



## **Europatriotism – Towards a Politics of the Heart**

## By Dick Pels

We breathe Europe. We eat and drink Europe: croissants, tzaziki, smørrebrød, goulash, cappuccino, Côtes du Rhône, Riesling, red port. We watch and listen to Europe: Scandithrillers, Harry Potter, Bach, Daft Punk, Conchita Wurst. We read Europe: John le Carré, Asterix, the *Da Vinci Code*, Houellebecq. We wear Europe: Prada, Dolce Gabbana, Louis Vuitton. We drive Europe: Mercedes, Citroën, Vespa. Europe is more and more the country we carry inside us. Just like Londoners take a small replica of Big Ben with them in their hearts, even when they sit on the beach at Rimini, so each and every one of us carries bits and pieces of Europe inside: the Amsterdam coffee shops, the London Eye, Camp Nou, the Acropolis, the Charles Bridge, the Mont Ventoux, the Mona Lisa, the battlefields at Verdun, the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin.

Whether it is art, architecture, literature, landscape, football, music or travel: we all love Europe in our own way. But regarding the European Union and its market, the political power of Brussels and the euro, opinions are increasingly divided. There is a gap between our quotidian, often semi- or subconscious love for Europe as a warehouse of culture, and the growing discontent and division over Europe as a political-economic reality. Eurosceptics and nationalists, however, tend to throw everything into the same pot, arguing that Europe lacks a commonly shared culture, that is has no 'soul', and hence will never be able to offer a true home to its citizens. Many halfhearted and fullhearted supporters of Europe for their part believe that 'ordinary' people do not care about utopian vistas, but are first of all interested in how they can materially profit from the Union.

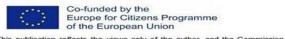
In this essay, I intend to counter this scepticism and to plead for a 'Europe of the heart'. The examples will be primarily taken from the context of the Netherlands; but I trust they will be recognisable and meaningful for other Europeans. Europe, I argue, is much more than a (currently failing) money maker and job machine: it is an ideal of civilisation. More than a politics of interest, it requires a politics of the heart. More than material well-being, it must create a sense of belonging and home. Hence we may learn something from populist nationalists who have successfully mobilised political passions *against* Europe. But our love for Europe must be lighter and softer than the exclusive sacrificial dedication which nationalists demand for their respective homelands.

How can such a lighter love for Europe grow? How can Europe become (increasingly) our homeland? 'You don't fall in love with the common market', Jacques Delors has rightly remarked. Historian Ernest Renan already knew in 1882 that a community of interest does not suffice to forge a nation: 'There is a sentimental side to nationality; the nation is at once soul and body; a *Zollverein* is not a fatherland' (2013: 95). All group identification has a libidinal, bodily aspect — a Freudian insight which has been sorely neglected by left-wing rationalists. A genuine European sense of identity can only emerge if we appeal to the emotions. Politics needs patriotism, as Rousseau already said.

# Feeling at home

Former Dutch foreign minister Hans van Mierlo, a progressive liberal, once quipped that he found it 'exciting' to dissociate itself from the nation state, because 'it had become too big for the small problems and too small for the big problems'. This statement has often been cited





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by conservatives and populists as an odious proof of cosmopolitan arrogance and of left-wing elitist nonchalance. But in the meantime, the mainstream left has come to recognise that a sense of belonging is an essential condition for good citizenship, and that cold constitutional reasoning is no match for the emotional appeal of the populists (e.g. Duyvendak 2011). It remains an open question, naturally, whether this longing for a home can only be satisfied by the nation. Ponderous *Heimat* feelings and the narrow-minded nostalgia of 'we were here first' could also be substituted by the lighter attachment to a broader, more open and welcoming community. Dutch historian Johan Huizinga already considered such an 'outward-looking identity reaching out to world citizenship' to be an essential part of the Dutch national character (1960: 159).

Do we realise how *small* the countries of Europe are, compared to emerging giants such as China, India, Brazil or Russia? Dutch people, Luxemburgers, Estonians, Maltese and Slovenians will admit this sooner and keener than most other Europeans. There is pettiness and complacency in wishing to preserve national *Kleinstaaterei* (you need only think of the ridiculous slogan brandished by Dutch populist leader Geert Wilders: 'The Netherlands is too big for the European Union'). Our beloved homelands are often less snug and cosy than they appear. Do we always feel safe and at one with the people around us? Do we actually want such closeness? As an Amsterdam city boy, I feel much more at home in London, Berlin or Barcelona than in the Frisian, Zeeland or Limburg countryside. I always feel comfortable on university campuses, anywhere in the world. In sum: I feel at ease among 'my kind of people'. Home is where my heart lies. World citizen Erasmus already said and lived it: *ubi bene, ibi patria*. My homeland is the place where my values and lifestyle are shared and embodied by others, where I gather interesting impressions and experiences: the urban hustle and bustle, the stillness of nature, cultural variety, watching attractive people, admiring beautiful buildings, shopping, enjoying the nightlife.

That is why we must extend our feeling of home in a cosmopolitan direction, first of all towards Europe. Those who romanticise the need for rootedness easily forget that we must also leave home in order to discover ourselves. Authenticity (the Nietzschean 'becoming who you are') also requires that we embark on adventures, travel to the horizon and explore the limits of the known world.

Postmodernists of course grossly exaggerate when they define the modern identity as nomadic: as if we have all become migrants and tourists in a global 'space or flow'. But this view is more than a facile generalisation of the habitus of jet-set academics, bankers and politicians. People do not only want to sit still but also to move – without giving up their deep attachments to their culture and beloved places. Therefore we need to cultivate a feeling of home which is at the same time a kind of holiday feeling. Europe is increasingly making that possible. Travelling in Europe is like being on holiday in your own country.

#### Symbols of the nation

We need to fill Europe with emotion – but not with too much of that heady stuff. A weakness for Europe is enough, as is a weakness for one's nation – both may actually complement each other nicely. If we like to replicate the nineteenth-century civilisation offensive on a grander European scale, it must also be conducted in a lighter tone and a softer key. On this important proviso, it is worthwhile to examine whether the symbols which have long expressed and shaped our national emotions, such as the flag, the currency, the national





anthem and in some countries the royal house, are suitable for European reuse or should be written off and replaced by more expedient alternatives.

In the case of the Netherlands, we should not fret too much over the loss of the guilder and the alleged decline of the Dutch language. Dutch has indeed retreated in areas such as business, science and politics, but it will be able to maintain itself in the long run as the language of everyday communication, national historiography, vernacular literature and indigenous pop music, theatre and film. In addition, near-fluency in Euro-English will enlarge our sense of mobility and bring Europe closer to home. The euro already does so on a daily basis. Its abstract yet recognisable symbolism of bridges, cathedrals and landscapes aptly expresses the light connections which are developing between European citizens. Despite stubborn complaints about the economic impact of the euro, the Netherlands appear to flourish without the guilder.

This leaves us (Dutch) with the tricolour, the national anthem, the House of Orange and holidays such as King's Day, Remembrance Day (when the Dutch honour their war dead) and Liberation Day. The European flag proudly flies next to the Dutch on all government and communal buildings, and only a handful of Europhobes want to take it down. The colour orange is exuberantly brandished by sports fans in soccer and other stadiums. The red-white-blue of the national flag is half-ironically painted on cheeks, foreheads and bare bellies, intimating a rather harmless festive nationalism. Except on Remembrance Day and Liberation Day, the tricolour carries about as much emotional meaning as the flags which routinely flutter on the stern of all Dutch boats.

Again excepting solemn commemorations, the Dutch national anthem, the *Wilhelmus*, carries but little meaning, similar to the official European anthem *Ode to Joy*; and it is equally wordless, since its most popular rendering is the la-la-la version sung in soccer stadiums. Our true folk anthems are properly European: they originate from contemporary pop culture and are sung in English: 'We are the champions' and 'You'll never walk alone'.

It is also evident that the Dutch royal family, like those of Belgium, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, England, Monaco and Luxemburg, will not be able to survive as an institution in the future European republic. The heads of the monarchs will have to disappear from the euro coins. Fortunately, the Netherlands are in possession of two 'Oranges': the royal house and King Soccer. Other than the hereditary monarchy, this 'New Orange' is made up of celebrities who have made their own name in the world, and who are swiftly replaced when their performance falls below standard. While hereditary blood ties reinforce a traditional view of national community, the national football team represents a new kind of community: light, individualistic, flexible and internationalist.

King's Day (formerly Queen's Day) is celebrated in a mood of festive commercialism and exuberant silliness, and has less and less to do with the family called Van Oranje. Liberation and Remembrance Day have become less exclusively focused on World War II, although the latter remains the centre of gravity. The past few years have witnessed emotional debates about whether Germans could participate in such commemorations, and whether they could also include fallen German soldiers. Let us hope that, in the foreseeable future, the Second World War and the Holocaust will be remembered in a European context and on a European scale, with the participation of the 'eternally guilty' Germans, as is already the case during celebrations of D-day.





# **Celebrating Europe**

Like the commemorations of 1914-1918, those of 1939-1945 are crucially important for affirming a European identity which leaves the horrors of war forever behind. European *lieux de mémoire* such as Verdun, Sarajevo, the Flemish Westhoek, Auschwitz, Sobibor, Theresienstadt, Dresden and the beaches of Normandy serve as focal points for this. Every visit to "guilty" Berlin recalls the disasters which the Hitler regime and the Cold War brought on the city and on Europe. Visiting the difficult landscapes of this "grating" heritage is becoming increasingly popular among Europeans (*dark tourism*).

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

The two World Wars constitute deeply shared European experiences, but are still subject to different interpretations of issues such as the war guilt and the amount of suffering endured (e.g. Holocaust denials). They are predominantly commemorated within national frameworks, and thereby again work in a divisive manner. There is little room for the experience of utter futility and despair found in war novels such as Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*. Fortunately there are also positive examples, such as Willy Brandt's famous genuflection before the ghetto monument in Warsaw in 1970, Helmut Kohl and François Mitterand holding hands in Verdun in 1984 or pan-European commemorations of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

German green politician Reinhard Bütikofer recently proposed that historical events which are currently celebrated nationally should be placed in a European perspective. The Portuguese Revolution of 1974, for example, just like the victory of democracy in Spain after Franco's death in 1975, would not have happened without Europe. In the course of the nineteenth century, local autarky was prized open by the construction of national railway networks and the substitution of local and regional festivals by national holidays. In the same way, some national events may give way to European ones in the wake of the TGV, the Eurostar and the cheap airlines. The Oktoberfest in Munich, the Notting Hill Carnival in London and the Amsterdam Gay Pride already attract international audiences.

Imitating the nineteenth-century cult of the nation, which invented all sorts of traditions and hero cults (in the Dutch case: the Golden Age of a seafaring and colonising Holland, naval hero Michiel de Ruyter who defeated the English), we should assemble a new pantheon of grand narratives and great figures from the past and present of Europe. Provided we again economise on nationalist traditions and bellicose symbols such as the anthem De Vlaamsche Leeuw in Flanders, the militaristic statue group on the Square of Heroes in Budapest, or the Napoleonic myth and his kitschy mausoleum in the Dôme des Invalides in Paris. It is shocking to realise that Europe is simultaneously dotted with statues of its many military warmongers and with memorials for their millions of victims, *Morts pour la Patrie*.





A more peaceful pantheon of European heroes would start with the statues of Goethe and Schiller in Weimar or that of Bach in Leipzig. But in our current virtual and image-saturated culture, stone or bronze statues are quickly becoming obsolete. Our Eurocelebs are everywhere among us, even though they are deceased. Next to sports heroes, we like to watch film stars such as Brigitte Bardot, Marcello Mastroianni, Sophia Loren or Hugh Grant, comedians such as John Cleese or Mister Bean, singers such as Placido Domingo, Charles Aznavour, Jacques Brel or Paul McCartney and, last but not least, the many fictional characters which populate Europe, such as Count Dracula, Don Quixote, Hercule Poirot, Sherlock Holmes, Tintin and Harry Potter.

Searching for rituals and symbols which may enhance a European patriotism, celebrity culture is an obvious place to look. Personal charisma will help to make the European identity visible and tangible (Conchita Wurst!). The monarchs on the euro coins should be replaced by images of famous European artists and philosophers, as well as those of founding fathers such as Schuman, Monnet, Spaak, De Gasperi and Spinelli. School curricula should include larger slices of European history, effectively broadening national perspectives. European democracy will become livelier if political parties are represented by media-savvy political personae who charmingly and skilfully communicate (e.g. through their fluency in different languages) with European citizens.

In this way, the contours emerge of a 'banal' Euronationalism (in analogy to Michael Billig's banal nationalism [1995]), which reproduces Europe in the daily life of its citizens through all kinds of everyday words, signs, practices, gestures and objects (such as flying the flag on public buildings). Rather than copying the nationalist flag ceremony to which American children are daily subjected, we should adopt lighter, less imperative symbols, as in the cheerful promotion of Holland by means of cheese, windmills, wooden shoes, tulips and the bicycle. How can we, following many Americans, develop a hyphenated identity and call ourselves Dutch, French, German, Greek or Romanian Europeans? This calls for enthusiastic Europatriots who are prepared to shamelessly plug, stage and embody our unique experience of freedom and democracy.

The European Union is still young: more than half of its states have only become members since 2000. Understandably, it has not yet settled in the hearts and minds of its citizens. In every new generation, Euroconsciousness is stronger than in the preceding one. We must therefore practice the virtue of patience. Europe is a project of the long haul: a democratic cathedral which successive generations of artisans have worked hard to build; and this building is still far from finished. It took the nation states at least two centuries in order to take shape; hence we are only at the beginning. The 'most generous idea of the past century' (Van Rompuy) will take time to establish itself.

Europe as a civilisational ideal is a project of cultural refinement which always needs to combine the creation of material life chances and opportunities for upward mobility with a moral education towards gentleness, freedom of thought, pluralism and creativity. It is therefore in the immediate interest of Europe as a whole not only to distribute its wealth more equitably, but also to invest deeply and broadly in education on all levels. The best Europropaganda still resides in the power of seduction of the European good life, freedom and democracy. Social freedom-in-security is only possible if violence, aggression and intimidation are minimised and all citizens are provided with genuine opportunities to improve





their lives. Europe must once again become the "land of infinite possibilities" – a promise which the broken American dream no longer fulfils. If this is our dream, we can be rightfully proud of Europe, without the aggressive impudence which has always accompanied national pride in the past.

#### Free-thinking Europe

Europe's 'minimal normative pride' lies in its dedication to individual freedom (Beck & Grande 2004: 163). European identity is the product of a self-critical response to the historical experiences of imperialism, the two World Wars, the totalitarian experiments of the left and right and the Holocaust. Having looked 'into the abyss of European civilisation', it is acutely conscious of the dangers lurking in all missionary offensives and totalitarian ideologies. European individualism is therefore not identical with self-certain Enlightenment rationalism or the rugged individualism of the market. Instead, it emphasises the art of doubt and the ethics of uncertainty. The capacity for self-critique and the attendant modesty and moderation are essential building blocks of this unique European identity.

This marriage between individualism and self-critique can legitimately be viewed as the main legacy of the European novel. From Cervantes, Diderot and Flaubert to Kundera and Houellebecq, the novel has always had a large share in the European exercise in self-examination. The sustained inquiry into the violent urges of mankind and the uncomfortable proximity of good and evil are likewise typical European themes, from Goethe's *Faust* and Klaus Mann's *Mephisto* up to war novels such as Lev Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk* and Hugo Claus's *The Sorrow of Belgium*. The same goes for the praise of doubt and the penchant for self-relativisation which connects Erasmus through the centuries to his biographer Stefan Zweig and other contemporary admirers.

European democracy is a relativistic democracy, which adroitly handles and even prides itself upon its ineradicable 'truth deficit': no one knows for certain what 'the people' want and who are and are not included in it. As a result, everyone is permanently invited to express an opinion on these matters. Democracy has been invented to endure this lack of commonality, cultural cohesion and binding values as best we can, and to accommodate our differences as peacefully as possible. One meta value rises above this eternal fray: the freedom of thought and expression, which provides a moral framework for this 'truth deficit' and obliges us to a civilised, moderate style of thinking and living. In his famous Funeral Oration, Pericles already expressed the same pride in the soft power of democracy. His panegyric to Athens as a freedom-loving, tolerant and relaxed society praised the superiority of democracy over Spartan militarism: 'While others emphasise masculine bravery in the education of their youth... we, with our more relaxed way of life, are just as ready to face the same dangers as they are' (Thucydides 2005: 24).

At first glance, the freedom to think, act and live differently appears to be a form of weakness; but actually it constitutes a source of strength. The refusal to use violence is often a token of great spiritual resilience. Too much certainty does not make you strong but instead vulnerable. Those who dare to embrace doubt enjoy greater autonomy than those who hold on to incontrovertible truths – e.g. orthodox believers who are deeply hurt by criticism or ridicule (Wijnberg 2008: 100-1). Self-certainty, hair-splitting and dogmatism smother all innovation. Liberality of thought promotes openness towards other people, other lifestyles and other ideas, creating cultural dynamism, social resilience and technological ingenuity. Is it a weakness to show one's weaknesses, or does it make one strong? What Putin detests as





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

European democrats should take pride in their uncertain identity, because it invites critical debate, tolerance and social renewal. Different from what is often thought, this democratic attitude of 'self-confident doubt' (Ulrich Beck) does not invite apathy; it is equally resilient as it is combative. Indeed, our refusal to enjoy a monopoly of the truth must logically extend to everyone else: our cultural 'superiority' lies in the fact that we reject all harsh superiority claims. Liberality of thought paradoxically marries the capacity to relativise our value tradition to a strong determination to defend it (Ter Borg 2010). We take pride in our culture of tolerance, and hence draw clear boundaries where this culture is being threatened.

That Europe's relative weakness is its greatest strength offers the core appeal of the European idea. Europe is feminine but firm. It (she) prefers to wield the forces of cooperation, seduction, persuasion and negotiation over and above those of struggle, conquest and humiliation. She is opposed to all the absolutisms and fundamentalisms which have drawn such bloody traces in her own history in the shape of religious and nationalist wars, crusades, pogroms, purges and dictatorships. At present, Europe faces new manifestations of this old absolutism: populist nationalism, Islamic jihadism, market fundamentalism and Russian macho power. In the confrontation with these hard ideologies and practices, Europe must continue to nurture her relative weakness as her most valuable ornament.

# Soft and hard power

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

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





firmer doses of hard power, geopolitical realism and strategic clarity. If Europe wishes to command respect for its ideals and lifestyle, it should muster more of this hard power, e.g. by developing a univocal foreign policy and building a strong army, and thus learning to play along with the other great powers (Holslag 2014).

European peace, freedom and tolerance will not spread automatically, without a fight. These values must also be defended against intolerant, cruel and unscrupulous enemies. A militant democracy must learn to deal with the paradox that it must fight its enemies without becoming similar to them. It must face the reality of political evil, but combat it with 'the means of lesser evil' (Ignatieff 2004). It should propagate its values convincingly, but without relying on unshakeable foundations of knowledge and morality. It can never become as hard and ruthless as its worst enemies, but should cherish its relative softness, moderation and self-control as pivotal to its pride and strength.

Power consciousness is therefore a necessary ingredient of European patriotism. Power can no longer be a dirty word for Europe. Pride in Europe is also pride in the forces of cooperation: the increment in strength which comes from pooling small sovereignties into a power block which can more successfully counter the economic dominance of markets, multinationals and state monopolies, the terror exercised by border-crossing Mafiosi and religious fanatics, and the military threat of macho powers such as Russia and IS. Europe is still too much of a toy for such border-crossing powers and too little of a great power itself. Pride in Europe is also pride in its global leadership, for example with respect to its model of social security or its innovative climate and energy policies.

Pride in Europe is also enhanced when we are able to revitalise European democracy and focus the creativity of European citizens in an innovation-oriented culture. Europe can lead the world by enforcing a green revolution and establishing social peace, pluralist democracy and a relaxed, tolerant lifestyle: the universally envied components of the European good life. Pride in Europe can grow further if we are able to speak with one voice in foreign affairs, establish a common defence and intervention force, and enthusiastically listen to the speeches of our directly elected European president.

In terms of geographical scale, European patriotism is somewhat comparable to its American counterpart. Naturally, we have no wish to copy the militaristic chauvinism of the 'Nation under God' celebrated by John Wayne, George W. Bush or the Tea Party. Instead, we take our inspiration from the left-liberal patriotism of a philosopher such as Richard Rorty (1998), which actually fits Europe better than the contemporary US. Rorty likewise recognises the need for emotional attachment to 'our country' and the need to determine its identity or soul. But it is not something which already exists and must be protected, as the Right believes, but something that needs to be discovered and developed further. The nation is unfinished. National pride is not pride in what exists, but in what we are able to make of ourselves.

The substance of Rorty's utopia also closely fits the ideals of European social freedom and social democracy which were outlined above. He endorses the individualistic ideal which John Stuart Mill adopted as a motto for his book *On Liberty*: 'The development of mankind in its richest variety'. Such individual development is only possible in a decent and civilised society which seeks to minimise violence and humiliation, and has accepted the fight for social justice as its vital principle. America (i.e. Europe) is the land of individual freedom, equal opportunity and the fair distribution of income and wealth: as such, it may become the





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'first classless society'. The grand historical irony, of course, is that millions of Europeans emigrated to America precisely in order to escape the closed class societies of the old continent. But, in the meantime, both wealth and poverty have become hereditary in the US, while some European countries, such as the Scandinavian welfare states, have been far more successful in levelling traditional class thresholds.

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

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