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Chapter 1

What is Europe? An Introduction

It was nearly 30 years ago when Edgar Morin, a famous French philosopher and sociologist historian was writing:

If Europe is law, it is also force; if it is democracy it is also oppression; if it is spirituality, it is also materiality; if it is moderation, it is also hubris and excess: if it is reason, it is also myth, even in the very idea of reason. (Morin, 1987, p. 23)

If one asked citizens the question, ‘What is Europe?’, they would probably disagree in their answers but many among them would assume that there is an absolute truth to be found – a definitive answer to be given. They would thus argue on the criteria or the historical evidence on which a definition of Europe could or should rest. Indeed, one might answer the question through reference to public opinion surveys, another may draw on historical works or quote the words of famous European thinkers, while many may privilege a politicized and ideological definition of Europe. More often than not, in such contemporary discussions, one would conflate the term ‘Europe’ with that of the ‘European Union’ (EU).

A basic answer to the question that we pose in this book is that Europe is a geographical *space*: it is a continent. However, Europe is also a *place*: it is a space that is culturally constructed. It is a reference to the European continent that includes cultural elements, a past that is both objectively (based on historical events) and subjectively constructed as European (the events are given a specific meaning and are put into a wider ‘European’ framework of meaning), and it also has a geopolitical power dimension (Europe is a contested and probably fragmented but still rather distinct global actor).

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Why is defining Europe an important question today? The reasons are twofold: first, Europe has become a reality that cannot be ignored; second, Europe is relevant in the political, societal, cultural, economic and commercial fields, as well as in the domestic sphere and in the global arena. At the same time, Europe is in crisis – at all levels. A book that tries to answer the ‘What is Europe?’ question seeks to contribute to a debate on who ‘we’ the Europeans are, where ‘we’ come from and where ‘we’ are heading. This book aims to give the tools to readers to ask and answer the question themselves. It does not provide answers *tout court*.

Europe today is politically divided and without a sense of direction. Even though there is a wider acknowledgement that nation-states, while still important, are too small (economically or geopolitically) to face the challenges of the twenty-first century as single entities, Europe fails to inspire its residents as to the way forward. In some cases, the European integration project almost appears to be continuing simply out of momentum, or out of fear that scrapping it would be too costly. The reasons for which the European Community (today the EU) was created, notably to guarantee peace, are now largely irrelevant, as newer generations have faint memories, if at all, of war. The Younger generations appear to be more concerned with prosperity, and it is not clear whether prosperity and economic stability are easier to achieve at the European rather than the national or regional levels, with what benefits and, more importantly, at what costs.

The implosion of the communist regimes after 1989 and the end of the Cold War has left us without a clear ideological struggle between competing conceptions of ‘good society’. At the end of the day, all questions of social justice and equality appear to be technical problems that require more efficient administrative implementation rather than new policies. Politics seem to not matter or to matter very little. In this absence of an ideological struggle, populist parties and extremist forces appear to be filling the void and gaining power. Worse still, terrorism, bred through social and economic marginalization, is occurring throughout Northern Europe.

In asking and answering the ‘What is Europe?’ question, this book seeks to shed light on the main differences and the tentative similarities that countries and people in Europe face, thereby pinpointing the main challenges that we share.

One may argue that Europe has become a central dimension of the wider societal transformation of modernity, since questioning what Europe is reflects also a questioning of what late modernity is, and how we orient ourselves towards the future (Bauman, 2004; Delanty, 2013). However, this book intends to take a somewhat different perspective: it aims to question the different facets of the Europe concept to reveal the internal diversity of the concept and not just its diachronic evolution. We wish to engage in a critical reading of the different perspectives on Europe: who decides what Europe is and what are the competing hegemonic discourses? We also seek to disassociate the concept of Europe from the current European integration project and consider how it can develop in new directions, deconstructing its past uses to inform our future plans. This does not mean ignoring the importance of the European Union project – actually this would be quite impossible. It does mean tracing its historical character and political limits with a view to opening up the horizon for considering anew the question of Europe.

Defining Europe

Defining ‘Europe’ seems to be an ongoing story that appears as an incessant effort to revisit the core existentialist questions of what makes up a definition of Europe. Throughout the course of the continent’s history, politicians, political elites, academics and thinkers have been tackling and returning to this question in elaborate, critical, as well as in simplistic, populist ways. Here, we highlight the historical and ambivalent character of the term, and offer alternative views of Europe by putting current developments into perspective. We adopt a critical viewpoint with regard to social and political developments in Europe today, and more generally in the post-Second World War period. This book is distinctively European, in that it tries to emancipate the concept from the specific project of the EU and look both wider and deeper into the origins, evolution and future of Europe in a variety of levels and from an interdisciplinary point of view.

We argue that there can be no single definition of Europe. The dynamic nature of what Europe represents is not new, nor is it a trait particular to the more recent phase of European history,

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namely, the EU. Therefore, we take the position that Europe is a concept that becomes meaningful in relation to its specific historical context. Mikael Af Malmberg and Bo Stråth (2002, p. 3) have argued that Europe is the invention of nation-states. By this provocative statement they wanted to highlight not only that there are different national answers to the ‘What is Europe?’ question but also that Europe is essentially a constructed nation. Stråth, like Delanty (1995), among other-well known contemporary historians and sociologists, points to the diverse meanings that Europe has assumed in history. They pay, however, less attention to the fact that Europe may have multiple meanings also synchronically. At a given point in time, depending on the perspective we adopt and the situation in which we find ourselves, Europe may represent very different things. Thus, perhaps we should speak of ‘many *Europes*’ rather than of just one.

Not only has the definition of Europe varied through the past centuries and even decades – as historians and sociologists argue – but its content and meaning also varies in relation to the different realms of social life. Delanty and Rumford (2005) argue that Europe has become a dimension that cannot be ignored at both the societal and the political level. Rather, we would say that there are different Europes operating in various social realms: there is a Europe in culture and/or something called ‘a European civilization’ (even if its meaning is highly contested); there is a Europe in politics and a social Europe; there is also a Europe in history and there are boundaries to Europe that are constantly shifting and changing. From a conceptual viewpoint, there is no need – and it is not possible either – to define a single Europe, drawing together all these meanings and perspectives into a single container. From an ideological viewpoint, however, it is possible to provide not only a critical review but also a synthesis of what Europe is – and also of what it should be at present.

Brand Europe

The issue of the *European-ness* of its people and countries that are at the geographical or cultural margins of the current EU project raises the question of *power*: who has the power to decide what Europe is and who belongs to it? This is a question seldom dealt with in academic and media debates, perhaps because it is judged as self-evident or, by some, as less important.

For instance, decisions on who belongs to the EU are taken by the European Council, consisting of the member states, which consider themselves, and are largely recognized by other countries, as the legitimate owners of the ‘brand’ name ‘Europe’.

Their ownership of the European-Union-slash-Europe as a geopolitical project is not argued on the basis of a crude power rhetoric. The political dimension of Europe’s ‘ownership’ is largely framed into a wider claim of ownership over culture and symbols (Handler, 1988, p. 142). The Copenhagen criteria for new countries’ accession to the EU, the political conditionality principles of EU international aid programmes, as well as the official EU negotiations’ debate with associated countries, such as Turkey, or other Balkan states, supposedly reflect this value dimension rather than a crude difference in power. Nonetheless, this value debate presupposes a power dimension: the EU and the countries that currently belong to it have the power to judge whether other countries, nations, ethnic groups, territories, traditions, cultural forms or symbols are ‘European’. And as Bourdieu (1991, p. 236) has argued, to name something is to bring it into existence. The political and symbolic power to assign the European label as a brand name that belongs to the EU has gone largely uncontested in recent years. However, this was not always the case and this is one aspect of the ‘What is Europe?’ question that needs to be critically explored with a view to uncovering how this power of naming has been used in the past and what its implications are today for defining Europe. Chapters 2, 4 and 5 on the Changing Shape of Europe, on Cultural Europe and on European Identity, respectively, tackle some of these issues.

Historical trajectories

In scholarly debate, some researchers have proposed theoretical or historical models from which a definition of Europe will emerge somehow ‘naturally’ and ‘objectively’ from *historical* inquiry. Europe has existed in history, albeit in different shapes and with different meanings or modes of organization. The EU is simply a landmark in the historical trajectory of the larger entity called ‘Europe’. In effect, however, much of the political and public discourse assumes an a-historical perspective: it treats the EU as a development unique in history and once formed, destined to be there until the end of time. This implicit view that

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many media and politicians take for granted leads to the search for absolute and timeless definitions of Europe often disguising the power differentials and (geo)political dynamics behind them.

Adopting a critical perspective, Chapters 2 and 3 in this volume discuss the origins of the term ‘Europe’ and the different meanings it has acquired over the centuries, as well as the different European unification projects that have developed in the last 100 years. More specifically, Chapter 2 looks at how the term emerged, mainly as a geographical expression demarcating the Christian world and how it changed in the mid-fifteenth century. In particular, a milestone occurred after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 and the colonial expansion of European powers after 1492, giving way to the notion of European identity as a system of ‘civilizational values’. It is argued that after the fall of Constantinople, when the Greek Christian Eastern Empire disappeared and Europe was confined to the Latin West, the idea of Europe began to replace Christendom and eventually became a new cultural frame of reference.

The meaning of Europe is examined during the period of European explorations of other parts of the world, between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, when the Christian universal mission was replaced by the ‘white man’s burden’. ‘Europe’ as a term is of course also linked to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment philosophers identified with the idea of Europe as the process of modernity and valued the primacy of science and rationality. Europe provided the symbol of the new universal civilization predicated by the Enlightenment.

The changes in the meaning of Europe during the era of nationalism, notably in relation to both early nation formation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the more recent nationalist movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, are herewith discussed along with how the term was used within nationalist discourses to signify specific geographical areas, values or populations.

A European value system?

Chapter 3 investigates the visions that Europe has stirred in recent centuries among thinkers and statesmen. However, to understand the various visions that Europe has inspired in the minds of European thinkers and leaders, it is necessary to understand the

political context within which these have been formulated and the drivers of these narratives. It is also necessary to trace the values and ideas that have been associated with these visions of Europe. Chapter 3 discusses what has inspired attempts at defining Europe and unifying it and the context within which these narratives co-existed, antagonized, impregnated and succeeded one another. The chapter offers a critical reading of the various projects of a united Europe promoted by different thinkers, intellectuals and politicians in the interwar period, during the rise of fascism and Nazism as well as in the post-war era and during the Cold War. We highlight the different variants of this imagined European unity and critically discuss its west-Eurocentrism, pointing to how such projects were perceived and conceived in Central Eastern Europe. The chapter concludes with a forward-looking reflection on the meaning and relevance of Europe in the near future.

European cultural dimensions

Complementing the political dimension of Europe, Chapter 4 discusses its cultural dimension. It actually highlights the ambivalence of any reference to a European culture or value system. We try to unravel European culture and what it represents, or rather what it has represented at different times, and in what ways these representations are relevant to the present. By navigating between the ideas of Europe as civilization, Europe as progress, Europe as modernity, Europe as unity and Europe as diversity, we explore the key themes that have been dominant in Europe's cultural battleground and their significance today. We also try to pinpoint some of the dissenters and exceptions to this theory.

We highlight some of the complexities and contradictions that make up the way culture is understood and explore the ways in which European culture has been defined, the heritages that constitute it and their relevance in contemporary understandings of European culture. We also present some efforts that have been made to attribute meaning and offer definitions of 'European' culture on the part of international and regional inter-state organizations, whose scope of competence covers issues of culture, education, democracy and cooperation. We also delve into Europe's relationship with the 'Other', in order to underscore the cleavages, contradictions and alternative visions that have been put forward as representations of European culture and European values.

Throughout this *parcours culturel*, we seek the dominant, the alternative and the dissenting definitions of what is included and represented within ‘European culture’. Just as importantly, we explore what ‘European culture’ aspires to. This latter aspirational dimension is probably its most distinctive feature, as it has shaped its universalist and forward-looking dimensions. European culture acquires meaning when the commonalities, shared values and experiences of the past are constructed in a forward-looking manner. In other words, references to a European culture seem to mostly be made when its constituent parts claim their belonging to a shared cultural space in order to express a political vision of Europe and the ideals it represents – or ought to represent.

Political and public discourses also refer to the social dimensions of Europe, notably the welfare policies that aim at taking care of the most vulnerable populations in society, on the basis of a shared notion of social solidarity. However, such discourses hugely differ both among European countries and within each country. Any similarity among them must be understood in relative terms: national social models of European countries, and their ideological variants, differ significantly from one country to the other. However, they are more similar with one another than with the social protection models that exist in other countries outside Europe. Indeed, any discussion of the social dimension of Europe today must acknowledge both the different welfare models and value constellations that prevail in each society and the different historical experiences that, for instance, characterize Western/Southern European countries from their Central and Eastern European neighbours.

Loaded meanings

The different meanings and outlooks of Europe through history raise, unavoidably, the question of whether a European identity exists, or has ever existed, and in what form. Do the Europeans feel European? And if they do, how does a feeling of belonging to Europe relate to other important collective and political identities, such as national identity or indeed ethnic/minority identity?

This set of questions is unpacked in Chapter 5. First of all, we need to discuss what kind of identity is, or would be, a European

identity. Should we expect it to be like a national identity? Should it have a similar type of cultural content, notably a language, a set of customs and traditions, a common civic culture, links with a historical homeland and a current political territory, a single economy and a wish to be politically autonomous if not for outright political independence? And if it is to be such a kind of primary political identity, have we seen this European identity take shape over the last two or three decades, when the communist regimes in Central Eastern Europe collapsed in 1989? Is it since then that Europe has been culturally and politically reconnected?

Or, should European identity be understood as an ‘umbrella’ type of secondary political identity that brings together a range of national identities that have some similarities in common, notably links to a common geographical territory (the European continent) and a certain link with a common European culture (see Chapter 4 on European culture and European values). This kind of secondary and mediated type of collective identity – mediated, that is, through national belonging – appears to have been a predominant feature of the European identity so far in the twenty-first century.

A second range of questions with regard to European identity considers the relationship between European identity, cultural diversity and democratic inclusive politics. Is European identity an ‘open’ identity that allows for the inclusion of migrants and minorities or is it a ‘closed’ one, as national identities often are? Can European identity help us, the ‘Europeans’, to understand ourselves better and clarify our relations with our ‘significant others’, whether these are minorities and immigrants within Europe or other nations, world regions, cultures or civilizations.

There are at least two implicit questions that are usually neglected in this debate. First, *who defines* what kind of diversity ‘belongs’ to Europe? In other words, who speaks on behalf of Europe? Is it the EU institutions? Is it the EU member states (or rather some of the EU member states in particular, such as Germany or France)? Or is it the people of Europe? The people, though hesitant as regards their attachment to the ‘EU’, do seem to be expressing a common European connection in the way they express commonly shared concerns or ‘indignation’ with EU and national policies and politics in the form of demonstrations, marches and mobilization in social movements.

Second, *what kind of cultural or religious diversity* is judged to be alien to the European continent and hence is not necessarily included in the ‘Unity in Diversity’ motto? Islam and Muslims are an obvious case in point here. For some politicians and a part of the public opinion in European countries, there is no such a thing as European Muslims or European Islam. Islamic traditions are alien to most of Europe. They have been the by-product of Arab expansion or Ottoman conquest in a more distant past and of recent migrations and colonial relations in recent times. But they are not considered as belonging to the European cultural and value area. However, Islam not only has a historical presence of centuries in Spain (800 years) and countries that were under Ottoman Empire rule (400 years), there is also a new European Islam that is the outcome of earlier labour migrations of the post-war period. However, as we discuss in Chapter 5, the question of whether Europe and Islam can belong together remains unsettled in public and political debates.

The geographical conundrum

Moving from geopolitics to geography, there are claims of *European-ness* by nations and people that are on the fringes of the continent and even beyond it, in Eurasia or in northern Africa. It is actually often unclear whether people wish to join an area of security and prosperity identified with the EU or whether they make reference to a cultural, historical or symbolic notion of Europe that brings with it certain value connotations. The question of the borders and boundaries of Europe is taken up in Chapter 6.

Europe’s external borders, or boundaries that trace its periphery and limits, are not the only borders that matter; there are also borders within. These internal borders – whether functional, spatial, national, ethnic, religious, linguistic, ideological or socio-economic – are just as defining in terms of creating identities and attributing substance to the concept of ‘Europe’. These internal borders, in many cases much more than the external ones, have structured both the course of Europe’s history and also the perceptions the rest of the world holds about Europe. Finally, there are borders that are not even situated at the borders at all, at least in the geographico-politico-administrative sense of the term (Balibar, 2002, p. 84). In effect, informal, cultural or ideational

borders may exclude or marginalize some socioeconomic groups from access to certain policies, privileges or rights.

Understanding Europe's internal and external borders is therefore fundamental to any attempt at defining what Europe is, what it represents, and what it aspires to. We try to tackle the issue of borders and boundaries in Chapter 6 in order to trace and identify some of the constitutive elements that define 'Europe', the changes that have occurred to these elements and how they have transformed and influenced what Europe represents. William Walters (2009) has argued that debates about the frontiers of Europe are necessary political interventions which interject elements of fixture into the fluid, diverse and ambiguous space that constitutes Europe. Thus, Chapter 6 highlights the politics of power behind different configurations of Europe's borders and boundaries and, through this, offers some insight on how others perceive Europe.

The political power map

The question of power poses two further interrelated questions: one concerns the political dimension in defining Europe and the other, the existence of a European culture and of a set of European values. Chapter 7 discusses the political dimension in defining Europe. This is particularly challenging not just because of the inherent complexity of politics but also because of the diversity that characterizes the political features in or of Europe. Unavoidably, we have been selective and highly subjective with regard to which political dimension we have singled out to discuss here.

Europe's political map is composed of a rich range of competing ideologies, from the liberal to the illiberal and from the democratic to the undemocratic, all with universalist aspirations and global resonance. It has been crafted through the coexistence of a long legacy of nation-building, of state-building, of improving democratic institutions and democratic governance and tumultuous experiences of different types of authoritarian rule. It has also been shaped by a history of tensions between the civil and the military centres of power and between the civil and religious centres of power.

The political map of Europe essentially emerged in the late Middle Ages. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the

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Church's hegemony began to gradually be challenged by powerful rulers, and feudalism offered the frame within which Europe's nation-states emerged. The social structures of feudalism lay the groundwork for the political structures that established France, Portugal, Spain and England. Among the most important structures of this period were the assemblies that are the roots of Europe's parliamentarism, and the system of justice (that was separate from the feudal structure), which along with the reintroduction of Roman Law, enabled the systematic and organized record of judgements and administrative decisions. Thus, at the end of the Middle Ages, the emergence of these European nation-states along with the Roman-German Empire and the later establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire replaced the fluid political territorial organization, which had been regionalized and compartmentalized until then.

Southeastern Europe was perhaps the exception to this trend given the political fluidity that continued to characterize the Balkans, Hungary, Moldavia and Bulgaria, and the threatening rise of the Ottoman Empire in the east. Nonetheless, the interstate system that began to emerge in this historical period became characteristic of Europe and was then exported to the rest of the world, forming the basis of the organization of modern political life in all corners of the world and the building blocks of international relations. Capitalism also emerged in this period mainly in the urban centres of northern Italy and the Netherlands and undoubtedly defined the socioeconomic cleavages and ideological conflicts in all political systems over the next six centuries.

Ideological cleavages

Chapter 7 concentrates on the left wing/right wing division in European politics among 'Western European' countries. The chapter discusses the main tenets of the left wing/right wing cleavage in the 1980s, when the 'Iron Curtain' was still in place and the world was divided into capitalist and communist camps, and corporatist models of mass production were still largely functioning in Western European countries. It then examines how the left wing dimension was reconsidered in the post-1989 context to the extent that some thinkers announced the 'end of ideologies' or even 'the end of history', as Francis

Fukuyama famously put it. In the post-1989 context, the focus was on how the left wing/right wing cleavage was reshaped and/or intertwined with the notions of ‘Western’ or ‘Eastern’ Europe to that of a common ‘united Europe’.

Peace, freedom, security and human rights are declared in political debates as core European political values. These general political principles, while important in defining the main common tenets of different political cultures in Europe, are not exclusively European. The way these are codified and conceptualized in contemporary politics and policies is undoubtedly defined by the European experience, history, philosophical heritage, legal and political systems. Nevertheless, peace, freedom, security and human rights are values that are part of all cultures and civilizations, even though they may be defined, prioritized or understood in different ways. The European or Western reading of these values as universal is often criticized by cultural relativists underlining that certain societies may prioritize social over political rights, or respect for tradition over certain individual rights or even nationalism over peace. In this respect, it is worth reconsidering the debate over the European character of these principles mainly to uncover the ‘cultural property’ and historical arguments that underlie it.

Europe and (in)equality

A social dimension is inherent to the discussion about what Europe is. The social dimension involves conceptions of equality and inequality, solidarity and community or indeed responsibility and autonomy. It includes ideas about rights and obligations of the citizens towards the state and of the state towards its citizens. The social dimension is fundamentally about what we consider a ‘good’ society and lies at the heart of the functioning of democracy and citizenship. Social protection provided by the state enables all citizens to function as such and creates the institutional links between the individual and her/his family, on one hand, and the state and society, on the other.

Thus, in Chapter 8, we concentrate on the political framework and cultural connotations of concepts such as community, solidarity and social cohesion. We argue that the current concept of social solidarity is strongly based on the concept of national citizenship that purports a high level of community cohesion and

solidarity among fellow nationals. However, there are a number of related developments that need to be taken into account when discussing the social dimension of Europe. These include the withering-away of the Fordist system of production and its replacement by a post-Fordist world that is much more volatile. The increasing cultural diversity of European societies as the result of post-war migrations in Western Europe, of post-1989 migration in Southern Europe and of the revival of nationalism and ethnicity in the post-1989 period in Central and Eastern Europe. The declining demography of Europe also needs to be taken into account.

Last but not least, a discussion of social Europe needs to engage with the post-1989 context and the rise of neoliberalism as a dominant if not hegemonic paradigm for socioeconomic relations. This temporary disruption of the ideological struggle among different conceptions of social solidarity and justice has transformed social justice struggles to technocratic debates about whether one system of welfare payments or entitlements is more effective than another. This has had important implications for the normative and political foundations of the European welfare systems and the values and self-conceptions of European societies. Interestingly, in the present day, we are entering yet another phase, after the acute financial crisis that Europe experienced in the late 2000s and early 2010s. This is a phase where the hegemony of neoliberalism is challenged, and the importance of social protection and social solidarity is being considered anew, albeit in a completely different framework.

The geopolitical context

In defining what Europe is, the *geopolitical context* of the answer is important. In the former EU15 countries largely in the western, southern and Nordic parts of the continent, Europe was often synonymous with the EU. However, in some countries, such as the UK or Sweden, Europe or the EU is something ‘out there’, across the Channel or further south. To the new member states (those that joined the EU in 2004, 2007 and 2013) and the associated countries, Europe is both geographically and symbolically or historically wider than the EU. A large part of the elites but also lay people in these countries consider(ed) themselves European, regardless of their membership of the EU.

The same is true for Switzerland, Norway and Iceland, who may define themselves as part of the European continent but wish to maintain a certain autonomy from (even if in parallel also a close connection with) the EU. From a geopolitical perspective, Europe also entails the Council of Europe (CoE, founded in 1949), an international organization that today includes 47 countries and 820 million citizens from the westernmost to the easternmost corners of the European continent. One should also not neglect the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); with 28 member countries today, it was created also in 1949 to safeguard the freedom and security of its members through political and military means and which ties most European countries to their allies across the Atlantic. More than just creating a security community, NATO has defined a significant part of Europe's presence in regional and global affairs on security issues. It has also influenced the ways in which much of Europe has responded to the numerous traditional and emerging security challenges that it faces.

Since the 1990s, both the CoE and NATO have seen their membership expand significantly to include the former Warsaw Pact countries, and during this time, their mission has also evolved. The CoE's mission in promoting the rule of law, democracy and human rights has been crucial, particularly in the early days of the political transition in Central and Eastern Europe, while NATO has had to reinvent its mission of cooperative security since its prime *raison d'être* (notably the Cold War context) ceased to exist and other geopolitical challenges emerged in Europe and beyond.

Europe's position in the global context is discussed in Chapter 9. We consider the Cold War era and the different *Europes* that existed during this timeframe. More specifically, on the one hand we examine the role that the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union's hegemony played in Central and Eastern Europe. And on the other hand, we discuss Western Europe as part of the Transatlantic Partnership and its development into the European Economic Community. We then examine the present geopolitical role of Europe in the world, given the tectonic shifts that have taken place in global politics since 1989. We question whether the idea of Europe can be distinguished from the EU or whether the EU has indeed monopolized the notion of Europe in its geopolitical dimension. We then analyse the position and role

of the EU in the post-1989 and in the post-9/11 contexts and its responses to important critical junctures in international politics. We discuss the civilian and normative dimensions that the EU developed and the extent to which it attempted to assert itself as an alternative pole within the West, exercising soft power and multilateralism.

Ambitions to establish itself as a normative global actor; the importance it has attributed to the promotion of the triptych of democracy, human rights and rule of law in its external relations through its conditionality approach; its importance in the global economy; and its emphasis on regional cooperation and improved global governance constitute part of the story, suggesting an evolution towards Europe acting as a single entity in global politics. The other part of the story consists of a fragmented and divided Europe in global politics, a Europe unable to formulate a common foreign policy and a political power risking increasing irrelevance in global politics. In this context, Chapter 9 seeks to assess whether there are common elements bringing European countries together in international relations. Is there a distinctive European view on issues of war, peace, security, environment and general global politics or is there only an EU and separate national viewpoints?

Europe in and beyond the EU

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the idea of European unity and of a distinctive European political project underwent, yet again, another set of crises. The early part of the decade, between 2002 and 2004, was pregnant with enthusiasm, at least among a large part of the national and European elites. They were excited with the emergence, through a process of public consultation and deliberation among representatives of the member states, of a Constitutional Treaty for Europe. Since the spring of 2005, ideas of a European unity and political project hit an all-time low, but this is not new, as European cynicism has occurred several times during the post-war period. The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by the Dutch and French voters prompted all EU member states to enter a period of reflection on what the EU is or what it should become in the near future. Social and political discourses concentrated on whether

the EU should pay more attention to the deepening dimension, addressing issues such as unemployment and social exclusion, or whether it should be more concerned with the widening perspective, notably furthering the enlargement process.

In the post-Constitution period, the ‘reflection’ exercise led to yet another socio-political arrangement with the Treaty of Lisbon. Overt conflict among the member states was avoided and so was radical change. At the same time, European institutions (such as the European Commission or the European Parliament) engaged in endless efforts to overcome the democratic deficit through web consultations and conferences aimed at non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders. Also, discussions about issues of public concern, such as gender equality, societal cohesion or the protection of the environment, were encouraged by European institutions in order to enhance citizens’ awareness of their ‘democratic ownership’ over Europe. They emphasized the several types of goods and services that can best be addressed at the European level because of their transnational nature.

Times of crisis at the doorstep

This political and institutional crisis was then followed by an economic one. Triggered by the Greek sovereign debt crisis in 2009, the foundations of the Eurozone were shaken to the extent that a real existentialist crisis challenged the EU. The end of the core European value of solidarity was proclaimed with public debate falling back into simplistic distinctions between northern and southern Europe, between centre and periphery, between creditors and debtors. Talk of a two (if not more)-speed Europe multiplied, based in principle on economic arguments of growth and fiscal stability, but essentially relapsing to cultural and religious stereotypes. In this discourse, there exists an implicit (and at times explicit) differentiation of ‘Europeans’. Simply put, there is a core Europe composed of ‘first class’ Europeans who are virtuous savers, law-abiding, well-organized liberals and generally Protestant; and there is a second category of Europeans who consume more than they produce, and are debt-ridden, corrupt and disorganized.

In these discourses, Europe is lost or completely subjugated to the actual project of the EU. The term ‘Europe’ is used as a

tautology: all EU countries are European countries and the reverse is true. Thus, the European-ness of countries like Ukraine or Belarus that most people would geographically identify as Eastern European is denied because they do not meet the socioeconomic and political criteria necessary to become associated states or to open negotiations for EU membership. The same is true for some of the Balkan countries. Thus, Albania's or Serbia's *European-ness* is still under 'evaluation', while the European character of neighbouring Slovenia, Bulgaria and Croatia is 'confirmed' through their EU membership.

However, in those cases, the meaning of *European-ness* is not even debated – the power of current member states, or more precisely of certain member states, to decide who or what is properly European goes uncontested. The question of what Europe is or can be, within or beyond the EU, only comes to the fore when the Turkish membership question is debated. On these occasions, the cultural, geographical, religious and political contours of Europe and of traditions or values that are labelled 'European' emerge in the public and political debate. Such contested cases raise the question of how to define Europe and whether there is a geographical, cultural, social or political Europe that goes beyond the EU. It is through such debates that the concept of Europe is emancipated from the EU and its specific policies and power arrangements.

The question of Europe is also raised when it comes to questions of values or principles rather than political matters. The 2006 controversy over the depiction of the Prophet Mohammed in cartoons published originally in the Danish press and later re-published in several European dailies is a good case in point, as is the 2015 tragedy over the *Charlie Hebdo* satire and the killing of their editorial team by three Islamic extremists.

In 2006, the controversy started in Denmark, but soon acquired a transnational character to the extent that it attracted the attention of government elites in the Arab world asking for an apology from the Danish editor and/or government. Once the question of apology became a public concern (several months after the cartoons had been published originally in the Danish daily *Jyllands Post*), editors and journalists throughout Western Europe mobilized upholding or criticizing their publication. Concomitantly, the issue was given publicity in the Arab media (Soage, 2006) and citizens across Arab countries also mobilized,

protesting against the cartoons. These protests led in some cities of the Middle East to violent outbursts and the burning of Danish embassies.

The 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* events were much more dramatic, as three extremists attacked and killed almost the entire editorial team of the newspaper in the latter's headquarters in Paris. The killing was presented as punishment for the cartoons that this small left-wing magazine had published through the years referring also to Islam and the Prophet. While the killings involved French citizens and a quintessentially French magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, the crisis took an international turn. Five days later, on 11 January 2015, a huge rally in memory of the victims and against extremism was held in Paris and other French cities, gathering a total of 3.7 million people, among which were representatives from 40 countries, including African and Asian, predominantly Muslim, countries' leaders.

Both crises, in 2006 and in 2015, were not only international in nature but also specifically European in that they called into question important political principles such as freedom of expression and respect for other religions, as well as the limits of implementing these principles in practice.

In both the case of Turkish membership to the EU and the cartoons crises, the question of 'What is Europe?' becomes important through contrast to real or imagined threatening 'significant others', notably Muslim countries and Islam in general, even if several thinkers and some politicians recognize that there are European Muslims too. Paradoxically, both the European Muslims and the Muslims outside Europe become pivotal in answering the 'What is Europe?' question, freeing the debate from the EU straitjacket.

Europe writ large becomes relevant also in the realm of transatlantic relations. The partnership between the USA and Western Europe created a 'security community' (see Adler and Barnett 1998) that defined the course of the twentieth century in political, military, financial, economic, scientific and cultural terms. With the end of the Cold War, this community started to change and widen through the processes of EU and NATO enlargements. Over the past two decades, this community has been both enhanced and rendered more vulnerable, as Europe has changed. These changes have as much to do with the challenges posed by the continent's reunification and the EU's difficulties to widen

and deepen; the challenges of post-communist transition for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe; and the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction for most of Southeast Europe, as with the global changes following 9/11, the consolidation of China's economic power and the global financial crisis.

Friend or foe?

Throughout all this, Europe becomes relevant through the direct or indirect efforts of the US political elites to contest the EU as a political player and to lure individual countries into privileged bilateral relations with the USA. On several occasions, the USA has sought directly or indirectly to foster instability and internal divisions within the EU. It happened in the case of the Iraq War with the G.W. Bush Administration's distinction between 'new' and 'old' Europe, and an argument that is frequently put forward is that US support for Turkey's EU membership essentially aims at putting an end to the project of political union. US diplomatic and military support for Kosovo's independence has also been seen in this light.

The transatlantic community renders Europe relevant in another dimension, as it points to tensions within what could be termed wider Western values of democracy, liberalism, freedom or secularism. Some issues, such as the death penalty or the possession of guns by individual citizens, have become exemplary of such tensions between a more European and a more North American current in the wider area of 'Western' values.

There is a majority of US citizens that tends to support the death penalty, as well as the right of citizens to possess and carry machine guns. Although there is strong internal contestation of these values, as there is contestation of the lack of a welfare safety net for the more disadvantaged sections of the US population, there is a distinct American tradition of individual freedom and individual responsibility that can be referred to as a support for both the death penalty and the policy about guns.

European countries, by contrast, have legally committed themselves to condemning the death penalty and severely restrict the possession of machine guns. They also support human rights in more fervent ways than the USA, although here again we see that practices are not always consistent. While intellectuals, the media and political parties condemned the Guantanamo

base and generally the US policy on prisoners of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, European intelligence services cooperated with the CIA for the unlawful detention and interrogation of citizens or residents that were suspected to have played a part in terrorist plots, without upholding the necessary judicial scrutiny and procedure. Nonetheless, there seems to be a culture of human rights and respect for human life that expresses itself by condemning the death penalty and by defending civil liberties even at the risk of loosening public security measures that is stronger on this side of the Atlantic than in North America.

At the same time, compared with Europe, the USA is a society where religion and religiosity are more prevalent, where references to God are considered an integral part of pre-election campaigns. The high level of religiosity in North American society was also evident in the management of the cartoons crisis there. The North American media refused to re-publish the cartoons insulting Prophet Muhammad on the grounds that these constituted unnecessary offence to the religious sentiments of some people. This concern was stronger than the concern of upholding freedom of expression. In Europe, by contrast, there was much less concern about religious sensitivities and the entire debate focussed on the balance between freedom of expression and freedom of religion, leaving the question at the end unsettled.

Concluding remarks

The above reflections suggest that the idea of Europe as a cultural, political or geographical entity is currently largely subsumed under the notion of the 'European Union', which has become hegemonic in Europe and abroad. Nonetheless, there are important matters and dimensions that are not and cannot be covered by a single discourse on European integration and that become apparent mainly when Europe is contrasted with 'Others', other nations, cultures or continents, because they are too close or too distant symbolically and/or geographically from Europe. In exploring the 'What is Europe?' question, this book also explores how Europe is viewed from these 'Other' continents and nations, notably from the Near or more distant East but also from the West (North America in particular).

22 *What is Europe?*

Overall this book is forward thinking: it looks into the past to better understand the present and to think about the future in innovative ways. It reviews past scholarly literature and research evidence on Europe with a view to clarifying the power dynamics behind naming Europe and to highlighting the diverse *Europes* that exist within and beyond the current European unification project. The book seeks to emancipate the concept of Europe from the hegemony of EU discourses and also to analyse some of these discourses critically. It also argues against an excessive Eurocentrism in the public debate and in the scholarly literature, obsessed with defining Europe. Rather, such a debate reveals the uncertainty and fuzziness of a European cultural or political entity and of a European identity. However, such an uncertainty is not, in our view, necessarily a bad thing. Such uncertainty could contribute to a self-critical and reflexive attitude within European countries.

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