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**The European Union and the Promise of Democracy:
What can Citizenship Education and Civil Society contribute?**

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Keynote

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This essay arose out of a growing frustration with the way the European debate has become overshadowed by the euro crisis. Every conversation about the integration of the old continent begins and ends with money these days. No one would deny that economics is important, but there is so much more – and it may be in those other fields that the essence of the notion of Europe resides. We no longer talk about the motives that were and are the main reason for the drawing together of our part of the world.

Earlier this year that sense of discomfort assailed me as never before. In February I was among several people invited to lunch in Brussels by the president of the European Union, Herman van Rompuy. Rarely have I returned home from a conversation so disillusioned; true, the host was exceptionally amiable, but he also turned out to be the personification of the autism so often encountered in the corridors of Brussels. We heard little more than a continually repeated ‘first we need to save the euro, then we’ll take it from there’. Punctuated by ‘there is no alternative’.

Now I come to think about it, ‘autism’ is not a good description. Van Rompuy is probably trapped like the rest of us in a situation that has become too much for him. He no doubt sees his mantra about the euro as a form of honesty: ‘What else can I say or promise at this stage?’ Indeed, we have swum into a trap and no real way back is in sight. It is no good suggesting that turning around might be better than blindly groping onwards, since dismantling the euro zone might have even more unintended consequences than the introduction of the common currency in the first place. No one can say for certain.

The problem is that the irresponsible decision to adopt a common currency for such a wide diversity of countries is now holding everyone hostage. I expressed my own doubts about it from the early 1990s onwards, but what is the value of proving you were right all along? Critics of the decision to introduce the euro in the way it was done are dismissed as irresponsible for refusing simply to embrace the fait accompli. Appealing to their sense of responsibility obliges everyone to vindicate a reckless act in retrospect: the train is underway and it is impossible to get out now, even though we have no idea just where the train is taking us.

Every suggestion I made about taking a longer view was dismissed by Van Rompuy as intellectually interesting but completely irrelevant. That is also the refrain we hear from The Hague: the view ahead is unimportant. The policymakers know well enough that keeping the common currency going involves all kinds of far-reaching choices, but for fear of public rejection they refuse to make those choices explicit. They persist in preserving a semblance of pragmatism, while behind the backs of all those involved an opaque economic and political union comes into being.

This is asking for problems, and those problems now have a date: 22 May 2014, the day of the next European elections, when we are likely to see a hostile response to the silence that currently prevails about further plans for Europe. The possibility cannot be excluded that both France’s Front National and its Parti de Gauche will gain ground in those elections, as well as Britain’s UKIP, and in the Netherlands the PVV along with the Dutch Socialist Party. In short, that the anti-Europe populism of

left and right may become a force to be reckoned with in the European parliament. These forthcoming elections, the eighth since 1979, will therefore probably be the first to have really mattered, if only because it will be the first time since the euro crisis that citizens have had a chance to express an opinion about the Union.

This may incidentally have a rather paradoxical outcome. Precisely because the European parliament will become politicized, in the sense that seats in Strasbourg will be won not only by those who favour more integration but alongside them advocates of placing limits on Europe, the parliament may gain legitimacy. It will also be interesting to see whether the populists seek international cooperation, because when nationalism internationalizes it is of course no longer really nationalism.

What I experienced at that lunch in Brussels was the assassination of politics, an unwillingness to clarify and justify other visions of the future that lie ready and waiting. It was a form of 'politicide', to quote an admonitory book title by Luuk van Middelaar, ironically enough one of Van Rompuy's advisers. With this essay I intend to share some observations that demonstrate there is far more to be said about Europe. I am convinced that if left- and right-wing liberal politicians do not present their own ideas about the future of Europe, populism will indeed turn out to be the only alternative. In other words: we cannot any longer put off developing a far-reaching view.

I. On internal and external borders

The idea that I want to investigate here is simple, but it may have major ramifications: for a long time European unification was all about the internal borders, but in the coming decades it will increasingly be about the external borders. I concentrate on the place of the old continent in a new world, but in doing so I wonder whether the growing pressure on Europe's external borders might not sooner or later lead to a revival of its internal borders. How can we achieve a more stable way of dealing with the border of Europe?

I do not want to take these questions too literally. I am not going to discuss checkpoints and customs posts, nor imports and exports. These are nonetheless crucial issues, especially the matter of border controls, because after the abolition of internal borders we now urgently need to ask ourselves how we can protect our shared outer boundary. Increasing freedom has introduced a new security problem, but resistance to cooperation in that field is considerable, since border controls are still regarded as the responsibility of nation states. The Union does not yet function adequately as a protective layer in this sense, which is another reason why there is such uncertainty on matters like the eastward expansion of the Union. Can we leave the protection of a shared external border to countries like Bulgaria and Romania?

These are all important matters, as I say, but I want us to turn our attention to a world in which power relations are changing. When Europe asks for help from countries such as India, Brazil and China to get it through the monetary winter, then we know something essential has changed. There are other examples that make clear that Europe's position in the world is shifting. To limit myself to the Netherlands: Tata steel has bought the steel company Hoogovens, Carlos Slim is acquiring a larger and larger stake in the prominent telecoms company KPN and tomorrow it may be the turn of Philips to be taken over. Way back in 1948, British historian Arnold Toynbee spoke of the 'dwarfing of Europe'. That is what I want to talk about in looking at Europe's borders.

Yet, this is merely half the truth. In thinking about the external borders we may become aware not just of Europe's relative loss of power but of the hidden vitality of the old continent. The BRIC countries, as they are known, do not resemble each other at all in many ways, but as well as above-average economic growth they have a number of features in common, such as extreme income inequality, poorly functioning judiciaries, corruption that pervades the whole of society, rampant urbanization and negligence in dealing with the environment. European experience is quite different, and often in a positive sense. Perhaps in thinking about the external borders we will discover where our societies' strengths lie.

The use of the term 'internal borders' to refer to the national boundaries within Europe involves a choice in itself, of course, because by talking about an internal border I am assuming Europe to be a

single whole. That is certainly one option, but there are good arguments for continuing to regard the Franco-German or Polish-Czech border as fully valid. We have to guard against the kind of overstatement exemplified by the description of the years 1914-1945 as Europe's long civil war. That is an interpretation in retrospect. In the experience of contemporaries, both the World Wars were intensely national in character.

It is in any case beyond doubt that we can imagine an inside only if we first conceive of an outside. However much we may talk about dismantling the traditional borders within Europe, all such efforts unintentionally point to a divided past. Europe's 'no more war' was inspired by a fear that history might repeat itself. It was a hopeful incantation, but, as we know, there is no hope without fear.

II. Capitalizing on the war

If we look back to the beginnings of the European Community, it is striking to see the degree to which thinking about the unification of the continent was dominated by division. It would not be going too far to say that the imagined future of Europe was hostage to the past. The founder of European integration, Frenchman Jean Monnet, wrote in his memoirs of the fear that 'if we did nothing we should soon face war again'. Something needed to be done before it was too late.

As I say, without an 'outside' there can be no 'inside'. Europe sought the outside in its own history; 'the past is a foreign country'. The notion of a union between traditional enemies France and Germany was the leitmotif of the establishment of the European Community. The ghosts of its own past amounted to a threatening outside world against which the idea of Europe was intended to offer safeguards. Its barbarism was of its own making, or as French writer Paul Valéry put it back in 1918: 'We modern civilizations, we too now know that we are mortal.'

Seen in this way, 'Europe' is the last great civilising ideal, with all the taboos that attach themselves to such ideals. The goal is so emotionally charged that it is difficult to have a rational debate about the means of achieving it, as was clear even during the development of the Coal and Steel Community. Monnet believed that from that moment on 'the method, the means and the objective [...] were indissolubly linked'. Many people experience a similar discomfort in the debate on Europe: if aim and means are conflated in this way, can we differ over the means even if we agree on the aim?

That 'no more war' motif is still invoked, as we saw in recent years during the crisis over the common currency. Dramatic statements were heard from Poland, France and of course Germany: the failure of the euro would mean a considerable increase in the likelihood of war in Europe. Angela Merkel made no bones about it: 'Countries that share a common currency do not go to war with each other.' She was forgetting former Yugoslavia for a moment. EU president Herman van Rompuy came up with the most concise version: 'If the euro falls, the Union falls, and with it our best guarantee of peace.' He had temporarily forgotten his criticism of the exploitation of fear by populists.

Yet I have the impression those words are no longer as powerful as they once were. Essential to the founders of Europe and the generation that came after them, they are not as significant now as they used to be. However much the past may be dragged up – see for example those Greek demonstrators who waved swastikas and welcomed their German financiers with a heartfelt Sieg Heil – it fires imaginations less and less.

All this can be seen as Europe's success. The internal borders have become more porous. Many countries have abandoned border controls altogether. Customs posts are crumbling even in northern France; they are still in place, but it is better not to ask what kind of state they are in. The free movement of people, goods and ideas is intensive, although we still have a long way to go to achieve what Goethe once called 'free commerce in ideas'.

As integration increases, the danger of violent confrontation on the continent is abating, although I must say that the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union demonstrated an all too unambiguous interpretation of history. Precisely the fact that the European Community has always been able to stay well away from the major power politics of war and peace may have been crucial to

its success. Without an American security guarantee, Europe's concentration on domestic politics – such as free economic exchange or shared support for agriculture – would not have been possible. Even during the civil war in Yugoslavia, Europe was a powerless observer, to say nothing of its divisions at the time of the Iraq War.

However that may be, with the smoothing away of the internal borders, the recurrence of war has slowly moved beyond the horizon of the conceivable. Nowadays the majority of people in the Union were born after the Treaty of Rome. We may fight over ways of giving shape to integration, but there is little difference of opinion about the goal it serves. The peaceful interweaving of the nation states of Europe was and remains a great achievement.

It was of course always Europe's intention that foreign policy would become domestic policy. Sure enough, European solidarity makes the Greek budget deficit our deficit too. It makes the Italian prime minister to some degree our prime minister and the refugee problem in Italy an issue that troubles us all. That is the purpose of integration: abroad becomes home. This is precisely the reason why the relationship between the new internal world and the larger outside world is becoming so important. Now that the internal borders are weakening, the external borders are increasing in significance.

That shift has been accelerated by the euro crisis. Conflict over the common currency has had contradictory consequences. Europe is closer than ever; the Spanish and Greek elections have become our elections. The time of avoidance is over, which is good; the Europeanization of national politics is well underway. That is an optimistic interpretation, but the image it evokes should not simply be taken at face value. The 'irreversible' euro project produces resentment, while Europeanization has created a backlash in the form of nationalistic politics. But perhaps the conflict over the euro enables us to create a new image of Europe as an internal world. Nationalization no longer has the same meaning as it had twenty or thirty years ago.

III. Belgium is the future of Europe

Does everything I have argued so far mean that the internal borders have gone? No, certainly not. They may have been reduced in their material effects, but they have retained a considerable symbolic value. I well remember interviewing a minister in Poland when I was a newspaper correspondent. It was shortly after German unification and the politician said, with obvious relief: 'Now, just like the Czechs, we have a shared border with the West.' He meant above all that East Germany was no longer in the way. This says a great deal, but mainly that Europe looks very different from Warsaw than it does from Rome or Brussels. It also suggests that every country projects its own self-image onto Europe as a whole.

Take the Netherlands, which has always looked at Europe through anti-continental spectacles. This became very clear at the point when former minister Joseph Luns named the accession of Britain to the Community as a precondition for any further discussion of political union, a stance known as the *préalable anglais*. He wanted the British to act as a counterweight, since he feared the predominance of France and Germany. This, incidentally, also goes some way to explain current hesitation in the Netherlands. Carrying on along the federal route in Europe will produce a Union that lacks the countries to which the anti-continental Netherlands feels closest, such as the United Kingdom and the Scandinavian nations. In a federal Europe the centre of gravity will shift towards the east and the south.

This probably accounts for the uneasy manoeuvring of Dutch politicians, whether of the left or the right. The Netherlands knew its place in the Europe of the Six, but it has lost all sense of direction in the expanding community of twenty-eight member states. Traditional Dutch submissiveness towards Germany aside, the pattern of coalition forming is no longer clear and we may wonder whether it ever will be again.

That borders within Europe still matter is also demonstrated by the differences between north and south. In the southern countries, many of which have had fairly recent experience of dictatorial regimes, the relationship between state and citizen is quite different from that which prevails in the

northern part of Europe. Citizens of countries such as Spain or Greece distrust their governments, as illustrated by the reluctance of Greeks to pay their taxes. This need not be fatal, but it takes a great deal of time to change such long-established historical patterns – more time than people in our part of the world realize.

The euro crisis has left deep wounds in the south in particular. The bitterness over swingeing cuts, and especially over the image the north has of the south, is far greater than we realize. This sense of humiliation is seeking expression and could easily turn into a dislike of Germany in particular. The signs are all too clear. So far the common currency has brought animosity rather than the greater closeness that was expected, showing that feelings of national honour and pride have not in any sense died out.

In Flanders I need remind no one that borders still matter. It would be good to be able to ask politicians like Guy Verhofstadt and Karel de Gucht (yes, I know I should not lump them together) what lessons Europe can draw from the slow disintegration of Belgium. How can they speak with such confidence about a union of more than twenty countries with hugely diverse histories, when they have not managed to keep their own country together, to rein in Flemish nationalism? What does that failure say about the future of Europe?

I think Belgian author Geert van Istendael was right when he wrote: '*L'Europe sera belge ou ne sera pas.*' Loosely translated, he meant that Europe must model itself on Belgium as a multilingual democracy or it will fail. He wrote those words in the years when Belgium was still functioning reasonably well, but twenty years have passed since then and Walloons and Flemings are steadily drifting apart. Indeed, to what extent can Europe unite if these neighbours in one country find it so hard to accommodate each other?

In his autobiography *The Turning Point*, Klaus Mann wrote: 'I tried to put a name to my desire, to name my inheritance and my duty: Europe! Those two syllables became for me the pinnacle of the beautiful, they became exemplary, an inspiring force, a political creed and a moral and spiritual starting point.' He too realized that the inner tensions of Europe are visible and lasting. 'This is the dual precondition Europe has to fulfil if it is to avoid destruction: it must retain and deepen its consciousness of European unity while at the same time keeping alive the diversity of European traditions and styles.' Does the euro not impose a uniformity that curtails precisely that productive diversity?

To achieve stability a clear statement is needed about the ultimate goal of unification. This issue has always been avoided. It was a highly productive form of avoidance, since everyone knew that nothing would be accomplished unless the European Community took shape step by step, from one compromise to the next. It was precisely because of that refusal to bring to the fore the question of what the Union should eventually become that advocates and opponents of federalism were able to work together, especially France and Germany. Stanley Hoffmann, who has first-hand knowledge of America, described integration as a process without a goal.

That avoidance can no longer be sustained. Jacques Delors, then chair of the European Commission, knew this by the mid-1990s. With the introduction of a common currency, a step had been taken that went beyond all pragmatic attempts to reach a compromise. From that moment on, the question of whether we want a federation could no longer be postponed. But the real debate never got off the ground.

It needs to be stated clearly: a European Union with the current twenty-eight member states can never become a United States of Europe and should not try to do so. In multilingual Europe, the European Parliament cannot exist without greater commitment from national parliaments. That interdependence must be the starting point for consideration of the political form Europe should take. A lasting union relies on the legitimacy of the nation states, and conversely those states cannot function any longer without the cohesion offered by the union. Because it is true: in a global market that is more turbulent than ever, countries like the Netherlands and Belgium cannot go it alone. In fact, neither can France.

We need a European constitution that embodies this idea of a mixed order and thus provides a guarantee against the mission creep of institutions like the Commission and the Parliament in Brussels. That is to say: we need a founding document that will summarize the powers of the Union in a limitative way. This is of course rather fundamental, but the Union should not see itself as the means to end the nation state, but as a guarantee of its survival as a vital democracy, a functioning welfare state and the continuation of the rule of law.

IV. The old continent in a new world

So the internal borders certainly do still matter, but Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset was correct when he wrote in the 1930s that the nationalism of his day needed to be seen in the context of the decline of European power. His words were cutting: 'The frivolous spectacle offered by the smaller nations today is deplorable.' He regarded that spectacle as the final gasp of nations that had declined to provincial proportions: 'the last flare, the longest; the last sigh, the deepest. On the very eve of their disappearance there is an intensification of frontiers – military and economic.'

Eighty years ago that was a glimpse into a distant future. It is now far more tangible. With the gradual shift of primacy from the internal borders to the external borders, a new chapter has opened. The relative power of Europe is declining rapidly. In his delightful novel *The White Tiger*, Indian author Aravind Adiga describes the ascent of an entrepreneur in Bangalore. In the margins of his life story we read: 'White men will be finished within my lifetime. There are blacks and reds too, but I have no idea what they're up to – the radio never talks about them. My humble prediction: in twenty years' time, it will be just us yellow men and brown men at the top of the pyramid, and we'll rule the whole world. And God save everyone else.' It is a witty summing up of an entire library of books about the dramatic shift in power that is now well underway.

That change can be seen in the proportion of the world's population that is made up of European or Western peoples. In 1913 the population of Western Europe alone was still 14.6 per cent of the global figure; by 2001 the proportion stood at less than half of that, namely 6.4 per cent. It has shrunk still further since then. At the same time around 40 per cent of human beings live in China and India. As a diplomat in Singapore remarked: It is unthinkable that the 12 per cent of the world's population that lives in the West will continue to lay down the law to the other 88 per cent.

This is no isolated figure. Not only is Europe's share of the global population declining, Europe is also the only continent where the population will remain more or less static over coming decades. Whereas the population of the United States is set to grow by 36 per cent in the next forty years, from 310 million to 420 million, Europe's growth will remain close to zero, with its numbers increasing from 501 to 517 million. If we accept that a young population usually tends to favour political and social reform, what are we to conclude about a greying Europe? How much innovation are our societies capable of, in a time that will demand a great deal of imagination and adaptability?

It is not just the demographic weights that are shifting. Economic relationships are changing no less rapidly. The debt mountain in the West and the surplus in China suggest that the world is being profoundly transformed. The global economy is becoming multi-polar. Even if it grows far more slowly than in the past thirty years, the size of the Chinese economy in 2030 will have outstripped that of America by a long way. One figure illustrates this: by 2020 the Chinese share of world trade will be an estimated 12 per cent, that of America around 9 per cent and the European Union's share a little over 8 per cent.

The starting point of Chinese development is at a low level, but the demographic weight of the country means that such growth nevertheless has huge consequences. Indian-American economist Aravind Subramanian shows very clearly how far China has already come. Gross Domestic Product per head of the population is still less than a quarter that of America, but because China has four times as many inhabitants, its economic weight is already considerable.

The economic contribution of a large part of the world's population was of course extraordinarily small over the past hundred years. Subramanian has calculated the total for China, India, Indonesia and

Brazil combined. In 1960 their share of the world economy was no more than 29 per cent of their weight in terms of their share of the world's population. That figure has since grown to 65 per cent and his prediction for 2030 is 95 per cent. So by then the share of those countries in the world economy will reasonably accurately reflect their share of the world population. His prediction is that two thirds of world growth between 2010 and 2030 will take place in the emerging economies.

A silent revolution is underway. The gap between richer and poorer regions of the world is shrinking, which is good news. The majority of developing countries have achieved higher growth than America or Europe over the past ten years. All the standard ways of thinking about North and South, East and West are in need of revision. Not just China, India and Brazil but countries including Turkey, Ghana and Nigeria are seeing a spurt in economic growth. This is a welcome change, since it means many people will be able to escape poverty. Three quarters of the poor in the world now live in middle-income countries such as Brazil. It is those countries that now face the question of whether they wish to redistribute their growing wealth.

A brief anecdote illustrates this change. Two years ago the Angolan president, Eduardo dos Santos, received his Portuguese opposite number in Luanda. During that state visit Dos Santos spoke the friendly, indeed one might say patronizing words: 'We're aware of the difficulties the Portuguese people have faced recently. [...] In this difficult moment of financial crisis hitting Portugal, it's important to remember the good relations that exist between our two countries, based not only on circumstantial interests but on historic ties, friendship, cooperation and even our shared blood.' He said that Angola was ready and willing to help.

Slowly but very surely, roles are being reversed and a more equal world is emerging. Whereas for a long time the South migrated to the North, we are now seeing the first moves in the opposite direction. The long queues at the Angolan embassy in Lisbon tell their own story. Those departures mark the end of the postcolonial world. It is a breach that goes deeper than decolonization. Anyone who is aware that in 2000 no fewer than 125 member states of the United Nations were former colonies will realize how important their liberation was, but in many respects the postcolonial world was a continuation of the old colonial dependency in a new form. Only with the end of the postcolonial era are we seeing a true emancipation of relationships.

We need to consider that we are in fact returning to the world, as it was around 1800. Not without reason, Henry Kissinger called China a 'returning power' rather than an 'emerging power'. The economic might of India and China was considerable until the early nineteenth century. In other words, the story of Western domination goes back no more than two centuries. Perhaps in fifty years from now we will be forced to conclude that Western dominance was an anomaly in a far longer history of more equal relationships, which are now slowly being restored.

A new story about 'Europe' must therefore take as its starting point not Berlin but Beijing; it needs to begin not in Paris but in Sao Paulo. 'No more war' has become a form of Eurocentrism, since it unintentionally concentrates our gaze inwards, whereas the real motive for integration lies outside the continent. The internal borders are no longer the main source of concern when we look at the time that is approaching. The external border is at the core of a future-oriented approach to European politics.

However much I would endorse the idea that the heart of Europe's ideal of civilization lies in its 'no more war', I believe nonetheless that a new justification for European integration is needed, not one that is nourished primarily by a view of the past but one that draws inspiration from the near future. Such a justification needs to start out from the shifting relationships in the world that have been so tellingly exposed by the euro crisis. The resulting loss of power compels self-examination.

We can experience Europe as our interior only if we manage to grasp this new exterior. Any justification for Europe that we may wish to talk about resides above all in a world upon which continental powers such as China, America, India and Brazil will place their stamp. 'Europe' is the only scale at which we can give shape to our own social model in the world economy. This means that European integration is not about loss of sovereignty but about increased influence through joint action.

V. Necessary self-examination

All these developments will confront Europe with countless new questions, but the most important change is that the way in which countries like China, India and Brazil view us will increasingly influence the actions and policies of European countries. Having lived for almost two centuries with European and later American dominance, we are now moving towards a world that is at least polycentric, a world in which Europe will increasingly be confronted with economic and cultural innovations that originate in the East and the South.

British historian Arnold Toynbee saw this development coming a long time ago: 'The paradox of our generation is that all the world has now profited by an education which the West has provided, except the West herself. The West to-day is still looking at history from the old parochial self-centred standpoint which the other living societies have by now been compelled to transcend.' But that complacent attitude could not endure, because 'sooner or later, the West, in her turn, is bound to receive the re-education which the other civilizations have obtained already'. Toynbee wrote those words in 1948, and in the rise of the so-called BRIC countries we see his prediction borne out. Europe has touched the world and as a result it is now being touched by the world.

As I have said, this forces us to examine ourselves more closely. We have seen it before; in the postwar decades the shock of decolonization had a wholesome effect. Without that experience, the unification of Europe would have been unthinkable. The decisive initiative that brought Europe together was taken by former colonial powers like France and the Netherlands, which saw in the integration of the old continent a means by which to halt their decline. They needed to be thrown back on their own resources before they could see each other as neighbours. This also explains why it is taking so long for Britain to identify with the European Community. The illusion of imperial greatness was preserved longer there, even though there was less and less reason for it after India gained its independence in 1947.

We saw the same story in the 1980s. The rise of Asia gave an important boost to the creation of the internal market. Under the leadership of Jacques Delors, many realized that Europe could hold its own in global competition only if it succeeded in reforming itself. The creation of a market of more than five hundred million people has been an important precondition for its continued ability to strive after its own social model. With the unification of Europe that ability is at stake, and many politicians and opinion makers could be reproached for having lazily regarded European unification as mainly a matter of bureaucracy and meddling.

The shifting of power in the world is once again raising innumerable questions, not just about how Europe should respond but about the consequences of the end of the postcolonial world for the way we look at history, to take one example. Early forms of religious tolerance in India might teach us that the history of democracy is not purely a European business. The ramifications of this relate to the future as well as the past.

It is surely remarkable that modern India, a state with extremely diverse religions and languages, plays no real part in the development of theories about pluralism and democracy. Indian historian Ramachandra Guha rightly remarks: 'One would think that given its size, diversity, and institutional history, the Republic of India would provide a reservoir of political experience with which to refine or rethink theories being articulated in the West.' In other words: what do the experiences of India, or for that matter Brazil, tell us about how to deal with ethnic and religious pluralism in a democracy? In discussing European federalism, would it not be fascinating to include the experience of federalism in those two continental states, rather than merely America?

We have to take one further step. The time has arrived when ideas about modernity should no longer be shaped by Western assumptions alone. This is an issue that lies at the root of the research programme I am currently establishing at the University of Tilburg. British expert on China Martin Jacques has defined one of the most important issues of coming decades: 'the emergence of Chinese modernity immediately de-centres and relativizes the position of the West. In fact, the challenge posed by the rise of China is far more likely to be cultural in nature.' He claims that the idea of modernity will

become increasingly contentious.

Much uncertainty surrounds the emergence of a non-Western modernity, but we cannot exclude the possibility that the authoritarian modernization of China will be seen as a model by countless developing countries. In a more general sense, we are justified in asking whether a new modernity is emerging in which democratic assumptions run into difficulties. How will things go in a world dominated by competition between continental states such as India, China, Brazil, Russia, the United States and Europe? What is the current state of democracy in these territorially vast states? Europe is itself struggling with this; it has not yet found a way to create a lively democracy on a European scale.

There is further uncertainty in the field of culture. A time will come when most Nobel Prizes are no longer won by scholars at American universities, but will English as a world language gradually be pushed aside by Chinese? Might Asian films, music, science and literature conquer the world? For the time being it does not look as if, in a cultural sense, ethnocentric China will overtake the melting pot that is America. Real power in the world is of course about the power of attraction as well.

VI. The hidden vitality of Europe

The image of shifts taking place in the world is therefore far from straightforward and we see this reflected in the work of Kishore Mahbubani. On the one hand he stresses that the world is going through a process of 'de-Westernization': 'the mindsets of the largest populations within Asia – the Chinese, the Muslims, and the Indians – have been changed irrevocably. Where once they may have borrowed Western cultural perspectives, now their perceptions are growing further apart.' This accords with Jacques' observation about 'contested modernity'.

On the other hand Mahbubani never tires of stressing that the East is developing so successfully because the lessons of the West have been learned and taken to heart: 'Asian societies are *not* succeeding because of a rediscovery of some hidden or forgotten strength of Asian civilizations. Instead they are rising now because (...) they have finally discovered the pillars of Western wisdom that (...) have enabled the West to outperform Asian societies for the past two centuries.' In a new book he even talks about 'global convergence': 'Today, despite a rich residue of differences, we are converging on a certain set of norms on how to create better societies.'

This rather self-contradictory diagnosis stems in part from the 'double bind' in which the rising or rather reviving powers of the non-Western world find themselves: their sense of self-worth tells them that their indigenous cultural traditions must be valued at their true worth once again, and at the same time it is obvious that many Western ideas have penetrated deep into those societies and are helping to determine the direction in which modernization is moving. There is too much of the West in the East and the question is of course how much of the East will eventually penetrate the West.

This is also to say that the loss of power by the Western world is relative. The differences between the two worlds have decreased but they are still considerable. We only have to look at the Human Development Index, a ranking introduced by the United Nations. The top five on the 2012 index are Norway, Australia, the United States, the Netherlands and Germany, in that order. France is at number 20 and the United Kingdom at number 26. The BRIC countries look unimpressive by comparison, with Russia at 55, Brazil at 85, China at 101 and India way down at number 136. So in terms of quality of life, the gap between the Western world and the emerging economies is still substantial.

If we look at the corruption index the picture is similar. Western nations, although not free of such abuses, do far better than the BRIC countries. On a list of 176 nations, Brazil, China, India and Russia are at numbers 69, 80, 94 and 133 respectively. This points to extremely weak judicial systems and the culture of corruption that accompanies them. The situation in Western countries is certainly not ideal, but they are very different. The United States is at number 19, while the three main European countries, Germany, the United Kingdom and France, are at numbers 13, 17 and 22 respectively. There are major variations within Europe, with the Netherlands at number 9, for example, and Italy in 72nd place, lower than Brazil.

So step-by-step we discover the hidden vitality of most European societies. They have a comparatively high degree of equality, a good quality of life, low levels of corruption and reasonably effective judicial systems, along with a type of urbanization that contrasts favourably with the growth of megacities in India, China and elsewhere. Migration from the countryside to the cities is taking place outside Europe on a scale and at a pace that has never been seen before in world history, and the effects of such rapid urbanization are clear: cities where both the social and the physical environment are up against huge pressures. You only have to think of the air pollution in Beijing or Harbin.

To a great extent these are growing pains; development in the non-Western world is happening so quickly that it is almost impossible to avoid material and moral imbalances. We can see in the history of industrialization in Europe and America much of what we are now seeing elsewhere in the world. The environment in cities like London in the late nineteenth century was appalling; the air was full of poisons and child mortality extremely high.

At the same time it is becoming clear that the creation of a stable judicial system, for example, is a long and laborious process. A law-based culture cannot be imposed by decree; it takes a great deal of time for its norms truly to permeate a society. Abuse of power naturally puts a brake on economic progress, since it is hard to do business in a corrupt environment. In a more general sense, a properly functioning constitutional state is extremely conducive to prosperity.

All this leads China expert David Shambaugh, in his recent book *China Goes Global*, to a cautious verdict concerning the impact on the rest of the world of the rise of China. He does not deny that a historic change is taking place, but he nevertheless comes to the conclusion, that regarding many aspects of power – especially as far as soft power is concerned, which he describes as the ‘intrinsic ability of a country to attract others’ – China is not doing very well at all. His conclusion: ‘I argue that China is a global actor without (yet) being a true global power – the distinction being that true powers influence other nations and events.’ What holds true for China is certainly also true of Brazil and India.

One final note in the margin: in the world’s emerging powers, the history of Western domination has awakened a powerful consciousness of the value of sovereignty. These countries, for important reasons, are looking for recognition from the rest of the world, and at the same time they are averse to any overly broad application of doctrines such as Responsibility to Protect. In their view Western countries are too ready to use human rights as a pretext for military intervention – see for example Libya or Iraq. They share an emphasis on sovereignty, but that may in fact make them less well prepared to deal with a world in which mutual dependency has increased enormously.

VII. A democratic empire?

The main question is whether the hidden vitality of Europe does not lie precisely in a diversity that is incompatible with a far-reaching federalization of the Union. This is the essential controversy that ought to be at the core of the debate at the upcoming elections to the European parliament. After all, such federalization – like the creation of any other form of state – demands at the very least significant direct taxation and a monopoly on violence, and therefore a common foreign policy and a common army. Creating a European foreign and defence policy is a particularly tricky business.

There is another way to put the same question. Is the common market, economic Europe, sufficient to compensate for the loss of power we are seeing once again in our own day? Or do we now need a political Europe, Europe as a player in power politics? Many would like to cling to the status quo; we need no additional prosperity or influence and realize that the years since the war have been a golden age. But history teaches us that standing still usually results in decline. Power gives birth to power, and that cumulative effect has been visible in European history since the fifteenth century. There is no reason to assume that the world that lies before us will reward withdrawal into neutrality.

According to German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, Europe has a unique ‘spiritual trademark’, namely the recurring notion of a revival of the Roman Empire. Examples include the Carolingian Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, the Napoleonic Empire, the Russian Empire and the Third Reich. Sloterdijk puts

it like this: 'Europe is the setting for metamorphoses of empire. The most influential political concept consists of a kind of transmigration of the soul of the Roman Empire.' In his view it is impossible to think about European unification without conceiving of Europe as a world power. At the very least it is clear that the internal market could never have been achieved without the will to make the European Union into an economic world power.

As for the political mission held out before Europe by Sloterdijk in the early 1990s, the drama of Sarajevo showed that an urge for what Nietzsche called '*grosse Politik*' had arisen. After fifty years of neutrality, how can the continent play a role on the world stage again without immediately reproducing all the unfortunate tendencies of power politics? Sloterdijk advocates a revival of the imperial idea but in a form that is not based on compulsion.

It is a core problem of integration. Can we imagine Europe as a power in the world within the bounds of democracy and the rule of law? And will such a goal inevitably mean German domination, not just economically as now but politically as well? This is what historian Timothy Garton Ash recently described as 'The New German Question'. 'Can Europe's most powerful country lead the way in building both a sustainable, internationally competitive eurozone and a strong, internationally credible European Union? Germany's difficulties in responding convincingly to this challenge are partly the result of earlier German questions and the solutions found to them. Yesterday's answers have sown the seeds of today's question.'

Hesitation in Germany about filling that vacuum in Europe is understandable. Greatness, as we know from experience, is dangerous, and even in its mildest manifestation it can lead to an unpleasant reception in Athens. But even if Germany is found willing to take on that role, is it in a fit state to lead? I think not. Germany is a dominant but not dominating power in Europe. You only have to look at its demographics. It is now the most populous country in the Union, but the predicted shrinkage will quickly reduce its weight in that sense, while Britain, for example, is set to continue growing and eventually overtake Germany.

For various reasons Germany is not capable of playing a central role of this kind. Perhaps a Franco-German centre of gravity will emerge, but a centre will undoubtedly be needed. The lack of a true capital city was, as we have seen, a precondition of European unification in the period before 1989, when American dominance compensated for Europe's weakness in world politics. Any attempt to give Europe a real external role could easily lead to greater internal tensions. Nevertheless, the European Union is increasingly exposed to this urge for '*grosse Politik*'.

As far as that is concerned, the introduction of the euro was a pivotal moment in the development I am trying to describe, namely the shift from the internal borders to the external borders. The euro was introduced in exchange for German unification and in that sense it was a development dictated by the past. But it was also a means of creating a power base in the world. As Mark Leonard of a European think-tank has pointed out, a global currency is a major source of power. Its introduction was an attempt at '*grosse Politik*'.

Meanwhile we are seeing just how many unintended consequences the common currency has. Even if it remains in existence – because the costs of failure are increasing daily – it is clear that the original aim has not as yet been achieved. The currency was surely intended to curb Germany's power in Europe. Well, that country's power is obviously greater than ever. It was also intended to strengthen relations within Europe. The results have been otherwise in that respect too: the euro has sharpened distinctions. Worse, in recent years the euro crisis has significantly eroded trust in Europe.

It is the great question that lies before us in the years ahead: how will the rapidly changing places of Europe in the wider world impact upon its diversity? What will become of the internal borders of Europe if the external border comes under increasing pressure? We have discovered that after half a century of integration the centre of gravity is shifting. Is the Union, a combination of different structures, equal to Europe's new role or will such ambitious power politics rebound like a boomerang on the fragile compromise that is Europe?

The urge for '*grosse Politik*' is tangible, and democracy is under pressure as a result. To return to the winning of the Nobel Prize for a moment: does the basis of peaceful relationships not lie above all in those stable democracies that are required to sustain the European idea? That is surely the real guarantee; countries where the population truly bears responsibility will not fly at each other's throats in a hurry. Is there such a thing as a democratic empire, a Europe that is a world power yet in which citizens feel represented? That is what the next few years should be all about. Perhaps we will at some point look back with nostalgia to the days when Europe was captivated by a currency.

VIII. A moratorium on enlargement

That is a modest conclusion about the opportunities for power politics that Europe has now, and the same goes for the Union's geographical reach. We cannot end a discussion about the borders of Europe without saying something more specific about the limits to the expansion of the Union. From the late 1960s onwards new 'outlying areas' have continually been added to the edges of the old continental core, first in the west (the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark), then in the south (Spain, Portugal, Greece), then in the north (Sweden and Finland as well as Austria) and finally in the east (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Estonia and Croatia). The question is how far this can go before the centre begins to weaken. How great is the elasticity of integration and therefore that of the zone of 'eternal peace' that Europe, in Immanuel Kant's sense of the term, wants to be?

Russia will not become a member of the European Union, since who could deal with the lopsided growth that would result from a great power like Russia taking part in European integration? Furthermore, that country is not exactly on its way to becoming a democracy, after all these years under Putin – and that is without even mentioning its countless ethnic conflicts. The war in Chechnya revealed a desire for authoritarian government, which makes relations between Russia and the West deeply problematic.

The issue of Turkish membership of the European Union presents, by contrast, an urgent political dilemma. Not that its membership can be contemplated in the short term, but in Ankara the impression has taken root that the Union is using economic inferiority and violations of human rights to mask a cultural argument. Christian Europe, Turks feel, does not want to make room for an Islamic country.

In their quest for European cohesion, many do indeed look to a specific civilization. Latin Christendom is regarded as providing Europe with its hallmark, and that civilization is seen as needing to defend itself against the Orthodox and Islamic worlds. The pull of such traditions is what the American political scientist Huntington was trying to describe in his study of the clash of civilizations. The possibility that a new conflict has developed along a line running between Western Christendom, Orthodox Christendom and Islam, certainly cannot be ruled out. In the expansion of the European Union it has become clear that our affinity with Catholic Hungary is greater than with Orthodox Bulgaria.

Of course various things can be said against that line of reasoning. The fault line between Orthodox and Western Christendom is far from straightforward. Do we want to claim that Orthodox Greece does not belong in Europe? It would surely be odd to exclude from the European Union the birthplace of European culture. Yet it is true that relations with Greece are marked by a distrust that points to profound differences in political culture and causes many to sigh that the European Union would be better off without Greeks.

The main criticism encountered by this culturally determined outlook relates to its undervaluing of nation states, which, for reasons of power, form coalitions that cut right across the pattern of a presumed 'clash of civilizations'. European history demonstrates that within a single 'civilization' countless ruinous wars may be fought. For that matter, the Gulf Wars showed that Islamic solidarity is fairly weak as well.

Although the obstacles are plain, there were good reasons to advocate eventual Turkish membership. Not only is Turkey an important country economically, it has a crucial geopolitical role as a member of NATO. Furthermore, the religious argument for keeping Turkey out of Europe – the claim that a predominantly Islamic population would be out of place in a Christian continent – is hard to reconcile

with the secular basis of the European Union. It is precisely the example set by Turkey as a secular state with an overwhelmingly Islamic population that makes it so hugely important that good relations prevail between Turkey and the European Union.

A great deal has changed for the better in Turkey since 1999, but over recent years a reversal can be seen. In interviews President Gül deplors the erosion of tolerance, has harsh things to say about 'Islamophobia' and makes all kinds of remarks about the importance of pluralism and human rights, yet he says nothing about the diminution of freedoms in his own country, even though it is the main cause of rapidly declining support for Turkish membership.

A recent article by Betsy Udink, a Dutch expert on Turkey, paints a shocking picture that is best summed up by its headline: 'Turkey, from military state to police state'. The legitimate battle against the army's omnipotence has resulted in a wave of arrests. Over the past three years, hundreds of military men have been jailed, culminating in the arrest of Basbug, who was chief-of-staff of the Turkish army from 2008 to 2010. At the same time almost a hundred journalists have been arrested, based on wild allegations of conspiracy. Gül's nonchalant remark that half of them are not journalists at all has done nothing to improve the situation.

If we take stock now, it seems clear that the limits of expansion have been reached. We cannot hold out to Turkey, or to former Soviet republics such as Georgia and Ukraine, or to Russia itself the prospect that membership of the Union will be possible over the next fifteen to twenty years. The exceptions here are the former Yugoslav republics, such as Serbia, that have not yet acceded to the Union. As far as their location and size go, they are a natural part of the European Union, which will then, with thirty members, have reached its limits for the coming decades. With the integration of the Balkan countries – a portion of whose populations are Muslim – it also becomes clear that the Union is based on the separation of church and state.

I spoke earlier about the impossibility of any longer avoiding an unambiguous statement about the internal borders of Europe. We need more certainty about the place of the nation states in the future union. A public announcement about the ultimate form Europe is to take means above all letting go of the notion of a United States of Europe. The nation states will not become federal states. Europe will remain a mixed bag in which federal and intergovernmental forms of governance are combined in a unique way.

The same goes for the external border; without an unambiguous statement about the outer boundary of Europe, uncertainty will persist. If the Union wants to bring some stability to its external border, a moratorium on further expansion must be proclaimed. That will require a diplomatic approach to the countries that are to be excluded from the Union in the long term. Good neighbourliness can be assured through treaties of association and customs unions, but their accession to the Union is out of the question for the foreseeable future. This must be made completely clear, since the burden of deepening integration in some areas can no longer be reconciled with yet more expansion. The further relaxation of the internal borders requires a strengthening of the EU.