an end. A means to make money. The VVD does not feel any love for Europe' (*NRC Handelsblad* 26.5.12).

Moreover, during 2014 and 2015 four great crises have intervened, which have put the European idea(l) in even greater jeopardy. An acute security crisis has erupted around the Russian annexation of Crimea and the hybrid warfare in Eastern Ukraine. The dragging euro crisis has culminated in nerve-breaking negotiations between the 'Institutions' (formerly the Troika) and the Greek government. Islamist terrorists have executed brutal attacks in Paris, Brussels and other European cities. Last but not least: an unprecedented stream of refugees has fled from the Syrian war (which has become a Russian and European war) and other regional conflicts. Piling up on top of each other, these multiple challenges have dramatically exposed Europe's moral and political weakness: its lack of mutual solidarity, political force and value cohesion. Together they have undermined the optimism of even the most passionate pro-Europeans, such as Joschka Fischer, Guy Verhofstadt or Frans Timmermans, who all worry whether Europe will be able to brave this 'perfect storm'.

Yet there is a paradox involved. Never before have ordinary citizens read so much about Europe in their newspapers, seen so much Europe on TV, or felt its presence so acutely in their personal and professional lives. More than ever, European politics has become an integral part of domestic politics. National elections, referenda and changes of government in other countries have become to some degree 'ours', generating unprecedented levels of Europe-wide interest.

In 2013, as elsewhere in Europe, Dutch citizens were relieved when bunga-bunga Berlusconi finally quit the Ital-

ian political stage. Incidents such as the Buttiglione affair in 2004, the Danish cartoon crisis in 2006 and the court case against Pussy Riot in 2012 triggered pan-European debates about family values and gay rights, the freedom of speech and religion and other core values. This chronic self-inquiry into our national and European identities has made all of us a little more European. The euro crisis, the border wars in Ukraine and Syria, the Islamist attacks in Paris, Brussels and elsewhere and the humanitarian disaster caused by the flow of refugees have all strengthened our sense of participating in a European community of fate.

But this growing sense of ‘being in it together’ has simultaneously called forth an opposite, defensive reflex, which has deepened existing political and cultural divisions and elicited a groundswell of nationalist sentiment. The refugee crisis has opened up a sharp cultural rift between East and West, which has complemented and aggravated the already virulent economic one between North and South. Both have been rendered more acute by a growing political divide, both within nations and on the European level, between mainstream parties and national-populist parties of the right and the left.

Polarization around the European project has grown stronger across the entire EU, pitting those who feel that such huge problems cannot be solved by supposedly ‘sovereign’ nations singlehandedly, against those who want to keep these problems out by erecting fences, closing national borders and sending migrants and refugees back to where they came from. In proclaiming that the refugee stream is ‘not a European but a German problem’, populist leaders such as Hungary’s prime minister Victor Orbán, while being a part of it, openly refuse to share in this European community of fate.

Even though a recent Eurobarometer reported that six out of ten people still felt European ‘to some extent’, it is evident that doubt and disaffection prevail among a sizeable portion of the electorate, particularly among the lesser educated. No more than half of the European citizenry still feels

optimistic about the Union's future. Even though a clear majority wishes to remain in the EU, this majority is slowly dwindling. While in 2011 less than a quarter of Dutch voters were in favour of leaving the EU, this percentage rose to 27 in 2015; the number of those in support of Dutch membership fell from 44 to 37% (Dekker a.o. 2015). In a 2014 survey, almost three quarters of Dutch respondents rejected the view that the European Union should develop into a single nation. More than half denied that he or she took pride in European citizenship, although the number that did feel proud also rose to nearly a quarter. Between 2009 and 2013, the number of those who 'were afraid of' or 'felt angry' at the Union almost doubled, from around 11 to more than 20% (NRC *Handelsblad* 11.1.14). This mood was amply confirmed by the outcome of the 2014 European elections, which saw an increase of the number of moderate to radical eurosceptical votes from 20 to 30%.

Hence there exist considerable minorities, and in some countries even majorities, which adopt a suspicious and dismissive attitude to further European integration. And indeed, there is a lot to be sceptical about. The euro market and the Brussels bureaucracy are in urgent need of further regulation and democratization. The neoliberal politics of austerity has progressively undermined economic and social protection for many European citizens. European summits and negotiations between the EU and its member states are usually not a pretty sight, and tend to produce weak agreements which are ignored by the strong with little impunity. So far, European leaders have not been capable of finding durable solutions to the epochal challenges of migration, collective safety, economic recovery, democratic accountability, energy security and climate change.

But Europe is much more than a bundle of deficits. Throughout the centuries, it has also performed as a cultural ideal, an idea of civilization, nurturing the dream of a good life of liberty, security, well-being, tolerance and happiness.

Throughout its history, Europe has also represented much more than the sum of its individual nations, which are woven together by innumerable historical, cultural and political threads, in a common fate, in good times and bad, in war and peace. Against all odds, Europe still holds out the promise of an open, welcoming, hospitable society which protects individual and social rights, supports a plurality of lifestyles and accommodates those who flee to it from violence, oppression and destitution. It is this normative horizon which glimmers behind our quotidian, often semi-conscious love for Europe as a warehouse of culture.

Eurosceptics and nationalists, however, insist that Europe lacks a common culture, that it has no 'soul', that it cannot inspire identification and hence, different from the nation-states, does not offer its citizens a true home. Many pragmatic supporters of Europe in turn believe that common people do not much care about utopian vistas, but are primarily interested in how Europe can be of material benefit to them. But these are at best half-truths which can either be bent in an optimistic or in a pessimistic direction. Germany's '*Wir schaffen das*' and its 'culture of welcome' proved that Europe still has a heart, even though its 'summer idyll' of 2015 rapidly faded after the almost daily attacks on asylum centres and the collective harassment of women in Cologne on New Year's Eve of 2016. The same can be said about the pan-European expressions of compassion and solidarity which followed the savage Islamist attacks in Paris (still Europe's 'number one city brand'). What the jihadi killers despised as the 'capital of prostitution and obscenity', many Europeans lovingly embrace as the capital of broad-minded, easygoing and lighthearted manners which they view as part and parcel of the European good life.

## **A Politics of the Heart**

The tragedy of today's debate about Europe is that champions of closer integration tend to use rational, economic and

pragmatic arguments, out of weariness of grand narratives and perhaps also the impotence to tell them, while eurosceptics and nationalists first of all tell emotional stories. They do offer a grand narrative, even though it is about finding freedom, identity and pride in the nation, making strangers go away and scaling down the EU or even abolishing it altogether.

In this respect, the populists may teach us an important lesson. Austrian liberal Matthias Strolz learned it from compatriots such as Haider and Strache: 'Politics must be conducted from the heart. Voters first of all follow emotions, then personalities and only after that rational arguments' (*NRC Handelsblad* 6.1.14). Facing the Brexit referendum, Caroline Lucas, the former leader of the British Greens, likewise pleads that we need to make the emotional case for Europe. Economic arguments alone will not do the job. They must be complemented with 'a more positive emotional value-based proposition that speaks to people's sense of identity, about who we think we are'. In order to counter the eurosceptical narrative, we should not so much rely on facts and figures but instead tell inspiring stories: 'People want to feel inspired by the EU as something positive, exciting, dynamic, open-minded and gregarious' (*The Guardian*, 27.1.16).

Populism is the emancipation of the underbelly. But it would be a mistake to dismiss the advent of a more emotional and personal style in politics as evidence of primitivism. The conventional view erroneously departs from a sharp distinction between 'blind' emotions and the rational conduct of 'high' culture and politics. It tends to view emotions as being grounded in uncontrolled, irrational reflexes, which may issue in verbal and physical violence if they are not curbed by the virtues of reasonableness and moderation. The very term 'underbelly' indicates that such emotions are easily branded as suspect.

But a more neutral term such as 'gut feeling' already suggests that emotions and intuitions function in a more in-

tricate and ambiguous manner, and that there is more traffic between reason and the passions than political rationalists find comfortable. 'Dispassionate' reason and free, rational choice, in the classical Enlightenment sense, simply do not exist. In addition, emotions are not nearly as blind as is often thought. Like images (and image-like charismatic personalities) they may function as swift and effective information carriers, and as such may offer a key to good citizenship.

In his influential book *The Political Brain* (2007), Drew Westen confirms that the brain is not a neutral calculating machine which objectively weighs facts, figures, costs and policy options. Thinking is something you do with your guts. Ideas, arguments and political leaders must touch people emotionally. Persuasion requires a subtle integration of thought and emotion, which is precisely the purpose of compelling political stories. In Westen's view, democracy is not so much a marketplace of ideas as of emotions. Political issues are always linked to interests and values, and successful political campaigns activate the sentiments residing in both. We therefore need a better appreciation of the emotional political intelligence of citizens.

Ceding the terrain of emotion-shaping to antiliberal forces, philosopher Martha Nussbaum concurs, is to give them a huge advantage in the hearts of the people. The traditional liberal fear of emotion is mistaken, and we should instead try to cultivate something like an emotional liberalism: 'All political principles need emotional support to ensure their stability over time, and all decent societies need to guard against divisions and hierarchy by cultivating appropriate sentiments of sympathy and love' (Nussbaum 2013: 2-3). These public emotions should support and sustain liberal principles and just institutions, and help people to think bigger thoughts and to commit themselves to a larger common good. They may goad people out of their selfishness and narrowness towards a common effort, play down fear and envy and limit the urge to shame and stigmatize others.

However, we need to reckon with a significant asymmetry: emotions have much more power to affect reason than reason does to affect emotions – particularly the emotion of fear (Gore 2007: 23-24). Fear is the most powerful enemy of reason, and is easily manipulated and exploited by populist ‘merchants of fear’ (Mak 2005). Populist leaders tend to support people’s prejudices and weaknesses and to magnify public anxieties for their own political gain. True moral leadership, on the other hand, consists in helping people to manage their fears, to pluck up courage and have faith. Powerful storytellers may turn around people’s anxieties and cultivate hope and optimism.

Raw emotions also usually inspire an all-or-nothing attitude. The true quality and calling of leadership is to moderate them and articulate them into values and ideals which may lift up people to their ‘better (European) selves’. Let us therefore bet on a politics of the heart: while the underbelly is raised to ‘heart level’, reason must in turn be ‘lowered’ towards it. In this way, the education of political sentiments will breed an intelligent politics of passion.

## **Ringling for the Soul of Europe**

How can we stir up political passion for Europe rather than against it? For this, a new ‘idea of Europe’ is required: a vivid narrative which appeals to the imagination and adds new inspiration to the European project. ‘Europe must acquire a soul’, founding father Robert Schuman already said. His motto was adopted by the platform A Soul for Europe, which started in 2004 in Berlin, with the purpose of activating European citizenship through the strategic vehicle of culture. Speaking at its first conference, then Commission President José Manuel Barroso argued that ‘The EU has reached a stage of its history where its cultural dimension can no longer be ignored. Europe is not only about markets, it is also about values and culture. If the economy is a necessity for our lives,

culture is really what makes our life worth living.' Culture, indeed, may trigger the imagination and touch people's hearts. It often divides people, but it also has a unique power to unite them, to lift them out of their smallness and make them 'think bigger thoughts'.

Yet eurosceptics insist that there is no such thing as a European culture or a European people, that Europe does not offer an inspirational community and that, as a result, a democratic Union is impossible as matter of principle. A typical example is furnished by Pim Fortuyn's book *Zielloos Europa* ('Soulless Europe') (1998), in which he argued that Europe solely existed on the abstract level of scholars, entrepreneurs and politicians, and was virtually absent as a lived reality among ordinary people. The nation state, on the other hand, had proven itself to be an institution fit for human size: 'A limited territory where people feel safe, which they are able to survey and which unites them through a common language, culture and mentality, where they feel to be one people. The nation-state not only offers a family residence but also a genuine home' (Fortuyn 1998: 23-4).

In this regard, a great battle is currently being waged about what constitutes the soul of Europe. As is suggested by the abbreviation Pegida ('Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident'), one side of this conflict is made up of those who wed a strong sense of Europe's Christian identity and heritage to an equally strong rejection of Islam. They defend national sovereignty and national pride against further European integration, and value cultural and ethnic homogeneity over and above cultural diversity and ethnic mixture (cf. Victor Orbán's phrase: 'We would like Europe to remain the continent of Europeans').

On the other side stand those who emphasize Europe's secular, pluralist and individualistic values, and who anticipate a more united political future in which Europe has made a concerted effort to surmount its multiple existential problems. In the latter view, Europe exists in order to protect



the rights of individuals rather than the sovereignty of nations, and will continue to offer hospitality, even if migrants bring along cultures and values which sit uneasily with the core principles on which the Union was founded. It imagines a better, more generous and more protective Europe, which offers a bigger feeling of home and a bigger pride than can be furnished by the nations.

The word 'soul' perhaps has a somewhat essentialist ring, allegedly pointing to a deep-seated kernel or primal source of culture which always remains identical to itself and mysteriously issues imperative demands. But viewed as a loosely knit, pointillistic tableau, as in Steinz' collection, and as a contested work-in-progress, as in the Berlin programme, the word aptly describes the novel spirit with which we may infuse Europe. If the soul of Europe is not seen as an objective essence but as a normative promise, we do not require any prior cultural, linguistic or emotional unity in order to engage in the never-ending act of making Europe.

The true meaning of the claim that Europe 'lacks a soul' is therefore performative and political: it is to suggest that Europe as a common entity cannot, should not and will never materialize. The claims of the nationalists are invariably self-fulfilling prophecies, which are politically effective precisely because they manage to disguise subjective preferences as objective facts. Yet such 'Eurorealism' is little more than disguised pessimism. Anyone who claims that the facts (or the people, or nature, or markets) speak for themselves, deceives both himself and others.

In fairness, our own positive imagination for Europe must likewise pay tribute to this self-fulfilling logic. 'We are Europeans' is of course more than stating a matter of fact; it is also a prophecy which purports to create what it states. Wishful thinking can be a powerful tool of persuasion, in both directions. 'The facts are rightwing', former European Commissioner Frits Bolkestein used to say. But they are not, at least not necessarily, and it is our duty to bend them a little to the left.

## Europatriotism

How can we construct a distinctive Europeanness? How can we re-imagine Europe as 'Our Country?' Nussbaum thinks that generous and uplifting civic sentiments may well be directed at the nation (the American one in her case); she accordingly defends a humane, aspirational and 'critical' patriotism against traditionally aggressive, exclusive and warlike versions. For better or worse, the nation is able to grab people's hearts and imaginations, since it can be construed as 'us' and 'ours'. Both American politics and crisis-ridden Europe currently encounter exclusivist and aggressive varieties of nationalism which prefer to distinguish between us and them in the narrowest provincial terms. How can this provincialism be overcome? How do we cultivate a spirit of civic love for Europe?

If Europe is indeed make-believe, it is ours for the making. Contrary to what nationalists claim, political integration has in many cases preceded and stimulated cultural integration. Nation-building and political institutionalization have often acted as preconditions for the formation of European peoples, their cultures and even their languages. Following the Italian unification of 1861 Massimo d'Azeglio, author and former prime minister of Piedmont, far-sightedly declared: 'We have made Italy, now we must make Italians'. Polish historian and politician Bronisław Geremek coined the variant which Delors or Schuman would also have embraced: 'We have made Europe, now we must make Europeans'.

At the start of the nineteenth century, less than ten per cent of French citizens spoke proper French. The number rose to a mere 20% in 1880, after a prolonged civilization offensive which has been justly described as a form of 'domestic colonization' (Weber 1976). Speaking the official language was declared a patriotic duty and was systematically promoted through the national school system and the na-

tional media. Far from being an empirical fact, the constitutional principle that France constituted 'a single and indivisible republic' was more like a dream, the realization of which still demanded huge cultural and political efforts.

The same was true of the much smaller and more uniform Netherlands, which only decisively emerged as a nation in the wake of the French-Batavian revolution of 1795. Two centuries ago, most European states were hardly less artificial than today's European Union, representing little more than drawing-board sketches drafted by a political elite. There is therefore no a priori reason why the EU cannot travel the same road through peaceful negotiation and co-operation which nineteenth-century Germany and Italy were forced to take by means of war and conquest.

The term patriotism is currently monopolized by nationalists such as Le Pen, Wilders and the Pegida marchers, who defend a chimerical sovereignty for their peoples and nations against an encroaching and threatening external world. In this book I envisage a different, enlarged form of patriotism, which is closer to the critical and generous spirit of Nussbaum. It requires that the harsh, exclusive emotion which nationalists claim for their respective homelands is stripped of its all-or-nothing character and applied to the higher and lighter level of Europe. Both for our individual nations and for Europe we need a more sober, non-inclusive and (self-) critical form of patriotism which, while appealing to public emotions and the public spirit, does not fall prey to the intoxications of nationalism and xenophobia. Europe does not demand a crushing family loyalty which excludes and mistrusts everything which is not 'our own'. It favours lighter, more promiscuous, friendlier attachments: those of a *family*, 'travelling light'. Such a lighter patriotism (or a 'weakness' for your nation) can be agreeably combined with a similar soft spot for Europe.

Dutchmen may well rejoice in the lukewarm national sentiments which characterize their easy-going 'bicycle

monarchy', as they manifested themselves once again at the inauguration of king Willem Alexander in 2013. Many Germans nowadays also embrace a modest version of national pride, being encouraged by the victories of Bayern München and the national *Mannschaft*. The team which won the world championship in 2014 was widely seen as an ideal representation of modern Germany: powerful without being arrogant, colourful, imaginative and confident, symbolizing a nation which no longer lived in a hysterical cramp. During the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics, Britain's identity and past were likewise presented with a mixture of pride and self-mockery, without exaggerated nationalistic displays.

Nevertheless, a European patriotism which ventures to say 'We are Europeans' and 'This is Our Homeland' will inevitably need to draw a line between 'us' and 'them' and 'ours' and 'theirs'. The naive dream of a 'borderless' Europe has been brutally shattered. The financial crisis already clarified that the open European market needs moral, political and physical boundaries which must effectively shield it from global market threats. The Ukrainian conflict, the mounting terrorist threat and the influx of more than a million refugees have reaffirmed the need to balance the erasure of Europe's internal borders with a stronger political demarcation and physical protection of its outer limits.

Imagining a new collective identity for Europe hence implies some idea of its distinctiveness and of its demarcation from outsiders or 'others'. Public security for Europe requires an effective collective management of its shared borders. The open society needs some kind of closure, some notion about where it begins and ends, even though its boundaries may be drawn in a less definite manner and necessarily remain more permeable than the walls of an embattled fort.

The political challenge of national populism teaches us that a new narrative about Europe must be emotionally liter-

ate, but also that it must adopt a lighter touch and tone, allowing for self-relativization and for cultivating multiple loyalties to multiple homes. Citizenship is layered, not singular and exclusive. Love of region and 'city chauvinism' often trump love of the nation, particularly for migrants. This kind of diversity agrees with current sociological analyses which suggest that (metropolitan) cities constitute a new element of dynamism in Europe (cf. Barber 2013). Cities are often guardians of a new superdiversity, drivers of creativity and sources of identification and pride. Their new transnational role fits the image of a multi-tiered cultural geography of Europe, which flexibly combines communal, regional, national and supranational attachments and identities.

Strictly speaking, pessimists who claim that 'the cosmopolitan citizen' does not exist (cf. Cuperus 2009) are right. But so are those who retort that 'the (national) people' does not exist either (cf. Lefort 1989; Rosanvallon 2008; Pels 2011). European patriotism is an effort to clear a middle way between earthly but narrow nationalism and exalted but abstract cosmopolitanism. Love for a generalized 'humanity' is bound to be weaker than love for a concrete place, which includes familiar landscapes, persons of renown, shared historical experiences and a common idiom.

The space of Europe is sufficiently bounded to provide citizens with a sense of identity and home, but it is also large enough to transcend petty nationalisms. The four great crises of 2014-15 have overwhelmingly demonstrated that they cannot be mastered by the European nation-states on their own, but also that Europe will only be able to survive if it becomes more like a country: a finite political and cultural space which exists within a common boundary which must be more closely monitored and protected.

## **The Seduction of Europe**

The battle for Europe's soul also ranges two conceptions of power against each other: the masculine power of the strong hand and the feminine power of seduction, or the 'power of

weakness'. Athenian leader Pericles already knew that the greatest strength of a democratic society resided in its relative openness and gentleness of manners. His panegyric to Athens as a freedom-loving, tolerant and relaxed society underscored its superiority over the militarism of Sparta: 'While others emphasize masculine bravery in the education of their youth... we, with our more relaxed way of life, are just as ready to face the same dangers as they are' (Thucydides 2005: 24).

In this regard, Europe once again harbours an embattled soul. On the one hand, gentle, relaxed and peace-loving Europe can be said to nurture a 'feminine' culture which abhors authoritarianism and the hard power of traditional macho politics. In all countries, the most pro-European parties (e.g. the progressive liberals and the Greens) are also the most gender-diverse. It is no accident that the most powerful European leader is a woman, and that in the current crisis Hungarian leader Victor Orbán has emerged as her archetypal macho opponent.

To the horror of many hardliners, in some European countries even institutional holders of the 'manly' monopoly of violence, such as the police and the army, have become to some extent feminized. France between 2002 and 2007, Spain between 2008 and 2011, and Italy, Germany and the Netherlands currently have female Ministers of Defence. Italy appears to have finally broken with gerontocratic rule due to the relatively youthful Renzi government, half of which consists of women – while for Berlusconi females were little more than sex toys and colourful pieces of wallpaper.

On the other hand, Europe's soul is being chased by both internal and external enemies who despise this softness and weakness. The populist parties and movements all cherish tough masculine values, and generally side with Victor Orbán against Merkel (and with Donald Trump against Hillary Clinton on the far side of the Atlantic). Their tolerance for institutional checks and balances, for political oppo-

nents and for minorities is thin, and neither do they show a great appetite for engaging in discussion and (self-)critique ('the people are always right'). As Geert Wilders recently declared: 'The truth is on one side only. It is on our side, so get used to it'.

Marine le Pen, the (female, but tough) leader of the Front National has called for the 'rearmament' of a 'weak' France in order to 'annihilate Islamic fundamentalism'. An MEP for the (formerly True) Finns admits: 'We are a very masculine party. We favour hunting and gun possession, and are against abortion – positions which do not appeal to women.' His own wife, though, votes for the Greens, like many other Finnish women.

The 'feminine' culture of welcome which was initially adopted by Germany and other Northwestern countries has meanwhile elicited a dark side of sometimes violent protest, also opening a deep value rift with countries in the East which reject Germany's 'moral imperialism' and anxiously guard their ethnic and cultural homogeneity. In Germany, attacks on asylum centres have increased sharply to more than a thousand during 2015, the majority of which were perpetrated by extreme right activists. But the attacks on women in Cologne on New Years' Eve and those on Christians and homosexuals in Dutch asylum centres also show that intolerance, machismo and misogynistic violence are imported along with traditionalist migrant cultures, and that *Mutti* Merkel may have been too naive in her euphoric policy of open borders and her initial gesture of extending hospitality to all comers.

Hence the distinction between hard masculine power and the weaker power of seduction is not a frivolous one, but represents a moral and political clash of principles. In Eastern Europe, machopolitical styles and values have taken hold of many governments, most prominently those of the Visegrad Four (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic). The recent clashes between 'rugged' Russia and

the 'weak' West offer additional examples of this deep value conflict. The knee-jerk reaction of alpha male Vladimir Putin to the playful protests by Pussy Riot was followed by widespread commotion about the Russian law against 'gay propaganda'. In this regard, the victory of drag queen Conchita Wurst at the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest was dripping with political symbolism.

At the eruption of the Ukrainian crisis, Europe long hesitated to give a firm political answer to Putin. Before the crisis broke, a Dutch expert on Russia wrote: 'With a superior smirk, Putin expresses his satisfaction that, a quarter of a century after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Russia is once again approached with trepidation and awe. As is proper in the self-image of a nation that feels safer when it is feared than when it is loved by the rest of the world' (*NRC Handelsblad* 8.2.14).

The conflict in Ukraine (literally: Borderland) is much more than a border conflict with geopolitical scope. It is also a clash of worldviews and cultures in which the concept of an ethnically pure, masculine and hierarchically organized Eurasia is pitched against a decadent and effeminate 'Gayropa' (*Die Zeit* 17.4.14). Armed and masked men in combat fatigues who smashed ballot boxes, burned ballot papers and uttered death threats against members of electoral commissions: these images from the Donbass in 2014 already sufficed to identify the enemies of European democracy. Soon after, the shooting down of flight MH17 and the death of 298 civilians brought this European border war very close to home.

The ruthless barbarism of Islamic State has meanwhile inspired homegrown jihadi's to kill journalists, cartoonists and Jews in the capitals of Europe itself. After beheading 21 Coptic Christians on a beach near Tripoli, IS fanatics pointed their knives northwards to Rome, threatening to conquer the hated 'capital of the Crusaders'. The terrorists in Paris likewise intended to strike at Europe's heart: at its lifestyle of openness, sexual equality and playful tolerance. Here as



well, women-hating and homophobic machos resorted to an orgy of violence in order to impose their version of God-given purity and order. As they did in Brussels, that 'ironic, non-conformist' city, which 'carried its cultural diversity as a proud banner, and now pays a terrible price for it', as Belgian writer Stefan Hertmans wrote shortly after the bombings in March 2016 (*NRC Handelsblad* 26.3.16).

## Hard and Soft Power

Taken together, therefore, the years 2014-2015 represent a historic turning point for Europe. Something has fundamentally changed, as economic problems have been largely pushed aside by geopolitical, strategic and moral issues. Due to the threats and dangers presented by Russia, the Assad regime and IS, many Europeans have suddenly realized that they do not only have common problems, but also common enemies.

Indeed, it is not the national cultures which are presently at risk and at stake, but the broader European one. The peace dividend which was generated by the fall of the Berlin Wall has been exhausted. No longer does Europe bathe in the warm glow of a victorious democracy which is only surrounded by friends and weak opponents. Europe has come face to face with its 'others'. It has begun to see that its pluralist, diverse and tolerant culture must be defended more rigorously and convincingly against violent dogmatists, iconoclasts and revanchist conquerors. It has discovered that it does indeed have an identity and a soul, which it must cherish and defend.

This existential moment once again raises - more keenly now - the old dilemma of European softness, gentleness and moderation. If Europe wishes to maintain itself against these enemies, it will need an injection of hard power and hence a more unified and cohesive political and military effort (Holslag 2014). We have insufficiently realized that

our soft power and tranquillity of mind are crucially dependent on the hard security wall which has been maintained by NATO and the Pax Americana since 1945. But Europe cannot protect its citizens against these violent threats if it does not become more like a state. It is a tragic mistake to cling to national sovereignty in matters of intelligence and public safety when we are confronted by border-crossing terrorist networks who target Europe rather than individual nations such as France or Belgium.

Yet this does not imply that we must surrender the ideal of the 'good fairy' Europe, who scorns male chauvinism and its eternal distrustfulness, its obsession with prestige and its penchant for violence. The mythical story which relates how Europa, the daughter of the Phoenician king Agenor, was abducted by Zeus disguised as a handsome white bull, had better be turned on its head. Upside down, the story anticipates the taming of the bulls (or bullies?) of this world by a strong woman called Europe, the attractive heiress of European freedom, democracy and prosperity. Prime Minister Birgitte Nyborg in the Danish TV series *Borgen* might offer an attractive role model here.

Pride in Europe is also pride in the power of Europe. But this power must flow from a spirit of moderation and self-restraint rather than from aggressiveness and a conquering drive. Since Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly*, Europeans have practised the art of self-mockery. Since Montaigne wrote his critical essays, they have fine-tuned the art of self-observation. From Cervantes to Konrád and Kundera, the European novel has pondered the vicissitudes of individualism and self-irony. Since at least Voltaire and Marx, Europe has become adept in social and political self-critique. From this perspective, Europe's heart and soul are constituted by values such as individualism, pluralism, tolerance and self-critique, which together define a unique cultural 'feel' and civilizational style. These values cannot be taken for granted; they represent achievements which should be more deeply

appreciated and defended in a more principled fashion. This essay is about how this old European dream may once again conquer the imagination of Europeans.

## 2: The Conquest of Fear

### Never Again War

Bismarck and Garibaldi could only accomplish the unification of Germany and Italy by waging war. The great questions of the time 'are not decided by speeches and majority decisions but by iron and blood', the Iron Chancellor declared. Napoleon and Hitler achieved their imperial dream only for a brief historical moment, sacrificing millions of lives in squalid, horrific, endless battles. Until 1945, violence and the law of the strongest were the leading organization principles of European society.

Since then, for the first time in human history, we have succeeded in uniting sovereign states by peaceful means and voluntarily, through negotiation and compromise. Timothy Garton Ash has called Europe the 'most successful example of regime change in our time', a 'voluntary empire' which everyone wants to be a part of (*NRC Handelsblad* 4.1.07). After seventy years without large-scale armed conflict, Europe stands as a shining beacon in a violence-ridden world.

War is the continuation of politics by other means, according to Clausewitz' famous dictum. At the cost of immense suffering, damage and shame, Europeans have learned to renounce these extreme means and confine themselves to down-to-earth, boring, civil politics. Our continent has finally broken with the primitive tradition of blood feud and honour killing, which transforms religious or national thinking into raging madness (Konrád 2013: 30). It is no accident that the first sharing of national sovereignty between the former arch-enemies France and Germany in 1951 focused on the regulation of coal and steel production: strategic raw materials of the economy but also of the arms industry and warfare.

'Never again war' was Europe's primal scream: a cry from the heart which carried an emotional resonance which was self-evidently and instantly shared by all. But this sentiment has been muted by habituation to the long peace after 1945. The generation which lived through the previous world war is gradually dying out. In 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on account of its more than sixty-year-long commitment to peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights. But at the time, not a few already wondered whether the peace ideal was still relevant for a Union which was rapidly sinking away in a deep financial crisis.

Until quite recently, it was widely presumed that 'never again war' had exhausted itself as a moral mission for Europe. Many mainstream politicians, both on the left and right, took leave of high-strung ideals for an 'ever closer' political union, considering that Europe had better confine itself to down-to-earth concerns such as maintaining the single market, facilitating trade and regulating competition. Europe, for them, no longer offered a lofty civilizational goal, but at best a pragmatic vehicle for generating prosperity and growth.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, for example, repeatedly distanced himself from the grand narrative of sustainable European peace, since in his view the Union needed a more modest message and a more realistic mission. If it was capable of procuring growth and jobs, it would become relevant for its citizens, especially for the young, for whom 'never again war' was a call from a distant past (*de Volkskrant* 26.6.13). Upon assuming the Dutch EU chairmanship in January 2016, Rutte repeated that he did not intend to use it for developing far-reaching visions for Europe: 'We embrace pragmatism. At the present moment, Europe is not in need of a grand imagination'.

Meanwhile, it is only partially true that Europe has experienced seventy years of unbroken peace. The political violence of the rightwing dictatorships in Spain, Portugal

and Greece only ended in the mid-1970s. The civil war between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland dragged on for three decades (1969–1997). During the 1970 and 1980s, leftwing and rightwing terrorists (the RAF, the Red Brigades, ETA and the IRA) hit core countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain and Great Britain. The threat of the Cold War only subsided in 1989 after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the two Germanies. The most dramatic example of large-scale violence on European soil was triggered by the disintegration of Yugoslavia, which led to a decade of hot war and ethnic cleansing which only ended in 2001.

In 2014, collective war memories in Europe once again flared up in the wake of the many commemorations of the start of the First World War, rekindling fears that we could unintentionally stumble into a third one, as happened during the summer of 1914. Beginning with the conflict in Ukraine, fears such as these have become more imminent and acute. Since then, the threat of war has effectively returned to Europe on a much larger and dangerous scale, mercilessly exposing the Union's political weakness and intensifying the issue of collective European security. NATO has strengthened its positions in the Baltic states, in Poland and in other nations on Europe's Eastern fringe. The frozen semi-war in Ukraine has meanwhile been overshadowed by the civil war in Syria and the Russian intervention on behalf of the Assad regime, which has exacerbated tensions with NATO member Turkey (which is itself caught in civil war) and among Middle Eastern powers such as Iran, Saudi-Arabia and Israel.

While the Ukrainian conflict already hit the heart of Europe, and particularly the Netherlands, as a result of the missile attack on flight MH17, the Syrian war has likewise escalated into a European war as a result of the attacks by IS sympathizers in Paris and Brussels, the threatening presence of IS on the Libyan shoreline, the massive flight of Syrian and

other citizens to Europe, and the military response of EU countries such as France, the UK and the Netherlands. The Mediterranean, Europe's Southern sea border, has turned into a veritable graveyard for refugees and other migrants. In France, a state of emergency was declared for the first time since the Algerian War, and was subsequently extended to an indefinite period. 'We are at war with IS', European leaders such as Hollande and Rutte declared after Paris, stepping up their efforts to bomb the enemy in its Iraqi and Syrian strongholds.

Instead of being a nostalgic admonition, therefore, the cry of 'never again war' has once again become unexpectedly and acutely relevant for Europe. The *Pax Europæana* has turned out to be more fragile than was widely assumed. But there is another, more forward-looking reason why the dream of peace of the European founding fathers is far from being exhausted today. Apart from representing Europe's birthmark and original mission, it may still offer an inspiring vision of our European identity and an attractive glance into a utopian future.

Europe, of course, is much more than a (currently faltering) welfare and growth machine. It constitutes a lasting ideal, perhaps the most momentous civilizational ideal of our time. Civilization means that violence, cruelty, harassment and humiliation are as much as possible banned from society. It requires that the power of the strong cedes before the right of the weak, and that fear gives way to trust. European civilization is the never-ending quest for a more gentle, more relaxed, less dangerous society.

To American political theorist Judith Shklar, the deepest foundation of a liberal society is found in the conviction that cruelty is an absolute evil. That is why a 'political liberalism of fear' continues to have relevance amidst the terrors of our time. It does not offer a *summum bonum* towards which all political agents should strive, but begins with a *summum malum* which all of us know and would avoid if only we

could: 'That evil is cruelty and the fear it inspires, and the very fear of fear itself.' If the prohibition of cruelty can be universalized and recognized as a necessary condition of the dignity of persons, it can become a principle of political morality (Shklar 1989).

Inspired by Shklar, Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit likewise requires a 'decent' society to mitigate both physical and moral cruelty as far as possible. Moral cruelty is committed when individuals are treated as if they were not fully human. A decent society is one in which institutions and laws are organized in such a manner as not to humiliate those who depend on them. If, in addition, citizens do not humiliate each other, one may speak of a truly civilized society (Margalit 1998).

Following this philosophical lead, the European project may be re-imagined as the idea of a society which is liberated as much as possible from physical, but also from political, economic, cultural, sexual and psychological fears. Evidently, this ideal is far from being realized within Europe itself, let alone in the harsher, more violent world beyond its borders. If the aspiration of 'never again war' can be broadened in this way, beyond the eradication of direct physical violence among nation-states, in order to include the gradual decline of institutional, moral and mental cruelty, a direct continuity is forged between the mission of Monnet and Schuman and current visions of Europe as a social safety zone in which all citizens feel at home and have access to the means of living a good life.

Instead of cultivating political nostalgia, the 'never again war' cry may therefore spark an offensive political imagination, which intensifies the ideal of European civilization and proudly upholds it to the rest of the world. The fortunate fact that several European generations have been spared first-hand experience of war turns them – ourselves – into a privileged exception, not only relative to all generations before 1945, but also to the everyday experience of violence and war in much of the non-Western world. Undoubt-



edly, this promise and practice of freedom-in-security is what lends the European Union its huge power of seduction: a pulling power which is not only economic and political but also cultural and moral in nature.

## The Conquest of Social Fear

Such a deepening of the European peace mission may also draw inspiration from the thought of the Belgian socialist politician Hendrik de Man (1885-1953). The author of *The Psychology of Socialism* (1926) could not think of a better formula for his brand of 'cultural' socialism than 'the conquest of social fear'. In his estimate, fears of the state had to a large extent subsided following the institution of liberal democracy; economic fears were likewise expected to recede if we would be able to put social restraints on capitalism.

As a corollary, cultural and psychological fears would also tend to diminish: fears of the unknown and the aberrant, of dissenters, free-thinkers and deviants. People would liberate themselves from the yoke of traditional 'religions of fear' and their equally dogmatic counterparts, the secular political ideologies (such as Marxism). At the end of this process, a humanity would emerge which would be 'freed from anxiety and hence from all forms of power as violence' (De Man 1932: 23-6).

Trying to ensure that people are no longer afraid of each other and of themselves remains a noble and far-reaching political mission. Liberating people from fear is one of the most important conditions for making them independent, self-confident and free. Europe already has some purchase on this illustrious ideal. The top ten of countries whose citizens enjoy the largest amount of confidence in each other and their institutions, is largely made up of European countries, with the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands featuring in the top five. It is no coincidence that they also enjoy the largest amount of social equality, and offer individ-

uals the best opportunities to rise up in the world and develop themselves, regardless of social origin.

Curbing violence in all its forms represents an immense task. The banking and sovereign debt crisis has demonstrated that Europe remains far too vulnerable to the structural violence of the capitalist economy, particularly to the supremacy of what De Man called the 'Wall of Money'. The right of the economically strongest has thrown many citizens, especially in the Southern states, into poverty and anxiety about the future. The economic gap between North and South has considerably widened, due in part to the refusal of the dominant powers in Europe itself (Germany, the Troika, the Euro Group) to ease the politics of austerity. European civilization also implies European risk-sharing, solidarity and generosity. For the euro zone, this inevitably means that the currency union will also function as a redistributive mechanism which evens out economic risks and opportunities between the richer states in the Northwest and the poorer ones in the Southeast.

The soft tyranny of the market must be curbed by political means, but politics may in turn also slide into tyranny. Economic fears are still rampant in Europe, but so are fears of the state. Some European democracies even exhibit proto-totalitarian tendencies, which no longer feed on naked repression but on the soft violence of the democratic majority. Italy during the Berlusconi cabinets, Hungary under Orbán, Slovakia under Fico, Poland between 2005 and 2007 and again since late 2015, offer examples of an illiberal 'governmental populism' which undermines the separation of powers, threatens the freedom of the press and the judiciary, and treats minorities and refugees with contempt.

In many Western European countries, populist parties in opposition likewise humiliate and criminalize minorities and asylum seekers, whip up the fear of strangers and rough up political morals with their swaggering self-certainty. Civilization also means that verbal and symbolic violence (the

fanning of hatred) is banned as much as possible from society, without endangering the freedom of speech itself (which should never be identified with the licence to insult others).

## The Politics of Fear

As George Soros has warned, open societies are always at risk from the politics of fear. Terrorist groups such as IS and al-Qaeda (but also nationalist terrorists such as Breivik and other neonazis – DP) have discovered the Achilles heel of our Western societies: the fear of death. When we are afraid for our lives, emotions take hold of our thoughts and actions and endanger rational judgment. A generation which has inherited an open society from its parents will not understand what is required to maintain it until it has been tested, and learns to keep fear from corrupting reason (*The Guardian* 27.12.15). ‘Innocent’ Europe indeed seems paralysed and vulnerable at the return of military and terrorist violence to its territory.

Terrorism is fear-mongering in order to secure political goals. The jihadi killers calculate to instil panic, despair and insecurity, in order to destabilize society and fuel a generalized Islamophobia. They are unintentionally aided in their design by the populist merchants of fear, who in turn magnify the terrorist threat far beyond its actual danger in order to spread the belief that all Muslims are potential terrorists (cf. also Wodak 2015). In this regard, populists and terrorists are bound in a kind of ‘antagonistic complicity’. Of course, a vast moral difference obtains between the physical violence which is perpetrated by ruthless killers and scare-mongering through verbal violence by politicians and journalists. Yet, despite all the difference in the means, there is a certain similarity in the ends pursued by both.

The European idea of civilization stands in principled opposition to the politics of anxiety and panic. After the massacre perpetrated by Anders Breivik, Norwegian prime min-

ister Jens Stoltenberg, the current NATO secretary, impressively reaffirmed the European value canon by promising that his country would not let itself be hijacked by fears of terror and fears of the Other, but would answer Breivik's provocation with more democracy, humanity, tolerance and openness. A few years earlier, in 2004 and 2005, both the Spaniards and the British did not react vindictively, but in a dignified and restrained manner to the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London – while after 9/11 the US rushed headlong into dead-end wars of revenge in Afghanistan and Iraq. The response of the French and (most) Belgians after the attacks on their capital cities displayed the same dignity, eliciting affirmations of solidarity and of the values of tolerance and openness all across Europe.

## Cultural Violence

In the historical long run, American psychologist Steven Pinker has argued, the 'better angels of our nature' such as empathy, morality and reason, have increasingly domesticated our inner demons of predator behaviour, revenge, sadism and totalitarian urges. Levels of violence across the globe have steadily declined, most of all in Europe. European liberal democracies are the least warlike societies on this planet. In his estimate, feminization has played a significant part in this process, since violence is known to be primarily a pastime of (young) men (Pinker 2011: xxvi, 684-89).

Nonetheless, Europe falls far short of fulfilling the ideal of a decent society shorn of cruelty and humiliation, even in its most innocent and peace-loving corners. The fight against violence is a never-ending fight. For example, racist violence can hardly be called incidental in present-day Europe. Violent antisemitism, both on the part of Muslims and neonazi's, has become as regular as have the attacks on Muslims, refugees, Roma and other ethnic and national minorities.

Following the brutal killings at the headquarters of Charlie Hebdo and in the Jewish supermarket in Paris,

French prime minister Manuel Valls declared that 'France would not be France without its Jews'. Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans appropriately broadened the scope of Valls's remark: 'Without the Jews, Europe will no longer be Europe'. Indeed, representing its historic 'minority of minorities' and having massively perished in the Holocaust, the identity of Europe is forever tied to the tragic fate of the Jewish community.

Sexual violence and intimidation are likewise still endemic in Europe. Recently in Spain, a wave of protest arose against the culture of machismo and domestic violence, which was reported to have claimed 48 fatal victims in 2015. Violence in the home, trafficking in women, violence against prostitutes and child abuse are still common all over Europe. In the Netherlands, domestic violence is an important reason why young Moroccan-Dutch are overrepresented in statistics about violent crime. A Belgian documentary from 2012 demonstrated that sexual harassment and verbal abuse by (mainly) immigrant males are an everyday experience for young white women in the streets of Brussels.

Gays have also come under pressure, and even in countries which cherish the cultural liberalism and lifestyle tolerance of the 1960s such as the Netherlands, reports of threats and assaults have multiplied. In Germany, the populist-nationalist party Die Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has organized rallies against '*Genderwahn*', being angered by the 'ubiquitous' presence of gays in the streets of Berlin. In France in 2013, an unexpectedly strong protest movement emerged against the proposed legalization of same-sex marriage, which was nevertheless ratified by parliament. But the disfigured face of a Dutch Parisian who was bloodily beaten by homophobes remains a vivid memory.

Meanwhile, Europe can also cite positive results in the fight against sexual discrimination. Since the European Parliament dismissed the Italian commissioner-designate Buttiglione for his ultraconservative views on marriage,

family and (homo)sexuality in 2004, the EU has mounted a modest civilization offensive furthering the emancipation of women and gays, forcing new and aspiring member states to prove their human rights credentials. Since 2007, when a liberal coalition took office in Poland, the Warsaw Gay Pride parade has no longer caused serious disturbances (it is hoped that the current homophobic Polish government will not stain this record). In Zagreb, rightwing attacks have similarly subsided and the parade now receives ample government support. In Belgrade, it had to be cancelled several times due to riot danger and still needs heavy police protection; but in 2015 for the first time several government ministers and the mayor of Belgrade attended the march.

Concerning gay rights, the picture nevertheless remains a mixed one. In Poland, Robert Biedron, the first openly gay member of the Sejm in 2011, became the first gay mayor to govern a large Polish city in 2014. He is held in contempt by Jarosław Kaczyński, the old power behind the new Polish throne, who is convinced that the affirmation of homosexuality 'will lead to the downfall of civilization'. Former President Lech Wałęsa advised gays to retreat to the back benches of parliament, preferably even to hide behind the wall, because 'the minority should not harass the majority'.

The Russian law prohibiting 'propaganda for homosexuality' was adopted with a similar purpose. According to Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Russia 'cherishes moral values and historical, cultural and religious traditions of its own. We do not want some groups to have the right to impose values on our children which differ from those of the majority.' The city of Venice duly broke off cultural relations with St. Petersburg when the latter adopted the law which, as the Venice councillors proclaimed, conflicted 'with the history, international standing and moral conscience of our city'.

In Western countries, a type of 'entertainment violence' has arisen which is accompanied by new levels of indifference and amorality. In a widely publicized case from the

Dutch city of Eindhoven in early 2013, televised footage showed pleasure-seekers striking a passer-by to the ground for no apparent reason, kicking him in the head one by one and leaving him for dead on the pavement. Such 'festive' violence is most severe around the soccer pitch. In another Dutch town in late 2012, a linesman was kicked to death by overexcited young players (of Moroccan descent). Even after this shocking incident, violent incidents continued to occur, forcing the Dutch national league to take sharper measures against physical violence and 'severe verbal violence in word and gesture'.

Soccer violence is sometimes accompanied by a farcical re-enactment of the Second World War, in the form of 'teaser racism': making jungle noises when coloured players enter the pitch or chanting 'all Jews to the gas chamber' during matches against 'Jewish' clubs such as Ajax. Sometimes this leads to veritable street battles, such as those which were fought a few years ago between the fanatical 'Yid Army' of Tottenham Hotspur (also an allegedly 'Jewish' club) and a mob of neonazi's in Lyon.

## **Violence and Laughter**

In spite of all this, Europe still acts as a great civilizing power, both 'domestically' and facing an even more violent-prone outside world. It has so far successfully subdued both the hot and the cold wars on its own territory, and has gained some headway in replacing lesser forms of violence by democratic tolerance and mutual respect. This civilizing effect is perhaps most tangible in Europe's Southern and Eastern borderlands. The protesters on Euromaidan explicitly wanted to share in the European dream of human rights, freedom and democracy, expressing it in simple terms: 'I want my children to grow up in a country where they do not hit young people... In Europe, politicians protect citizens and maintain the law... Here policemen are corrupt and serve themselves

and their family instead of the law' (*NRC Handelsblad* 13.12.13; *Trouw* 14.12.13). As demonstrated by slogans such as 'Ukraine is Europe', they view themselves as Europeans and see the future of Ukraine to lie with 'the European family of peoples' (*NRC Handelsblad* 23.2.16). We should not forget that on the Maidan, for the first time in history, people have died while waving the European flag.

In this perspective, the soul of Europe is intimately bound up with combating the politics of fear. It is about guaranteeing human dignity, protecting civil liberties and subverting an ideal of male pride which is prone to intimidation and violence. Hungarian writer György Konrád imagines an essential moral confrontation between 'the truculent person, who is always looking for a fight, is always right, refuses all self-critique and blames all misfortunes on others' and the person 'who is eager to learn, who dares to engage in doubt and self-examination. This learning, curious person is Europe's weapon and true identity.' Europe is a 'verbal' continent, which nurtures a tradition of self-reflection, of learning from one's mistakes, of self-education and not least of self-mockery (Konrád 2013: 21-22; 69-70).

Indeed, let us hope and pray that the disarming laughter of gentlewoman Europe will eventually chase away all violence. Cruelty and humiliation cannot suffer doubt. The ability to see oneself through other people's eyes makes it far more difficult to treat them like sub-humans. All educators and diplomats know that, as long as people continue to talk to each other, it is less likely that they will hit each other over the head. The prospect of 'the conquest of social fear', as envisaged by the great European Hendrik de Man, may therefore still infuse the European idea with the inspiration it so desperately needs. To banish violence in all its shapes and forms from society, to begin with in Europe: that is the passion, the realistic utopia with which Europe may once again conquer the world.



# 3: The Nationalist International

## The European Right

Geert Wilders is one of the best known Dutch politicians in Europe and the rest of the world. A recent top hundred of globally successful Dutchmen placed him at #28, immediately after DJ Tiësto. The only other politician gracing the list was (then) European Commissioner Neelie Kroes at #7, while Prime Minister Mark Rutte lagged behind at #43. The most outspoken Dutch nationalist since World War II is a professional world citizen. Our biggest eurosceptic is our most famous European. Wilders speaks his languages, maintains an English website and delivered notable speeches in the capital cities of Europe, the US and Australia.

In the prelude to the European parliamentary elections of May 2014, Wilders also emerged as a prime mover behind the formation of something like a nationalist International. Before him, Front National leader Marine le Pen had already summoned the peoples of Europe to dismantle the European Union: 'I want nations', she repeated after De Gaulle. Thus, the two populist leaders from the countries which had rejected the draft European Constitution in 2005 joined in a new attack on the Union. Wilders announced future collaboration with the FN, Vlaams Belang and Lega Nord. He travelled to Paris to have lunch with Marine Le Pen ('impressive woman'), confirming that they agreed 'for 90%, maybe more'.

In Prague, he was hosted by former President Václav Klaus, who explained to him that 'Europeanism' was a dangerous ideology that had replaced socialism. In Turin, he addressed a convention of Lega Nord. In Vienna, he visited FPÖ-leader Heinz-Christian Strache, declaring that the PVV

had more in common with the Austrian party than with the bulk of the Dutch Parliament. At Marine Le Pen's return visit to The Hague, both celebrated the occasion as historic: 'The liberation from the elite of Europe, from the European monster, begins today.'

According to Wilders, Europe was hovering on the brink of a political revolution: 'Parties which oppose what we call the course of the elite are growing rapidly in popularity: parties which are devoted to the national interest, to the national identity. If we join forces, we can accomplish a great deal... I am convinced that next year will be a year of reckoning in many European countries.' In June 2013 in Los Angeles he said: 'In Europe, the time is ripe for a glorious democratic and non-violent revolution to preserve our national freedoms and restore our sovereignty... We can feel the heartbeat of the New Patriotism in Europe... The European Spring is near.'

But that revolution turned out to be half-baked. The European elections of 22 and 25 May 2014 did indeed produce major victories for parties such as FN, UKIP and the Danish People's Party, each of which became the biggest in their native countries by gathering a quarter or more of the vote. The Austrian Freedom Party, the Sweden Democrats and the AfD likewise achieved good results. But the PVV, like the Finns Party, fell below expectations. Vlaams Belang was wiped out by Bart de Wever's N-VA. In Italy, Prime Minister Renzi's socialists won while Forza Italia and Lega Nord lost.

Nevertheless, the elections marked a new phase in what may be called the 'Europeanization of the right'. Eurosceptical and anti-European parties together leaped from 20 to 30% of the seats in the European Parliament. In addition, as a result of post-ballot coalition formation, the two most outspokenly pro-European political groups, the Liberals and the Greens, were numerically overtaken by eurosceptical fractions of the right and the left. After having

initially failed, the parliamentary group led by Le Pen, Wilders and Strache materialized in June 2015, naming itself Europe of Nations and Freedoms (EFN).

Nevertheless, and different from what occurred in core states such as France and England, these advances hardly added up to a political landslide on the European level. Deep-seated political divisions between left and right, but especially among the (far) rightwing parties themselves, have rendered it difficult for eurosceptics and anti-Europeans to pool their strengths. The European Parliament is still dominated by the two largest party establishments: the Christian-Democratic EPP (European People's Party) and the Social-Democratic PES (Party of European Socialists).

But the influence of both leftwing and rightwing populists on national parliaments, governments and societies is rapidly growing, particularly since the refugee crisis and the Islamist terror shook up Europe in 2015 and 2016. Everywhere anti-immigration parties are riding high in the electoral polls, not excepting traditionally pro-immigration countries such as Sweden and Germany. The Sweden Democrats jumped from nearly 13% in the 2014 national elections to around 27% in recent polls, leaving the governing Social Democrats trailing behind. In the German *Landtag* elections of March 2016, the AfD effected a major breakthrough with voting percentages ranging between 12.6 (in Rheinland-Pfalz) and 24.2 (in Sachsen-Anhalt).

In France, the FN reached a historical high of 28% in the first round of the 2015 regional elections; but it failed to win control of any of the regions in the second round. In Austria, the FPÖ's presidential candidate gained an unprecedented 35% of the vote in the first electoral run, leaving the traditional ruling parties far behind. In Dutch polls, the PVV has hit record heights since mid-2015, claiming the virtual support of around 30% of the voters.

## National Individualism

The political rapprochement between a number of populist parties in Northwestern Europe is eased by their ideological convergence towards what may be called a 'libertarian nationalism' or 'national individualism' (Pels 2011). The ideological novelty of postwar populism is to have outgrown the collectivism of classical fascism and national socialism and to have selectively incorporated a number of liberal-democratic, secular and individualistic values. Populist parties are self-professed freedom parties (often literally, as in the case of the FPÖ, the PVV and the EFN) which successfully harness some of the ideals of the 1960s and the consumerist 'Me Age' (personal autonomy, self-development, consumer sovereignty) in the defence of national sovereignty, identity and culture against external threats such as Islamization, economic globalization and European integration.

In this new constellation, 'Me first' and 'My people first' are not treated as opposites (as in the notorious Nazi slogan 'You are nothing, your people is everything') but have become near-synonyms ('Everyone for himself and the Netherlands for us all'). Hence the new nationalism also carries a strong stamp of market freedom, meritocracy and the minimal state – while in the fascist and national socialist regimes the state was everything and the (entrepreneurial) individual nothing.

Freedom is everyman's friend. It is a battle-word which is universally understood, and usually defined in negative terms, implying the liberation from something ugly: slavery, oppression, insecurity, fear. The desire for freedom of the Western European populists is primarily directed against Islam, against paying taxes and against Europe. It offers a curious amalgam of liberalism and authoritarianism, in claiming an intolerant and self-righteous type of liberty which dislikes contradiction and critical debate (since the people and its common sense are always right).

Populist freedom is possessive, exclusionary and conservative: it is the freedom to hold on to one's culture and identity as much as one's wealth, jobs and social benefits. Elements of neoliberal market and consumer sovereignty are opportunistically combined with the desire to protect national welfare systems against neoliberal economic globalization (for national citizens only). In this regard, rightwing populists represent and embody the 'dark side of liberalism', making good use of it especially in shoring up their criticisms of Islam (Margulies 2015).

It remains a source of confusion and dismay for left-leaning *Gutmenschen* that populists have successfully hijacked and nationalized many progressive values of the 1960s, including versions of anti-racism, expressive freedom, gender equality and gay rights. These are brandished as a kind of 'property of the people' against everything which supposedly threatens the 'soul of the nation'. The Danish People's Party for example declared that 'freedom of speech is Danish, censorship is not'. Pim Fortuyn had no wish 'to do the emancipation of women and gays all over again'. *Violence Against Women*, a PVV report from 2013, contains little more than predictable analyses of misogynistic Qur'an verses. Its leader Geert Wilders has repeatedly insisted that the fight against 'Islamic racism' constitutes his veritable life mission, to be fulfilled 'to his last gasp'.

French political scientist Pierre-André Taguieff (2012) likewise considers it the greatest innovation of European neopopulism to have entered the combat against sexism, misogyny, homophobia and the persecution of religious minorities in the name of individualistic, postmaterialist and secular values. Taguieff calls it 'libertarian Islamophobia', while other researchers speak of 'sexual nationalism', 'homonationalism' or 'femonationalism.' Evidently, this liberal dimension of far right discourse has been considerably reinforced by the rise of Islam (Zúquete 2014: 170). Yet we should be careful not to dismiss it as entirely opportunistic or empty, even though it is clearly selective in its purposes. We

cannot overlook the overlap with progressive-liberal values which likewise target the oppressive and violent-prone features of particular Islamic traditions.

## **Towards a Milder Populism?**

Marine le Pen has led the Front National in taking a republican turn, in which the classical 'revolutionary' values of *liberté, égalité and fraternité* – hence those of of secular democracy – occupy pride of place. The *priorité nationale* or right of preference of French citizens in all areas (employment, housing, public benefits) is not intended 'for whites or racially pure French, but for anyone who enjoys the French nationality, regardless of origin or religion.' While her father Jean-Marie still consorted with former collaborators, Algerian veterans and royalists, and notoriously called the gas chambers a 'detail in the history of World War II', his daughter Marine has distanced herself from the party's racist fringes. Her pursuit of the normalization and 'de-diabolization' of the FN forced her to break with her father's antisemitism, and ultimately also with her father – for Wilders a *sine qua non* for closer collaboration between the two parties.

On the other hand, Wilders' pronouncements about Islam often go too far for Marine's taste. In her view, Muslims – who enjoy a greater numerical presence in France than elsewhere in Europe – cannot be 'all lumped together'. She immediately dismissed Wilders' infamous promise to somehow 'organize fewer Moroccans' in the Netherlands – while Vlaams Belang's Filip de Winter enthusiastically repeated it. Le Pen also rejects Wilders' drive to ban the Qur'an: 'I respect believers and their convictions'. The Dutch leader, in turn, is unwilling to support a generalized ban on religious expressions and symbols in public spaces which includes the Jewish yarmulka.

The 'normalization' of FN is indicative of a more general softening of populism in Northwestern Europe, which has

-muted all-too rabid expressions of ethnic and cultural racism and diluted it with a more pragmatic economic nationalism and anti-Europeanism. For the FN, restriction of immigration and toughness towards the *sans-papiers* remain as important as ever. But its leader has generally preferred to speak about economic issues (in favour of national protectionism and against neoliberal globalization), about Europe (favouring France's exit from the EU and the euro) and about shared French republican values.

For the Finns Party, issues such as immigration and Islam have been far less prominent than for the Danish People's Party or the PVV. They are primarily economic nationalists who resent the dues hard-working Finns have to pay to Southern debtor countries: 'Europe is not meant for poor relief'. Their leader Timo Soini is not in principle opposed to immigration and, being a Catholic, is also averse to militant critiques of religion. It is no accident that both the Finns and the Danes have meanwhile joined the parliamentary group which is dominated by the British Conservatives. But the refugee crisis has once again reinforced talk about a direct connection between immigration and Islamism as the root of terrorism. In Denmark, the DPP has once again struck a shrill anti-immigrant tone and has pressurized the government into taking the toughest deterring measures of all Western European countries.

UKIP has similarly worked hard to avoid any direct association with the far right, especially with the British National Party. It prefers to parade as a rightwing liberal party in the Thatcherite tradition, wishing to protect British sovereignty and identity and the British economy against European overregulation and immigration. After De Winter's resignation, even Vlaams Belang has attempted to turn its brown page. Excusing himself for his party's past record, his successor regretted that VB had lost the moderate voter. It should never have given the impression of 'being against people, against foreigners'. Still, in his view, the slogan 'Our

own people first' accurately summed up the party platform (NRC *Handelsblad* 29.4.13).

The most conspicuous turn, though short-lived, was taken by the Dutch PVV, which in its 2012 election manifesto *Their Brussels, Our Netherlands* made an intriguing switch from Islam to Europe. Instead of Mecca, Brussels was now targeted as the chief enemy. This move also implied a tendential shift from cultural to economic issues: from the defence of Dutch culture against the threat of Islamization to the defence of hard-working Dutch taxpayers against Brussels bureaucrats and 'lazy and corrupt' Greeks, Spaniards and Portuguese (in its 2013 election campaign, the FPÖ similarly extended its long-standing anti-immigration slogan 'the boat is full' to 'lazy Southerners'). Wilders' denunciations of 'lazy' Greeks still carried racist overtones ('We do the work, while they eat souvlaki. We are plodding, while they drink ouzo'), yet they appeared less venomous than his hatred of criminal Moroccans.

In the interval, the situation in Europe has altered dramatically. While the euro crisis has somewhat abated, the jihadi attacks and the refugee flow have offered Wilders and others new and vast political opportunities, shifting back the emphasis of populist politics from economic to cultural nationalism and anti-Islamism. The most telling illustration of this reverse switch is offered by the German AfD, which has quickly transformed itself from a conservative-liberal anti-euro party into an antiliberal nationalist party which focuses on resistance to immigration and Islam, in close alliance with the radical citizens' movement of Pegida.

In the Netherlands, Wilders' promise in March 2014 to 'organize fewer Moroccans' in the Netherlands has triggered more than 6500 criminal complaints for using racist hate speech, for which he will stand trial in late 2016. During the parliamentary debate about the third financial aid package for Greece in August 2015, he freely mixed his concerns about a rising 'flood' of refugees (always a potent metaphor



in the Netherlands), with a xenophobic distrust of 'swindling' Greeks and a raw 'our money first' nationalism: 'We are faced with an unprecedented tsunami of asylum seekers. One would think that we badly need our money to stop them all. But no: once again we are sending five billion euros to the Greeks.... How trustworthy are they back there in Greece? Let me say it: Greeks lie and cheat. They have promised everything and have done nothing... The Netherlands deserves a prime minister who cares for the Dutch instead of the Greeks and fortune seekers'.

## **The Threat of Illiberalism**

Despite the electoral potency acquired by the populist movement, anxieties about a Weimar-like situation or an impending fascist coup in Europe appear to be exaggerated. For one thing, the liberal nationalism of the populists of Northwestern Europe continues to differ substantially from the reactionary nationalism which is still rampant in some South-eastern countries. In this as in other respects, the political geography of Europe displays a great Northwest-Southeast diagonal, which runs from Great Britain, Scandinavia and Germany towards Hungary, Greece and Cyprus. It not only describes an enduring cleavage between more prosperous and poorer nations, but also highlights a cultural-political divide between the old democratic core of the EU and its former periphery, where both rightwing and leftwing dictatorships have left behind an enduring legacy of illiberalism, authoritarianism and xenophobia.

Parties such as Ataka in Bulgaria, Jobbik in Hungary, Golden Dawn in Greece, the Slovak National Party, the Greater Romania Party and the Congress of the New Right in Poland sometimes remind us of the styles, traditions and ideologies of fascism, national socialism and national communism. While the Northwestern populist parties generally defer to the rules of the democratic game, preferring to win

elections, parties such as the above tend to favour a near-revolutionary overthrow of the parliamentary system, and flirt with, threaten to or actually use political violence.

This type of party is also found in the Northwest (cf. the British BNP or the German NPD), but only as a marginal phenomenon. Those which have cultivated ties with the brown or black past, such as the FN under Jean-Marie Le Pen, Vlaams Blok/Belang under Filip de Winter, the FPÖ under Jörg Haider and Lega Nord under Umberto Bossi, have meanwhile adopted more civil and democratic political styles, partly in response to the pressure of moderate competitors such as the N-VA, Team Stronach or the Five Star Movement.

Golden Dawn is without doubt the most extremist voice in this right-radical choir. Its leader Nikolaos Mihaloliakos, who was imprisoned after the assassination of the leftwing rapper Pavlos Fyssas, is explicit: 'We are racists and nationalists and we do not hide this'. In 1987, he wrote an article entitled 'Hitler for a thousand years', which contained phrases like 'We are loyal soldiers of the national-socialist idea' and 'We exist and will continue to fight for the final victory of our race'. In the party's orbit one encounters black metal bands such as Pogrom, who celebrate Auschwitz and shout lyrics such as 'Fuck Anne Frank' and 'Speak Greek or die'. Golden Dawn's goal is to build a homogeneous people's community which values Greek ethnicity above and to the exclusion of all others. One of its recent election slogans was: 'We can rid this country of the dirt'.

It is highly unlikely that Wilders or Le Pen will make overtures to such political extremists. It is therefore equally unwise to generalize from political experiences in the Northwest as from those in the Southeast of Europe. The fear that fascism will once again raise its ugly head throughout Europe is misplaced. Neopopulism is not a new fascism. Perhaps the most significant contrast between the 1930s and today is that, for the better part of seventy years, European

integration has effectively subdued and contained the raw nationalism which has ravaged a continent which, before 1945, still dwelled in something like a Hobbesian primal condition. This ring of peace and of democratic moderation has become a compelling reality for all postwar European nation-states, including those which not long ago were ruled by dictatorial elites.

All populists are nationalists and EU-bashers; but this unfortunate similarity should not blind us to the inner diversity of the anti-European movement. Instead of fearing a new fascism, we had better recognize the novelty of the political landscape in Europe, which is more appropriately described in terms of the rise of 'illiberal democracy'. EU member states such as Hungary since 2010, Slovakia since 2012 and Poland since late 2015 have been ruled by majoritarian parties with a nationalist and authoritarian agenda, which have actively undermined the checks and balances of European liberal democracy, curbing the freedom of speech and assembly and limiting the independence of the courts. In a remarkable speech in 2014, Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán embraced the ideal of an anti-Western 'illiberal state' on a national basis, holding up Russia and China as examples to emulate. Poland's ruling party is currently following this 'Budapest model' with great enthusiasm and unprecedented haste.

The challenge offered by the rise of governmental populism in Eastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic also show traces of it) is all the more serious because these regimes demonstrate what could happen if populist parties were allowed to take undivided power in the Northwest. While operating in an established liberal-democratic context and selectively embracing liberal and secular values, the Western parties nevertheless profess similar forms of nationalism, support similar notions about popular sovereignty, and feed a similar disrespect for political opponents, critics and minorities. In the refugee crisis, populists from West-

ern Europe emphatically side with Orbán, Fico and the Polish government in advocating the closure of national borders, refusing to admit asylum seekers (who are typically branded as ‘fortune seekers’) and wishing to deter all future comers.

As noted before, this already formidable challenge to European liberal democracy is deepened by an unofficial but effective alliance between Russia and the European right, which also includes some leftwing eurosceptical parties (Klapisis 2015). They tend to toe Putin’s line, and share his objective of sowing dissent between Western nations and of disestablishing the European Union. Most rightwing radicals (and not a few on the left) describe the EU’s actions in Ukraine as irresponsible and aggressive, support Russia’s ‘legitimate’ annexation of the Crimea and sympathize with the Donbass separatists against the Kiev ‘fascists’. The leaders of Jobbik, Golden Dawn, Ataka, Lega Nord and the BNP are not the only ones to idolize Putin. Victor Orbán is an admirer, like Nigel Farage, Heinz-Christian Strache, Alexander Gauland (the AfD’s number two), Janusz Korwin-Mikke, the former leader of the Polish Congress of the New Right, Filip de Winter and until 17 July 2014 (the date of the missile attack on flight MH17) also Geert Wilders.

Marine Le Pen has long been a welcome guest at the Kremlin and the Russian Duma. She has given support to the Russian law against homosexuality and has called Putin a patriot with whom she shares core values, because he ‘is devoted to the sovereignty of his people and defends European civilization, the Christian heritage’. The FN recently received a nine million euro ‘loan’ from a Kremlin-connected bank. Volen Siderov, the leader of Ataka, has organized protest rallies against ‘EU homosexuality’, reaffirming the ‘holy brotherhood’ by which Bulgaria and Russia are joined together. Both rightwing and leftwing populist groups in the European Parliament have voted against the imposition and extension of punitive sanctions on Russia. Most of the nega-

tive votes on the ratification of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in 2014 came from MEP's belonging to far-right parties, including not only the FN, the FPÖ, the PVV and Lega Nord, but also the NPD, Golden Dawn and Jobbik (Klapisis 2015: 53).

In this way, the intra-European challenge of populism (both in opposition and in government) is aggravated by the external one of Russian geopolitical revanchism. Both call in question the core values and beliefs on which Europe was founded and threaten its civilizational style and 'soul'. Yet, paradoxically, they may also turn out to be a blessing in disguise. Like a *deus ex machina*, Putin has already provoked a sharpening of the European self-image, involuntarily granting the EU 'a new foundational experience' (*Die Zeit* 20.3.14). The graver challenges of Islamist terrorism and the refugee stream likewise force Europeans to rethink what defines them and who they are. The terrorists attack us and the refugees appeal to us as Europeans, not as French, Belgian, German or Dutch citizens and, in doing so, make us more European ourselves. In this way, gentle-mannered and peace-loving Europe is perhaps fortunate to discover a sharper sense of its identity, passion and mission. In the following chapters, I will continue this soul-searching by sketching what a European idea of freedom, a European idea of democracy and a European idea of the good life may look like.

## 4: European Freedom

### Freedom Unbound

Freedom and democracy occupy places of honour in the catalogue of European values. But both also figure among the most controversial concepts in political science and intellectual history. They are everyman's friends and well-trodden clichés which are greedily appropriated by all and liberally used as ammunition against political adversaries. These days, everybody hoists the freedom flag and puts on the freedom hat. In the daily political scuffle, 'true' freedom and 'real' democracy usually function as essences which add a hard crust of security to one's views. Hence it is often more interesting to see what they rally against than what they promote.

The greatest domestic challenge to the European project currently arises from populist 'freedom parties' which seek to liberate their nation-states from the clutches of oppressive and profligate 'Brussels'. This nationalization of the concept of liberty is expressed with great clarity by the Dutch Party for Freedom: 'The nation state is the political body in which we live. The spirit of political freedom cannot exist outside of it. Everything which truncates this body, each attack on the nation state, curtails our freedom. Without the nation state, there is no independence. Without the nation state, there is no self-determination which enables us to defend our prosperity and identity... We must defend our sovereignty against Brussels. We must be Dutch patriots... The Netherlands shall be independent and free and shall remain Dutch' (*NRC Handelsblad* 19.10.12).

We noted before that (Western) neopopulist parties combine the call for individual with that for national freedom in historically unique fashion. Collectivist national

sovereignty smoothly converts into individualistic consumer sovereignty and vice versa, and the virtues of individual self-reliance and national independence are seen as fully compatible and complementary. In order to counter this 'national individualism', we urgently need to develop a European notion of freedom which steers individualism in a more internationalist, solidary, green and tolerant direction. The populist conception of liberty-as-sovereignty offers a welcome challenge in this regard, because it calls forth a critical examination and sharper delineation of the substance of our own liberal-democratic ideals. All lofty ideals develop a dark side as soon as they harden into absolutes, and the concept of liberty is no exception. It easily turns into its opposite if we are incapable of moderating and restraining it.

Such a boundless, intemperate idea of freedom is precisely what is advocated by the spokespersons of national individualism. The addition of popular and individual sovereignty easily results in a double absolutism and a double imperative. 'The people' are taken to embody common-sense wisdom and to guarantee access to the political truth (actually, claims such as these should be read in reverse: populist leaders tend to call 'people' whatever they take to be wise and true). The Pegida demonstrators who appropriate the old leftwing slogan 'We are the people' not only imply that 'foreigners' do not belong to it, but also that they are absolutely right against all 'lying' politicians and media who misrepresent the popular will.

Next to celebrating national narcissism and popular truth, populism also cultivates individual narcissism and personal 'truthiness'. Increasingly, individuals claim to be fully sovereign in their opinions, shout out their views instead of arguing for them, and tend to interpret reasonable criticisms as personal insults. Like nations and peoples, individual citizens are considered (and consider themselves) to be the best judges of what is good for them. This presumption breeds an aggressive anti-paternalism which gives free

rein to big egos, loutishness and a culture of licentiousness. Freedom of speech then becomes little else than the licence to say, email or twitter anything that comes into your head.

It is intriguing to note that, on the one hand, national individualism is deeply rooted in the free-thinking, anti-paternalist culture of the 1960s, but simultaneously defines itself in hefty opposition to it. The hedonism of the sixties promoted an absolutization of wants and desires, engendering an ideology of instant gratification ('I want it all and I want it now'), which fed naturally into the consumerism of the eighties and nineties (Robert & Edward Skidelsky 2012). The anti-authoritarian freedom of choosing your own way, doing your own thing, of being master in your home and in your life, was smoothly incorporated and popularized by the market, the advertizing business and the mass media. The pragmatic commercialization of the 'Me Age' should hence not be seen as a perversion but rather as a dominant elaboration of this libertarian heritage.

The collective drive of market institutions to prefabricate and absolutize the freedom of choice has bred a dark side of addictive consumerism, shameless greed and meritocratic arrogance. Supposedly free and unique individuals have increasingly come to resemble one another. In this regard, national individualism offers little else than the European variant of the American neoliberal notion of freedom, which one may encounter in its rawest form in the Tea Party, the NRA gun lobby and Donald Trump. It is no coincidence that Wilders' second-in-command is an enthusiastic supporter of the absolute individualism which was preached by the American neoliberal guru Ayn Rand.

A European notion of freedom would instead celebrate the ability of individuals to emancipate themselves from traditions and group pressures (including those of the nation), to test and broaden their limits (including national ones), and to live and think differently from the majority, if needed in a minority of one. Such a principled pluralism is incompat-



ible with any form of absolutization of one's identity, culture or personality. The sovereignties of the 'Big I' and the 'Big We' must be dismantled as a pair. Ironically, both for individuals and for nations, curbing the excesses of absolutism will enlarge rather than restrict their spaces of discretion.

## **Freedom Cannot Flourish Without Limits**

A European ideal of freedom implies that all individuals enjoy a maximum of material, political and cultural opportunities in order to develop according to their own preferences. A more equitable distribution of income, an inclusive labour market, an accessible housing market and an 'uplifting' educational system are all vitally important for creating a maximum of developmental opportunities for everyone. Establishing the conditions for such a truly social welfare system on the European scale already presents a tremendous political challenge.

However, the enjoyment of the resulting freedoms cannot be left to the full discretion of individuals themselves. The first person singular (I) may have the first, but does not have the last word. Individuals also need to engage in normative debates about the broader purposes which their choices and opportunities should serve. A sense of accountability for the social, cultural and natural environment is not innate and does not fall from the sky. The responsible enjoyment of freedom is a moral learning path which requires education and training, and hence implies improvement, elevation, civilization. The blind spot of social liberalism, in exclusively focusing on the expansion and equitable distribution of positive liberties, is to forget that, next to material conditions for freedom, we also need to establish moral conditions which enable individuals not only to make *free* but also *good* choices (Pels & Van Dijk 2011).

Freedom is the freedom to test and cross boundaries, but it cannot exist without boundaries itself. True prosperity

and wealth are not about earning and appropriating as much as you can in order to arouse the envy of others. If we wish to extend equal opportunities to all to live a rich, versatile and enjoyable life, it will be necessary to curb the freedoms of some (the absurdly rich and powerful) in order to enhance those of others. Limiting the absolute freedom to own and consume is a precondition for the self-development and autonomy of all. Greater equality between the sexes is not feasible if the freedom of men to treat women as property and merchandise is not curtailed. Productive debates are only possible when we are prepared to set normative limits to the freedom of expression.

This ‘freedom paradox’ can be sharpened up as follows. We enjoy more freedom than ever to shape our lifestyle – at least in the prosperous countries of the Northwest. But the downside of it is the risk of addiction (Giddens 2007). More choice options lead to greater choice perplexities. Material abundance produces a host of incentives which promote short-term thinking and undermine our self-control. The sovereignty of the consumer is more often than not a painful illusion. Addictions offer the clearest proof of this. Hence the need for both personal and social (self-)binding techniques, which strike a better balance between short-term satisfaction and well-being in the longer run (Offer 2014).

That freedom and self-restraint presuppose one another is not so much a liberal as a conservative principle. Conservative thinkers have been more acutely aware of the paradox that one needs to limit one’s freedom in order truly to possess it. This idea lay at the core of Edmund Burke’s critique of the political extremism of the French Revolution. ‘What is liberty without wisdom and without virtue?’ he inquired in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790): ‘It is the greatest of all possible evils, for it is folly, vice, and madness, without tuition or restraint.’ Freedom as a metaphysical abstraction was dangerous: ‘The effect of liberty to individuals is that they may do what they please; we ought to see what it will please them to do, before we risk congratulations which may

be soon turned into complaints.’ As Burke emphasized, ‘Men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters’ (1968: 91, 393).

Of the four cardinal virtues: justice, courage, wisdom and temperance, the last one is perhaps the most consequential, because it bestows a relativizing modesty and sense of proportion upon the other three. Their essential purpose was to strike a just balance between two extremes (too much of the good, too much of the bad) and thus to avoid excess and absolutism. The different virtues also served to moderate and restrain one another. Indeed, without prudence and self-restraint, justice, courage and wisdom may easily degenerate into absolutism, fanaticism and pedantry, and encourage verbal or physical violence. This ideal of the just balance or ‘golden mean’ can be traced back to the ethics of Aristotle, who held that abundance, luxury and a materialistic lifestyle more often than not stood in the way of human happiness. Moderate possessions and pleasures sufficed in order to live an autonomous and prosperous life. It was the task of the Greek polis to promote these civic virtues through the arts of education and legislation (De Geus 2003).

That freedom cannot exist without boundaries has also been brought home to Europeans in a more immediate geographical sense. While the euro crisis and the threat of Grexit already highlighted the necessity to restrain neoliberal market pressures and alleviate the politics of austerity, the civil wars in Ukraine and Syria and the refugee crisis have once more hammered home that European freedom needs definite boundaries in order to survive. So far, the response of the EU to the influx of refugees has been shamefully weak. Some nations have literally fenced themselves in, and border controls have multiplied, putting great pressure upon the freedom of mobility guaranteed by the Schengen treaty.

But the EU cannot give in to the populist reflex to link freedom to national sovereignty. The euro crisis already demonstrated that genuine market freedom in Europe can-

not exist without enhanced political governance. The 'clear and present dangers' of border wars and of borderless terrorism likewise force the EU to step up its efforts at political, economic and military cooperation. Europe will only be able to guarantee the safety of its citizens if it concentrates its efforts to stabilize, monitor and guard its common outer boundary.

'People cannot exist without boundaries', EC Vice-President Frans Timmermans has recently underscored. Boundaries are useful and important, because they define who you are and how you relate to people on the other side; boundlessness, on the other hand, equals licentiousness and immorality. Those who currently clamour for closure of the borders want to build walls around us, which is quite another thing. They tend to view the border as the Roman *limes*, as a bulwark against barbarism. But boundaries do not exist in order to keep people out (or in), but to regulate their relations and to facilitate mutual exchanges and understanding, without losing the productive differences between communities (Timmermans 2015: 20-22).

## Social Individualism

That the ideal of liberty comes with a dark side, and requires both inner self-restraint and a bounded space, is something which many *soixante-huitards* have come to see rather late in the day. To reinvent this ideal has now become an urgent mission. The American dream of freedom, equal opportunity and prosperity has conspicuously failed in this regard. It has turned into the privilege of a tiny elite, while poverty has become hereditary for the majority of poor, hard-working Americans. The promise which America long represented for generations of poor European migrants has now travelled back to the old continent. It has become the dream of millions of immigrants and refugees, of the poorest European countries themselves and of all those in the European periphery and beyond who want a share of it.

The cluster of countries which enjoy the greatest happiness of the greatest number (including children and rich people) is found in Northwestern Europe. Not accidentally, they also enjoy the most egalitarian income distributions, the best-equipped welfare states and the most efficient and inclusive democracies. They have successfully reduced social heredity and accelerated social mobility, both within the life course and between generations.

As Wilkinson and Pickett have shown in detail in *The Spirit Level* (2009), economic equality is closely linked to a whole range of indicators of well-being and security. More egalitarian societies feature higher levels of mutual trust, lower levels of overall stress and more stable conditions of physical and mental health. Greater income equality and less social hierarchy directly correlate with higher life expectancies (including for the rich), lower levels of infant mortality, lower percentages of alcohol and drug addiction, fewer obesity victims (especially among children), less mental illness, a smaller number of teenage mothers, lower murder rates, a smaller prison population and better educational performances (and hence better opportunities for breaking the vicious circle of poverty and destitution).

Freedom cannot be a scarce resource, or the property of the strongest, richest, smartest or most famous. It is not reducible to market freedom, nor can it be rightfully owned by the nation. Individualism is not the birthright of a small elite: everyone should have ample material and cultural opportunities in order to become a genuine individual. In laying out this ideal, we may draw inspiration from a slogan which was coined in 1939 by the Dutch political thinker Jacques de Kadt: 'Socialism for the sake of individualism'.

De Kadt's dual purpose was to resist the contemporary challenges of fascism and national socialism, but also to learn from these enemies. Individualism, in the sense of personality and nonconformism, constituted 'the most precious element of a dynamic culture'. But in contrast to traditional

liberalism, society should to be reorganized in social terms, since individualism could not flourish without a large amount of socialization and collectivism (De Kadt 1980: 216).

'Individualization for all' as an emancipatory ideal is more topical than ever. But individual freedom can only grow within a framework of physical security, economic protection and social trust, and hence requires a larger amount of social equality that currently exists. Wilkinson and Pickett have conclusively shown that greater inequality generates psychosocial mechanisms which result in higher levels of stress, anxiety, anger and vindictiveness. An intensified culture of competition breeds status anxiety, feelings of inferiority and loss of self-respect and identity, inciting social distrust, cynicism and (domestic and public) violence. People living in sharply diverging income classes tend to inhabit separate worlds, and are less capable of sympathizing with each other. To put it simply: people are more afraid of each other in unequal societies than in more equal ones.

Poverty means lack of freedom. But apart from poverty, unemployment and disillusionment about job and career opportunities, economic anxieties are also whipped up by the meritocratic rat race. 'Absolute' individualism treats all the fruits of one's labour and talents as personal property: success is seen as meritorious by definition, failure as one's own fault, and individuals bear full responsibility for all their actions. Losers in the game can no longer be excused by circumstances other than their own lack of effort; they become isolated and lose their self-respect. An unequal and competitive society thus enhances the fear that others may despise and humiliate us.

In response, it becomes tempting to embrace a 'gratuitous' identity such as an ethnic, national, gendered and often also a religious one, which you acquire and merit simply by having been born in the right place in the right family. *Enfants de la patrie* no longer need to worry about where they belong. Being male effortlessly raises you above all women.

As a consumer, you only have to pay cash in order to earn some respect.

In our time, the language of marketing and advertizing routinely appeals to the autonomy, authenticity and desire for self-stylization of individuals, which paradoxically results in a mass production of styles, tastes and identities. Yet these ideals can also be turned against the marketeers who otherwise so smartly capitalize upon them. Genuine individualism requires consumers to be critical, informed and courageous enough to be able to oppose market coercion, performance pressure, status comparison, the culture of celebrity and the meritocratic ideology which legitimizes them all.

Social individualism not merely recognizes that one's talents and capacities are to a large extent gifts of nature, upbringing and social background, but also that they cannot flourish without the 'gifts' which are bestowed by a whole range of social institutions and public services. These include adequate and accessible health care, high-quality and accessible education, a reliable system of social security, a trustworthy and efficient system of justice which reduces corruption and crime, and a working political democracy which guarantees people's say in public decision-making.

All these socializing factors ensure that individuals are no longer thrown back on themselves and may gather confidence in their capacities for the future. The spreading and pooling of social and individual risks dampens social anxiety. In a more socially relaxed conception of meritocracy, moreover, what counts as individual merit or as a productive contribution to society is not fixed, but is permanently at stake in moral debates and political controversies. There is no economic or scientific 'last instance' which is capable of determining meritoriousness or productivity in any objective manner (Pels 2007).

## Communities 'Lite'

Social freedom-in-safety not only requires that the culture of anxiety which is bred by poverty and desperation is subdued, but also that individuals liberate themselves from the constraints of 'heavy' traditions and communities and from the gratuitous identities of class, gender, religion, skin colour or nationality. The pamphlet *No longer afraid to say 'I'*, which was published by the Dutch Zina collective in 2008, offers a good illustration of this link between cultural anxiety and incomplete individualization. It describes the arduous struggle of Moroccan women who are emerging step by step from a culture which is dominated by the honour ethic of family and community (and therefore of men). Such a culture of 'togetherness' is laced in a tight corset of habits and traditions, a strict sexual morality and inhibiting social controls which operate through backbiting and gossip. At worst, such incomplete individualization – not least in the men who are unable or unwilling to resist the moral pressure of their peers – may issue in domestic and honour-related violence.

Social individualism hence presupposes and is accompanied by a new communitarian ideal, that of 'communities lite'. Whereas 'heavy' communities impose unity, loyalty, consensus and conformity, lighter communities are characterized by weaker bonds, lower thresholds, greater internal diversity and less costly exit options. *Framilies*, friendship ties, artists' collectives and social media networks may exemplify such more loosely tied relationships, which are more open to the outside world, more hospitable to new people and new ideas, and hence more prone to creative renewal.

Diversity implies the right to live and think differently, to make a difference as an individual. It hence requires us to defend free-thinking, dissidence and nonconformism within – and if necessary against – all groups, cultures and communities. The calling of democracy is not so much to exercise



the rule of the majority, but to protect the rights and freedoms of minorities. However, since minorities have minorities of their own which they may in turn discipline and oppress, democracy is ultimately called upon to protect the minority of one.

Religious freedom offers a ready example in this context. It is and remains a collective freedom which is legitimately claimed by all creeds, denominations and world-views. But it simultaneously protects not only the individual freedom of religious dissenters, but also the freedom to renounce one's faith and the freedom to lead a completely irreligious life. The individual freedom of religion therefore always takes priority over its collective form.

This view implies a broader understanding of public safety, which reaches beyond and tends to clash with the sovereignty claims of nation-states, but also with those of religious, ethnic and other cultural minorities. In the Netherlands, the latter received its classic expression in the Protestant doctrine of 'sovereignty within one's circle' (*soevereiniteit in eigen kring*), which not only shaped the Dutch historical experience of denominational pillarization (which mentally and institutionally separated Protestants from Catholics, liberals and socialists) but also the postwar multicultural ideal of preserving the integrity of migrant cultures and identities. A European concept of freedom-in-safety must on the other hand place the rights of individuals above all sovereignties of a cultural, religious or political nature, including those of the nation state and its people. That is the true significance of the European emphasis on human rights and the UN doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (Daase 2010).

What does social individualism as an emancipatory ideal imply for the future of Europe? Concisely put: Europe must create a safe haven, both in physical and in economic, political and social terms, in order to enhance the positive individualization of all its citizens. Building such a protective ring and social safety net requires the promotion of far

greater equality among the member states, in order to establish a European 'society of opportunity' in which all citizens may realize their hopes for a self-chosen rather than imposed identity. Contrary to the populist mix of absolute individualism ('Me first') and absolute collectivism ('My own people / nation first'), a European idea of liberty therefore links a morally bounded individualism to the prospect of a truly solidary European community.

Freedom requires a sense of proportion and self-imposed restraints. Autonomy, in the sense of self-government, is closely linked to a heightened consciousness of limits (Cohn-Bendit 2014). This paradox also operates on the level of Europe. The only way for its member states to safeguard their national sovereignty is to cede large portions of it to Europe. If the EU wishes to reduce its dependence on state-controlled energy suppliers such as Gazprom, it should create a working European Energy Union. If it no longer wishes to be the plaything of fraudulent banks, insolent rating agencies and tax-evading multinationals, it must establish stronger forms of economic governance, including tax coordination, supervision of banks and the restructuring of collective debts. A coordinated campaign to combat tax evasion by border-crossing multinationals and millionaires, for example, would yield an annual dividend of around 1000 billion euro: twice as much as the budget deficits of all EU countries taken together.

## **Unequal Opportunities in Europe**

Evidently, the resources and opportunities for positive individualization are very unevenly distributed across Europe. The previously introduced 'European diagonal' reveals patterns of variation which not only reflect diverging political and historical experiences, but also correlate with major socioeconomic inequalities – especially with the rift which has opened since 2008 between the creditor countries in het Northwest and the deficit countries in het Southeast. In addi-

tion, the diagonal traces systematic variations in 'value profiles': differences in worldviews and lifestyles, in views on family and authority relations, and in levels of social trust, confidence in democracy and tolerance for diversity – all of which are in turn strongly related to political preferences.

The first thing to notice along this political-geographical axis is what may be called an international 'class division' between richer and poorer countries, including widely divergent poverty and unemployment rates and the associated migration flows. In Norway, the gross national product amounts to around 54.000 euro per capita, in the Netherlands and Austria to almost 43.000 euro, in Italy and Spain to approximately 30.000, in Poland and Hungary to 20.000, while it reaches a mere 13-14.000 euro in Bulgaria and Romania.

These differences in prosperity are reflected in disparities in average life expectancy, which reaches eighty years in Northwestern Europe versus seventy in the Southwest. A similar gap exists between higher and lower income classes within individual countries. In the Netherlands, for example, the difference in life expectancy between upper and lower-skilled workers amounts to seven years. These differences are confirmed by other demographic statistics, such as those regarding infant mortality and the mortality of women in childbirth.

While making up only 7% of the world population, Europe as a whole commands 25% of global GDP and accounts for 50% of global social expenditure. But within our continent, vast differences occur in social security spending per capita per year. In 2012, Luxemburg and Norway spent 15-16.000 euro, Denmark and Sweden 12-13.000, Finland, Austria, France and Belgium around 9000, Great Britain 8000, Italy 7000, Cyprus, Spain, Portugal and Greece 4-5000, Hungary 2000, Poland, Slovenia and Estonia 1500, while Romania, Bulgaria and Lithuania scored lowest with less than a thousand euro per inhabitant per year. Closely related to these socioeconomic variables, the diagonal also reveals ma-

jor variations in the ratio of higher vs. lower educated groups. In 2011, the European average of 25-64 year-olds holding a certificate of higher education was 26.8%. The Inner London region scored highest with 59.7%, followed by the region to the south of Brussels (55.7%). In Amsterdam, nearly half of the population is highly educated, compared to a national average of 28%. Lowest on the ladder are 75 EU regions in which higher educated make up less than 20%. One is found in Spain, one in Malta (which is a single region), two in France, three in Slovakia, four in Poland and Bulgaria, six in Greece, seven in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Portugal, while nineteen (!) are located in Italy.

In their detailed comparisons between more and less egalitarian countries, the authors of *The Spirit Level* consistently arrive at the same social gradient. Although their diagonal spans the entire globe, they likewise locate the richest and most egalitarian countries in the Northwestern corner of Europe (the UK is the exception proving the rule), while the poorest and least egalitarian countries lie in its Southeastern corner. Inhabitants of the former are generally happier and healthier, are less often confronted with violence, suffer less from various addictions, have better educational and mobility chances and enjoy larger levels of social and political trust. The UNICEF child welfare index is consistently higher in these more egalitarian societies than in less egalitarian ones.

Data gathered by the European Values Study and the Corruption Perception Index enrich this picture. The statement that 'most people can be trusted' is endorsed by an average of 30% of respondents across Europe. High trust societies such as Denmark (66.5%), Sweden (65%) and the Netherlands (60%) are in this respect far removed from countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania and Turkey (15-24%), while social confidence sinks to even lower levels in other Balkan countries (Halman e.a. 2012: 96-97). As a Bulgarian political scientist commented: 'Paralyzed by deeply ingrained distrust, Bulgarian society believes that there is a yawning gap between the rules of private life and

those which apply to the public good. Distrust is indeed the basic idiom of Bulgarian politics' (Bechev 2013).

Confidence in the reliable functioning of democracy similarly varies along the diagonal, with high scores in Sweden, Denmark and Iceland (but also in Greece) and low ones in Southern Europe (but also in Finland and the UK). The same variation emerges when we focus on perceptions of corruption. In its 2014 Index, Transparency International lists no 100% 'clean' countries; but the Scandinavian ones attain high scores (Denmark leads with 92%), as do the Netherlands (84), Germany (79), the UK (78), Austria (72) and France (69). Spain follows with 65%, Estonia with 69, Poland with 61 and Hungary with 54, while Italy and Greece level with Romania and Bulgaria (43%). Russia does not manage more than 27% and Ukraine 26%. The report on corruption published by the European Commission in 2014 highlights a similar 'diagonal' variation.

Taken together, data such as these add up to a dramatic contrast between the high trust societies in the Northwest and the low trust societies in the Southeast. Another way to formulate the European ideal of freedom-in-safety could then be: how can we gradually reduce social anxiety and improve social confidence, with the aim of transforming low trust societies into high trust ones? Seeing that the resources and conditions for acquiring self-confidence and self-respect are very unevenly distributed throughout Europe, this is a tremendous ambition which will take many generations to fulfil. A vast effort of improving material equality is needed if we want to realize 'socialism for the sake of individualism' on this broader European scale.

Next to securing the material preconditions for European freedom, we must also create the cultural preconditions for it. The profiles traced by the European Values Study also reveal the presence of a cultural diagonal which runs from more secular, individualistic and free-thinking countries in the Northwest towards more religious, communitari-

an and less tolerant countries in the Southeast. While survival values still predominate in the latter, they have been surpassed and mitigated by values of self-expression in the former.

For example, divorce is tabooed in societies which support a close link between sex and reproduction (at a EU average of 5.47%, the Northwest scores above 6.55, the Southeast below 4.60). Similar differences arise with regard to views about motherhood, abortion, euthanasia and the acceptance of homosexuality. On the latter, at a current EU average of 41.8%, the Netherlands score highest with 78.3%, followed by Sweden, Denmark and Iceland, while countries such as Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Hungary score lowest. The same gradient emerges if we focus on the incidence of antisemitism. A recent survey by the Jewish Anti-Defamation League revealed that it is much stronger in Eastern and Southern Europe than in the Northwest, with Greece (69%) and the Netherlands (5%) occupying the extremes.

On balance, therefore, Northwestern societies tend to score higher on values such as individual freedom, subjective well-being, tolerance vis-à-vis foreigners and lifestyle minorities, power of imagination and quality of life – results which not only correlate with their higher average levels of education but also with their higher levels of democratization. Countries in the Northwest feel less bound to traditional religious views, traditional authority relations and traditional gender roles, while countries in the Southeast are more closely attached to materialism, hard work, absolute moral standards and patriotic sentiments (Halman e.a. 2012: 132).

The Gender Gap Index published by World Economic Forum, which combines economic, political, educational and health criteria with regard to gender equality, offers another angle on this cultural variation. Its 2015 rankings put all Northwestern European countries in the top twenty. The East and South score in the middle and lower ranges, while

Greece, Slovakia, Hungary, Cyprus and Malta bring up the European rear. Comparative data from another source confirm that the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Slovenia and the Baltic states enjoy relatively 'feminine' cultures, while Eastern and Southern European countries count among the more masculine ones – although 'greater' nations such as Germany, France and Great Britain also score prominently on the index of masculinity (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkus 2011: 143ff, 158). Facing these differences, to talk about Europe as having a 'feminine' soul is therefore still wishful thinking, even though the ideal does not lose its attraction for being so poorly realized.

Gender equality, like the acceptance of homosexuality, are both at the forefront of positive individualization. The diagonal shows that many European countries still lack both the economic and the cultural resources for establishing a less anxiety-ridden, more relaxed society in which such diversity would be welcomed instead of feared. As in the case of socio-economic inequalities, it will take many generations before this value gap can be to some extent closed. The stark unwillingness of many Eastern European countries to welcome war refugees and asylum seekers is one more token of it. But the European idea of civilization is worth little if we are unable to reduce these disparities and attempt some convergence across the European diagonal in the direction of greater trust and tolerance.

# 5: European Democracy

## National Democracy

The idea of democracy is at least as contestable and controversial as the concept of liberty and, like God, lends itself to all worthy causes and parties ('God with us', or in secular terms: 'The People with us'). Nowadays everyone parades as a democrat, waving the colours of 'true' democracy against all other pretenders. Hence there is no point in trying to determine its essence – which is merely a way of solidifying one's own view and robbing opponents of a cherished 'hur-ray word'. In this debate as well, the European populists act as our best enemies, since the populist understanding of democracy provides an excellent whetstone against which we may sharpen our own ideas.

As in the case of liberty, populism reveals the dark side of the anti-authoritarian and anarchist ideals of the progressive sixties ('power to the people!'). It is therefore not so much opposed or hostile to 'true' democracy, but makes the most of its classical or primordial meaning: that of direct popular rule. Populists are 'Athenian' or 'Jacobin' democrats who take the concept literally and sanction this radical interpretation as the only correct one. The themes of 'popular sovereignty' and 'giving back power the people' are deeply embedded in their repertoire, reviving the redemptive, almost religious dimension of democracy as a politics of salvation (Zúquete 2014: 169). How closely this ideal approaches our own is evident when we hear Barack Obama repeat the famous slogan of his predecessor Abraham Lincoln: 'Government of the people, by the people, for the people' – a principle which also found its way into the French and other democratic constitutions around the world. The danger of such a literal understanding of democracy lurks first of all in



the tendency to deify and absolutize the sovereign people, in suggesting its essential unity and homogeneity and the identity between rulers and ruled. One of Jean-Marie le Pen's slogans was: 'Le Pen = le Peuple': 'I have a tendency to imagine the people as I am... that is, straight, loyal, honest and genuine'. The political doctrine of his daughter Marine is likewise geared to 'understanding and defending the will of the people and putting it at the center of politics'. On the left, Hugo Chavez claimed: 'I am the people', while many Venezuelans echoed: 'I am Chavez'. Even Obama's campaign managers suggested that he was 'just like you', while he was obviously like nobody else.

Secondly, such a close identification between people and nation-state inevitably introduces a nationalist conception of democracy. The 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Jacobin Constitution of 1793 already defined popular sovereignty in terms of *national* sovereignty. Marine le Pen routinely calls upon this grounding principle of the French Republic in order to suggest that 'true' democracy is currently being violated by a self-appointed ruling elite. Deliberately varying on Lincoln's formula, she demands a politics 'by the French, for the French and with the French'. The Pegida movement's slogan 'We are the people!' likewise resonates both with democratic and with ethnic-national sentiments.

At the height of the refugee crisis in 2015, Hungarian prime minister Victor Orbán pleaded for closure of the European borders, claiming that the erection of a fence around Hungary was a legitimate way to defend his country. Democracy, in his view, first of all meant 'listening to what the people wanted'. Explicitly calling on Lincoln's slogan, Orbán suggested that Europe could not legitimately act against the will of its citizens, who clearly wanted something different from the majority of the European governments: 'The people require us to master the situation and to protect our borders' (*NRC Handelsblad* 3.9.15).

Around the same time, rightwing leaders Geert Wilders, Matteo Salvini, Heinz-Christian Strache and Marine le Pen collectively authored an article in the *Wall Street Journal* (15.10.15) stating that 'mass immigration is leading to the dilution of cultural identity in the EU member states. Its citizens resent this. Instinctively, these citizens are patriots. They don't like to lose their identity as a people. They don't want to give up their countries. Instinctively, they grasp two very important truths. First, that without identity, there is no country. Second, that without a country, there can be no prosperity, no justice, no democracy, no liberty.' The gap between citizens and those who ruled them had never been as wide as today: 'Reclaiming democracy is the key to solving the migration crisis.'

Analogously to the term 'national individualism', postwar populists may therefore be characterized as 'national democrats' since, in addition to the values of *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité*, they also nationalize the idea of democracy. Populists are hence not anti-democratic *per se*: they continue to operate, though often not very loyally or politely, within the frameworks of parliamentary democracy. In contrast to their radical predecessors from the Interbellum, they have little intention to abolish the system of free political competition and free voting.

In their perspective, however, democracy represents a historical achievement of national cultures which cannot be shared with strangers. The nation-state offers the only feasible home for democratic self-government. Beyond national boundaries, for example on the European level, true democracy is impossible, because there exists no European people or common European culture. Following this logic, the Flemish nationalist Bart de Wever views Belgium as being split between two democracies, which are divided by irrevocable cultural differences, similar to those which divide the European North from the South. The mania surrounding the Belgian soccer team and the ubiquitous waving of Belgian flags

during the 2014 World Cup tournament were not enough to change his mind.

Eurosceptics from the left embrace similar slogans ('without people no sovereignty, without *demos* no democracy') in order to suggest that democracy on a European scale remains 'a mission impossible' (e.g. Cuperus 2009). In 2005, many Dutch socialists and social-democrats campaigned for a no vote to the draft European Constitution. Current Minister of Home Affairs Ronald Plasterk was one of them: 'Cultures differ, and there is no *demos*, hence no basis for a real democracy' (*de Volkskrant* 10.6.05). A decade later, the European radical left continues to mobilize distrust of and resistance to the EU and the euro, particularly since the humiliation of the leftwing Greek government by the Euro Group and the 'Institutions' during the summer of 2015. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the former leader of the French Parti de Gauche, concludes that France can no longer act as an independent nation: 'If we must choose between the euro and sovereignty, we opt for sovereignty' (*Die Zeit* 4.9.15).

The Dutch Socialist Party similarly warns that democracy (i.e. the will of the sovereign Dutch people) must be defended against the encroachments of a neoliberal EU. Former leader Jan Marijnissen even flirted with the word *Heimat* in order to describe 'our Dutch democracy which provides us with basic securities and confidence in the world'. Democracy's primary concern was 'the common fate of a community of citizens within a particular territory'. The Dutch had conducted a long national struggle in order to establish civil rights, social security and adequate systems of education, care and justice: 'These achievements define our attachments, our identity. Europe, on the other hand, is neither objectively nor subjectively our "home". The European Union does not have a past or an identity; for most citizens it is a faraway land. The EU's size and aloofness will turn its democracy into an inevitable failure' (*NRC Handelsblad* 9.6.08).

Facing this rightwing and leftwing nationalization of democracy, our challenge is to reinvent a conception of it which is no longer trapped in a 'Europe of the nations'. As in the case of liberty, European democracy must be re-imagined as a 'society of individuals', in which the political rights of citizens are also activated on a supranational level, for example in the form of transnational political parties, post-national persons, Europe-wide elections and referenda and European citizens' initiatives. As in the case of liberty-as-sovereignty, the absolutist notion of democracy-as-sovereignty must be confronted with a view which favours cultural and political pluralism and which practises modesty with regard to claims to truth and justice.

### **Liberal vs. Illiberal Democracy**

Following the American political scientist Robert Dahl, we may roughly distinguish between two main currents in democratic thought: the populist and the pluralist one. Since at least the seventeenth century, the primordial 'Athenian' model of direct democracy has been challenged by an alternative, liberal model of indirect or representative democracy. The first tradition prefers to interpret democracy in literal terms, favouring direct popular rule, political equality and majority rule, harbouring deep suspicions about professionalized politics and elite representation. Liberal or representative democracy, by contrast, remains apprehensive of the risk of tyranny by majority rule, and emphasizes the interactive play between elected representatives and their constituents, the separation of powers, and constitutional guarantees for minority views and divergent lifestyles.

Following political thinkers such as Montesquieu, Madison and Mill, the installation of checks and balances to concentrated, overwhelming power is here seen as democracy's primary goal. Constitutional rules of political moderation and self-restraint must ensure that no power can become

totalitarian, not excepting that of 'the people'. Protecting the rights of minorities (and those of minorities within minorities, hence ultimately of the minority of one) requires that the singularity of sovereignty is broken up by a multitude of agencies and political power is kept ever-contested and contestable.

In the populist tradition, the people is preferably described as a homogeneous moral, cultural and political community, while the liberal tradition has come to see it as essentially divided and diverse: a collection of minorities. Populists tend to reify (deify) the people and render its political spokespersons (themselves) invisible, claiming that 'the people speaks for itself'. Liberals, on the other hand, favour a constructivist or performative view which recognizes that the will of the people is always co-produced by its spokespersons, who should therefore remain constitutionally visible and accountable in their role of political opinion- and decision-makers.

A democracy which cultivates differences and pluralism must also extend in a vertical dimension (Pels 2011). The liberal 'art of separation' (the break-up of absolute sovereignty) not only operates horizontally (by means of the *trias politica* and the broader institutional separations between church and state, media and politics, state and market), but also in terms of a functional distinction between elected elites and their political audiences. While the populist tradition remains distrustful of representation by political elites and strives to level the gap between rulers and ruled, the liberal tradition accepts both the inevitability and the democratic utility of the vertical separation of powers and the productive interaction which (ideally) unfolds between innovative and 'edifying' elites and their political audiences. Political power is neither the exclusive property of the people or that of an elite, but emerges in the gap between both players in the political game (Ankersmit 2002). In this interplay, neither the elite nor the people are sovereign or have the final say.

Democratization does not mean that the (potentially productive) tension between elites and people is abolished so that 'the people' can govern themselves, but instead that their mutual interaction is intensified, that elite positions become more accessible, and that the circulation of the elites is accelerated. Democracy also means that leaders must have the courage to run ahead of public opinion rather than blindly follow it. In this manner, elite formation and democratization do not exclude but instead presuppose one another.

Yet we should remain wary (and we would be wise to borrow some of the political distrust which is cultivated by the populists) that power remains a risky business and is therefore 'never in good hands, at least not for long in the same hands' (Van Doorn 1996: 123-27). Democratic voters should therefore hand out good trust and healthy distrust in equal measure, always keeping a critical eye on the representatives which they have elected to do the job for them.

Following the refugee crisis and the Polish elections of October 2015, it has become clearer than ever that there is a contest going on between these two competing visions of European democracy. Instead of being a temporary aberration, the 'Budapest model' of illiberal democracy, apart from closely resembling the authoritarian politics of Putin and Erdoğan on the other side of the European border, is now also adopted by the national-conservative Polish government, while some features of it recur in countries such as Slovakia, Czechia and Bulgaria. Czech President Miloš Zeman has been described as 'a populist legitimizing xenophobia' by his own prime minister Bronislav Sobotka, for agreeing with his predecessor Václav Klaus that immigration 'artificially mixes nations, cultures and religions' and hence must be seen as 'a fundamental threat to the stability of Europe'. Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico recently affirmed that 'Slovakia is built for Slovaks, not for minorities' (such as Roma, Hungarians, homosexuals and refugees).

Even though populist parties have participated in governments in Austria, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands and Finland, the impact of full-scale governmental populism is far stronger in the East and South than in the Northwest. The Berlusconi governments in Italy already put pressure on the *trias politica* by attempting to discipline the media and to undermine the independence of the judiciary. During their populist regime in Poland (2005-2007), the Kaczyński brothers repeatedly turned against liberal constitutionalism, attacking the independent courts, the central bank, journalists and academics for neglecting 'the voice of the people'.

A decade later, the new Polish government once again abuses its majority to undermine the rule of law and the constitutional division of powers. The new restrictive media law is part of a more general drive of 're-Polonisation', which aims to establish cultural homogeneity and a state which is directly expressive of the popular will. Critical journalists and broadcasters are debunked as 'anti-Polish'. Foreign minister Waszczykowski evocatively pictured the dystopian world which would reign if liberal pluralism would take over Poland: 'A novel mix of cultures and races, a world full of bikers and vegetarians who are only concerned with renewable energy and fight against all forms of religion' – all of which of course clashed with 'Polish values'.

While countries such as Hungary, Slovakia and Poland practise a 'populism from above', the illiberal model of democracy also enjoys broad support from below across the entire continent, being favoured by populist parties which are often frontrunners in the electoral polls. In his well-known 1997 essay, Fareed Zakaria already identified it as a 'spreading virus', which had taken over many countries across the globe. Constitutional liberalism was facing increasing opposition from regimes which located the essence of democratic government in 'the absolute sovereignty of the majority' (Zakaria 1997). Two decades later, we observe that the ideas and institutions of liberal democracy meet a new

and strong groundswell of illiberal democracy also within Europe itself.

## **A Democracy of Minorities**

Another way to develop this fundamental contrast is to distinguish between majoritarianism and constitutionalism, or between 'majority democracy' and a 'democracy of minorities'. Full, undivided popular sovereignty is usually operationalized in terms of majority rule (half of the number of votes plus one or more). The (largest) part is formally identified with the whole, implying a form of totalization which offers privileged access to the political truth and the general interest (since 'the voter is always right').

As Jean-Jacques Rousseau notoriously claimed, majority decisions represented the general will of the people by definition; hence the minority was simply mistaken in its conception of the common good. In the original contract according to which the citizens ceded their individual freedom to the absolute sovereign (i.e. themselves), dissidents could not be part of the agreement since they were strangers among the people. Because the vote of the largest number constrained all others, the need for absolute obedience to the general will logically implied that dissidents were 'forced to be free' (Rousseau 1968: 64, 152-54).

Following in Rousseau's footsteps, many minorities have climbed the historical stage in order to parade as the majority and identify with the whole. The revolutionary Jacobins were the first to translate this version of 'totalitarian democracy' into war and political terror (Talmon 1970). The most notorious historical example is offered by the Bolsheviks under Lenin: a small revolutionary splinter of the Russian social-democratic party which literally named itself 'the majority' in order to intimidate the more moderate and tolerant Mensheviks. While the latter were more sympathetically disposed to the liberal opposition, the Bolsheviks remained



self-righteous, authoritarian and unforgiving, praising the virtues of democratic centralism and of 'proletarian' dictatorship. An heir to this illiberal tradition, Putin similarly counts on the loyalty of an 'aggressively obedient majority' (Joeri Afanasjev). He disparages his political rivals as losers who have no right of say, since the strongest man wins and legitimately takes all the spoils. Turkish strong man Erdoğan displayed the same majoritarian arrogance when he was facing the protesters in Istanbul's Gezi Park: 'We are with more than you!' and: 'We are the people! Who are you?'.

But of course, the majority and its spokespersons cannot lay an exclusive claim to the true and the good. The naked force of the largest number must be constrained by checks and balances and constitutional rights. Democracy does not so much represent and express the unity but the plurality and the divisions among the populace: the rich gamut of its opinions, passions and lifestyles. European democracy can therefore only be a 'democracy of minorities'. Let us be the new moderates, the new minoritarians, the new Mensheviks!

French political scientist Pierre Rosanvallon (2008) has argued that the majority vote is little else but a formal arithmetical agreement or pragmatic decision rule, needed to ensure that debates reach a provisional closure. It carries no deeper moral significance, nor does it guarantee that the majority is right and may legitimately end the discussion. On the contrary, it has the duty and responsibility to use its temporary dominance with restraint, and to continue the dialogue with the minorities it has overruled. The democratic ethos is diametrically opposed to the winner-take-all mentality. As John Stuart Mill said, democrats should always remain wary that their opponents may well possess 'half of the truth'.

According to Rosanvallon, popular sovereignty does not express itself in a singular general will, but emerges from the mutual balancing of numerous partial interests, and hence subdivides into a multitude of minoritarian views.

'The people' will always remain fictional and structurally indeterminate. But the will of the people can be approximated by various detours, through multiplying the representations of it: elections, but also other aggregations and imaginings, such as those offered by the media, the arts and the sciences (statistics, sociology, political science). The minority is no longer the smaller part that must succumb to the decisions of the larger part, but 'one of the many broken expressions of the social whole... From now on, "people" is also the plural of minority' (Rosanvallon 2012: 130). The notion of superdiversity (Vertovec 2007) introduces something similar with regard to ethnic dominance: since there no longer exists a (white) majority, we have all become minorities.

The populists, on the other hand, remain committed Bolsheviks, who insist on the indivisibility of the *demos*, and thereby risk absolutization of the political truth and the resultant tyranny of the majority. Dutch rightwing populist Rita Verdonk put it simply: if, at a family dinner, three members opt for French fries and two for sauerkraut, then fries it is: that is democracy for you!

The same *pars pro toto* gesture is popular on the left. Socialists like Marijnissen, for example, consistently inflated the winning 61.5% in the 2005 referendum to a massive No of 'the Dutch people' to the draft European Constitution. Both Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain initially adopted the notion of democracy as popular sovereignty and favoured majoritarian election strategies. Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias has never been overly charmed by the prospect of forging political coalitions, preferring to aim at single-handed hegemony – a concept which, like that of sovereignty, sits uneasily with pluralism and diversity (Marcellesi 2015). Both parties have drawn major inspiration from the grassroots movement of the Indignados who, in a similar totalizing move, contrasted the 99% of 'the people' to 'the caste' of 1%

## Majority Rule

Majoritarian democracy is by no means an exclusive feature of populist ideology. It is firmly anchored in virtually all political systems in Europe, even in countries where the practice of coalition formation and minority government is deeply embedded in the political culture, as is the case in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Scandinavia. All political parties admittedly seek political power by trying to attract the majority vote. But if civilization implies moderation and self-restraint, the urge to become the biggest and greatest harbours an uncivilized streak. Both FN and UKIP indulged in noisy chest-pounding at becoming the biggest national parties in the previous European elections, brazenly inflating their quarter of the votes into 'the voice of the people'. In the Netherlands, we witnessed a comical neck-and-neck race for the title of biggest party between progressive liberals and Christian-Democrats, even though neither of them gathered much more than 15% of the vote.

In the British majoritarian system the largest party rules, but between 2010 and 2015, for the first time in history, a coalition government held power. The system is designed to facilitate the formation and preservation of majorities, instead of enhancing the accessibility for minorities. The candidate who first passes the post wins the district: winner-take-all. But in reality, majority governments in Britain are formed on the basis of a minority of votes. In 2005, Labour gained a majority with 35%, while the Tories came to power in 2010 with 36%. In 2015, the Conservatives once again won a majority with 36.9 % of votes cast. UKIP came in third with 12.6%, but won only one parliamentary seat.

In systems of proportional representation such as the Dutch one, or in mixed systems such as the German one, political newcomers face lower thresholds, and the ideal of minority democracy is much more alive. In this respect (though not in others), the EU is definitely more democratic

than many of its member states. For example, proportional representation in the European Parliament offers populist politicians a platform which is often denied to them in their countries of origin, even though they view national democracy as superior to it (Verhofstadt 2015: 231).

Majorities may be artificially enlarged by means of bonus provisions or voting thresholds. In Greece, the biggest party receives a perk of 50 seats on a total of 300. Syriza duly criticized this bonus scheme before the 2015 elections, but fell conspicuously silent after it won a near-to absolute majority. In Italy in 2005, Berlusconi pushed through an electoral law which awarded the largest party or coalition a majority of 55% of seats in the Chamber of Deputies. It counted two precedents: Mussolini's law from 1923, which awarded two-thirds of the parliamentary seats to the largest party (the Fascists of course) and a Christian-Democratic law from 1953, which promised 65% of the seats to any coalition which would rise above 50%. It was swiftly abolished as soon as the Christian-Democrats themselves proved structurally unable to attain it. A recent law introduced by Prime Minister Matteo Renzi still guarantees the party which wins at least 40% of the vote a winner's bonus of 340 out of 630 seats.

Election thresholds prevent the entry of smaller parties, with the effect of curbing political diversity and promoting tactical and opportunistic voting behaviour. In the Netherlands, the electoral threshold coincides with the electoral denominator: only 0.67% of the vote is required in order to gain a seat. In Greece the threshold lies at 3%; in Austria, Slovenia and Sweden at 4%; in Belgium, Germany, Latvia and Poland at 5, and in Turkey even at a discouraging 10%. In the German national elections of 2013, neither the FDP nor the AfD were able to cross the electoral threshold, so that nearly seven million votes were lost and 15.7% of the voters went unrepresented in the Bundestag.

What a populist majority democracy may lead to is sufficiently demonstrated by Victor Orbán's Hungary, which

his compatriot Konrád has aptly described as a ‘democratorship’. The ruling Fidesz party occupies 67% of the seats in the National Assembly on the basis of 43% of the vote (but in early 2015 it lost one seat to the opposition, which cost it its two-thirds majority). Governmental populism and illiberal majoritarianism also flourish in the EU’s immediate vicinity: in Turkey (on the basis of almost 50% for the AKP in 2007 and 52% for Erdoğan in the 2014 presidential elections), in Putin’s Russia (effectively a *Führerstaat* which calls itself a ‘sovereign democracy’) and in Belarus under Lukashenko.

Liberal-democratic Europe must pull itself together in order to meet this historical challenge. The contest between liberal and populist democracy is the more acute since supporters of the latter may rightly claim to represent the ‘original’ or literal conception of it, which has also struck deep roots in the leftwing democratic tradition. The challenge therefore comes both from the right and the left, both from elected governments and opposition parties, and both from within the European Union and from outside.

## Whistleblowers

A European ‘democracy of minorities’ or ‘democracy of differences’ should not only protect minorities against the might of the majority, but also represent political, cultural and ethnic diversity in the fullest possible manner. Belgian Muslim activist Dyab Abou Jahjah has described his adopted country as ‘a motley collection of minorities, where no one imposes his own culture and values upon others: there is neither majority nor minority, there is only diversity’ (*De Groene Amsterdammer* 28.11.13). Apart from indulging in some wishful thinking in the land of N-VA, Vlaams Belang and Molenbeek, Abou Jahjah perhaps insufficiently realizes that this superdiversity must also be translated towards the minorities themselves, which may try to compensate for their humiliation by the majority by oppressing their own

minorities (women, homosexuals, apostates). A democracy of minorities therefore ultimately needs to protect and support the minority of one.

Topical examples of this democratic 'point zero' are institutions of trust such as the national ombudsperson, who defends the rights of individual citizens vis-à-vis their governments, or the much-discussed safeguard regulations for whistleblowers. In the Netherlands, an employee who unveiled structural corruption and fraud in the building trade was prosecuted for twelve years. Another who exposed cover-ups of fatal accidents involving land mines was misled and threatened by the Ministry of Defence for eighteen years. A dramatic recent case involved an employee of the Dutch health care authority, who committed suicide after delivering a memorandum of six hundred pages criticizing the sloppy treatment of confidential patient data and the harassment of his own person by his managers.

European civil servant Paul van Buitenen exposed fraud and mismanagement in the Brussels bureaucracy and conflicts of interest within the European Commission. After being dismissed, his stubborn protests indirectly brought about the downfall of the Santer Commission in 1999. In 2004, *Reader's Digest* honoured him as 'European of the Year', while his party Europa Transparant won two seats in the European Parliament.

In 2000, the EP adopted new rules safeguarding the protection of whistleblowers. But a recent report by Transparency International notes that most European countries still fall below standard in this regard; only four have developed adequate legislation (Worth 2013). Outside the EU, we may recall notorious cases such as those of Chelsea (born Bradley) Manning, who published a video of an American helicopter attack on Baghdad, the Swiss bank employee Hervé Falciani, who did the same with personal information about large-scale tax evasion, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and, last but not least, NSA leak Edward Snowden.

## The Democratization of Europe

Is the ideal of a European 'democracy of differences' a realistic vision or a mission impossible? I recommend that we exchange the negative prophecy of the eurosceptics for the positive one of the famous European baron who pulled himself out of the swamp by his own bootstraps. Europe is not an object that does or does not exist, but a project in the making. Populists prefer to present political problems, which are soluble in principle, as insoluble cultural problems arising from irreconcilable differences between national identities. But political democratization is not dependent on a primordial groundwork of cultural community. A common culture and a shared identity may also arise through political processes such as transnational party formation, European policy debates, Europe-wide elections and referenda, and visionary intellectual and political leadership.

What does this signify for the democratization of the European institutions? Let us not dwell extensively on manifest abuses such as the costly Brussels-Strasbourg carrousel or the excellent financial self-care of European officials and parliamentarians. It is far more important to try to enhance the power focus of European politics and render it more transparent and politically effective. Following the model of interactive pluralist democracy set out above, checks and balances must be multiplied, especially along the vertical axis of power and representation, which is less fully developed in Europe than the horizontal one.

The EU is often praised for its felicitous mixture of supranational and intergovernmental structures, but the chief effect of it is not to forge equilibrium but to increase political opacity and uncontrollability. A power shift is required from the European Council, which primarily serves national interests and enjoys only a wafer-thin democratic legitimacy, to the European Commission. Arguably, the latter's democratic legitimacy is even thinner; but instead of

being appointed by the heads of government, it should in the future be elected by the European Parliament. The Council may retain the role of a Senate representing the member states, in which citizens would be represented as nationals.

An interactive democracy for Europe requires that the vertical separation of powers is simultaneously extended in an upward presidential, and in a downward plebiscitary direction. Differently put: European democracy needs more (elected) aristocracy *and* more populism – which may appropriately keep each other in check and balance. The weight of the executive then comes to lie with the Commission and its President, who combines the ‘two hats’ which are currently worn by the Council and Commission Presidents.

The Commission should act as a genuine political government and become accountable to a strengthened European Parliament, creating a new balance and a more intensive interplay between both institutions. The President may initially be elected by the Parliament and in the future, through direct ballot by all EU citizens. In addition, we must strengthen the supervisory and agenda-setting powers of European citizens and intensify the interaction between them and the Brussels political elite as a whole.

A more presidential system in Europe and direct elections of political leaders would positively enhance the personalization of European power. Europe must acquire better visibility and therefore needs more recognizable faces. This too is a requirement of the individualistic democracy that Europe should strive to develop. The reluctant steps in this direction taken by the Lisbon Treaty, which established the functions of Council President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs, have so far had little impact. The initiative of the leading European party families to bring *Spitzenkandidaten* into the electoral field finally resulted, after much haggling, in the appointment of Claude Juncker, which marked a decisive victory of Parliament over the Council. In this regard, although he was first elected by the EPP party machine, Juncker may be seen as the first elected Commission Presi-



dent. He also appointed a Commission which promised to operate less technocratically and to act more like a political government.

A European 'democracy of persons' could bring a new type of political leader on the scene. Until now, genuinely post-national politicians are rare birds in the European fauna. The personalization of power would focus the attention of citizens upon attractive personae who would embody Europe in a more expressive and emotional way, by displaying perfect linguistic skills, cultivating open and caring attitudes, and welcoming debate and criticism. In this manner, Europe would profit more from the representational opportunities offered by the media, which tend to politicize issues not through rational persuasion, but by stirring the imagination and mixing politics with entertainment. The focus on political style and political celebrity may enliven the democratic process by staging power struggles as clashes between recognizable 'style icons' or 'idols with ideas'. European politicians need to capture some of the panache of the populist leaders who, due to their controversial media charisma, count among the best known faces in European politics.

A personal political style acts like a brand and provides a shortcut to political information for those (the vast majority) who are not interested in reading party manifestoes or following complicated technical debates. As the 'Fortuyn effect' proved in the Netherlands in 2002, the visual and emotional dimension of media democracy renders it easier for many citizens, particularly lesser educated ones, to relate to the stakes of the political struggle by engaging (or disengaging) with exceptional 'programmatic persons' – who are seen as authentic and trustworthy precisely because they do *not* parade as 'one of us'. In this sense, a European democracy of persons might be an important channel for forging stronger bonds between Europe and its citizens ('emotional citizenship'), as would be a more courageous and visionary European leadership.

## A Democratic Elite Project

Europe was, is and will continue to be an elite project. Such a statement does not easily fit the dominant populist *Zeitgeist*. But as we have seen, liberal democracy is a process of two-way interaction between political elites and their audiences, which implies that elected politicians do not simply defer to the will of the majority, but also should attempt to (re)shape it. Anti-elitist populists who claim to speak for the people effectively act as alternative, oppositional elites, whose welcome function has been to bring decades of permissive consensus and technocratic governance to an end. The shock of the 2005 referenda in France and the Netherlands has forced the European establishment to enter into critical dialogue with their neglected constituencies. In this sense, the machinery of 'normal' interactive democracy has finally begun to gather steam also on the European level. Ironically, then, the populist challenge has made the EU more democratic, against the belief of the populists themselves that European democracy is impossible as a matter of principle.

Europe as a democratic elite project can only continue on the assumption that its elites are selected in an open and transparent fashion, and that they are willing to enter into more intensive dialogue with their sceptical publics. They should not be afraid to contradict their audiences, with the purpose of elevating their views and rallying them to an attractive vision of a better European future. In the past, the shaping of national cultures was likewise often initiated by elites who wished to educate people to national citizenship and bind them together in a common territory. A similar initiative on behalf of Europe requires the presence of political, intellectual, artistic, journalistic and sportive elites who are bold enough to exercise moral leadership and to educate citizens to their 'better European selves'.

This is Europe according to the Willy Brandt model. 'Mehr Willy Brandt wagen' ('Dare to be more like Willy Brandt') was the title of a widely read interview given a few years ago by sociologist Ulrich Beck and EP chairman Martin Schulz. The latter recalled that the German elections of 1972 had resulted in an unexpectedly large endorsement of Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, against the current of public opinion and in the face of fierce political opposition. Apparently, the silent majority was willing to give priority to broader European over narrow West-German interests. Brandt's historical intuition turned out to be justified: voters supported him because they sensed his determination and could identify with it (*Die Frankfurter Allgemeine* 23.5.13).

Today, we once again require boldness of imagination in order to overcome the European *Kleinstaaterei* and the deficits of European democracy. The lesson offered by Willy Brandt (but also by contemporary populist leaders) is that charismatic political leadership may play a decisive role in this regard. Charisma often acts as a force of breakthrough and renewal. It may liberate emotions which pull people out of their comfort zone and make them cross boundaries, including those of their national homelands.

## 6: The European Good Life

### Kapitan Dimitriev

On a huge waste dump near the Bulgarian village of Kapitan Dimitriev, 150 km east of the capital Sofia, I saw the underbelly of Europe. My friend Vasil steered his rattling Suzuki without the guardsman's permission up the mountain, along a narrow road of black muck dotted with long strips of plastic and silver foil. The snow which had fallen the day before had melted: it was wet and cold.

On top of the mountain we encountered a hellish scene. On the road towards it we had already passed wooden carts, pulled by horses and donkeys, in which the Roma carried their loot home. Above, small fires were burning at which men, women and children tried to warm themselves. Plastic waste was lying around as far as the eye could see. The toxic stench was all-penetrating. Here and there piles of car tyres were burning, sending clouds of black smoke our way: the Roma had set fire to them in order to 'harvest' the metal rims.

Everywhere groups of people were rummaging through the garbage for saleable metal scraps and plastic packaging. One man opened his garbage bag and showed us dented plastic bottles, the remains of a stethoscope (grinning, he play-acted a doctor for us) and pieces of thread from a Christmas tree illumination. With this beach-combing he earned about five leva (2,50 euro) a day. The Roma boys Suleiman, Nacho (or Anastasios) and Krasimir (literally: he who makes the world beautiful) looked cheerful but also intensely grimy, like all the Roma around them. They had grown up on the waste pile and had never attended school. They were keen to be photographed and proudly watched their portraits on my mobile. Previously in the village, we had spoken with a group of residents who, led by their may-

or, had blocked the road to the county town of Pazardzhik in protest a few days before. During the past decades, they told us, almost half of the deaths in the village had been caused by lung cancer; the street protest had been triggered by the death of a 53-year-old local woman. The village doctor confirmed that the percentage of cancer deaths was six to seven times higher than the Bulgarian average.

For decades, the smoke and stench had smothered the village, and with strong Westerly winds plastic shreds flew all around. The villagers regularly shut their windows and stayed inside to escape the chemical stench and poisonous gas smoke: 'We live in hell here'. Young people moved out at their earliest opportunity. The dump (which the inhabitants called the 'eternal fire' or 'the volcano') had been established in 1964 to serve the town of Pazardzhik, and should have been cleared after twenty years. But half a century later, it was still there, many times larger than legally permitted, and it now served more than thirty municipalities in the area.

Protests and petitions to the municipal authorities of Pazardzhik and the Ministry of the Environment in Sofia had all run aground. Although the EU offers targeted funds to sanitize such waste depots, the mayor of Pazardzhik had twice failed to submit a grant application. He had refused to sit down with the villagers of Kapitan Dimitriev and had put pressure on the village mayor. Local environmentalists suspected that he was busy setting up a private waste disposal company of his own in order to collect a levy from the residents.

On the other side of Kapitan Dimitriev, at Novo Selo, lies another 'waste dump': a burial mound of the Thracians. It marks the first high point of European civilization. The living human waste of Roma scavengers rummaging in filthy rags in the black mud and the stench of burning rubber and plastic, represents its lowest point. Scenes like these are far removed from the comfortable and secure lives we, including our own poor and underprivileged citizens, enjoy in

Western Europe. The whole gamut of social problems is concentrated in this Dickensian inferno: abject poverty of a discriminated-against minority, acute health problems and soaring death rates resulting from air pollution and other environmental poisoning, administrative arbitrariness, and political ill-will and corruption.

The problems we face in the Northwest with regard to our own (ethnic) underclasses, environmental pollution and administrative and political corruption may be similar in nature, but they must be multiplied by a factor of twenty for Europe's Southeastern rim. The deplorable condition of the Roma in particular should alert us to these vast differences of scale, as well as to the fact that the integration of our own ethnic minorities, despite all the clumsiness and fussing, has so far proceeded rather well. 'The treatment of the Roma is the litmus test for democracy', Václav Havel already declared in 1993. It is the more true because, from 2004 on, most of them have become European citizens.

The Roma are the poorest of the poor in the poorest countries of Europe. Counting more than ten million, they make up the largest European minority; an estimated 750.000 of them live in Bulgaria. Most *tsigani* live in self-built shacks of stones, canvas and corrugated iron, sometimes in containers, lacking water supply, sewage or electricity; or in urban ghettos such as Fakulteta ('Fuck-ulteta') in Sofia, where taxi drivers refuse to take you because you might be robbed or assaulted (Kooijman 2006).

After the fall of communism in 1989, their plight has only worsened, and it has not noticeably improved after the accession of most Eastern European countries to the EU in 2004 and 2007. According to official (rosy) figures, more than half of the Roma goes without paid work. Health problems abound and crime rates are high. Girls and women suffer from an oppressive patriarchal culture. The number of schoolchildren and college students is extremely low: not more than 4.4% above the age of fifteen. Illiteracy is chronic.

Many Roma speak only poor Bulgarian and school dropout figures are dramatically high.

Dislike of these 'stinking and thieving brownies' is widespread, and has been fuelled for decades by a nationalist and xenophobic party such as Ataka. Although they inhabit Bulgaria since many generations, they are still seen as migrants. During anti-Roma riots in the village of Katounitza in 2011 and an assault on the Banya Bashi mosque in Sofia in the same year, Ataka militants shouted slogans such as 'All Roma are criminal' and 'Gypsies in the soap kettle, Turks (i.e. Muslims) under the knife'. Ataka's political manifesto idealizes Bulgaria as a unitary, monolithic nation which cannot be divided on religious, ethnic, cultural or any other grounds. Minorities such as the Roma, 'Turks' and gays are branded as 'eternally guilty' and scapegoated for all the problems Bulgaria suffers from.

## **Social Justice in Europe**

And these problems are huge. As we saw before, the great European diagonal illuminates a 'class divide' between rich countries which feature high levels of education and mutual trust, and poorer countries where average levels of education and social confidence are low. Many variables make a sudden jump when they cross the Austrian-Hungarian border – which not only constituted the soft, porous boundary which separated the two core nations of the Danube Monarchy, but also the hard borderline between West and East during the Cold War. Bulgaria is situated at the lower end of this diagonal, and hence as a country figures at the bottom of many tables and charts, like its own Roma citizens.

While in Bulgaria only 30% of the population professes to be content with life, the percentage rises to 95 in Sweden. Countries such as these are the enviable abode of a free and easy lifestyle, which is facilitated by social security and framed by an atmosphere of trust and tolerance. They are

exemplars of the European good life, in having reduced socioeconomic anxieties and offering individuals ample opportunities to improve their lives and develop confidence in themselves, each other and the future.

As we saw before, greater social equality is generally productive of higher overall levels of happiness. While inegalitarian societies deepen social contradictions and easily stir up we-they enmities, more egalitarian societies tend to promote mutual trust and empathy. Europe's mission as a peacemaker therefore includes much more than the abjuration of war. It also demands social peace, which must be grounded in social justice (Nida-Rümelin e.a. 2013: 10).

In present-day Europe, however, social justice is increasingly sacrificed to harsh imperatives of economic growth and austerity, which have also weakened the welfare states of the Northwest. This 'German' austerity politics effectively amounts to 'state socialism for the rich and the banks and neoliberalism for the middle class and the poor' (Beck 2012: 13). While profits have been shamelessly privatized, losses have been equally shamelessly socialized. Governments have been forced into sharp cutbacks on public expenditure in order to win back the whimsical 'confidence of the markets'. Arrogant rating agencies have indulged in sweeping judgments about the creditworthiness of entire nations, manipulating premium rates and constraining their financial latitude, inducing huge losses of national sovereignty.

Economic insecurity has increased for everyone except the very rich, as has the number of working poor stuck in junk jobs, while unemployment, especially among the young, has attained record levels. In 2014, 62.5% of young people in Greece were jobless; the percentage reached 56.4 in Spain, 43.5 in Portugal and 40.5 in Italy. While the European states spent 700 billion euro in order to stabilize the banks, they could spare no more than 6 billion for combating youth unemployment. Social security systems have been stripped



bare and national debts have exploded as a result of bank bailouts, the huge costs of which have ultimately come down on the ordinary citizen and taxpayer (Legrain 2014).

A comprehensive summary of the social fall-out of this dynamic is provided by the Social Justice Index. It offers a cross-national comparison of European countries on the basis of a calibrated sum of six major indices: poverty prevention; equitable education; labour market inclusion; social cohesion and non-discrimination; health; and intergenerational justice (Schraad-Tischler 2015). The European diagonal is once again clearly traceable, though not without some exceptions and surprises. At an EU average of 5.63 percentage points, Sweden leads with 7.23, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands follow with scores ranging between 7.10 and 6.84. The Czech Republic, Austria and Germany reach between 6.68 and 6.52 and Slovenia, Estonia, Belgium and France between 6.44 and 6.18 points. While the UK scores only slightly above average, Poland falls just below it. Ireland (5.14) stands lower than Slovakia (5.33); Portugal and Latvia equal at 4.98, Hungary and Spain at 4.73, while Italy scores still lower with 4.69. The rear is brought up by Bulgaria (3.78) and Romania (3.74), while Greece is situated at the very bottom (3.61).

In their 2014 report, the authors concluded that social injustice had increased across the board, most obviously in the crisis-battered countries of Greece, Spain and Italy, but also in Ireland and Hungary. Rigid austerity politics had clearly exercised a negative effect on overall levels of social justice. Social security systems had been undermined, investment in education and R&D had diminished, while youth unemployment and the risk of poverty had increased (Schraad-Tischler & Kroll 2014).

The 2015 report likewise concluded that, although overall deterioration had been avoided, 'a genuine and comprehensive turnaround in terms of social justice' was not forthcoming. Nearly one quarter of all EU citizens (approx-

mately 122 million people) are currently regarded as being at risk of poverty or social exclusion. In Spain, this figure is more than 29%, while in Greece it reaches 36% (Schraad-Tischler 2015).

In its current neoliberal profile, the EU tends to privilege the market as its centre of gravity and 'marketism' as the beginning of all wisdom. The four freedoms laid down in the Maastricht Treaty (the free movement of goods, services, people and capital) are first and foremost market freedoms. As a result, the EU primarily functions as a free-trade zone without effective buffers or restraints.

The deregulation of the financial trading system during the globalization spurt of the 1980s has created a dramatic asymmetry between nation-states on the one hand and globalized markets and multinational companies on the other. It is often noted that this structural imbalance between a rampant economy and a weakened polity constitutes the biggest construction flaw of the European monetary union. One less often realizes that the capitalist world system has always featured a structural and geographical unevenness between national states and international markets, although this feature has been dramatically enhanced since the 1980s.

Since the banking and sovereign debt crises broke out in 2008, this discrepancy has been somewhat mitigated by actions taken by the European Central Bank and by political frameworks such as the banking union which took effect in January 2016. Yet it is clear that the primacy which the (financial) economy has acquired over the polity can only be effectively reversed by a far more decisive transfer of decision-making powers from individual nation-states to the European Union. Because the financial stability of individual nations can only be guaranteed by enhanced political cooperation, the social protection of European citizens is directly dependent on it. National economic sovereignty and the integrity of the national welfare states can only be rescued by ceding large parts of national sovereignty to the EU. That is

the only way to muster the strength which is needed to resist zombie banks, multinationals, tax evaders and other large-scale polluters (Eickhout e.a. 2013).

## **Socialization in One Continent**

Parties of the old left rightly argue that Europe 'shall be social or shall cease to be'. But their tragic resolve is to fall back on a type of social nationalism which closely resembles the welfare chauvinism which is advocated by the populist right. Both left and right promise to protect citizens from the fallout of neoliberal economic globalization – a promise which appeals to voters on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. Fidesz in Hungary and PiS in Poland thrive in large part on a delayed reaction of frustrated citizens to the neoliberal shock therapies which were administered to the post-communist states from 1989 on. The transition to market-based economies has come at a tremendous social cost, creating a gulf between the economically successful and those who are left behind. Both in the East and West, then, the national-populist turn may in large part be understood as a reaction to the insecurity, economic dislocation and lack of opportunity which 'modernization losers' have suffered as a result of the hegemony of economic liberalism.

'Roles should be reversed: henceforth the state must command the banks instead of being commanded by them!' This resounding call would perfectly match the ambitions of the contemporary radical left. Yet it originates from a fiery speech delivered by Hendrik de Man at a congress of the Belgian Workers' Party in 1934. In the year before, De Man had drawn up the Plan of Labour, which offered the most consistent ideological answer by the social-democratic left to the economic collapse of 1929. One of the slogans of the Plan was: 'We need a strong state in order to tear down the Wall of Money!', which sounds equally fresh and topical as the earlier one. However, the Planist socialists of the 1930s tended to identify the strong state first of all as the *national* state. The social-

ization of the banking and credit sector was only feasible if the national implementation of socialism took priority over the international one. The choice was simple: either one had to begin with 'socialization in one country' or one had to abandon socialization altogether. This was the core idea of the *socialisme national* which De Man elaborated with Paul-Henri Spaak, the postwar Belgian prime minister and European founding father. In Germany, the early national socialist movement adopted similar ideas about breaking the power of finance (*Brechung der Zinsknechtschaft*), recommending state capitalism and national autarky as ways out of the crisis – although such anticapitalist sentiments were immediately linked to a racist critique of 'Jewish' usury and 'Jewish' world domination.

The dilemma of Planist socialism tends to repeat itself in our time, as both the old left and the neopopulist right opt for the defence of national economic sovereignty. Speaking in general terms, a repoliticization of economic structures is only feasible in two major ways: by means of a complete lock-out from the world market and the development of 'socialism in one country'; or by means of a world government which includes all nations. While the cosmopolitan road remains a distant utopia, the road of national economic autarky has turned out to be paved with terrible political and humanitarian risks. In modern history, such a clean break could only be realized by socialist and / or nationalist revolutions which harnessed all national resources in the service of a state-enforced industrialization. This was the historical logic which drove Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany and Communist China on the path to a totalitarian war economy.

Twentieth-century socialists have become too much ensnared in this logic of national closure and have tended to neglect or even betray their internationalist aspirations. This is what happened to the Planist socialists during the thirties, and what is once again happening to parties such as the SP, Die Linke and the Parti de Gauche in our time. Yet it is evi-

dent that a strategy of national protectionism will not resolve, but only increase the structural imbalance between powerful transnational economic players and weak national polities. National economic sovereignty is an irresponsible fiction when facing all-powerful multinationals and giant state-capitalist challengers such as China.

We should therefore follow a third option, beyond abstract cosmopolitanism and narrow nationalism, and envisage a repoliticization of economic structures on the European scale. In the medium run, the strong state which is able to 'tear down the Wall of Money' can only be the European state. Instead of withdrawing into 'socialism in one country', we must therefore advance towards 'socialization in one continent'.

## Security and Freedom

Conservative politicians such as British Prime Minister David Cameron intend to abolish 'social Europe' as soon as possible. ECB president Mario Draghi has declared the European social model to be 'dead'. A European welfare state is barely conceivable, Brussels insider and author Luuk van Middelaar agrees: 'Europe can no more take upon itself the role of *patronus*, protector of the hungry, than it can the *pax europeana*. Collective security and individual social welfare are both out of reach as public justification for its existence' (2013: 262).

Yet what Europe needs against such pessimism-in-disguise is precisely a *lack of realism*, a surge of imagination, a flare of political passion, perhaps a touch of political madness! 'We need to re-imagine what a Good Europe looks and feels like', as the London think tank Compass demands. Idealism implies striving for the impossible in order to attain the possible. The result will necessarily be disappointing, but that is never a good reason not to try. A European welfare state should combine the energetic freedom of liberalism and the social stability promised by social democracy, and

add to these the sustainability which is demanded by the Greens. Freedom, security and sustainability are mutually dependent. The self-confidence which encourages individuals to seize opportunities, risk experiments and tap their creativity can only grow on the basis of peace, durable prosperity and social and environmental protection.

A charming example of the link between institutionalized security and risk appetite is offered by the experimentalism of the *Nordic noir* thrillers. The former head of drama of the Danish public broadcaster believes that the protection offered by Danish democracy and the Danish welfare state (not least its generous funding of culture) goes some way towards explaining why Danes feel comparatively free and are not averse to risk-taking. The neoliberal conviction that a comprehensive welfare state discourages entrepreneurship and risk-taking is thereby stood on its head (*NRC Handelsblad* 16.5.13).

Material prosperity, social security and 'green' sustainability are important preconditions for enjoying individual freedom. People will feel more European as soon as they discover that Europe is a working 'society of opportunity' which supports them on the road to a better life. Instead of exclusively focusing on traditional forms of economic growth (and the concomitant threat of climate damage), the job motor must be shifted to proactive governments which heavily invest in labour-intensive sectors such as health, education, research & development as well as in green technology, housing and mobility.

The large-scale tax evasion by multinationals and megarich individuals, as recently exposed by the Panama Papers, can only be effectively tackled through European coordination and European sanctions. Tax competition between individual states must be brought to an end. Europe should be able to raise taxes of its own, for example on financial transactions, in order to enlarge the Union budget, which currently stands at a mere 1% of combined GNP. Taxation in

all member states must become more progressive, in order to facilitate the redistribution of resources, both nationally and on a European scale.

Such a prospective European welfare (or social investment) state can be constructed step by step, departing from the baseline of a Europe-wide unemployment insurance scheme and/or a European minimum wage. Member states should agree on social minimum standards, or harmonize their welfare systems according to a corridor model which allows broad margins of variation, for example by linking the volume of welfare benefits to national levels of economic performance. The minimum wage could be gradually raised to 60% of national median or average income, which would reduce poverty and inequality and boost demand. Such a concrete political project would confer real substance upon the idea of a social Europe, and help to regain people's trust in European integration (Schulten 2014).

For the future, we might even contemplate something like an individualized European basic income, which would not only provide citizens with a guaranteed income but also relax the work ethic and relativize the political goal of full employment. Belgian political philosopher Philippe Van Parijs, one of its best-known advocates, has proposed an amount of two hundred euros per month, to be financed by a Tobin tax on financial transactions, a European carbon tax or a dedicated VAT. A modest amount such as this would already effect a huge redistribution in favour of the poorer European countries. In Bulgaria, for example, it would create a per capita income increase of some 40%.

Like the first legal state pension introduced in 1889 by Bismarck, who intended to outflank social democracy and to forge stronger ties between the newly united German states, such a 'eurodividend' could effectively bind citizens to the European project, while also removing economic imbalances within the euro zone and halting the social race to the bottom. It would lay a common European 'social floor' under

the national welfare states, which would otherwise retain their diversity. As an individual share in the profits of European unification, the eurodividend would literally 'make the profits of Europe visible for everyone' (*De Groene Amsterdammer* 27.11.13).

## A Rich Life

The good life involves a great deal more than material prosperity, social security and a sustainable environment. The familiar Maslow pyramid suggests that, once basic physiological and safety needs are met, people may develop higher ambitions which center on social recognition, self-realization, and cultural transcendence. However, Maslow subsequently discovered that people are from the very outset interested in mutual solidarity, religious transcendence, national pride and other higher ideals, and are to some extent willing to trade prosperity and security for experimentation and personal growth. The desire to exchange certainty, habit and safety for the 'danger' of acquiring novel experiences is by no means the privilege of a prosperous elite: every human being is bound to make such calculations.

A quality-rich life entails that you have sufficient access to employment, income, health, housing, education and culture. But it also means enjoying pleasant relations with family members, friends and strangers, as well as having access to sufficient relaxation, tranquility, space, fresh air, clean water and unspoilt nature. Nature itself provides an important source of well-being, since the quality of the environment undeniably impacts on people's lives (De Geus 2003).

A European polity would be far more effective than the national states in protecting citizens from the consequences of energy exhaustion, industrial restructuration and anthropogenic climate change. In the latter field, the EU is already more powerful and forward-looking than the majority of its



member states, e.g. with regard to greenhouse gas reduction or energy policy. Europe's agriculture and trade policies provide it with ample opportunities to realize ecological values and stimulate its member states to become greener.

Another key element of the good life is the liberation of time. A richer life implies that we win back command over our own time (*Eigenzeit*) from the economic production and consumption spheres. Temporal wealth creates the conditions for a more balanced, versatile and varied existence, by drawing a more satisfactory balance between work, care, education, learning, reflection and hobbies.

A European basic income could be one way of distributing this time freedom more evenly and fairly. It would not only benefit the stressed-out multitaskers and burnt-out managers of the rich Northwest, but every EU citizen. Post-material values such as these are by no means secondary to material values, even though their comparative weight varies along the European diagonal. A European basic income might well effect a shift in the distribution of these values and promote their gradual harmonization.

The greater preference for postmaterialist values in the Northwest (particularly with well-off and highly educated citizens) primarily focuses on ecological values, which are by definition transnational. Green parties therefore enjoy a much stronger representation in Germany, Austria, Scandinavia, Belgium and the Netherlands than in the East and South of Europe. However, climate *scepticism* is also most pointedly developed in the Northwest, where it goes hand in glove with neoliberal marketism and a populist rejection of 'green' Brussels. In the Southeast, we instead encounter various types of green nationalism, again most outspokenly in the populist parties. Their drive to protect the national heartland and the national peasantry as the core of 'the people' is sometimes reminiscent of Nazi ecology. Jobbik's talk of 'cleansing the Danube Basin', for example, while ostensibly referring to 'Western' polluting industries and greenhouse

gases wafting across from Europe, simultaneously spreads insinuations about Roma who 'pollute' the Hungarian nation.

In sum, it remains essential to treat freedom as a distributional value. Poverty reduction must be linked to 'riches reduction', in order to reap the benefits of equality and happiness which have been laid out by the authors of *The Spirit Level*. The green components of the good life should likewise be made available to all, through a fairer distribution of the risks of pollution and climate change. In this way, the issue of redistribution is globalized and futurized: it is extended to people living in other parts of the world and to future generations. Redistribution of wealth is also rendered more acute once we decide to mitigate economic growth and link social progress less exclusively to higher incomes and material prosperity. If the economic cake becomes smaller, e.g. because we choose to respect ecological limits, we deliberately create forms of scarcity which must be divided more equally.

The good European life is by no means an elitist ideal which only appeals to those who are comfortably off and comparatively rich. It is also highly relevant for those for whom survival is still a daily fixture, and who can only dream about what may come next. It is a costly mistake to suppose that human rights, political freedom and individualization only become significant when you no longer need to worry about your daily bread.

Liberation from social anxiety entails much more than the provision of safety and security. A floor of social protection will encourage people to grasp opportunities, take risks and reinvent themselves. Material security and social protection must therefore always be put in the service of higher cultural ideals such as the development of free thought and genuine individuality. Civilization implies that citizens are educated in democratic virtues such as openness, modesty, curiosity, self-critique and tolerance, and learn to resist absolutism, authoritarianism and xenophobia.

In a nutshell, this was the thrust of cultural socialism, of which both Hendrik de Man and Jacques de Kadt were prominent representatives. It advocates material improvement, with the ultimate aim of furthering the spiritual and moral development of individuals. In this sense, 'making Europe' is a grand project of cultural-socialist education, for which greater equality is never an end in itself, but always promotes the unfolding of productive cultural differences ('socialism for the sake of individualism'). The European good life is not only a secure but also an adventurous life, which sets out to broaden established traditions and to leave beaten paths. It enables individuals to become, in De Kadt's phrase, 'genuine personalities who are eager to embark upon a journey into the unknown'. This journey will take all of us further into Europe.

# 7: The Language of Europe

## **Euro-English**

Europe suffers from serious communication problems. With the accession of Croatia in July 2013, Croatian was admitted as the twenty-fourth official language. All legislation is available in the twenty-four working languages of the Union. Each MEP has the right to use his or her national tongue in all plenary sessions, and every citizen is permitted to write to the European institutions in it. In addition, the Union recognizes a number of regional languages such as Basque, Catalan, Galician and Welsh. Still, the costs of interpretation and translation are comparatively modest, amounting to 1% of the EU budget or around three euro per annum for every European citizen.

In everyday practice, however, the Commission, the Parliament and the Council use the three dominant languages English, French and German, with English a clear frontrunner at press conferences, in parliamentary corridors and at the negotiating tables. In 2004, the European Parliament rejected a proposition to introduce Esperanto next to English as *lingua franca* – which now sounds equally quaint as a good-humoured proposal from 1974 to adopt Latin. The European Commission has formally adopted the ideal of ‘mother tongue plus two other languages’, but it remains questionable whether this is indeed a realistic goal.

Euro-English is inexorably on the rise. It is already the most widely spoken language in Europe (by close to 40% of Europeans, not counting the 13% who use it as their native tongue). According to recent Eurostat data, 28% of European citizens command two languages in addition to their mother language, while 56% speak one foreign language. Nearly 90% of European schoolchildren – in some countries 100% –

are currently learning English as second language. French, German and Spanish follow with 24, 20 and 18%. The media, internet and pop culture are rapidly educating the young to become near-native speakers. Everyday (street) language is increasingly peppered with English terms, among which 'shit' and 'fuck' are merely the coarsest. In an optimistic estimate, the citizens of Europe will have become bilingual in one generation from now, i.e. around 2050.

The existential crises which hit Europe in the past years were heavily English-spoken. The humiliation of the left-wing Greek government by the neoliberal-minded Euro Group and the other 'Institutions' was primarily administered in English. Former Greek minister of Finance Yanis Varoufakis derived his flamboyant political stardom (and his reputation as an irritant) in large measure from his perfect command of English. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian, Eritrean and Afghan refugees met with English-speaking volunteers and coast guards on the shores of Lesbos and Kos, faced harsh English commands from border guards in Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary and Slovenia, were shuttled through Austria and other countries by English-speaking helpers, and were finally accommodated by English-speaking volunteers and asylum personnel in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden.

*Lingua franca* is Latin for 'free language'. But it also refers to Frankish, the hodgepodge of Italian, French, Greek and Spanish which was spoken from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century by traders and diplomats in the Eastern Mediterranean (all Western Europeans were known as 'Franks' at the time). It is becoming increasingly difficult to reconcile the Union's formal objective of preserving its unique linguistic diversity with the rapid advance of English as European 'free language'. The need for direct communication between European politicians and citizens is increasing apace, but the current language diversity inhibits mutual understanding and obstructs durable cultural exchanges.

A true European republic will only emerge as soon as politicians are capable of campaigning in person in all member states and citizens can freely vote and debate across national boundaries. European friendships and a European public sphere can only develop when not only intellectuals, politicians, entrepreneurs, media makers and artists, but citizens in all walks of life are able to meet and talk face to face. The future of Europe thus depends in large degree on the ambition to achieve perfect bilingualism. In practice, this means that every European must become a fluent speaker of Euro-English.

Greater linguistic unity comes with tremendous benefits. Speaking a small language is an obvious handicap for anyone engaging in science, commerce and industry. Command of a world language offers direct access to abundantly rich knowledge resources, which enable one to market one's talents, performances and products directly to a much larger cultural audience. Bigger languages such as German and French will eventually share the fate of smaller ones such as Dutch or Danish, which do no longer have a future as a language of science in the majority of research fields. Virtually all universities, research labs and international companies have become bilingual or even prefer to use English in their everyday communication.

This fact should by no means be considered fatal for our national cultures. For example, Dutch music (the Concertgebouw Orchestra; André Rieu), ballet and opera, the visual arts, fashion (Viktor & Rolf), design and architecture (Rem Koolhaas) and sports such as football, cycling and speed-skating, already occupy a European if not global cultural space. Some nostalgics fear that literary Dutch will sink to the status of a regional dialect in Europe, similar to Frisian within the Netherlands itself. But instead of being a cultural disaster, anglicization also offers a huge challenge and opportunity to literary talents: like their English-speaking colleagues, Dutch authors may become world-famous and rich on the strength of one bestseller (Van den Bergh 2004).

While it is easier for nonverbal cultural crafts such as the visual arts or sports to conquer the world, language-based professions such as the humanities and the social sciences will inevitably lag behind. In the past, literary romantics often assumed that Dutch, by virtue of its unique location at the crossroads of Germanic, Roman and Anglo-Saxon cultures, was well-positioned to mediate between and mutually integrate them; but we have come to recognize that this advantage is greatly outweighed by the disadvantages of cultural insulation.

The classical humanistic ideal, which required every civilized person to master the three 'modern' languages German, French and English in addition to the native one has faded, not least because of its Eurocentric bias. But the decline of this ideal is more than offset by the rapid democratization of English bilingualism. Fears about the emergence of a new social boundary or even class dichotomy between a bilingual elite and the monolingual masses appear unfounded. In addition, the advance of English is accompanied by the equally unstoppable rise of *visual* culture, which is much more universal and readily accessible than any spoken or written word.

It would be mistaken to assume that only the highly educated are profiting from this development. As Karl Schlögel has shown, Europe is also growing from the bottom up, virtually unnoticed, by means of numerous molecular processes and border-crossing flows, far beyond what professionals and intellectuals assume to be the case. Bus companies such as Eurolines, cheap air carriers, ferry services such as the one that runs between Helsinki and Tallinn, international trains, the Channel Tunnel, bridges such as the now media-famous one between Copenhagen and Malmö, and all kinds of bazaars, professional meetings and festivals connect ordinary Europeans in daily travelling routines, creating at least some degree of multilingualism and intercultural sophistication. Travel guides, maps, and road atlases consti-

tute a new European literature. In almost all European capitals one can buy local newspapers, maps and entertainment guides in English. A new class of multilingual commuters has emerged, including the hundreds of thousands of Poles who commute by air and car between Britain and their native country. English is also the language of airports, ATMs, internet, hotels and gas stations. International truck drivers find their way around Europe with the aid of special guides such as the quadrilingual drivers' manual (Schlögel 2008; 2013).

For smaller nations such as the Netherlands, progressive anglicization would both strengthen their domestic tradition of world-openness and further national emancipation, since perfect bilingualism is the only way to break the linguistic imperialism and cultural domination of the Anglo-Saxons. Europe is already the world leader in English language proficiency, even though both multilingualism and command of English once again vary along a Northwest-Southeast diagonal.

According to the 2015 English Proficiency Index of Education First (EF), Sweden leads the non-native English-speaking countries with nearly 71%. The Netherlands and Denmark are second and third, followed by Norway and Finland. Interestingly, younger member states such as Slovenia, Estonia and Poland already feature slightly higher English proficiency levels than older ones such as Austria, Germany and Belgium. Spain and Italy occupy the zone of moderate proficiency (below 57%), together with Slovakia, Latvia and Lithuania. Notably, the lowest level of English proficiency in any EU member state is found in France, which in this respect equals non-member Turkey (below 50%).

The accession of twelve new member states in 2004 and 2007 has given a massive boost to English as the preferred lingua franca. The position of German has also been strengthened: counting approximately 90 million speakers, it is currently the largest native language in Europe. Coun-



tries such as Poland and Hungary demonstrate a rapid increase in English language skills – and a widening generation gap between speakers of Russian and English. France, by contrast, shows a negative trend. Of all European countries, it is most singularly devoted to (anti-English) language protection. The French language, of course, will be the biggest loser if English would become the official vernacular in Brussels. From 1951 on, it was the first and only language of the Coal and Steel Community, and long retained this privileged position within the EEC. But already in 1973, at the accession of Denmark, Ireland and Britain, it was outflanked by English.

### **Linguistic Chauvinism**

In today's Europe, clinging to the native tongue as the core of one's culture and identity is a recipe for provincialism, spiritual isolation and cultural ghettoization. Populist nationalists, however, uphold the identity of language and people as a holy principle, celebrating the mother tongue as the most natural expression of our most deep-seated sentiments. The native language is felt to embody the *Heimat*, even more than the national colours, the national anthem or the head of state: 'In your language you really feel at home'.

An influential nineteenth-century Dutch dictionary carried the motto: 'The language is the soul of the nation, it is identical with the nation itself.' It was the life's work of Leyden linguist Matthias de Vries, who praised Dutch as a 'reflection of our national character, the marker of our national existence, the bond and pledge of our nationality'. In his view, Dutch literary science was 'closely tied to the most sacred interests of the fatherland.' De Vries' successor even concluded that a Dutch linguist should therefore be a true and trusted Dutchman.

Pim Fortuyn, whose command of English was notoriously poor, harboured an almost desperate love for his

mother tongue. Dutch, to him, constituted 'the centre of our emotional expression, the core of a person's and a people's identity', without which one felt culturally displaced. To be able to speak, read and write Dutch was therefore mandatory for every resident and immigrant (Fortuyn 2001: 105). The proposal to enshrine Dutch in the Constitution accordingly graced the election platforms of Fortuyn's own party and of a number of successor parties, and also made up a central ingredient of Geert Wilders' 2005 'Declaration of Independence'. Rita Verdonk, the leader of a short-lived populist party called Pride in the Netherlands, even demanded that everyone should speak Dutch in public, because otherwise 'people would feel *unheimisch*' (which is good German for 'uneasy'); people should even speak the national language inside their homes. In 2010, the government formally proposed to include Dutch in the Constitution, but the Council of State successfully advised against it.

Linguistic chauvinism and the quest for linguistic homogeneity are characteristic features of all populist parties in Europe. Like nationality, gender and religious fundamentalism, the mother tongue offers a near-to gratuitous identity: you do not need much effort to acquire it and have some standing in the world. Like nationalism, machismo and religious fundamentalism, linguistic chauvinism is therefore tempting for those who fear they are nobodies: a frustration which is eagerly whipped up and exploited by populists.

Bulgarian Ataka has proposed a ban on all public broadcasts in Turkish and demands exclusive recognition of Bulgarian as the national language; in neighbouring Romania, the Great Romania Party likewise demands the abolition of Hungarian. The Finns Party has long opposed constitutional bilingualism; many ordinary Finns still see Swedish as a vehicle of the elite. Belgium perhaps offers the most tragic example of the dire consequences which follow from the identification of language and people. Many Flemish speakers still consider French to be the language of the oppressor; the boundary between 'us' and 'them' is experienced first of

all as a language barrier. The populist N-VA, for example, routinely vilified the previous Belgian government as a 'tax government of French-speaking socialists'.

The problem of protecting minorities expresses itself most acutely in the politics of language: formal recognition of one's native tongue equals recognition of one's minority culture. A day after the deposition of President Yanukovich, the Ukrainian parliament voted down a law which would have made Russian the second language of government – whipping up fears in many Russian-speaking Ukrainians that their culture was in danger. The new government quickly conceded its mistake and went on to secure a protected status for Russian in the Ukrainian Constitution. In Soviet times, by contrast, it was forbidden to speak Ukrainian. In the Eastern provinces, the Russian-speaking majority is held hostage by separatists who would love to do the same.

Indeed, a core element of the Putinist doctrine of *Russky Mir* is that all speakers of Russian belong to one unified civilization (Pomerantsev & Weiss 2014). In the Baltic states, Russian minorities hence feel threatened, fearing the backlash of Russian power politics. A patriotic Latvian parliamentarian explained: 'Putin's ideology is Greater Russia. The Crimea constitutes a watershed. In his view, Latvia too is a historical mistake, and Russians have the right to correct it. Russians cannot accept being in the minority wherever they are' (NRC *Handelsblad* 24.3.14).

In the populist worldview, protecting the native language is a form of national defence. 'Every word is a soldier', nineteenth-century cultural nationalists already proclaimed. Linguistic politics lies at the core of all conflicts about internationalization and integration. This applies as much to the integration of migrants and refugees in national cultures as to the integration of national citizens in Europe and the rest of the world. If (English) bilingualism becomes the norm, we will all turn into migrants who must make themselves at home in Europe.

Eurosceptics find this prospect neither feasible nor desirable: 'Because of the many languages spoken in Europe, there can be no public debate. A European Parliament can never be representative. The "voice of the people" will never be heard on the European level' (Baudet 2012: 24-5). However, essentialist views such as these are contradicted by current statistics (the percentage of English speakers among the young already doubles the European average of almost 40%) and by the everyday experience of students, scholars, managers, politicians, tourists, truck drivers, pensionado's, singer-songwriters, football fans, internet users and deejays.

Historical experience likewise undercuts this type of cultural pessimism. The identification of language, national identity and nation state is the contingent outcome of a long history of cultural education and political centralization. Even a century after the French Republic was proclaimed to be 'indivisible' in 1789, only a fifth of its citizens was able to speak proper French. Pubs in Brittany long featured warning signs like: 'No spitting. No speaking of Breton'. At the unification of Italy, a mere 2.5% of its population could speak Italian. In the Netherlands, a royal decree of 1814 proclaimed Dutch to be the official language, even though the king himself did not speak it faultlessly and French remained *usance* in government circles (the Senate even exclusively debated in this language). Dutch was deliberately applied to unify the new kingdom, in order to drive back French culture and demonstrate to the great powers that the new state indeed had a unique character (Aerts 1999: 74).

In 1989, consternation arose following a proposal by the Minister of Education to introduce English as official language in Dutch academia. Since then, this 'spectre' has largely become a reality, both within research institutions and in academic education. The elite university colleges are entirely English-spoken, like the vast majority of master's curricula. All Dutch universities offer bachelor courses in English, and some are preparing to render their entire curriculum

bilingual. Art education at the Amsterdam Rietveld Academy, where more than half of the students are foreign-born, is conducted entirely in English.

Defenders of the national language and culture maintain that Dutch is suffering particularly in the scientific field. But this complaint appears equally nostalgic as the failed effort of white elite universities in South Africa to preserve Afrikaans as a language of science. The progressive anglicization of Dutch academia is put into perspective by realizing that, until 1876, Latin constituted the academic *lingua franca*. The demand for Dutch as an academic vernacular and for Dutch literary studies date from the nationalistic Patriotten era in the late eighteenth century. The 1797 plea by a Leyden professor of 'Eloquentiæ Hollandicæ' for public education in what was then known as 'Lower German' was considered a dubious novelty at the time. This 'Dutch' tradition has therefore existed for less than a century and a half, following two 'Latin' centuries after the foundation of the Academia Lugduno Batava in 1575.

## Language as Home

If the order of constitution between culture and politics can also be reversed, the fact that Europe lacks a common vernacular is better seen as a glass half full than half empty. Yet it is important to see that populists respond to a genuine deficit and a genuine sense of alienation. Feelings of being 'a stranger in your own land' become acute as soon as one encounters 'gibberish' everywhere in the streets, the shops and the next-door neighbours.

Fortuyn was right to say that our native language is 'the centre of our emotional expression' and offers confidence and security. We feel uncomfortable and vulnerable when we are unable to express ourselves or to understand others. Anyone who is less than fluent in a foreign language knows about the embarrassment of being tongue-tied (in Dutch:

having a 'mouthful of teeth'). The fear of losing one's speech is equal to the fear of losing one's say and hence one's identity. In this respect, Europe's language problem is part of the larger problem of emotional attachment and identification, or what may be called Europe's '*Heimat* problem'.

Once again, it is not only the lesser educated who suffer these discomforts. Some Dutch academics argue that their students are unable to think in English, lacking the means to express what they want to say or write; the same would apply to the broken English of their teachers. But if the implication is that one can never properly think or feel in an adopted language, we slide once more into the pit of cultural pessimism. English writing and speaking skills are improving by leaps and bounds in both teachers and students at Dutch universities. Secondary schools increasingly employ English as their language of instruction. In the Netherlands, there are currently 120 such schools (versus 22 in 2000), while thirty professional training colleges are currently introducing bilingual education. In 2014-15, twelve elementary schools began to experiment with bilingual teaching, while an additional six followed in 2015-16.

The Early Bird Programme for 'more, better and earlier' English is already in operation in hundreds of elementary schools, also offering courses for toddlers and after-school seminars. The author of the immensely popular 'Nijntje' ('Miffy') character recently published an illustrated English-Dutch dictionary and a counting book for 1-2 year-olds. If children are able to learn a second language as early and as playfully as this, without having to wait till they have fully mastered their native tongue, it may indeed become a second home, certainly if it is used on a daily basis. The sense of vulnerability and loss will evaporate, and the self-assurance to act in a broader circle will grow. In this way, the 'free language' will enlarge everyone's orbit of communication, also for sharing Dutch experiences with others. Books such as Ian Buruma's *Murder in Amsterdam* or Ayaan Hirsi Ali's

*Infidel* have for example familiarized a worldwide audience with the Dutch struggle with integration and Islam.

Euro-English – which of course mingles with national language cultures – does not need to convey the same intellectual subtlety and emotional intensity which is offered by the native language, just like European citizenship does not need to match the depth of attachment of family bonds or a traditional village community. The ideal of perfect bilingualism therefore perfectly fits the ideal of Europe as an easy-going, individualistic and mobile community ('Europe travelling light'). Mixing the native language with English felicitously combines the desire for security with the quest for adventure. Sociologist Abram de Swaan adduces a typically Dutch metaphor for it: he writes his academic books in English but his columns and essays in Dutch, like you would board a plane to distant destinations but mount your bike for places closer by (De Swaan 2001: ix).

More or less perfect bilingualism will make all of us feel more like European citizens. The preservation of our national identity does not depend on maintaining Dutch in all domains of culture and business. If our language of birth lies at the heart of our identity, we should also recognize that, like our identity, it is not static and singular but may become mixed or hybrid. Language skills might also be seen in a more pragmatic light, as communication tools which do indeed carry emotional resonances and may offer a home away from home, but which are not essentially linked to other identity-defining features. City-branding slogans such as *Iamsterdam* advertize the identity of my hometown worldwide, in English. 'Ghent: so much city' does the same for the city that both the Flemish and the Dutch spell without an 'h'.

The pillarized society of twentieth-century Holland, in which Catholics, Protestants, socialists and liberals fought their ideological battles in the same language, proves that language is relatively independent of cultural identity. Multilingualism in Switzerland and other European countries

likewise suggests that linguistic uniformity is not a precondition for national unity or vice versa. According to Ernest Renan, a common language foments the desire for unification, but does not enforce it: 'There is something in man which is higher than language, which is the will. The will of Switzerland to be united in spite of language differences is more important than a uniformity which is often obtained through coercion.' A nation is not defined by territory or race; it is 'a soul, a spiritual principle'. Thus taking distance from nationalist essentialism, Renan pioneered the constructivist view which I have adopted throughout this essay: a nation is 'the desire to live together on the basis of shared memories and a sense of togetherness', and only persists as a result of a 'daily plebiscite' (Renan 2013: 85, 97-101).

In a less sentimental and ideological approach to language, the native tongue (like the national currency) does not so much act as an identity carrier, but as a practical aid in social interaction, which functions the better the more people it brings into mutual contact (De Swaan 2001). This is not to deprecate the emotional bonding function and the sense of security which is delivered by the mother tongue: language is also a carrier of socio-cultural values and political signals (Appel 2002). But as I have suggested, these bonding and signalling functions can partly be taken over by Euro-English, as the preferred conduit for a lighter attachment to Europe. In this regard, the Netherlands may even act as a 'language guide' to countries such as France, which are less proficient in foreign tongues and still indulge in linguistic protectionism.

## **A European Public Sphere?**

What, against this background, are the prospects for the emergence of a European public sphere? The oft-cited view that there are no European intellectuals who speak and write for a Europe-wide audience, but only national ones, is once again a matter of the half empty / half full glass (cf. Lacroix &



Nicolaïdis 2010). One representative sample of a Europeanized intelligentsia is at least offered by the roll-call of initial signatories of Ulrich Beck's 2014 appeal *Wählt Europa!* Apart from to the inevitable Jürgen Habermas, the list includes writers, philosophers and scientists such as Zygmunt Bauman, Bruno Latour, Ivan Krastev, Peter Ésterházy, Agnes Heller, Anthony Giddens, Pascal Lamy, Mary Kaldor, Robert Menasse, Geert Mak, Adam Michnik, Edgar Morin, Cees Nooteboom, Tomáš Sedláček and Alain Touraine; art pundits, film makers, dramatists and actors such as Chris Dercon, Volker Schlöndorff, Wim Wenders, Johan Simons and Hanna Schygulla; and politicians such as Jacques Delors, Andrei Pleșu and Kostas Simitis.

In 2013, Habermas was honoured as Erasmus Prize laureate in the Royal Palace in Amsterdam: a universal German and true European in his views and intellectual influence. The late Ulrich Beck, who indulged in a 'place polygamy' which is typical of many contemporary academics (in his case, shuttling between Munich and London), has already been cited several times in this book. A few years before, the Erasmus Prize was awarded to Ian Buruma, a global intellectual who embodies the European literary spirit as few Dutchmen are capable of doing. The life of Antwerp-born Hendrik de Man, who was fluent in Dutch, English, French and German, wrote books in all these languages and taught in many different countries, dramatically contrasts in this regard with that of Jacques de Kadt, who bitterly resented his Dutchness as a 'curse of birth'.

The EU should place its bets on Euro-English, on bilingual education from an early age and on lifelong English learning for every EU citizen. The increase of these linguistic skills requires a broad educational offensive which should also equalize the differences in language proficiency across the European diagonal. In addition to lifelong language learning, we need to extend the opportunities for travel, internship and accommodation for all European citizens, mul-

tiply Europe-wide media, and develop and popularize instant translation technologies such as Google Translate and Skype Translation.

In the nineteenth century, newspapers and novels were the primary carriers of the imagination of the (national) community. At present, this role is played by high-speed media such as photography, film, TV, radio, video conferencing and the internet, which are less textually bound and more audiovisual in nature. So far, Europe-wide newspapers are lacking; tv channels such as Euronews or Arte remain an exception. The experiment by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to add an international book review section (*Liber*) to the weekend editions of major European newspapers survived only for a few years.

But the success of cultural and political debating sites such as *Eurozine* (a network of more than 150 European cultural journals, magazines and institutions), *Social Europe*, *Open Democracy*, *Eutopia*, *The European*, *Notre Europe* and *Politico Europe* sufficiently demonstrates that something like a European space of intellectual debate and political commentary is emerging. The euro crisis already triggered an unprecedented politicization and Europeanization of public spheres across the continent (Risse 2015); the current security and asylum crises have intensified public debate even further, both in national and transnational public arenas.

In the field of cultural exchanges, foundations and organizations proliferate such as the European Cultural Foundation, the European Festivals Association, and the many federations of European film directors, actors, musicians and publishers. Initiatives abound such as the Société européenne de Culture, A Soul for Europe, Europa Nostra, Reclaim Europe, WeMove.eu and GoodEurope.org. A Europe-wide political movement such as Varoufakis' DiEM25 is still exceptional. But all existing European political families cultivate networks of political contacts, conferences and think tanks, which often mutually overlap. In my own case, the

international corridors of the European Green Party and the Green European Foundation brought me to many European countries and cities for meetings and discussions.

Last but not least: the technology of Computer Assisted Translation (CAT) is making great leaps ahead. In the near future, machine translations of boring bureaucratic texts (such as EU publications) will require only light correction by a human hand. And the time is near when we will be able to hear a faultless rendering on our iPhone or iPad of what our interlocutor has just said – while our Dutch is instantly translated into melodious Bulgarian.

## 8: Europatriotism

### Euromophilia

We are Europeans. Europe dwells in us. It sits in our fibres and genes. Of course, it also exists outside of us, as a massive reality consisting of other humans, animals, woods and landscapes, rivers and mountains, towns and monuments. But at the same time, Europe is deeply embedded in our history and our sentiments. We barely realize how far these roots extend, and how powerfully our daily lives are affected by European nature, history and culture. The country that dwells inside us is already much bigger than the nation. Just as Londoners take a small replica of Big Ben with them in their hearts, even when they sit on the beach at Rimini, so each of us carries bits and pieces of Europe inside: the Amsterdam coffee shops, the London Eye, Camp Nou, the Acropolis, the Charles Bridge, the Mont Ventoux, the Mona Lisa, the battlefields of Verdun, the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin.

From Kubrick's *Spartacus* and Fellini's *Satyricon* to Ridley Scott's *The Gladiator* and the tv series *Rome*, Europe's shared Roman past is impressively brought to life. European museums are a resounding success story, attracting visitors of all ranks, ages and nationalities, like the countless film, music, and arts festivals which are annually organized across the continent. The Dutch violinist André Rieu has conquered Europe and the rest of the globe with his Viennese waltzes. Scandinavian tv thrillers featuring fiercely independent female protagonists and intelligent narratives in the grey zone between good and evil, are watched by millions in Europe and beyond. Fashionistas nervously follow what is happening in sartorial meccas such as Milan, Paris, Berlin and London.

The European soccer leagues offer additional examples. Today's top teams feature a strong international mix

and are literally colourful, with indigenous players making up only a small minority (in 2005, Arsenal was the first English team to enter the pitch without a single Englishman). National teams travel throughout Europe, playing matches which are watched by millions every week. Away games have familiarized fans from many countries with soccer capitals such as Barcelona, Milan, Munich and Manchester. As a result, fans develop mixed loyalties, which often put club and city chauvinism above love of the nation and the national side (King 2000).

Major club teams are trained by foreign coaches. FC Barcelona, AC Milan and Manchester United still have a Dutch flavour due to the (former) presence of star players and coaches such as Johan Crujff, Marco van Basten, Frank Rijkaard, Clarence Seedorf and Louis van Gaal. Dutch soccer fans keep close track of the international adventures of their compatriots, just like fans from other countries follow theirs. Soccer expats have become European celebrities and lifestyle icons (David Beckham, Cristiano Ronaldo, Zlatan Ibrahimović), offering 'living billboards promoting European integration' (Kuper 2007: 174).

This ubiquitous Europe of culture is embedded in an equally massive infrastructure of highways, tunnels, high-speed trains, Eurolines buses, cheap flights, electric grids, internet and other media of communication. One in three Europeans annually visits another European country. Between 2000 and 2010, 19 million citizens moved house to another member state. Children make school trips to London, Paris, Rome and other European capitals. Funded by the Erasmus Programme, since 1987 more than three million students have become intimately acquainted with fellow students from other countries.

As we saw, European bilingualism is growing apace: by mid-century nearly all citizens will be able to speak a passable Euro-English. While national sentiments still prevail over European ones, as the European Value Study con-

sistently reports, the love for Europe is growing, especially among the young: in all member states the youngest generations feel most European (Halman a.o. 2012: 13). Within the Netherlands, we tend to behave like Amsterdammers, Frisians or Zealanders, while in Europe we often feel like Dutchmen. Outside our continent, however, we are Europeans, and Americans and Asians invariably identify us as such.

In 2011, 16.5 million people living in the EU had been born in another EU country. Due to the Channel Tunnel and the Eurostar, London has become France's sixth biggest city. Many thousands of Dutch own second homes in countries blessed with a milder climate such as France, Greece and Spain. English pensionados are crowding the Costa de Sol (where Torremolinos is affectionately known as 'Torrie') and now also hibernate on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. The BBC recently estimated the British population in Spain to amount to more than 750.000; for all (other) 27 EU countries the figure approximates 1.3 million.

Since Goethe, Germans are in love with Italy, 'the land where the lemon trees bloom' (*Dahin, dahin!*) – but during the *Kaiserreich* and the *Third Reich* they tended to idealize the North. Since the Grand Tour of young aristocrats and the exploits of travelling poets such as Shelley and Byron, the English have nurtured a similar Italian idyll, indulging in a romantic contrast between their own cool reserve and the flames of Southern passion.

Europe, in sum, is in our heart and bones. Even those who campaign for a Brexit, such as London mayor Boris Johnson, readily admits: 'I am a European' (*The Telegraph*, 22.2.16). But how can this quotidian love for Europe as 'the home of the greatest and richest culture in the world' extend to the European Union, in view of the current mess it finds itself in? *Pace* Johnson, this first of all requires the EU to become far better than it is now: more politically cohesive, more socially protective and more intellectually and morally

challenging. 'You don't fall in love with the common market', Jacques Delors has justly remarked (in English). Particularly when it fails to deliver.

In 1882, Ernest Renan already considered that a community of interest is not enough to forge a nation: 'There is a sentimental side to nationality; the nation is at once soul and body; a *Zollverein* is not a fatherland' (2013: 95). Group identification necessarily includes a libidinal, bodily dimension – a Freudian insight which leftwing rationalists have neglected to their own detriment. Philosopher Simon Critchley affirms that a European identity cannot be created by bureaucratic means; something more potent is needed, 'something which appeals to the emotions, a kind of new civil religion. Politics needs patriotism, Rousseau already said. I don't see any European patriotism' (*de Volkskrant* 1.10.11).

Yet a politics of the heart for Europe cannot do without some form of European patriotism. This is the lesson we must learn from the populists, who have successfully mobilized the forces of political passion *against* Europe. However, our love for Europe must be lighter and weaker than the often exclusionary and sacrificial dedication which nationalists demand for their respective homelands. Their love of country is often cast in patriarchal and kinship metaphors which suggest unity, strict authority and indissolubility.

But such imperative and backward-looking claims tend to be ineffective in modern individualistic, pluralist and post-sovereign societies, in which national and other collective identities have grown weaker over time. Following the 2002 Fortuyn revolt, Dutch centre-right politicians began to clamour for a new patriotism which could 'fill society with emotion' and generate a 'club feeling' for the Netherlands. Little came of it: attempts to create a unified cultural canon and a linear 'story of the Netherlands', to be put on display in a dedicated House of History, ended in conspicuous failure.

## Feeling at Home in Europe

As noted before, both rightwing and leftwing sceptics are convinced that Europe, in contrast to the nation-states, cannot offer its citizens a cultural, democratic and socially secure home. They castigate federalists and europhiles for dismissing the longing for a home as narrow-minded and nostalgic, and for viewing the nation-state as outdated. Former Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van Mierlo, a progressive liberal, once quipped that he found it exciting to dissociate himself from the nation state because 'it had become too big for the small problems and too small for the big problems' – a statement which sceptics have often cited as odious proof of elitist nonchalance.

Since then, however, the mainstream left has come to recognize that a sense of belonging is an essential condition of good citizenship, and that cold constitutional reasoning is no match for the emotional appeal which is exercised by the populists (cf. Duyvendak 2011). Yet it remains an open question whether this longing for a home can only be satisfied by the nation. In the 1930s, Dutch historian Johan Huizinga already argued that an 'outward-looking identity reaching out to world citizenship' made up an essential part of the Dutch national character (1960: 159).

The European Union itself is founded on civil rights which express the idea that individuality is more important than nationality (Kleinpaste 2013: 224-5). Ulrich Beck's 'Europe of the individuals' hence better captures the aspirations of the many (not merely the millions of Erasmus students, expats and tourists) who, starting out from a self-evident sense of home and place, reach beyond their local attachments in order to develop a European identity, however light it may be.

That is why we must extend our feeling of home in a cosmopolitan direction, first of all towards Europe. Undeniably, the place, region and country where you have been



born and raised induce strong feelings of attachment and loyalty. But they do not necessarily hinder or forbid the cultivation of attachments to other beloved spots. The longing for security and for a firm footing does not preclude that people also want to 'come loose' in order to explore their limits and experiment with new ways to live. Home is also the place you may leave for unknown horizons. The cultural imagination of Europe supplies excellent travel tips for such journeys into the unknown.

Do we realize how *small* the countries of Europe are, compared to giants such as China, India, Brazil or Russia? Dutchmen, Luxemburgers, Estonians, Maltese and Slovenians have less difficulty in admitting this than other Europeans. Wishing to preserve the national *Kleinstaaterei* often betrays pettiness and complacency (cf. Wilders' grotesque slogan: 'The Netherlands is too big for the European Union'). As an Amsterdam city dweller, I feel more at home in London, Berlin or Barcelona than in the Frisian, Zeeland or Limburg countrysides. I tend to feel comfortable on university campuses anywhere in the world. Hence I feel at ease among 'my kind of people'. My homeland is the place where my values and lifestyle are shared and embodied by others, where I can gather interesting impressions and experiences: the urban hustle and bustle, cultural variety, watching attractive people, admiring beautiful buildings, shopping, enjoying the nightlife.

Home is where the heart lies. World citizen Erasmus already said and lived it: *ubi bene, ibi patria*. A Hungarian-British photographer considers: 'I have become used to the feeling of home as a place inside myself'. A Russian violinist who has fled her country of birth feels 'most at home in the world of music'. Singer-songwriter Neil Young, who these days lives on a boat and in his touring van: 'I like moving around. I've done it my whole life, and it makes me feel good. It makes me feel at home'. Those who romanticize the need for identity-as-rootedness easily forget that we must also

leave home in order to develop and discover ourselves. Authenticity (the Nietzschean 'becoming who you are') often requires that we embark on adventures, travel to the horizon and explore the limits of the known world.

Postmodern thinkers of course grossly exaggerate when they define contemporary identities as 'nomadic' – as if we have all become migrants and tourists in a global 'space of flows'. Not everyone will boast, like cosmopolitan architect Rem Koolhaas, that his favorite spot is 'seat 1A in a Lufthansa Boeing 747'. Still, this nomadic view is more than a sloppy generalization of the habitus of jet-set academics, artists, bankers and politicians. People of all classes not only want to sit still but also want to move, without severing their attachments to their native cultures and their beloved places. We may try to cultivate a broader feeling of home which is at the same time a kind of holiday feeling. Europe is increasingly making that possible. Travelling in Europe is like being on holiday in your own country.

## **Symbols of the Nation**

We need to fill Europe with emotion – but not with too much of that heady stuff. A weakness for Europe will suffice, as may a weakness for one's nation – sentiments which may pleasantly complement each other. If we intend to replicate the nineteenth-century national civilization offensive on a grander European scale, it had better be conducted in a lighter tone and a softer key. On this proviso, it may be worthwhile to examine to what extent and in what form traditional identity items and cultural symbols which have long expressed and shaped our political emotions, such as the national language, the currency, the flag, the national anthem or (in some countries) the royal house, will be able to survive in a more abstract European context.

As argued before, we should not worry too much over the alleged decline of the national languages. For example,

while Dutch has retreated in areas such as business, science and politics, it will be able to maintain itself in the long run as the language of everyday communication, national historiography, vernacular literature and indigenous pop music, theatre and film. In addition, near-fluency in Euro-English will enlarge our sense of communicative freedom and mobility and bring Europe closer to home.

In spite of its structural deficits, the euro already does so on a daily basis, through easing innumerable transactions across the former currency borders in Europe. The euro notes' abstract, yet recognizable symbolism of bridges, cathedrals and landscapes aptly expresses the light sense of connection which is developing among European citizens. The emotional value which nostalgic Nexitters still attach to the Dutch guilder is not shared by the majority of Dutch people.

This is not to deny that the euro still incurs distrust and even hatred, for sealing the hegemony of neoliberal austerity politics and causing the loss of national economic sovereignty. However, since the sovereign debt crisis has somewhat subsided, there is a restored sense within the euro zone that we are 'in it together', for better or worse; and that instead of reverting to national solutions, issues of unequal development and economic injustice had better be tackled from within, by means of stronger political governance of financial markets and institutions. Political polarization around the euro has not diminished but instead increased the sense of European identity, and many Europeans are prepared to pay a price for their Europeanness (Risse 2015: 142-44).

In the Netherlands, we still fly the tricolour, sing the national anthem, honour the House of Orange and celebrate holidays such as Kings' Day, Remembrance Day (when the Dutch honour their war dead) and Liberation Day. But the European flag flies next to the Dutch one on all government and communal buildings, and only a handful of europhobes like to take it down. The colour orange is on exuberant dis-

play by sports fans in soccer, skating and other stadiums. On festive holidays, the red-white-blue of the national flag is semi-ironically painted on cheeks, foreheads and bare bellies, in expression of a rather harmless 'entertainment nationalism'.

Excepting solemn occasions such as Remembrance Day and Liberation Day, the tricolour carries little emotional value: about as much as the flags which routinely flutter on the stern of all Dutch boats. The same is true for the *Wilhelmus*, the Dutch national anthem, the most popular rendering of which is the wordless, la-la-la version which is sung in sport stadiums. Our true folk anthems are plainly European; they originate in contemporary pop culture and are sung in English: 'We Are the Champions' and 'You'll Never Walk Alone'.

It is evident that the Dutch monarchy, like those of Belgium, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, England, Monaco and Luxembourg, will not be able to survive as an institution in the future European republic. Conveniently, the Netherlands possess two Oranges: the royal house and King Soccer. Other than the hereditary monarchy, this New Orange is made up of celebrities who have made their own name in the world, and who can be swiftly replaced when their performance falls below standard. While the notion of hereditary blood ties reinforces a traditional view of national unity, the national soccer team represents a new kind of community: light, individualistic, flexible and internationalist. Unfortunately, we so far lack a European team that we can cheer against the champions of the Americas, Africa or Asia.

King's Day (formerly Queen's Day) in the Netherlands is celebrated in a mood of festive commercialism and extravagant silliness, while having less and less to do with the family called Van Oranje. Remembrance and Liberation Day have become less exclusively focused on World War II, although the latter remains the centre of gravity. The past few years have witnessed emotional debates about whether

Germans could participate in such commemorations, and whether they could also include fallen German soldiers. In the foreseeable future, World War II and the Holocaust will probably be remembered within a European context and on a European scale, with the participation of the 'guilty' Germans, as is already the case during celebrations of D-day.

## Celebrating Europe

Like the commemorations of 1914-1918, those of 1939-1945 are crucially important for affirming a European identity which is intent on leaving the horrors of war forever behind. European *lieux de mémoire* such as Verdun, the Flanders Westhoek, Auschwitz, Dresden or the Normandy beaches already serve as focal points for this, like the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and the Schindler factory in Kraków. Every visit to Berlin recalls the disasters which the Nazi regime and the Cold War have wrought on the city and Europe as a whole. Visiting these 'difficult landscapes' is becoming increasingly popular among European citizens (*dark tourism*).

There is nothing amiss with celebrating national holidays, on condition they are purged of their militaristic, nationalist and xenophobic overtones and promote a welcoming festivity. Low points in this category are the Serbian obsession with the Battle of Kosovo (1389), which continually reanimates the old national trauma of defeat against the Ottomans; or the obsession of Islamophobes with the two occasions (1529 and 1683) when the advance of the same Ottomans was halted before the walls of Vienna. Europe's bloody past actually forbids us to commemorate the innumerable battles which have been fought on European soil (see Wikipedia for shockingly long lists by country) other than as incomprehensible anachronisms and warning signs.

The two World Wars started in Europe and constitute deeply shared traumatic experiences. Yet they are still pri-

marily commemorated within a national context, while the Second World War still attracts different interpretations of the war guilt and the amount of suffering endured (e.g. Holocaust denials). There is insufficient room for the shared sense of futility and universal despair which found expression in war novels such as Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*. Fortunately, we may also draw on positive examples such as Willy Brandt's genuflection at the ghetto monument in Warsaw in 1970, Helmut Kohl and François Mitterand holding hands in Verdun in 1984, or the annual pan-European commemorations of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. More recent occasions include the transnational acts of mourning and remembrance of the victims of the terrorist attacks in Madrid, London and Paris.

Green politician Reinhard Bütikofer has proposed that historical events which are currently celebrated nationally might be placed in a European perspective. The Portuguese Revolution of 1974, for example, like the victory of democracy in Spain after Franco's death in 1975, would not have happened without the influence of Europe. During the nineteenth century, when local autarky was prized open by the construction of national railway networks, some local and regional festivals were subsumed by national holidays. In the same way, national events might give way to European ones, facilitated by the networks of high speed trains and cheap airlines. The Oktoberfest in Munich, the Notting Hill Carnival in London and the Amsterdam Gay Pride Parade already attract hordes of international visitors.

Imitating the nineteenth-century cult of the nation, which invented new traditions and forms of hero worship, we could try to assemble a treasure house of grand narratives and a pantheon of great figures from the past and present of Europe. Provided we again economize on nationalist traditions and bellicose symbols such as the anthem *De Vlaamsche Leeuw* in Flanders, Napoleon's kitschy mausoleum in the Dôme des Invalides in Paris, or the militaristic statue group

which adorns the Square of Heroes in Budapest. It is shocking to realize that Europe is simultaneously dotted with statues of its many military warmongers and with memorials for their millions of victims, *Morts pour la Patrie*.

A more peaceful tableau of European heroes could start with the statues of Goethe and Schiller in Weimar or that of Bach in Leipzig. However, in our virtual and image-saturated culture, stone or bronze statues are quickly becoming obsolete. Our eurocelebs are everywhere among us, even though they are deceased. Next to sports heroes, we like to watch film stars such as Marcello Mastroianni or Hugh Grant, comedians such as John Cleese or Mister Bean, singers such as Stromae, Jacques Brel or Paul McCartney and, not least, the many fictional characters which populate Europe, such as Count Dracula, Don Quixote, Sherlock Holmes, Tintin or Harry Potter.

Searching for rituals, images and symbols which may channel a 'light' European patriotism, celebrity culture is an obvious place to look. Personal charisma will help to make the European identity visible and tangible (Conchita Wurst!). The monarchical heads on the euro coins had better be replaced by images of famous European artists, philosophers and founding fathers. School curricula should include larger portions of European history in addition to national perspectives. European democracy will become livelier if political issues and parties are represented by media-savvy political personae who charmingly and skilfully communicate with European citizens, e.g. through their fluency in different languages.

In this way, the contours emerge of a 'banal' euronationalism (in analogy to Michael Billig's banal nationalism [1995]), which summons, 'flags' and reproduces Europe in the daily life of its citizens through all kinds of performative signs, practices, gestures and objects (such as flying the European flag on public buildings). Small prosaic words such as 'we' and 'our' will convey and confirm a shared sense of

Europeanness ('We are Europeans'; 'European culture is ours'). Rather than copying the nationalist flag ceremony to which American children are subjected on a daily basis, we should adopt lighter, less imperative symbols, like those which support the cheerful promotion of Holland by means of cheese, windmills, wooden shoes, tulips or the bicycle. In this way, we might gradually develop a hyphenated identity, and come to see ourselves as Dutch, French, German, Greek or Romanian Europeans.

Nevertheless, the best europropaganda still issues from the seductive power of the European good life. Freedom-in-security is only possible if violence, aggression and intimidation are minimized, and citizens are offered genuine opportunities to improve their lives. Europe must once again become the beckoning 'land of infinite possibilities' – a great promise which the broken American Dream is no longer able to fulfil. If this dream is brought a few steps closer to reality, not only for the millions who presently seek refuge in it but for all of its citizens, we can be rightfully proud of Europe, without reverting to the arrogance which has accompanied patriotic pride in the past.

The European Union is still young: more than half of its states have only become members since 2000. Understandably, then, it has not yet settled in the hearts and minds of its citizens. But in every new generation, euroconsciousness is growing stronger. We should therefore practise the virtue of patience. Europe is a project of the long haul: a democratic cathedral which successive generations of artisans have worked hard to build, and this work is still far from being finished. It took the nation-states more than two centuries to take definite shape; with Europe we therefore stand only at the beginning. The 'most generous idea of the past century' (Herman van Rompuy) will necessarily take time to establish itself.



## The Spirit of Moderation

Having started as an elite project 'without people', Europe has in recent decades become more of a *democratic* elite project, in which citizens have started to talk back and also started to talk among themselves. 'The people' (or rather: their spokespersons) have become a political force to be reckoned with, often expressing an acute distrust of all political, intellectual and artistic elites. Nevertheless, the symbolic construction of Europe as 'our country' cannot do without elites who are bold enough to imagine its common political destiny. European civilization means that the creation of better material life chances for all is combined with a moral education towards gentleness, freedom of thought, pluralism and creativity. Such edification is by definition the mission of an elite, although its message should be 'elitist for all' (*'élitaire pour tous'*), in the felicitous expression of French dramatist Antoine Vitez.

This educational project must be dedicated to developing the inner security which enables individuals to 'unlearn' and outgrow the absolutisms and fundamentalisms which have wrought such havoc during many centuries of religious and nationalistic conflict. European identity is the product of a self-critical response to the combined experiences of imperialism, the two World Wars, the totalitarian experiments of the left and the right and the Holocaust. Having looked 'into the abyss of civilization', Europeans have become acutely conscious of the dangers which lurk in all missionary offensives and totalitarian ideologies (Beck & Grande 2004). This abhorrence of all forms of absolutism, and the attendant spirit of moderation and modesty, come close to constituting Europe's unique 'soul'.

This capacity for doubt and self-critique may also be viewed as the most important legacy of the European novel. From Cervantes, Diderot and Flaubert up to Kundera, Houellebecq and Rushdie, the novel has had a prominent

share in the European exercise in self-examination. The inquiry into the violent urges of mankind and the uncomfortable proximity of good and evil are typical European concerns, being sustained from Goethe's *Faust* and Klaus Mann's *Mephisto* up to war novels such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk* and Hugo Claus's *The Sorrow of Belgium*. The same goes for the praise of doubt and the penchant for self-relativization which connects Erasmus through the centuries to his biographer Stefan Zweig and other contemporary admirers.

European democracy is a relativistic democracy, which adroitly handles and even prides itself upon its ineradicable 'truth deficit': no one knows for certain what 'the people' want and who are and are not included in it. As a result, everyone is permanently invited to express an opinion on these and other matters. Liberal democracy has been invented to negotiate and to endure this *lack* of commonality as best we can, and to accommodate our differences as peacefully as possible. Dissent and disagreement therefore constitute core values of a 'critical patriotism' for Europe, and it is important to cultivate emotional attachment to them (cf. Nussbaum 2013: 389). It also entails that one meta-value rises above the fray: the spirit of moderation itself, which provides a moral framework for this 'truth deficit' and pledges us to a civilized, tolerant style of thinking and living.

At first glance, the freedom to think, act and live differently may seem a form of weakness; but on second thought, it offers a source of strength. The refusal to use violence is often a token of great spiritual resilience. Too much certainty does not make a person strong but instead vulnerable. Daring to embrace doubt brings greater autonomy than clinging to incontrovertible truths, as in the case of orthodox believers who are deeply hurt by criticism or ridicule (Wijnberg 2008).

Self-certainty, hair-splitting and dogmatism smother all innovation, while freedom of thought fosters cultural dynamism, social resilience and technological ingenuity.

Hence the economic power and cultural creativity of Europe cannot very well be separated from its liberality and mildness of manners. What Putin detests as the 'cowardly decadence' of the EU is precisely what constitutes its inner strength. He fails to understand that Western societies are not successful in spite of, but precisely as a result of their 'weakly' habitus of tolerance and pluralism (*Die Zeit* 28.8.14).

European democrats should therefore take pride in their 'uncertain' identity. Different from what is often thought, an attitude of 'self-confident doubt' (Ulrich Beck) does not invite apathy, but instead promotes resilience, activism and even combativeness. Indeed, our refusal to monopolize the truth and the good must logically extend to everyone: our cultural 'superiority' can only lie in the moderation of all absolutist superiority claims. Liberality of thought and behaviour paradoxically combines the capacity to relativize our value tradition with a strong determination to defend it (Ter Borg 2010). Because we take pride in our culture of openness, tolerance and moderation, we draw a clear line in the sand where this open culture is being threatened.

This peculiar strength-in-weakness defines the core appeal of the European idea. Europe might be 'feminine' but she is also firm. She prefers to wield the forces of cooperation, persuasion and negotiation over and above those of struggle, intimidation and humiliation. She opposes the fundamentalist beliefs which have left such bloody traces in her history, fanning religious and nationalist wars, crusades, pogroms, purges and dictatorships. At present, Europe faces new incarnations of this old and familiar enemy: populist nationalism, Islamist terrorism and Russian macho power. In its confrontation with these strong ideologies and hard practices, Europe must continue to nurture her relative weakness and protect it as her most valuable ornament.

## Soft and Hard Power

Stefan Zweig praised Erasmus as 'the first literary theorist of pacifism', who viewed Europe above all as a spiritual idea. According to the great humanist, the elimination of all violence and especially the abolition of war ('that shipwreck of all good things') figured as its prime condition. For a brief moment, the 'empire' of Erasmus included all countries, peoples and languages of Europe. It was a 'mild domination, obtained without violence, through no other means than the persuasive power of mental achievement.' Decisions forced by the use of arms would never lead to a moral resolution of conflicts, Erasmus held; education towards humanity had to follow the path of intellectual and moral development. Peoples should no longer be divided by their different languages. For Erasmus, the ideal of the nation was too narrow; it had to be superseded by a supranational, European ideal (Zweig 1959: 82-86).

Due to his nomadic life experiences and border-crossing ideas, Erasmus can truly be called the first European, and Dutchmen should be proud that his contemporaries universally knew him as 'Roterodamus'. Yet there are good reasons to avoid the term humanism in reference to the European identity. First, the humanist tradition tends towards a rather abstract notion of world citizenship. But European patriotism can only be effective if it marks out a clearly delimited, finite space, which is larger than that of the current nation-states, but does not overshoot towards a 'rootless' cosmopolitanism. It is bad living in boundless, unlimited spaces (Schlögel 2013: 79-80). Secondly, it is questionable how pacifist Europe can be if the ideal of 'no more war' and the values of individualism, pluralism, democracy and solidarity must be vigorously defended against outside and domestic attacks – as currently in the Ukrainian and Middle Eastern borderlands and in the European capitals themselves.

If Europe wishes to command respect for its ideals and lifestyle, it needs firmer doses of geopolitical realism and strategic clarity, and should muster more hard power, e.g. by developing a univocal foreign policy and building a strong army (Holslag 2014). European peace, freedom and tolerance will not spread automatically, through 'feminine' seduction. These values and virtues must also be defended against intolerant, cruel and unscrupulous enemies. A militant democracy must learn to deal with the paradox that it has to fight its enemies without becoming similar to them. It must face the reality of political evil, but combat it with 'the means of lesser evil' (Ignatieff 2004). It should propagate its values convincingly and with passion, without being able to rely on unshakeable foundations of knowledge and morality. It can therefore never become as hard and ruthless as its worst enemies, but should cherish its relative softness, moderation and self-control as pivotal to its pride and strength.

It remains a delicate balancing act: Europe must be made stronger, but we must continue to cultivate its relative weakness, as well as our 'weakness' for it. Let me illustrate this conundrum by means of the familiar rhetorical query whether we would be prepared to 'die for Brussels'. In the traditional nationalist vocabulary, giving your life for your country counts as the ultimate proof of loyalty of *enfants de la patrie*. However, civilized nations have generally distanced themselves from such absolute sacrificial nationalism, and have abolished compulsory military service in order to delegate 'the labour of violence' to a professional army. In most European nations, 'dying for your country' has become a professional risk instead of a civic duty. Abolishing universal conscription has also been a crucial pacifier of society itself, by reducing military machismo, the educational exemplarity of rigid discipline, and personal familiarity with guns and other means of violence.

In early 2014, Ukrainians on the Maidan were the first to die, not for any particular nation, but for European liberal-

democratic principles. Being prepared to die for such principles might still be the ultimate civic duty for European patriots, if the European armies are defeated and the enemy threatens to overrun 'our country'. But such principles are the very opposite of absolutist beliefs, and this sacrifice should remain ultimate in the same way as police and military violence are the *ultimum remedium* in a society which undertakes to rid itself as much as possible from violence in general. Unlike most of us, the jihadi terrorists are willing to die for their absolutist beliefs. While this renders us weaker than them, refusing to die for your beliefs (while fighting for them) might also be a laudable token of civilization.

Hence power can no longer be a dirty word for Europe. Power consciousness is a necessary ingredient of European patriotism. Pride in Europe is first of all pride in the forces of cooperation: the increment in strength which comes from pooling small sovereignties into a larger power block which is able to counter the economic dominance of markets, multinationals and state monopolies, the terror exercised by border-crossing mafiosi and religious fanatics, and the military threat of states such as Russia and IS. Europe is still too much of a toy for such border-crossing powers and too little of a great power itself. Pride in Europe is also enhanced when we are able to revitalize European democracy and focus the creativity of European citizens in an innovation-oriented culture. Pride in Europe is also pride in its global leadership, for example in promoting the green revolution and in furthering social peace, pluralist democracy and a relaxed, tolerant lifestyle.

In terms of geographical scale, European patriotism is comparable to its American counterpart. Of course, we have no desire to copy the militaristic chauvinism of the 'Nation under God' as celebrated by John Wayne, George W. Bush or the Tea Party. Instead, we may draw inspiration from the left-liberal patriotism of philosophers such as Richard Rorty (1998) or Martha Nussbaum (2013), which actually fits Europe better than the contemporary US. Both thinkers recog-

nize the need for emotional attachment to 'our country' and the need to determine its identity or soul. But it is not something that already exists and should be salvaged and protected, but something that requires further development. The nation is and will forever remain unfinished. National pride is not pride in what exists, but in what we can make of ourselves.

Both Rorty and Nussbaum envisage a decent and civilized society which seeks to minimize violence, cruelty and humiliation and prioritizes the fight for social justice. Their better America is the land of individual freedom, equal opportunity and a fairer distribution of income and wealth; Rorty hopes it may even become the 'first classless society'. The bitter historical irony is that millions of Europeans have previously emigrated to America precisely in order to escape the closed class societies of the old continent. In the meantime, both wealth and poverty have become hereditary in the US, while some European countries, such as the Scandinavian welfare states, have been far more successful in leveling traditional class thresholds.

Rorty also affirms that democracy must do without fixed values or rockbottom truths such as the will of God, the moral law, the laws of history or objective scientific facts. Neither does the people's will guarantee access to the political truth: Rorty rejects the (leftwing) populist desire to return 'all power to the people' which is currently embraced with such relish by the radical right. Democracy is essentially incomplete: it is the never-ending quest for a better society. Rorty's hopes for America are therefore better suited to our utopian homeland Europe: 'You have to describe the country in terms of what you passionately hope it will become, as well as in terms of what you know it to be now. You have to be loyal to a dream country rather than to the one to which you wake up every morning' (1998: 101). It is this Europe of dreams and hopes that we should adopt as the fatherland of our fatherlands.

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Dick Pels (1948) is a Dutch sociologist and freelance political writer. In previous lives, he was Professor of Sociology and Communications at Brunel University, London, chairman of the left-liberal think tank Waterland and director of Bureau de Helling, the research foundation of the Dutch Green Party. Among his English books are *Property and Power. A Study in Intellectual Rivalry* (1998), *The Intellectual as Stranger* (2000) and *Unhastening Science* (2003). Since then, he wrote a number of books (in Dutch) about Pim Fortuyn, national identity, the economy of honour, politics and religion, and the challenge of populism in Europe. He also writes and performs songs in the folkblues genre and lives on the historic yacht *Nymphaea*. See further [www.dickpels.nl](http://www.dickpels.nl)

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Dick Pels is a Dutch sociologist and freelance political writer. He has taught at various Dutch and English universities, and was director of the research foundation of the Dutch Green Party until 2013.

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