

CDA Research Institute & Wilfried
Martens Centre for European Studies

Seeing Europe anew

Young politicians and the
future of Europe



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Introduction

Europe is never complete. That is a hugely inspiring idea, particularly for a young generation of Europeans. Previous generations have endowed Europe with a rich heritage of traditions, cultures, diversity, and pluralism. And because of the endless diversity that characterises Europe, the European project is always a work in progress. No one will ever be able to ‘call it a day’ and declare Europe as a finished phenomenon.

The energy generated by this duality of rich history and challenging perspective has given rise to this book. As young Christian Democrats in the Netherlands, we found it most inspiring to engage with our contemporaries in political positions in the EPP family¹ — to allow them to have their say and to enter into a dialogue with them. This collection, encompassing dialogue and vision, is the result of this engagement, which in a time of Covid-19 took the form of digital meetings and discussions. The structure of the book shows — we do hope — how fascinating and substantive the conversations were. The book is neither a literal account nor a summary and digest of each individual interview, but rather a composition of content from these multinational and multicultural dialogues on themes relevant to European Christian Democrats and members of the EPP.

The chapters are organised around questions we wanted to explore. The first chapter immediately poses a penetrating question: ‘What makes you a Christian Democrat?’ Whether people see themselves thus by name, by national tradition or by political affinity, Christian Democracy has something to say. Chapter two continues with the question: ‘Who made you a Christian Democrat?’ Who are role models when we talk about the Christian Democratic political style and content? Whose vision and practical example has encouraged our young generation of politicians? Without question, our generation has been blessed with a European leader like Angela Merkel. But other and sometimes surprising names have also been raised and discussed — from parents to “no nonsense” leaders and beyond.

Chapter three moves from the individual level to Europe as a political body and asks, ‘What makes Christian Democracy European?’ And, ‘what distinguishes Christian Democracy as a European movement?’ This immediately raises the question in chapter four: ‘Is there such a thing as a European “demos”?’ If so, what does it look like? And if not, does that matter?

¹ The European People’s Party, more formally known as the EPP group the largest and oldest political group in the European Parliament gathering over 81 parties from 43 countries, of which Christian Democrats play an important role

— and why or even why not? Once the contours of the answers to these questions become clear, chapter five proceeds to examine the foundations of a European democracy. Here another question comes to the fore: ‘What does this idea and ideal of an ever-closer union actually mean? In other words, ‘Whose union is this, and what does it unite, in reality?’

Chapter six arose from our desire to go deeper with our discussion partners. We did this by prodding them with somewhat uncomfortable questions such as ‘how European are they themselves?’, and ‘where and how does that cause friction and sometimes even conflict and disappointment?’

The discussions produced some very interesting thoughts and ideas. Many of the observations that were both challenging and fun didn’t really fit in the first six chapters — and so we made room for them in a concluding chapter which contains quotes, ideas and thoughts to ‘chew on’...

Esther de Lange concludes with a sharp and erudite essay on the current dilemmas and opportunities that Europe offers the young generation. In essence, De Lange gives us quite some homework. And here again, everything points to the fact that Europe is not finished yet. There is work to be done. And we can and may contribute to it.

Finally, a heartfelt word of thanks to our fascinating, intelligent, warm-blooded and entertaining conversation partners. Merci François-Xavier Bellamy for making us all read the German thinker Max Weber and Sven Simon for pointing out both Erhard and Bismarck. Thanks, Tom Berendsen, for remembering ‘heated, young discussions’. And Sammy Mahdi for explaining Christian democracy using the story of a drunk guy in a Belgian café, where the Finnish Silva Mertsola probably didn’t enjoy the local brew. Thank you, Silva, for telling us about your path to Christian Democracy. Nike Örbrink and Lídia Pereira deserve thanks for presenting such diverse views from a far north and a warm south within the Union. Karlo Ressler and Mara Mares also deserve thanks for giving us rich perspectives of peoples who are truly ‘new Europeans’.

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Chapter 1

Christian Democrat, how do you become one?

In many countries they have their own words and concepts for it. The traditions within the EPP-family of Christian Democracy are rich and diverse. This prompts the question: ‘What is it you are, in essence, when you call yourself a Christian Democrat? How do you become one, and what does it mean when they say you are one of them?’

For young people today, this question is even more complicated as the historical roots of this party lie further and deeper in the past. On top of that, with the broadening and deepening of the Union, this current within European democracy has also deepened and broadened itself. This brought in new and different generations of young people, and with them new answers to the question of the identity, of what a Christian Democrat is or should want to be.

That is why this book begins with that question. We ask the question about the development of thought and political action. What made these young politicians from many countries and regions a Christian Democrat?

Sammy Mahdi

‘I may have followed the wrong route. Normally, you start by thinking ideologically about where you fit best politically, and then you follow a path to become active in a political party. My route, however, started with frustration. I was frustrated with basically all political parties and their messaging. It was out of this frustration that I started to look for a political family.

For me, the party that said the most sensible things was the Christian Democrats, or perhaps better: they were the group that seemed to talk the least nonsense. So, I went and looked there for that political home. Because what appeals to me in Christian Democracy as an ideology is its depth. Its point of departure is personalism, whereby

you especially have the feeling that you are part of a broader whole and that you have responsibility for other people.

Here's how I usually explain to others where I stand: "Liberals always say I am a liberal because I believe in freedom. Others say I am a social democrat because I believe in equality. But I am a Christian Democrat because I believe in responsibility. I have a calling as a human being, a being that is somewhere in society, to make the world better for myself, better for others. And to move forward together from this principle."

So this means that we as Christian Democrats, like some among conservatives and liberals, believe in a government that is restrained. Because, in principle, you give an important role to people themselves. But that additionally means that, unlike Liberals, I do not believe that each person should be left to their own devices, preferably, but that you do have a responsibility from one person to the other. Christian Democrats here also see an important role for the government to help in realizing such responsibilities. So yes, in the first place people, individuals, have a responsibility towards each other and in addition the government must both act in a corrective manner where necessary, and act in order to realise the good life as well as possible."

Mara Mares

'Christian Democracy is, in my view, founded on clear norms derived from moral and ethical values. On this basis and from the beginning of the Christian Democratic movement, its followers have promoted individual freedom as well as respect for private property rights and have resisted a dominance of collective interventions in civil society and education. This therefore makes me a Christian Democrat, because I fully believe that these ethics and social aspects are really important. Nonetheless, I don't define myself as a Christian Democrat in the more classic, traditional sense. The reason for this is that, economically speaking, I am in favour of as little state intervention as possible — and that is different from the more traditional Christian Democratic philosophy about the social market economy.'



Sammy Mahdi (1988)

Country: Belgium

Function: Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration

Political party: Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams (CD&V)

Sammy Mahdi is the son of an Iraqi father, who came to Belgium as a political refugee in the 1970s, and a Belgian mother. Sammy studied Political Science at the Free University of Brussels and obtained a Master's degree in International and European Law. In 2017 Sammy was elected president of the youth department of the Flemish Christian Democrats, JONGCD&V. After a role as a municipal councillor he became a member of the Chamber of Representatives in 2020. On 1 October 2020, Sammy was sworn in as State Secretary for Asylum and Migration at the Ministry of the Home Affairs in the De Croo administration.

Lídia Pereira

‘It’s not all that easy to identify all the reasons you are a Christian Democrat. Let me suggest three major characteristics that, for me, make this nonetheless clear to define. First, I see in a Christian Democrat someone who looks at life and society from the humanist point of view; this way of looking at reality puts the individual at the centre of our political action. It means that in politics you stand for the dignity of every human being.

Second, being a Christian Democrat means that you are someone who considers democratic politics and its principle of the rule of law as founded in moral values and conduct, as a domain of life where views and decision-making must be built on the expression of such values and principles.

Third, in Christian Democrats you should always recognise the relevance of the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. These principles not only represent our duties regarding the society we serve, but also are essential in helping us both to find concrete solutions for real problems and challenges as well as to define, consider and evaluate the priorities and the means by which we may act.’

The Croatian Karlo Ressler has formulated the question of what it is that makes him a Christian Democrat in such a penetrating way that he has learned to answer it “in a nutshell”. For him, “being bridge-builders” and “wanting to form a community where people belong together” have become central thoughts. In one word, that might be “destiny”.

Karlo Ressler

‘To tell what Christian Democracy is, you can certainly refer to the history of European integration. But if I had to describe it in a nutshell, I would try to explain that we have always been bridge-builders; that we try to connect differences and have an eye for both

sides of political dilemmas and tough questions. Christian Democrats have always tried to build togetherness and a sense of community.

And there have been times when that may have been easier than it is now, when we are witnessing strong fragmentation in the whole European political environment. But it is precisely for this reason, at this time, that Christian Democrats can have a special role in responding to all the challenges we face. Whether it is the digital agenda, a green agenda or also the negative demographic trends. And that is how I see myself: a politician who connects differences and focuses on the public and general interest.’

You speak of fragmentation. How do you define this? How do we see fragmentation in European politics?

‘I wouldn’t say it’s only in politics. It is deeper than that. People’s trust is eroding — in politics, authority, in science, in the community. That is a particular problem for Christian Democrats. Traditionally, in many cases there has been a close relationship between Christian Democrats and strong institutions. Especially in those countries where Christian Democrats were traditionally sometimes in power for many decades. But now erosion of trust is visible almost everywhere, closely related to the “social bubbles” in which we live nowadays.

Of course, fragmentation existed before the advent of social media and online networks. But these do reinforce polarisation and fragmentation. In this respect, the Covid-19 pandemic has not been a good influence — certainly not on parliamentary life, to be honest. The number of meetings decreased — whereas, to reach a good agreement, it is enormously important to really meet people. To look at each other, eye to eye. So, this is a big challenge. From our Christian Democratic tradition we will have to redouble our efforts to create connections in policymaking in these times.’

Some are early adopters in political life, others sometimes grow — to their surprise — into a political consciousness that can be called ‘Christian Democratic’. Finland’s Silva Mertsola began to see this more and more when she started looking at her homeland from other places in Europe. Encouraging and challenging people to get involved, to take their destiny into their own



Lídia Pereira (1991)

Country: Portugal

Function: Member of European Parliament, President of YEPP

Political party: Partido Social Democrata (PSD)

Lídia Pereira was born in Coimbra and graduated in Economics from the University of Coimbra and holds a Master's degree in European Economic Studies from the College of Europe (Bruges, Belgium). She became politically active in the youth organisation of the Partido Social Democrata (PSD) and was secretary of the JSD board from 2016-2018. Since 2018, she is president of the Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP). She was elected to the European Parliament in 2019. She was recently elected to the Standing Committee on Taxation, where she is the coordinator of the EPP Group, and she is also registered on the Special Subcommittee on Cancer.

hands and not to wait for someone else or a government to give the signal: that was a thought that she started to see, which had very deep roots. It could hardly be more European, of course.

Silva Mertsola

‘I became a member of the National Coalition Party relatively late, I think I was around twenty-five or twenty-six when I joined. The reason for getting into politics was that I was living in Denmark at the time and became aware of how much better some things worked in Denmark. During my studies in Copenhagen I saw what it means for a society to have a well-functioning labour market, and what it means for young people to be able to trust that they can find jobs and look after themselves in the future. At the time, we were discussing some major labour market reforms in Finland that had been carried out in Denmark a long time ago. In my daily life I could see how well these reforms had worked in Denmark. Unfortunately, the reforms were not very popular in Finland. This debate was something that really motivated me. I was tired of the Finnish rhetoric on the left side of politics, where politicians just promoted the idea of taking a lot of responsibility away from the individual. And I saw the contrast with Denmark in this field of thinking and politics, and what we were lacking in Finland. So that’s why I joined politics – I wanted to make an impact on my home country.

Why Christian Democracy appeals to me? While I am not a member of the Christian Democratic Party in Finland, many of the ideas of my political party certainly have roots in protestant values that really appeal to me. I think it is important not to forget the historical roots of one’s political ideas. I would say that a key conviction shared by all the EPP-parties is that, ultimately, the human individual must stand on his or her own two feet. And society is then needed to offer the support that makes it possible for every individual to actually accomplish this. This stems from the conviction that such an outcome is possible and good for everyone. Ultimately, Christian Democracy is about the empowerment of the individual within the community.

The individual should be at the center of politics, and politics should be about building better lives for individuals. And that, I think, is

a strong and empowering message, especially in these times when we are engaged in identity politics, and people are very concerned about the role of the individual in relation to the collective. I think this empowerment of the individual is at the heart of Christian Democracy. I believe that this view of the individual can be traced back to the historically very impactful idea of having a personal relationship with God — a relationship that empowers you as a person and a human being.’

It is very interesting that in your essential motives for being a Christian Democrat, you combine the theme of individual responsibility and social mobility. People should have the opportunity to make something of their lives and be a part of a broader community, and not just be seen as atoms. What it is, is social mobility in the broader view, not just material mobility.

‘Exactly. And that is why, although not a member of a classic Christian Democratic party, I characterize myself as a Christian Democrat in the sense that the concept is understood in a wider European context. I used to be quite a libertarian, thinking that “the smaller the state, the better we’re off”. But I have become more moderate in my views, and I think there is a need for a “social market economy” that guarantees individual freedom. I am very much into philosophy, and the idea of individual freedom really appeals to me. I think that an individual cannot be free unless that individual is free from the arbitrary will of other people. Realizing that notion of freedom requires political institutions that ensure that an individual is independent of the arbitrary will other people – hence, we must have for example social security that ensures that a person is not bound on the context that one happened to be born into.

I developed an appreciation for Christian Democratic thought through reading philosophy, but most importantly, from sharing meals and meeting with young people active in Christian Democratic parties in other European countries. Drinking beer until four in the morning and having good conversations. For a long time, I was convinced: oh, all that conservatism sucks. Slowly during all those conversations, the idea arose: I am starting to understand Christian Democracy, and the form of conservatism that appreciates the value

of strong societal institutions and gradual change. So, I owe my Christian Democratic leanings to young people around me. And, of course, to beer — Belgian beer, to be precise.’

Chapter 2

Christian Democrat, who made you one?

Politics is about content and meaning. The content is about thinking and acting from a conception of humankind and a vision on society. That is what makes young people Christian Democrats, if need be — in the words of Sammy Mahdi — as such a political movement ‘that talks the least nonsense’. But like everything in a society and human communities, politics is always imperfect, it remains man-made. Politicians, even Christian Democrats, do make mistakes. This does have its beautiful sides too, however. For it is almost always people who get others, who get young people to recognise themselves in a political family and ideas. This is true for Christian Democratic organisations, traditions, and ideas as well.

Who are these people? Who were role models for today’s young politicians? And why? What was it that made them such role models? How do they recognise such people who have been an inspiration to them? The personal stories turn out to be very political here as well.

Nike Örbrink

‘Even as a child, I found it hard to cope with change. I just didn’t like it. I remember once when my parents bought a new car and it made me so sad. I was always a bit cautious when it came to change. I always stick to my own views in the first place, to what I have thought about by myself.

Because of this characteristic, my brother said at one point in the run-up to the 2014 elections: you are either a Christian Democrat or you are really conservative. This prompted me to look into Christian Democracy — for example, through debates between politicians that I found on YouTube. I had never heard of Christian Democracy.

By following debates, I found Ebba Busch, who later became the leader of the KD party in Sweden. She was young and talked about

things I'd never heard of before from this kind of politician and party: about equality, about feminism, not just about old-fashioned issues.

I thought she was cool. So this made me think, "I want to be a part of that party." Funny, I've never actually told her this. Maybe I should.'

Sven Simon

'There are several reasons why I joined the CDU. I have always been a politically interested person. In my home growing up, there were always political discussions, but not partisan ones. Neither my grandparents nor my parents were partisan. The concrete decision to join a party came later, when I was 22 years old.

At that time, it was actually a result of various causes, among them school and education policy. In my state, Hessen, the SPD has governed for many years. The Social Democrats tried to enforce equality of outcome not opportunity through education. The urgency I felt about what influence a political ideology can have on making real political choices and on making policies in such things as the school system and educational fields was one reason to go to the CDU.

Another reason was the figure of Helmut Kohl. He was a man who always described and saw German unity and European unification as two sides of the same coin. And he acted accordingly. Especially in the years when I joined, the CDU was clearly the leading party on European issues and ideas. This was important for my choice for this party. Unfortunately, that leading role is no longer the case, but I would like to strive to make this once again the political reality.'

How old were you when the Wall came down? Do you remember?

'Yes, very well, I was eleven years old. When those images of the *Mauerfall* in Berlin appeared on TV, I was at a birthday party. Then, a week later, after the Wall had fallen, we went to visit family in Erfurt, a city in the then-GDR. My father had lived there as a child, until the age of five, when he fled with his parents from Erfurt.' It must have been somewhere around the 13th of November in 1989.'



Nike Örbrink (1997)

Country: Sweden

Function: President of the Swedish Christian Democratic Youth Union (KDU)

Political party: Kristdemokraterna (KD)

Nike grew up in Stockholm and joined the Swedish Christian Youth Organisation when she was 18. In 2018 she was elected as a representative in the Stockholm City Council for the Swedish Christian Democratic party. She studied Government studies at Uppsala University. She later postponed her studies when she was offered a job as press assistant for the KD party leader. Meanwhile, she was First Vice President of KDU Sweden and International Secretary. After working there for a year, she was elected as the chairman of KDU Sweden. Currently, she is in the running for a seat in the Swedish Parliament for the 2022 elections.

Tom Berendsen

‘What first springs to mind is that I was made a Christian Democrat mainly because of the values I was taught by my parents. Key in what I learned at home were the values with which you function in society, values about the way you treat others, the quality of unpretentiousness you should have. It’s precisely those values that I strongly recognise in Christian Democratic parties.

The period in which I really became interested in politics was the time of Pim Fortuyn and his political movement in the Netherlands, while at the same time the CDA rose surprisingly under the leadership of Jan Peter Balkenende. After the shocking murder on Fortuyn, Balkenende won the elections and even became Prime Minister then. My interest in politics grew out of the heated discussions that took place at the time, and fuelled by the attacks on the Twin Towers in America. But I discovered that I recognised myself particularly in the political narrative by Balkenende, because he stressed that we should think, talk and act in terms of solutions, instead of only pointing out problems.’

To be a bit ironic: Osama Bin Laden made you ‘a CDA guy’.

‘The attacks had such an effect on society that we were collectively made to think about the consequences. And I noticed that I had sympathy for political beliefs that remained calm in that storm, maintained a steady course, were nuanced and actually offered solutions to flaws and problems. Later on I found that very clear in Jan Peter Balkenende and the way he led his party, CDA, at the time.’

Living in the rich traditions of Belgian nightlife and gastronomy has proven to be an important source of inspiration not only for young Finns. Sammy Mahdi, too, clearly recognises and appreciates the great diversity in his country’s culture. He thus teaches everyone a lesson about how the human side of politics can perhaps prove to be the most effective in practice.

Sammy Mahdi

‘The man who made me a Christian Democrat was Jean Luc Dehaene. He was Prime Minister of Belgium in my youth and he communicated in such a way that I understood what he was doing, was thinking. Even as a fourteen-year-old I could understand who he was. Contrast that with now: I am 32 years old and struggle to understand the communication of most of my colleagues. That says something. So, you might say that Jean Luc brought me into the party by having the gift of speaking clearly, understandably, and normally.

The Christian Democrats were popular then not because they were somewhere in the political middle, but because they used a language people understood — and I think that’s gone a bit. You don’t have to stir things up or be overloud. Just say what it is. Try to make it clear how you are trying to define and improve society. And that is what Jean Luc Dehaene tried to do in Belgium. Having the courage to do that inspired me enormously when I was a kid.

A parable in the “Dehaene manner” can perhaps make clear what I mean with this: A liberal, a socialist and a Christian Democrat meet in a café. All three of them are drinking a fine beer. While they are having their “pintje”, they see a man further on in the corner of the pub. He is drinking a lot of vodka and he is not doing well. But he keeps on drinking. The socialist gets angry and says: “There should be a rule about a maximum of three beers per hour for consumers in pubs. You shouldn’t be allowed to drink more.” The liberal scolds the socialist and says “who are you to interfere in someone else’s life? If this man wants to drink himself senseless, that is his problem. Dying from alcohol, well that’s his choice.” And as they argue, they look for the Christian Democrat and cannot find him at their table. While they are looking around for him, their glance falls on the drunk — and they see the Christian Democrat sitting next to him and hear him ask the guy, “would it really be such a good idea for you to drink that last glass?”

Chapter 3

What makes Christian Democracy European?

If you are a Christian Democrat and you know what that can mean and who inspired it, the question of its authenticity soon arises. After all, if Christian Democratic politics and the way of thinking and policymaking are so thoroughly European, how can you tell?

For some young politicians, this builds on classic — some would even say old — principles and developments that in their own country almost belong to their *raison d'être* in national politics. For others, the history of their country of origin alone is entirely different. And yet all of them and their generation will be the next to have to shape both Europe and Christian Democracy within that continent. It is a Croatian — Karlo Ressler — who brings together a number of those original principles that were put on the agenda by the very founders of European cooperation: subsidiarity, solidarity, and their basis in the trust that you wish to place in each other. What do these founding ideas and fundamentals mean in this day and age?

Karlo Ressler

'I believe that Christian Democracy is an essentially European movement — in the sense that it has always been focused on bridging national differences and on really finding solutions for, and solutions by, a process of integration. You can see this in the foundations of today's united Europe in the way they were laid down after the Second World War. You cannot say that European integration was purely a Christian Democratic initiative. What you can say, however, is that these two movements were closely linked — and still are.

You can see the Christian Democratic vision about Europe very clearly in the principle of subsidiarity. In the EU, the idea that problems should first be solved at the local level — at the level closest to the problems and issues if possible — is still very much alive. When that is not possible, we look first to the regional level and then

to a national level. And the next step, of course, involves issues and challenges that require a European and even a global approach. This idea of subsidiarity is an important Christian Democratic notion that is still alive in Europe.

Another important contribution of our thinking is the principle of solidarity. Solidarity is a multi-layered concept having to do with responsibility, loyalty and trust. This principle clearly stems from the Christian view of society and has taken shape in the Christian Democratic political philosophy. As a key-principle, it is important not only for relationships between Member States, but also for how you look at “smaller” communities: friends, family and associations within the social sphere. By giving human beings in such communities a sense of common destiny, solidarity helps people have a sense of belonging within their society. This is essential, I think. Solidarity cannot exist without responsibility, loyalty and trust. That is the basis — and without that fundamental notion there can be no real solidarity.’

Lídia Pereira

‘Christian Democracy is a political ideology and movement without borders. This really is one of its most important characteristics. Its message is global, in the sense that this political philosophy stands for fundamental rights and the undeniable dignity of every human being. This approach doesn’t know — or should not know — major divergences in these philosophical ideas on the basis of national realities and differences. Of course, as within any political ideology, the traditions and history of every country influence the views on issues and the concrete application of various principles — but the essence of this political idea is the key.

I see as one of the fundamental principles of Christian Democracy the idea of solidarity. This concept comprehends a concrete dimension for each person’s relation to society, and therefore it also comprehends the mutual, shared commitments of sovereign states within Europe to each other. The challenges we face demand a common approach, and phenomena such as globalisation or digitalisation of societies and economies require that countries commit to wider spaces for decision-



Karlo Ressler (1989)

Country: Croatia

Function: Member of European Parliament

Political party: Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica (HDZ)

Karlo Ressler was born in Zagreb and graduated from the Faculty of Law in Zagreb. He completed his senior year at the University of Sheffield, England, participating in an Erasmus Student Exchange programme. He is currently completing his doctorate degree on Human Trafficking in South East Europe at the Max Planck Institute in Freiburg, Germany. Since 2009, Karlo Ressler is a Member of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). He is the Vice-President of the Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP) for the second term. In 2019 he became a Member of European Parliament.

making. This links to the principle of subsidiarity, which is at the core of European integration.

Indeed, there are several areas where it is more appropriate to decide about major issues on the basis of a common international, cross-border analysis and a supra-national reality. This approach makes the European Union the most adequate way to pursue the best possible solutions. Christian Democracy builds on these two principles to fulfill each person's aspirations. To achieve this, individual European states must pursue every possible effective policy-option and in many areas the really adequate way is to cooperate - in a progressively closer fashion - with their partners in such an "international scenario". Here for us in Europe the Union then appears as a natural path for both solidarity and subsidiarity.'

The Frenchman François-Xavier Bellamy sees European uniqueness in both ideas and sharp political battles. But deep down, for him it is almost something visual. 'I have only just returned from Rome, you can see it there. But also in Paris and in Amsterdam.'

François-Xavier Bellamy

'Christian Democracy does not have to prove its European credentials. It stood at the cradle of the European project. There is no need to list the names of the founding fathers to demonstrate this as a fact of history, a fact of life.

This is still true today. The EPP is often the political force looking for a European compromise, for the way to work towards solutions, in a way to create institutions that can deliver decisions, focusing on getting things done. You could say that the Greens are also a major European movement, but they have been brought into a position of infinite manipulation around their political agenda. For example, they were the only group, apart from the Eurosceptics, that voted against the appointment of the President of the European Commission. This gives one the feeling that the Greens use European politics primarily

to promote their own image rather than to be useful to the wider European interest.

I think that the EPP, as the inheritor of Christian Democracy of earlier phases in European development, still has an important role to play for the unity of Europe. And this really is the most important challenge we face: European unity. However, we see that rifts within Europe are getting wider and wider, particularly because dialogue is becoming increasingly difficult. Exactly because of this tendency, I believe that the work of the EPP must be aimed precisely at reviving a spirit of dialogue, based first and foremost on an awareness of our common heritage.

For example, around the discussions on the concept of a European Constitution we refrained from naming our common roots, including especially the Christian roots of Europe. These are in fact a given, a historical fact and reality, irrespective of our personal faith or convictions in this time and age. And that reality can be seen everywhere. I have only just returned from Rome, and you can see it there. But also in Paris and in Amsterdam.

It is a common heritage and not just a Christian heritage. It encompasses also the heritage of Greek thinking and philosophy, of the Roman legal tradition, of Jewish inspiration and, of course, of Christian traditions which were changed and even challenged by the new thinking and views from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Surely you cannot suggest that these different legacies are each other's rivals or even enemies. It is rather that they are layers and stories enriching the full narrative of Europe's civilisation.

Just look at the principle of the social market economy. The approach of a liberal economy within a capitalist system that we are trying to bring to life comes directly from this Christian tradition. You can just quote Max Weber, whose work on this subject is authoritative. After all, it is this cultural, philosophical "substratum" that leads to a certain vision of a valuable economic construction of society. And the

way we organise our economic interactions is directly related to this shared “substratum” of civilisation. Nobody can deny this.

And that is why I believe that it is “the moneyman” who has become the main gurehead now of Europe — and that this way of looking at Europe has led many people within Europe to lose some sense of its unity. We no longer know who or what is the basis of such unity. Because if we are indeed only “a market” and live in a Europe that could only look at itself as “a market”, then it is obvious to me that this has no chance of surviving for long. Look elsewhere in the world. What makes China or the United States economically strong is not merely the material aspects of their economies. It is that both have a sense of something much more intense and wide-ranging that binds them together. The Chinese, for example, have a civilisation of fifty centuries of philosophy and cultural values. They are working on the perspectives of another thousand years to come. And therefore, they are faster than us. This is essentially why Europe must acknowledge that it is a civilisation.’

For young Finns, being a European is also very much about being Finnish. You cannot separate being European from the unique role and position of their country that have defined it for so long. Finns wanted so much to be part of a Western, free-thinking and trading Europe, but they had to be constantly on their guard, looking over their shoulder to restrain a big, powerful neighbour. And then you start to see and propagate what makes Christian Democracy truly European in its own, geopolitical way.

Silva Mertsola

‘Our party is very pro-Western, but us Finns have a history of being in the shadow of Russia. For a long time, my party was not allowed to enter government coalitions, because the Soviet Union dictated the constraints of domestic policy. It meant that we always had to look for other ways to find cooperation within. It also meant that for a long time, my party was among the only political powers that actively pushed for Finnish NATO-membership, and we always strongly advocated for Finland being a member of Western institutions and European unity. So, we were very proud when we finally joined the European Union, and joining the EPP was hence in my opinion the

right political home for us both at the policy-level and in terms of shared values.

Our grandparents had fought a war against the Soviet Union, and they were standing up for something very tangible and very important: values that they had inherited and passed on to our generation. Our grandparents' stories about how they defended Finland's independency are still in our collective memory; historical tensions still color our political landscape here in Finland. This historical perspective also affects how I view European politics.

Another aspect of my thinking about politics is the Nordic dimension of the development of the welfare state. While we are strong proponents of a welfare state that guarantees individual freedom, we are also the critical voice that says: "hey, do you really think the government should run its own flower shops? Maybe that's something that should be left to the markets?". If you believe that individuals are able to decide for themselves, you should welcome them being empowered to start businesses, run businesses, enter markets and so forth. I think that faith in the individual is something that really defines my party, and unites many parties in the EPP.

Of course, from the members of my party I sometimes hear comments about whether we should be part of this family, or whether we would better fit somewhere else... I think this is due to the fact that unlike many other EPP-parties, we've never been an explicitly Christian Democratic party — although we do have very strong ideas which essentially share the values of Christian Democrats. But we never talk about Christian Democracy explicitly — this is due to historical developments, but also because Christian Democracy, as a word, has some dusty connotations in Finland. Unfortunately!

I think Christian Democratic values are a good foundation for society. However, it is currently not that popular a brand. Perhaps, my party sometimes forgets what actually binds us to the other parties in the EPP. We still have some members who would like us to join Renew Europe, because we have a strong "liberal" outlook to politics. Personally, I really value the idea of a social market economy, which is core for the EPP. Sometimes people make a distinction between

being “pro-society” or “pro-market”. I think that is an absurd distinction. I believe we need both. I am “pro-market” in the sense that entrepreneurs make the base of our economy, create wellbeing and jobs that employ people. I am “pro-society” in the sense that there should be a social safety net that ensures that people are caught when they fall, and that gives people the freedom to quit their job if that is their need. We must encourage and enable people to stand on their own feet, and to do this, there must be a strong economy. Society, in my terms the welfare state, and markets need each other.

I think that every human has the right to be free. However, freedom comes with you being responsible for your actions. This idea can be said to be deeply Christian at its core. It is a political principle that holds that freedom and responsibility going hand-in-hand. Finnish history has made think about freedom as always urgent, essential.’

The way a German thinks about and looks at this subject is also very much based on experiences and historical roots. The foundations of European thinking and of the economic model of Christian Democracy are clear to Sven Simon. For a European Christian Democrat, economic thinking is always thinking in terms of social values. It is no coincidence that others call it the “Rhineland Model” — and it is hardly surprising that someone like Adenauer was both the mayor of Cologne and very innovative in tending his rose garden in Rhöndorf.

Sven Simon

‘Well, first of all, it is the principle of the honest broker. The social market economy with a capital “S” is a Christian Democrat invention. It is included with a small “S” in the Treaties on the Functioning of the European Union. It concerns the idea of the social market economy and socially responsible entrepreneurship. It means that the whole concept of economy in society is not viewed from a stereotypically neoliberal perspective of maximising profit and exploiting people, but that decent treatment of people is an inclusive value here where the deeper principle of charity clearly plays a part.

This can actually become a competitive advantage for Europeans in a global perspective of today. All around the globe, people can see

the fact that workers are treated decently here with social norms that strengthen productivity, opportunities and efficiency and do not, as many have assumed, create a competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis those who treat people worse and exploit them.’

What does the term ‘social market economy’ mean in the German historical context?

‘You know, it actually starts relatively early. Think of Bismarck and the creation of social security on his watch, which then of course did not necessarily have anything to do with modern Christian Democracy. But typical examples from the political actions of those days are health insurance, pension insurance and unemployment insurance. Later, the concept of the social market economy became strongly associated with Ludwig Erhard as the main “economic” CDU politician. When it comes to the social market economy, the German Christian Democrats occupy a middle ground between Social Democrats and Liberals in Germany, who among themselves are additionally split between “Social Liberals” and “Economic Liberals”.

This shows how Christian Democracy is the political force that seeks a balance between economic activity, which in principle should enjoy freedom and only needs regulation when necessary, and social norms prescribed by law. Such social norms are negotiated conclusions between employers and employees who reach agreements as collective bargaining parties. These principles led in the politics of the post-war era to the CDU becoming a people’s party, because it was open to wide sections of society, to both employees and employers. This gives it a politically and socially unifying element and encourages the trend of the party not to pursue a policy of patronage or one-sided representation of interests.

What could be a Christian Democratic political approach towards the EU?

Christian Democracy understands the European Union — or at least that is how I understand it — as being closely linked to the motto of the Union. And this really shows a difference with the US, whose motto is “E Pluribus Unum”. Out of Many, One. The US has achieved

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this and Europeans have not. And they do not want to achieve it! Europeans have the motto “United in Diversity”. That is something quite different.

That is of essential importance to the Christian Democratic approach taken by the EPP. We want to be united in diversity. We do not want people to lose their identity and attachment to their country and nationality. This diversity makes Europe exciting, but it also represents a great challenge. Cultural and legal differences have been neglected and overlooked in some aspects of European integration and we are always disappointed when we encounter differences of approach or viewpoints.

Look at the rule of law, for example. At the moment we have serious problems with regard to civil rights. We emphasise — again strongly linked to the idea of subsidiarity — that Europe is united in diversity. Europe must also be able to act strongly in those policy areas where the political added value is clear and recognisable. Priorities have to be derived from this analysis. These need to be emphasised more strongly in order to be more effective and successful in making EU policies. In abstract terms, the goal is essentially the further development of a European Union that is more focused, more capable of action and more democratic.’

Chapter 4

Is there such a thing as a European “demos”?

Europe is not a super-state. Even those who would like it to be so, must recognise this. There is always something absurd about portraying Europe in this way. Those who nevertheless do so with a great deal of intensity not only accuse the Union of impotence, lack of decisiveness and complex inertia but also paint a picture of an infinitely ingenious power apparatus that knows no bounds and imposes itself and intervenes everywhere with great force. It would be difficult for either to be true — let alone both at the same time.

That does not alter the fact that many people grumble about a lack of democracy and democratic relations within Europe. Are they right to do so? Or is the failure to replicate national decision-making mechanisms not such a worry? After all, what is “democracy” within such a complex phenomenon as the EU? And is there in fact a “demos” within that Union on which such a culture and praxis of democracy could develop? For young politicians, this question literally raises more questions than many wise men could answer.

Tom Berendsen

‘I don’t believe there is such a thing as a European “demos”. I see it much more as a sum of European national democracies. And I don’t think that a European demos is necessary, either. The different democracies are too diverse for that.’

And when you talk about the EPP, who are those people of the EPP?

‘I find it difficult to determine this for the EPP, because it is also a sum of peoples from many nations — and even that is not always linked to national borders. You can see that very strongly in several Member States: the French-speaking Belgians, the Dutch-speaking Belgians, the Tyroleans and many other identities are actually peoples without

national borders. What we do represent is our belief in the common interest and in society in all its diversity.

In the EU we trace something we have in common: we live together on the same continent with a large number of people who all need stability, peace and prosperity. That shows something of a sense of shared destiny. And we also have this sense of shared destiny in our relation to the superpowers around us like China, Russia and the US. And that same sense of shared destiny also extends to the United Kingdom; despite the fact that they are out of the European Union, they are still next door to our continent. We simply still will have to work together again.'

Perhaps it is this idea of destiny that brings to us the idea of the European demos. Demos? Puzzles! A Belgian probably understands this better than many others. Sammy Mahdi can dive deep here from the unique perspective of his country.

Sammy Mahdi

'There is no European project at the moment, and there is no European family. There are European puzzles made up of parties that cling to each other and look for their own interests in order to have as much speaking time as possible and to have as many rapporteurs as possible. And these may not be so concerned with coming up with a distinct European "story".

I know what I'm saying now is not very popular to bring up, but I do think Europe should ask itself who should be part of this Union. I was very much in favour of the way in which Europe came about: the idea was to deepen Europe first of all, not to simply widen it. Whereas, at the moment, we see a Europe comprised of five or seven different speeds, with everyone having their own opt-out. Denmark, for example, has an opt-out on migration and another member state will have an opt-out on something else. Everyone has his own



Tom Berendsen (1983)

Country: The Netherlands

Function: Member of European Parliament

Political party: Christen Democratisch Appèl (CDA)

Tom Berendsen grew up in the south of the Netherlands and has been involved in the Dutch Christian Democratic Appeal, the CDA, since 2007. After studying Public Administration at Tilburg and Leuven, Tom worked as a staff member of the CDA delegation in the European Parliament and on sustainability in a consultancy firm. In 2019, he was elected as a Member of European Parliament.

exception to the rules. Well, that's not how you get European policies and policymaking.

If you don't want to be part of a group that wants to move forward, then I say, "okay, no hard feelings". But let's be honest about that, and you have to step aside then, so the rest of Europe will carry on. You do not keep Europe together and coherent by giving everyone exceptions. Ultimately, this would mean a slippery slope where you get a race to the bottom where everyone performs worst, where no one is punished for this and, in the end, all take the lowest bar as the standard that a member state would be able to handle. That is a far cry from the initial Europe project.

I would rather have a "smaller" Europe than a large Europe that will be doing sort of everything except respecting all we hold dear. I think that, without a European demos, you'd have to abandon the European project. First of all, make the European demos part of the European project by carrying out political reforms. Make people part of the European project by giving them the feeling that they are in control or partly in charge of the direction it is going.'

The Romanian Mara Mares sees a "demos" not as a distinct political community, let alone a "population". Political development and reform of European democratic institutions calls for a more philosophical approach that is "ever-evolving."

Mara Mares

'The EPP should see its political contribution to the reform of our Union not as a static agenda. The best approach will be constant and proactive, oriented toward the development of freedom. The values of Christian Democracy are expressed within the principles of the EPP in terms of democracy, human rights, human dignity, freedom, responsibility, tolerance and the rule of law. This too is never a static thing. We must go further in supporting efforts to promote and protect these values.

In this sense, I believe that European politics defines itself in a process over time, as new challenges emerge and new decisions that have to

be made arise in the context of ever-changing circumstances. Defining European politics should not be a goal in itself. I see this as ever-evolving, which means we should focus on affirming and reaffirming our core values both within European borders and outside of them.'

The Swedish Nike Örbrink does not see one single “demos” in Europe. Why should that be? But with her, too, notions of recognition and kinship soon come up. Apparently, a sense of destiny has grown up for which there is still little to no “language”. Who could bring this about?

Nike Örbrink

'I see myself as Swedish. I don't think I have ever introduced myself as European. I would say I am Swedish first and then I say Nordic. And then if people don't understand, especially Americans, I say: “yes, we are in Europe”. I think I have never used the term European. Well, I'm sorry. I say I'm Swedish or Scandinavian. Which means, of course, it's in Europe. The time I do feel really European is when I'm outside of Europe, outside of European nations. But I don't feel “connected” to an Italian, for example, just because we both live in this continent.

This explains, I think, why I've never looked at Europeans as if we were one people. What I do recognise is that when you are outside Europe and you meet people from Europe, you are clearly more connected — but that too differs from country to country. I mean to say that there are countries in Europe with which I don't feel much of a connection. But as for other countries in the EU with which you have a lot in common — well, they will always make you feel more connected. And of course those kinds of connections are also felt during football championships!'

Not 'one people', but recognition — and perhaps even destiny. And lunches that both underscore our similarities and highlight ways in which we differ. In Brussels and Strasbourg, François-Xavier Bellamy sees it play out before his own eyes. He sees that uniformity is absent, and remains so. There is an essential lesson to be learned from this — also for the demos, by the way.

François-Xavier Bellamy

‘A demos, does it exist? In any case, I note that it is not present. And in a way, yes, this is what makes Europe so special. In the European Parliament, we work and function all in the same place, we lead similar lives, yet each of us comes there from our own cultures. If you go to Parliament’s canteen at 11 o’clock for lunch, the Germans will be there at half past 11. Some of the French stay till 4 p.m. And at 3 p.m. the Spanish and the Italians arrive. That is what makes Europe so special.

We are constituted from this diversity of traditions, of the representation of a political culture, of references, also of institutional references, and so on. And yet there is European unity. It is the unity of this shared civilisation. But there is no European uniformity. And yes: that is quite a beautiful thing.’

You clearly distinguish between unity and uniformity...

‘Yes, I believe it is about this as the essential, true European balance — and if the European Union thinks it will strengthen itself by weakening the states that comprise it, that would be a grave error. The European Union will be all the stronger if it shows that it can strengthen the democracies of which it is composed.’

Lídia Pereira

‘A European demos as a people with an identity in relation to the European Union is the ultimate goal of the European integration process. But this a complex process that is, by my way of thinking, not exclusively linked to just politics. At this stage, we are European citizens in both formal and substantial ways. On the one hand, European citizenship is given to us in the treaties — and, with this, a set of rights for Europeans is foreseen as instruments of primary law (based on the treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights) and secondary law (through directives and regulations). That is the formal

approach guaranteeing that this relation of citizens to the Union is fundamental and “safe”.

On the other hand, European citizenship must also be interpreted as a substantive relation that is much more than a formal fact. The truth is that European peoples know the Union and are progressively more aware about their rights and duties because of their participation in the EU. In general, according to mentality-studies and polls, people do support the idea of European integration.

In that sense, on both dimensions, I believe we have a European citizenship. But this is unfinished, just like the European Union itself is incomplete. Thinking therefore of a “European demos”, I believe we are not at that stage of political development. European politics today is a platform of sovereignty-sharing and strong cooperation in areas where member states are willing to delegate competences. People perceive the EU as “their space”, but not as their origin. That is why I would say we have a strong European citizenship, albeit unfinished — but not a European demos.’

Chapter 5

Whose Union is this, and what does it unite in reality?

How then, in such a diverse and almost “demos-less” Union, do you get a fundamentally democratic disposition? For there is no doubt that Christian Democracy sees such a disposition in Europe. But what then, and how? The young politicians appear to be not at all at a loss when it comes to this dilemma. The Greek thinker Plato even comes to the forefront from Paris. As does the fundamental distinction between life in the sense of society being a kind of archipelago of loose islands, and life in the sense of young people searching for who they are. Perhaps the often-disputed - and for some even controversial - idea of this “ever-closer Union” is the new answer to an old question...

François-Xavier Bellamy

‘If we want our European civilisation to survive, we must learn to pass it on. In saying this I do not mean that everyone has to become Christian in the sense of personal religious convictions. Rather, everyone can recognise that Europe is objectively built upon the heritage of which Christianity is a part. The most common street name in France is “rue de l’Église”. This heritage is a daily experience and a common reality in public life. And I think our Muslim compatriots can understand that very well.

That does not mean that you cannot be an atheist or a Muslim in Europe. It just means that you exist in a culture characterised by this essence, this history — and this defines thinking and acting in our economy, about our laws and the relations that we have with each other and ideas we have, like the principles of equality between men and women, for example. The idea that we share of freedom of the press — even of caricature — the freedom to inform. All this is linked to this deep and both old and relevant heritage. It goes back to Socrates, Plato, Cicero and Marcus Aurelius. But very fundamental, in

the end, is the deeply Christian idea of freedom of conscience, which gave rise to the Enlightenment, to the emancipation of reason.

That does not mean, however, that Europe has always lived up to the values and ideals of this heritage. We have had to learn, little by little, to respect freedom of conscience — and that lesson still does not always appear to be learnt. We had to learn to recognise the inalienable dignity of the person. It took centuries to understand, little by little, what such a common heritage meant. But it is still what inspires our worldview today.

And I don't think we can, or should, negotiate on this; it's not a question of tactical, political compromise. The danger in France in this respect is that of "archipelisation". This idea, from an influential book called *The French Archipelago*, is about small communities that live next to each other but no longer recognise each other; people who no longer know what they have in common. For me, civilisation is the answer to this — the best possible answer. This surely does not mean that anyone should deny their own convictions. On the contrary, it is precisely in European civilisation that there is freedom of conscience. In Europe we have the right to be Muslims. That is fortunate, because there are many Muslim countries where you cannot be a Christian. And so we stand for freedom of conscience, which we will of course defend.'

Mara Mares

'We share basic European freedoms — just think of the free movement of goods, capital, persons and services — and I believe that we must never take any steps back from what has made the EU what it is today. We should always choose cooperation over conflict.

That's why I see "an ever-closer Union" not so much referring to an idea of strengthening a common European ideology, but rather as the drive — the ambition — to practice a deeper, more and more Europeanized, common set of norms and values.

So, in the meantime, we are obliged to oppose any kind of radical threat against this ideal from both inside and outside. The ever-closer



François-Xavier Bellamy (1985)

Country: France

Function: Member of European Parliament

Political party: Les Républicains (LR)

François-Xavier Bellamy is a French philosopher, author, high-school teacher and politician. For 10 years he was deputy mayor of Versailles for employment, youth and higher education and has been head of the French delegation of the EPP Group since 2019 in the European Parliament. He received his education at the École normale supérieure. He earned the agrégation in philosophy in 2008. Bellamy has been teaching philosophy and art history at several schools. He won the Prix d'Aumale from the Académie Française in 2014 for his first book, *Les déshérités ou l'urgence de transmettre*

union is a continuous process that will advance by the same speed with which we accept our differences and deepen our identification with each other.’

Sammy Mahdi

‘The European dimension is mainly, I think, about subsidiarity — which does not mean that Europe could not function at the supranational level. On the contrary: subsidiarity means doing things at the best possible level, and not simply “as close to the citizen as possible”. This is linked to the feeling among Christian Democrats that you have a global responsibility — that your responsibility goes beyond the people who live in your street and the people who live in your country — to improve the world.

Mind you, this is a way of thinking about politics that does not depart from the idea of citizenship. I sometimes have a hard time in getting this message over. After all, our founding fathers were “conservative” in their outlook for a reason. They believed that community shapes and determines people; that it was therefore important for people to feel part of - and to be part of - a certain society. I am not just a citizen of the world. In addition to being a citizen of the world I am also responsible for the part of the world where I belong. I am Flemish, a Belgian. I am responsible for certain traditions and certain cultures, which I also value. And I am also responsible for ways of integrating people to create a society as it should be. So that we can have a better world — not only here, but also somewhere else. That is a philosophy that permeates Christian Democracy. And this encompasses from the beginning also the element of security for nations and peoples, the peace aspect of the European project.’

I hear you going against the old-fashioned narrative of “nie wieder krieg”. Should we be open to talk not only about the peace aspects but also the security aspects in Europe?

‘Yes and no. You have to keep making it clear that societies always draw on the deepest parts, on the darkest parts of people, and that we humans can go to war. You must not forget that such tendencies,

and their ideas, can return. The reality is that many young people think that war is not going to come back. I don't think you can convince them with the ancient "message of peace" that Christian Democrats have been delivering. I think you have to address this with "generation Z", that you cannot look away from the possibility of war.

Young people are searching for who they are. I have often looked back at history for that. Perhaps after the Second World War, when we shook off patriotism, we also somehow shook off the idea of the importance of borders. Certainly, with the fall of the Wall in 1989 this became strong. We sometimes ran ahead because we were afraid that the past would catch up with us. But you need a society that is organised upon cultural values that are shared in order to move towards the common goal. There has been too little of that in the thinking of the last decade. We have lived too much in a multicultural concept of the idea where communities co-exist but do not "see" each other — and we have not found that problematic.

A community in Molenbeek consisting of people of Moroccan origin is not a problem as such; it enriches who we are as a culture. I do think however it does not enrich the culture if cross-fertilisation in that sense remains absent. You need both such cross-fertilisation and a common layer of the cultural values you share — otherwise, you don't have or cannot keep a common society. Society benefits from shared goals, and you need a shared direction of your community. There is a need for shared myths, for what you can dream of and can expect to be. In a way, the Americans do have that. We need a common story and common myths that shape us as a European society that dreams of going somewhere.'

Nike Öbrink

'When I think about European democracy, I would say that it is values that bind us. And secondly, the economy. But I wouldn't want countries to join the EU just because it benefits them or is nice for our own economy. Because the idea of common values clearly comes first. It means that we also dare to speak to each other on the basis of those values, when those values are called into question. The rule

of law, for example, is very fundamental and worthy of protection. If there is a shift within countries towards undermining this or if democratic values around freedom are under pressure, then there must be consequences.'

Could the media make a contribution to European democracy?

'Yes, definitely. If I may relate it to Sweden for a moment: the media here hardly write about the European Union. For me, that became especially clear when I stayed in Germany, where it was much easier to get news about Europe. Very few Swedes seem to understand what is happening in Europe and how European legislation affects their lives and national politics. The only time the EU is report on is when there are elections somewhere else. As Swedes, we can be more alert to what is happening in the EU, but the media is tasked with helping citizens as actors in democracy here, by reporting both positively and critically on European politics and its impact on people's lives.'

Lídia Pereira

'The EU is, today, a "Union of Democracies", and the values of this political project require that the Union stands for this ideal both abroad and within. Our Christian Democratic approach has a clear ideological link to the European project. Europe has a common background in values, principles and morals and, in that sense, it is normal and almost inevitable, that member states have strong relations that resulted in the kind of "platform" as the EU has been developing. In any case, political realism shows also that in a globalised, digitalised and multipolar world, European integration is the most suitable way for national states both to strengthen their sense of national identity as well as to express their values and pursue what they want to achieve.

European integration is an inevitable process, as the main challenges for our societies and economies are more and more global, requiring common approaches. So for me the choice for Europe is intensely ideological, based on a shared commitment around common values and denominators of identity. This ideal of that ever-closer Union is, in that sense, also very realistic and pragmatic. Political leaders

understand today that single individual states, whatever their history, authority and relevance, are not able to tackle the challenges of the 21st century with similar impact and effectiveness as a common platform such as the EU guarantees.’

Karlo Ressler

‘I see the “ever-closer Union” concept particularly in a legal context. Perhaps I can’t help it, because I studied law. The concept helps us to understand and interpret European legal rules. I do not see it as a kind of prophecy. In a philosophical sense, of course, there has been the inspiration and the motivation for it, but I see it mainly as an inspiration for legal issues and questions.’

But how does it relate to the idea of a values-based community, next to the idea of an “economic” community as the identity of Europe? How do you see that, and does it have any connection with the ever-closer Union?

‘I fully agree that it is really important to take into account the fact that we are first of all connected by these values. I would say that they really come from a Christian worldview, from our tradition that has really shaped our legal order, culture, language — even arts and architecture — to a large extent. But in order to make it concrete and tangible, we should not put the idea outside its legal context. So when we talk about values, we can talk about them philosophically, can discuss all kinds of books on this. But in the end, in a community of different countries, of quite different countries, it becomes formulated within a legal system and then this develops into a legal community. These rules are the glue that really binds that community together and this shapes the EU into what it is. And that’s why the issue of the rule of law is so important.

I mean, its main foundation is the understanding that all people are created equal and so they should be represented equally. I would say that’s really the most important starting point, and this principle is evidently connected to a Christian worldview and its idea of human dignity. But if you then really try to translate it into something concrete, tangible, then it leads to, and it really needs, a legal order.’

Chapter 6

How European are we, actually?

As a young Christian Democrat doing politics from a passionate, ambitious perspective is, of course, a wonderful challenge. But not everything succeeds immediately and automatically. ‘Circumstances are not as they should be’, Bertolt Brecht already bitterly wrote in his *Dreigroschenoper*. So the stories about minor and major annoyances, and about the lessons to be learned from them in order to keep going, to start again if necessary, certainly belong in a book like this. ‘It is my greatest frustration that no one realises: the time is now,’ says a young minister with a portfolio in which he notes that 95% of his activities and issues are European in nature. ‘I am never indifferent, otherwise I would not be here, but yes...’, sighs a French colleague.

Such analyses sometimes lead to sharp conclusions. Sven Simon therefore raises what he calls “construction faults” in that enormous edifice of Europe. They are in the parliament itself, as well in the way in which political debates are conducted, and in the way the Commission should do its work and be accountable. It is not the quality of the work of the European institutions that is at fault. But the meaning of the work of European institutions is incomplete, either because it is not very political or because it is too politically and nationally driven. In short, there is plenty of food for critical debate.

Sven Simon

‘I was quite shocked or surprised, if you like, at how little the European Parliament is a European Parliament. It is highly fragmented into national delegations, an opinion I hear also from other groups and political families. Before I came to the European Parliament, I always thought that one of the shortcomings of democracy in Europe is that we do not have a European public sphere. There is no exchange of arguments, no discourse. Therefore, the relevant elements of democracy cannot have an effect and decisions are not communicated, not understood and therefore not accepted. This creates a latent anti-European attitude, because people do not understand the decisions taken at the European level. Most people accept the democratic system not because the

majority happened to make a decision at a particular moment, but because the majority made a decision that visibly took into account arguments from the minority as well. Only in this way can you create acceptance.

That central element is currently missing. What we in the European Parliament have had to learn is that not only is there no European public sphere, there is also no parliamentary public sphere. Corona has made that worse, as there is no plenary, personal debate. There is no actual exchange of arguments, where at the end of the debate there is a vote and the majority now understands the viewpoint of the minority — these are the arguments of some, these are the arguments of other colleagues, and so on. This exchange does not exist, it does not take place. The plenary debates are a succession of one-minute statements, usually read from a white sheet of paper, and addressed almost exclusively to their own Facebook community. That is what happens there, but it is not a debate.

I first put this to President Sassoli over a year ago with some new MEPs. He took up the idea and set up what he called focus groups. Now, in October — which I consider a great success — a pilot project will be launched in which we will structure the plenary debate differently. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, there will be so-called prime-time debates, if possible on controversial legislative subjects. Speakers will be given a bit of extra time from the lectern and, if possible, there will be a mechanism to ensure that more MEPs are present in plenary.

Because that is another problem with communication. This is one of the issues I want to focus on. The European Parliament has many, many shortcomings, some of which are similar to those in other European states. One of these, for example, is the culture of consensus. After the elections are over, most people have the impression that everything will stay the same. So why go to the polls at all? Having this broad culture of consensus means that, in principle, everyone always agrees with each other, except for a few scattered anti-Europeans on the right who are then excluded. Of course, this is not necessarily conducive to democracy and democratic debate, because this is essentially about voting, selecting, deselecting,



Sven Simon (1978)

Country: Germany

Function: Member of European Parliament

Political party: Christlich Demokratische Union (CDU)

Sven Simon has been serving as a Member of European Parliament since 2019 as part of the EPP Group. He was the lead candidate for the Christian Democratic Union Hesse in the 2019 European Parliament election. In the European Parliament, he also sits on the Committees on International Trade and Constitutional Affairs, through which he is currently involved in the reforms of the European Electoral Law and of the structure of plenary debates. He also takes a strong role in the Conference on the Future of Europe. Sven Simon studied Law at the University of Giessen and the University of Warwick. Since 2016, he holds the chair for International Law and European Law at the University of Marburg.

majority and minority. In my opinion, a change must be made to the European Parliament's way of working.'

In a way, you could say that it is not political enough.

'Precisely. With the Treaty of Lisbon, we created a political union where highly political issues are negotiated at a completely nonpolitical level. This is done in back rooms, in the trialogue with the Council and the Commission, where nobody is really present to report. We end up with absurd situations, for example, in the form of groups voting in favour of legislation in the plenary sessions — even though they are against it — on the assumption that the Council will negotiate away what they are against. That is inexplicable in a democracy.'

So we have a political union that also functions in a very political way, but does not do politics.

'The commissioners certainly "do politics" but it is done in an apolitical way. The European Commission is still organised like a high authority. Basically, it is a legislative authority that cannot do much more than legislate. They can do that well. European laws are probably of better quality, on average, than national laws. But if we look at the composition of the Commission, it is either an apolitical body or a body that fights internally, because all the parties are represented and because the national governments send the respective Commissioners to such a "high authority". This is, of course, a flaw in the construction of the EU that urgently needs to be changed.'

Sammy Mahdi

'At the local level I notice that there is a lot of room for participation — where the centre of civil society is very involved and where subsidiarity is still respected. People are very involved in their own society and take on that role themselves. The youth associations here are very Flemish and very Christian Democratic. People take matters

into their own hands and colour their neighbourhoods. Yes, that is the most Christian Democratic thing you can have.

On the Flemish and Belgian levels, it's certainly the freedom of education that's vital. Where you have freedom of education then it is particularly important how you have to leave room to organise education yourself. That being said, I notice that we are becoming more and more "etatist", and the government is increasingly giving teachers orders about how they should teach — whereas you should give teachers the space to decide for themselves. I notice at the regional and also the federal, national level that there are too few Christian Democratic characteristics. I say this often, and I know that my party colleagues don't like to hear it. We have to represent a Christian Democratic narrative if we want to be what we are.

My portfolio in government is 95% European. We certainly do a number of things nationally, such as around reception of migrants and refugees and around immigration, the rules around family reunification. But you are almost entirely dependent on the patterns and developments of the "influx", which is determined at European level, and which is determined globally. I am completely dependent on Europe in the external parameters that continuously influence my policy.

A big eye-opener for me was seeing that at the European level the sense of urgency is present in the mind but not in the heart. And that I find to be incomprehensible. Most countries realise that we cannot handle a new immigration crisis. But then, when you do your deliberations at the European level and you talk to European colleagues, I find that I never quite know what I'm doing there, in all honesty. I can perfectly record a speech in advance and play it back in eight languages — and nobody reacts. There is absolutely no progress, while we are on the verge of a crisis that could bring down Europe. That is my biggest frustration: that nobody realises that the time is now.

There is the question of who has responsibility and who has solidarity. The non-frontline states focus on responsibility; countries on the outside must take responsibility: check, screen and cage



Mara Mares (1992)

Country: Romania

Function: President TNL Romania, Vice President of the YEPP

Political party: Partidul National Liberal (PNL)

Mara Mares was born in Fagaras, a small mountain town in Transylvania, Romania. When she was 16, Mara moved to the United Kingdom, where she studied in Oxford and London. She received a BA in European and International Studies from King's College London and a BSc in European Public Policy from University College London. After her return to Romania she was elected to the Romanian Chamber of Deputies in 2016. A year later, she was elected president of the youth organisation of the National Liberal Party. Mara has been Vice President of the YEPP (since 2018). Currently she is state advisor to the Romanian prime minister.

everyone. And then you have the frontline countries focusing on European solidarity: everyone must do their fair share and take in asylum seekers. And the way you have this discussion, you don't get anywhere. I even hear at times that some people think that controlling external borders is something anti-Christian. Well, Jesus was born and Joseph and Mary had nowhere to go and could go only to an inn. And anyone who comes to Belgium and asks for asylum can go to a hostel, a centre where everyone is told whether or not they are entitled to protection. This does not mean that everyone who comes to the centre can stay here. Nor does it mean that everyone can just stay in Europe. A leftist party may like to think that that's possible, that everyone moves freely and can stay and that that can just happen — but serious politicians cannot hold this view.'

Tom Berendsen points out the need for Europe to be aware of its global environment. With systemic rivals with whom you do have to maintain a dialogue and trade relations, but you do have to define your own position as a union very clearly. The problem is that the world in which we live calls for bold decisions — and often quick ones. And the European institutions are 'clearly not very well suited to this kind of challenge,' Bellamy urgently warns.

Tom Berendsen

'Yes indeed, it is such a moment now. If I may cite some examples of such challenges. "Combating climate change", that is the promise we are making to future generations — and we want to keep it. You cannot combat climate change on your own. We need EU cooperation, and the EU can encourage other parts of the world to go along with it. A second example has to do not only with what we have in common that binds us, but also with challenges from outside. Consider China. The EU has been naive for too long, hoping for reciprocity. You see it in tech espionage, strategic investments, the new Silk Road and points I have highlighted in the EP. Nuctech, a Chinese state-owned company scanning people and goods at our EU borders, giving them access to the sensitive data of what and who crosses our borders. Now they are developing AI and facial-recognition in their products. It is an example of how we have been naive for too long. I think that we are always open to dialogue and to sitting at the table. We have unfortunately always welcomed their strategic moves — at

the expense of our own position. That's where we need to change our position.

We also have to combat unfair competition of Chinese state-financed companies on the EU market. Yes, we need China for stopping climate change. China is a competitor and a partner, but it is also a systemic rival. That means that if they become more dominant, their vision of society may push ours away. The third challenge, besides climate change and China, is that we are very dependent on other parts of the world: chips, data, raw materials — you name it. We have to think strategically, and we can only do it as an Union.

There are many colleagues in my generation who are giving shape to Christian Democracy in a new way in many areas. I hope that my generation is now prepared to take responsibility, and that people from even younger generations are invited more often to participate in shaping our political story of the future. Soon I will speak in Katowice, thanks to the invitation of Jerzy Buzek. When I speak with him I have so much respect for him. If I had to name one person that inspires me a lot, it would be him. He has an incredible experience in politics, but he takes everyone seriously, listens to everyone, gives feedback and is open to ideas of new generations. A true bridgebuilder between generations.'

François-Xavier Bellamy

'So, in my work as an MEP, I sit on the industry committee. Obviously, this is not very close to my profession in philosophy. I've also been on the Culture and Education Committee, alongside the Fisheries Committee. I like such tasks because I think the big challenge for the Europe of tomorrow is precisely to be able to produce what we need. Add to that the ecological challenge, and it is absolutely enormous. We are facing a huge task in France as well, because our trade balance has been in deficit for a long time and

we have become a country that does not know how to meet its own needs, in a certain sense.’

There will also be times when the work in Europe, European cooperation, will provoke enormous irritations.

‘Let us say, allergies. I am never indifferent, otherwise I would not be here, but yes... I think that the most painful thing is the European decision-making process, which is so slow and so complicated that there is little chance that a very courageous decision will be made in the end. In fact, the European institutions are built on a principle that is far removed from French political life. Our political life is built on a majority and opposition structure, whereas the European institutions are built on the principle of compromise. In France, there is no compromise except that the majority decides and the opposition complains.

However in the European Parliament, as well as in European institutions, a decision can only be finally approved if everyone agrees with it. So you have to agree in your group, and within the groups and party you have to agree with all the wider delegations. Then all the MEP’s have to agree. Then Parliament has to agree with the Council and the Commission, who themselves have had to coordinate their positions. Because of this everything is a matter of compromise.

And there is something very good about that, because it forces us to talk and to listen. But also something very problematic: you always end up with a middle ground that is a bit frustrating. You have a group that says “black” and our world that says “white”; in the end everything always ends up in “grey”. And the problem is that this process takes a lot of playing time, while the world in which we live requires courageous decisions and often quick decisions. European institutions are clearly not well-suited to this kind of challenge.’

Has that changed your style of politics?

‘Perhaps I have changed. I dislike sectarianism and people who are stuck in systemic thinking. And so, for me, dialogue with the European institutions has always been important. Personally, I like it.

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I don't like hard opposition and systematic confrontation. So I don't know if I have changed that way. I like it quite well, but at least I can see how slow and difficult the decision-making process is.'

You have developed more patience in Brussels and Strasbourg?

'Or perhaps I have developed an impatience, rather.'



Chapter 7

You either are or you are not

When you talk to young Christian Democrats, you meet people of flesh and blood, of every conceivable kind and origin. And in our dialogues many things were discussed, in addition to Belgian beer, lunch habits or certain allergies. Some of the colourful and unexpected moments in the conversations for this book deserve a place here — as they indicate what makes both Europe and Christian Democracy itself so surprising. Letters from Seneca, and “hardwood planks” demand attention. The question is whether the government should not only run flower shops but also make many more personal products free of charge. Flags and other symbols are also debated. Putin and tulips, a less-than-popular topic with the Dutch. And ponies. Europe, may she continue to surprise!

Sven Simon

‘As far as the representation of society is concerned, two high-speed trains are currently racing towards each other in Europe from the East and the West, and I do not know where it will end. On one side there is a model that is even called “illiberal” democracy. And on the other side we have the Left and the Greens; their narratives are creating an “illiberal” society in some other aspects. If I look, for example, at the gender debate or at the issue of equal representation on lists: why should you suddenly undo all the achievements of equality, and order people into groups?’

It is no longer about the person and his achievements, but about whether the individual is male or female, black or white, of what origin and what sexual orientation. People are categorised, and quotas and lists are made for different groups. On each list in fifth place is always someone of a different origin and on its first place a woman must be found. In fact, this leads to the introduction of

a class-dominated society, not one of free individuals — a very “illiberal” idea.

We Christian Democrats must take a clear stand against this. For us, people are at the centre of politics. Man is understood first and foremost as he was created as a being, and can develop as a human being completely independent of more-or-less arbitrarily chosen discriminating characteristics. It is first and foremost an individual’s personality, character and achievements that count and that matter, not gender, skin colour or sexual orientation.’

Sammy Mahdi

‘Symbols are important for a society. You sometimes need stories, invented tales to create the society that goes somewhere. We’ve all seen photographs of Americans who, while receiving citizenship, stand by a flag and feel that they are part of something — yes, that does something to a person. In Belgium we have made this an administrative procedure, where you get a letter in the mail informing you that you have become Belgian.

You need those rituals, those symbols, to integrate, to move somewhere. You need a narrative. Then you become part of a whole. We have lived in a totally permissive world, where anything was possible, everything was allowed, and the idea of forcing things on people was dirty. And I think that’s been misguided, because we’ve ended up with a society where communities live side by side and no longer share higher goals. And that’s something that Christian Democrats should be pushing — not in a coercive way, but in an inclusive way. Certainly not in the way that right-wingers and extreme groups are acting; Christian Democrats should oppose such ways and means.’

You have to be careful with rituals and symbols because otherwise it will be hijacked by extremists from the far-left and the far-right.

‘Yes, absolutely. And I think we have to take back those symbols again. Consider, for example, how Vlaams Belang - the Flemish Interest - hijacked the Flemish flag, leading to the Flemish flag



Silva Mertsola (1994)

Country: Finland

Function: Deputy Member of the Helsinki City Council, Vice President of the YEPP

Political party: Kokoomus (KOK)

Silva Mertsola has studied political science at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark and is currently working as a public governance consultant at an international think tank based in Helsinki. Her main interests lie at the intersection of political thought and public policy, which is why she is currently studying Philosophy and Public Policy at LSE in London. Within politics, Silva has been serving as international secretary of the Youth of the National Coalition Party since 2020, and she is currently a deputy member of the Helsinki City Council.

becoming totally tainted. And that community is such a beautiful community in Belgium and has elements of identity which are meant to be anything but exclusive. Unfortunately, along the way, the movement — the struggle for Flemish independence — has been contaminated by xenophobia, by racist thoughts. Then you have extreme right-wing groups hijacking the symbols. This makes it very difficult for groups to join such movements and ideals when you immediately get the feeling “Well, I can’t even carry that flag, because every day I get signals that I’m not good enough to be part of that group”.’

Silva Mertsola

‘There is a debate, at the municipal level, about which goods should be free of charge for citizens. One point of discussion during the recent municipal elections was whether adults under 25 should have access to free contraceptives. Now, there is a discussion about whether young women should have access to free hygiene products for menstruation — these are classic examples of how the left tries to expand the responsibilities of the political authority.

Gradually, via a sliding scale — we already talked about those publicly owned florist shops, didn’t we? — we are seeing the government expanding into the private sphere where I believe individual freedom and responsibility should be the guiding principles. Even if, for example, it would be economically feasible for the government to provide young adults with contraceptives, I believe it should not do so. In my opinion, there shouldn’t be a constant expansion of the welfare state into areas, that should be personal responsibility. We shouldn’t involve government into people’s private domain too much.’

Sven Simon

‘There is often a wrong idea about Russia. Russia has remained, in large parts, a developing country; we have always thought that it was a major industrial nation, which it is not — it never has been. In some areas, ironically therefore, sanctions imposed by Europeans are

helping the Russians to build up their own economy — for example, in the area of beef and milk, their farming sector and so on.’

That is not good news for the Netherlands.

‘There are two things I’d better not talk about with the Dutch: the climate-neutral tulips from Algeria and Ethiopia, and agriculture.’

Tom Berendsen

‘The EP has to get off the European Commission’s back. The EP must take its control function seriously. There is insufficient accountability during sessions of formal and oral scrutiny. Besides, no matter how sharply you formulate your written questions, you really get back garbage. It is just doing our parliamentary job when we control the Commission. In the past, the EP and the EC have often joined forces against the council, so the controlling mechanisms remained weak — but this monitoring function really has to improve.’

Mara Mares

‘I am as European as one can be! I am also as Romanian as one can be. One does not exclude the other; one only enhances the other.’

All those who have internalized European values are, de facto, European. I don’t feel more or less European based on changing circumstances or nationality. Being European is not quantifiable. You either are or you are not. I surely am.’

François-Xavier Bellamy

‘I have always wanted to teach philosophy. In particular, I have always wanted to teach it in secondary school. I studied philosophy at university, but I did not get a doctorate and I did not want to teach at the university level.’

I am really a generalist and regularly go to Paris for meetings called “soirées de la philo et de la theatre”. Every Monday evening five to eight hundred people come to the theatre to do philosophy with us.

We go through almost all subjects, so I can't call myself a specialist. I mainly focus on ethical issues, and I've worked a lot on issues about death — an uplifting topic!

I am currently reading Seneca's *Moral Letters to Lucilius* — really beautiful. So I would say, read Max Weber's *Wissenschaft als Beruf* and *Politik als Beruf*, which is really unbeatable. His definition of political professionalism and dedication as having the energy to drill through thick hardwood planks, it is absolutely true, and all historical experience confirms it. Never in the world could the possible be totally achieved and the impossible denied and destroyed. And this man who was able to formulate this in such a very beautiful way... It is wonderful.'

Sammy Mahdi

'I think the Commission and the entire European Parliament and all Member States together have a responsibility to look at what is happening in the rest of the world — and certainly in the countries around Europe. We do have a responsibility there, just as I am responsible for my neighbours' pavement.

Indeed, look at MH17. That too has to do with our history and the fact that Europe is traumatised by the event and absolutely does not want to see it happen again. And although the rest of the world realises that, it knows very well that Europe is toothless. And if you are sitting around the table with a toothless mumbler — yes, it is not difficult to bang your fist on the table and to scare him and make sure they do not put any pressure on you and that you can do your own thing.

Europe must always start with the diplomacy and intelligence it has. But at some point you also have to realise that the world is not a pony camp and you have to show your teeth.'

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Epilogue

by Esther de Lange

‘Hardwood planks and the Christmas turkeys of Brexit’

‘What made you a Christian Democrat?’ ‘And who actually did?’ This book asks questions that make the interviewees dig deep - questions that politicians, as well as those who want to become politicians, would do well to ask themselves more often. These questions, moreover, are as relevant as they are essential, regardless of where you were born, what language you speak, your political orientation or European roots.

The answers here are as rich, diverse and at times as surprising as these young politicians are. They come from literally everywhere in Europe and are the sound of inspirations and traditions that are as widespread as they are rich. The answers from Finland are as fascinating as the ones from Portugal, and those of the Croatian and the Romanian are as idiosyncratic as those of the Frenchman or Dutchman. In all their pluralism, the reflections and thoughts of the young Christian Democrats and centre-right politicians here are as coherent in many aspects as they are grounded in recognisable experiences and values.

That is why I first want to emphasise the surprising coherence and the essential attitude that shine through these conversations. What binds them together, what unites them, is precisely — and this within that typically European diversity of cultures, thought, spirituality and origin — what gives depth to their answers. This is the first generation of Erasmus youth in politics, both national and European. These are the children of Jacques Delors and Frans Andriessen.

They grew up and developed a political consciousness in the Europe after the Mauerfall, Maastricht, Schengen and the single currency. A Europe that was never perfect, never finished, but *alternativlos* in the words of Angela Merkel. For this younger generation of politicians, Europe is like tap water or the internet. It is a kind of utility infrastructure that is simply there, that is supposed to be there, supposed to work. Without such a Europe, in their reality, all well-ordered life collapses.

Europe is therefore both essential and existential as well as rather sober and unspectacular. It needs to be cherished and carefully managed, but at the same time it should not be subjected to excessively loud, megalomaniac rhetoric — perhaps precisely because it is so relevant and indispensable in all areas that determine society and culture in the 21st century. The sobriety and focus of the young people in this book will save them from the hysterical

expectations and propaganda that will eventually result in Europhobic governments patting themselves on the back about how they made the effort to buy enough turkeys for the British Christmas dinner from Poland and France at the last minute.

This immediately brings up a second aspect. This is the first generation of politicians of strategic autonomy. Their Europe already seems to look beyond the “geopolitical EU” of Ursula von der Leyen. It will be a different Union from that of ‘Maastricht’ and ‘Lisbon’. It will certainly be able to build on those foundations, but it will have to do so in a world that the designers of those treaties could hardly see emerging. After all, a strategically autonomous Europe will first have to define itself, or else others will do it for the citizens of the Member States. Putin is already trying it through trolls, undermining democracy, and accomplices on the extreme flanks of politics. Xi is already trying it by marginalizing economic partners. Trump was trying it by encouraging Brexit and pitting European partners against each other.

This new generation will live in this reality. It is a political reality in which their Europe will have to prove itself and be able to prove itself. This reality has some striking characteristics, and these are clearly reflected in the stories in this collection, in the questions, and in their answers.

The first characteristic of this reality is a new vision of the principle of sovereignty. From the 19th century onwards, this has always been regarded as a territorial and often centralist-hierarchical concept. A sovereignty was what could affirm itself as a national unity of administration, development of power and cultural identity. That is why Germany, as an empire, could consider itself a sovereign state after 1871, while the much older and traditionally rich Habsburg Empire could no longer do so fifty years later. Such a uniformist vision of sovereignty did not and does not easily tolerate diversity, pluriformity, federalism and culturally polychromatic expressions of identity and communality.

It is therefore not surprising that contemporary worshippers of the idea of the nation state not only reject any other view or vision of sovereignty, but declare it illegitimate, as a kind of treason, anti-national Ungeist or self-hatred, also called oikophobia. Since such a different view is not allowed to exist, it cannot exist — according to this way of thinking. Those who adhere to it therefore always tend to delegitimize dissenters, pluralistic views of culture, faith, and society. See here the fundamental difference of opinion that underlies the vision of the PiS government in Warsaw on European law and that of their kindred spirits elsewhere such as Salvini, Baudet and Farage. Their conception of sovereignty is that of the territorial fiction of uniform, centralist structures

that pretend to exist independent of others and present “monochrome” spheres of living and thinking. Those Christmas turkeys from Brexit tell a rather different story by now. All the more reason, therefore, to deepen a contemporary understanding of what sovereignty entails.

It seems probable to me that this will be related to the second striking characteristic of the new political reality, which is that of a thoroughly elaborated strategic autonomy of the Union as a global player and as a community of values. After all, the sovereignty of the Member States will be strengthened to an important extent by the fact that their Union, as a factor on the world stage, offers them a clear, respected, and decisive role. And such a role for each Member State within the Union as a whole will, in the turbulent world of today, depend even more on the combined strength that each is willing and able to muster with the others. The experience and clear focus that has grown in trade policy and with the Eurozone in monetary policy will help us in this respect.

But this strategic autonomy is not just something mercantile, even if many of my compatriots naturally think so. On the world stage today, it is precisely that characteristic of the community of values and the richness of European civilisation that will play a far greater role than we may have seen and wanted to see in recent decades. The thoughts of the young politicians in this book clearly point in this direction, and we would do well to understand them here. Where other world powers emphasise that their forceful, decisive and authoritarian thinking and acting points to the future via silk routes, gas pipes and “fake news” dissemination, it is precisely the European Union’s own identity as a concentration point of diversity, enrichment and reconciliation that will have to be propagated with much more élan.

For ‘the world is not a pony camp’, in the expressive terms of Sammy Mahdi in this book. It is precisely in this context that French philosopher François-Xavier Bellamy points out what he sees as the essence of the thinking of the German Max Weber. His hallmark of political action was ‘drilling through thick planks of hardwood’. That requires perseverance, focus and knowing what you need that effort for, and at what and whom it is directed. This book helps us to do that with a steady hand and warm heart.

Esther de Lange

Member of European Parliament and Vice President of the European People’s Party

November 2021

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Seeing Europe anew

Europe is never complete. That is a hugely inspiring idea, particularly for a young generation of Europeans. Previous generations have endowed Europe with a rich heritage of traditions, cultures, diversity, and pluralism. Because of the endless diversity that characterises Europe, the European project is always a work in progress. No one will ever be able to ‘call it a day’ and declare Europe as a finished phenomenon.

This collection of interviews with young European politicians, encompassing dialogue and vision, is the result of the engagement of a young and dynamic generation of Europeans. This publication is a composition of content from multinational and multicultural dialogues on themes relevant to European Christian Democrats and members of the EPP.

In the words of Esther de Lange, who wrote a epilogue to the interviews:
‘The answers here are as rich, diverse and at times surprising as these young politicians are. They come from literally everywhere and are the sound of inspirations and traditions that are as widespread as they are deep. The answer from Finland is as fascinating as the one from Portugal, and those of the Croatian and the Romanian are as idiosyncratic as those of the Frenchman or Dutchman. In all their pluralism, the reflections and thoughts of the young Christian Democrats here are as coherent in many aspects as they are grounded in recognizable experiences and values.’



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