

# Europe is not about Europe

## Christian Democratic answers to populist and anti-EU sentiments

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How to counter populist and anti-EU sentiments without disrespecting the voter? Here are a number of answers grounded in Christian-democratic thought. The text is based on a lecture held in July 2013 in Vilnius, Lithuania, for representatives from a number of EU countries, and updated to February 2014.

### Lost

Dear friends, the last time I was here in Vilnius, I gave a training to a group of young people. It was late in March 2009 and fresh snow had fallen. A lot of snow. Early Sunday morning I wanted to go for a run, even though the cold white stuff would come far above my ankles. It was wonderful to move slippin' and slidin' through the town in the quiet Sunday morning. I aimed for the park near the river. Arriving there, I thought I would just follow the river for a while and then find my way back.

After running steadily for a while, I admitted to myself I was lost. White spaces and black trees with white covers of snow were all I could see, occasionally broken by a glimpse of the river. In order to find my way back, I started looking around for someone who could point the way. No one. It was truly quiet in the park.

Finally I saw someone in the distance. A man, walking a dog. I increased my pace. But when I met him, I was taken aback.

The man was blind. His dog was a guide dog. What was he doing here in the snow? Never mind. Though it seemed obvious that he could not help me, I asked my question anyhow. In English of course, but he started talking back to me in what I guessed was the Lithuanian language. We could not communicate, or so it seemed. With a bit of German, and a lot of calling 'Vilnius, Vilnius', I tried to ask my question again, not expecting a real



answer anymore and certainly no hand pointing in the right direction. Still, somehow, somehow the man managed to indicate my way back.

### Pointing the right direction

The title of this lecture had been given to me by the organisers. It is about 'mainstream right': Christian democracy facing anti-EU and anti-establishment upsurge'. When preparing myself, I considered myself to be running rather snow-blind through a political landscape that is blighted by the big losses of my own party, the CDA, in the Netherlands in 2012, and by a political crisis that seems to be all around me these days. What should I tell you? When you go back from 41 seats in a parliament of a 150 seats in 2010, to 13 seats now, you are hurting. We tried to deal with populism by bringing in – however reluctantly – the populist party of Mr Wilders and are still hurting from that choice. That cabinet was a failure and we were part of that. So what to see?

And now you are listening to me and you might be excused to think I am not the runner but the blind man. Somehow, somehow, I will try to point you in the right direction. To my mind this means a grounded, more fundamental answer to the question what the reaction should

be to populism and the anti-vote.

This meeting is about answers as provided by 'ideology' and not about the usual marketing responses, which I think deserves a big compliment to the organisers of this conference. Even so, I do want to use some insights from model developers in a campaign context. As a former campaign manager I don't want to hide my past. However, this lecture is on the level of ideas, ideals and concepts, nothing less. Not much graphs or statistics, quite a lot of statements and teasers.

### **Europe is built like a cathedral**

Just to give a bit of structure, I start out with the analysis of how bad it all is, or: how cold it is. I do so on a European level, not per se the Dutch level. Questions are asked like: why is it so hard to fight populism? And: why is it hard to fight 'natism'? I will show that many of the criticism aimed at the European 'bureaucratic monster' are not proportional, but can still be effective. Explaining how Europe works, or showing yourself empathic – 'we understand why you think Europe is a monster' - is not good enough. But what is good enough? Key to a more fundamental answer is to have 'faith in society'. Translating this into more specific answers, it is important to realise how incredibly clumsy the state is and that big corporations can be no better. The main answer lies not in making things smaller, but in creating diversity. From that starting point I give several more specific answers: how political parties can capture the idea of pluralism, about the 'We-mancipation', on the renewal of Christian-democratic thought in a post-secular time, capturing the power of social media and a new deal between the generation ins Europa. I also end with Europe, stating paradoxically that Europa is not about Europe.

There are no easy answers, certainly not when it comes to ideology. It is with an ideology a bit like it is with this institution called Europe. The more you try to change it, the bigger it gets. And the more you want to get rid of some aspects, the more will be added. In an article about the structure of the EU, the authors said that you should think of it as a cathedral and not of that of any big office block in Brussels. Every time the structure is threatened, something will be added *on the outside*. An extra pillar, an extra ornament. Every time someone wants to get rid of some aspect of ideology, some new chapter will be added on. Every time the European project is threatened, some new committee or treaty will add something on. In the end no one can explain it anymore. It has become too complex. Still we can hope that looking back it will add up to something as beautiful as a cathedral.

### **How cold it is**

Though in 2014 things are looking up from an economic viewpoint, there is still a shiver in the air, connected to the remaining cold of a severe financial crisis. However, as bad as it has been for most countries, it could have been worse: when a crisis starts turning from cold to hot. When from serious riots in London, Athens and Stockholm, it would have gone to red hot riots everywhere, and more. An overview of social unrest<sup>1</sup> shows that this, luckily, is not the case on the European continent. In a way that is strange. In other times, remember the sixties, the reaction would have been fiercer. But let us just be glad it is a cold crisis and not a hot one. The one hot crisis on our continent in 2014 is in the Ukraine, a crisis brought on in part by the wish of much of the population to stay connected with Europe.

Even so, the bad news is, that much of this crisis is of a fundamental nature. Hard to change, showing some of the characteristics of the deep slump Japan has been in for the past decade and more. Our crisis is multidimensional and all too real. Unlike in the United States, the banking crisis is not really solved. Many businesses are failing, having lost all their reserves and not able to find funding from banks or governments. Worse: technological change is rapidly breaking down business models. Libraries and whole shopping streets close in my country through the impact of Internet. New models – like 3D printing – do not necessarily lead to new jobs at this stage. As a consequence, not only lower educated people fail to find a job, but also those with a higher education. And speaking of

fundamentals: the changes in the demographic build up of populations do not help, and neither does the threat of climate change, or that of coming food and commodities shortages. Translating this to politics, it looks like the worst place where you could be as a party right now is in government. There is no electoral reward in governing. Populist parties are having a field day with a combined promise of less austerity and Our Own Country First. All centre parties are in danger. The test comes with every election, but it will probably come together in May 2014 when we vote for the European Parliament. The omens are not good. In my country, the Netherlands, 47% are saying Europe is not doing a good job, only 32% is saying that it does. In other countries, sentiments are worse. Scepticism reigns. Even in new member states, the turnout for European elections is low.

### Why can be so hard to fight populism?

So go for it, the answer could be. We should warm ourselves by fighting. Do not accept all those easy and fact free populist arguments. Attack. And we should. Even so, it is time we should better understand why fighting the populists and Euro scepticism can be so hard.

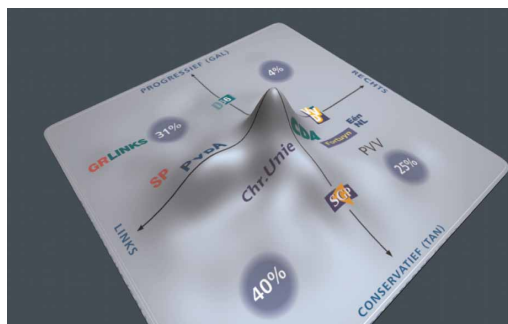
Let us start with the populists.

Why can it be so hard to fight them? First, it is not easy to fight the populist without at the same time hitting the voters behind them. There is enough data that shows that populist parties have appeal to Christian Democratic parties too. Given that they are in part our own voters, we really should take care not to imply that the voter is as stupid as a populist frontman. Arrogance is the big turn-off. Mainstream parties should make it clear that it is not 'an elite thing' to be in favour of more integrated Europe. It is the common sense thing to do. Populists often do not have a realistic alternative. Challenge them. People can be expected to be as smart in debunking a populist as they can be in debunking arrogant mainstream politicians.

Ignore the populists? Silence is an awkward option. Recent Parliamentary history suggests it does not work, at least not with populists who know how parliament works, like Mr. Wilders does (his last job outside parliament is something like 20 years ago). And who know how the media works. Television does not quote the ones who stay silent. And here we have another reason why the center right, and certainly the Christian Democratic party in the Netherlands, has a problem when it goes against populist politicians: the sympathy of the media is not with the mainstream.

And so we see that the center right goes for the only answer that seems to work a bit: using the populist arguments themselves. However, if that helps to remain successful in the long term is doubtful. I agree with pollsters like Krouwel. They say that voters always prefer the real thing to the imitation. Centre right parties imitating populists is hardly ever successful. The reverse is true as well: populist trying to adopt the cloak of centrist respectability does not work too well either. But here the populists, especially the pragmatic ones, have an advantage. With a good mix of left- and rightwing policies, parties like that of Mr. Wilders can capture center ground. This is what Mr. Krouwel showed<sup>2</sup>:

In the mix of policies the PVV, Mr. Wilders party, comes out pretty close to the middle of the



political landscape. It is not surprising that polls show he is luring voters from all major parties. It is a matter of time before other populist parties copy his approach, especially now several large European populist parties seem to be agreeing on forming a collective in de the European Parliament.

In summary: when fighting populists, you are not always fighting fringes. You may end up hurting your own electoral base in the center. The question then is this: are you recognizable enough, both in

content and style, as a non-populist party? Mixing styles might not be a good idea.

Supported by much research in five countries<sup>3</sup>, Mr. Krouwel tells us that Christian Democracy is down but not out. It has to guard itself though for a populist attack in the form of positions that eat away at the natural base of the movement. All traditional parties will face difficulties in maintaining the social coalitions that make up their core electorates. I think this means that traditional parties should start acting less traditional.

### **Why is it hard to fight natism?**

There are also handicaps for the center-right when fighting Eurosceptic (or other expressions of so-called 'natism'); one of the core concepts for populists (De Lange, 2013). One of the problems is that right wing thinkers have always had trouble going 'beyond the nation state'. A common or 'native' history, language and culture is supposed to be a precondition for any true form of union, even though that same history, language and culture shows just how much it has always been a source of disunion.

In this the center right is basically a romantic movement, with the United States as prime example. However, even those 'united' states of America, are only a union in hindsight. When reading the history of the war of independence, you soon realize that the only thing 'the former colonies' had in common was the same enemy: the British. Their civil war must be seen as the outcome of a truly conservative revolution against unity, motivated by the not so noble intention to keep slavery. Even so, it is hard arguing for center right parties with this romantic idea. For Christian Democratic parties, with the notion of 'God given power', it is slightly different, but in a way even harder.

Another, and quite unromantic aspect of right wing thought, is 'real politics': the hard-nosed appraisal of political realities as made famous by Dr. Kissinger. This also is not good enough for the Eurosceptic. For instance: strategic reasons to keep the Arab world out of Europe, are by no means enough to convince Eurosceptics that Turkey should be allowed to enter as a member of the EU. The real politicians may be right, but the point here is that Eurosceptic is very hard to meet with the rational voice of traditional center right politics.

Then there is another cultural factor in Eurosceptic that makes it harder for right wing politicians to fight it, for they usually share it to the core. The cross Atlantic, Anglo Saxon attitude, particularly shared in a country like the Netherlands, is hard to combine with enthusiasm for a German-French Europe.

The roots of these cultural preferences or antagonisms run deep. Often it is expressed in a manner that carries a cloak of neutral colors, but is heavy with cultural baggage. Take the way scientist look at the world. Science may be the way we look for objectivity, but the way science is practiced can be subjective indeed, certainly when we are talking social sciences. Looked at it this way, the 'science' of economics is mostly an Anglo-Saxon game. The 'study' of the rule of law is more of a continental game. The two ways of looking at society are hard to reconcile. The first sees the European Union as a failed experiment in monetary discipline, the other sees the Union as the arbiter in last resort, the top of the legal framework. These differences are meaningful and hard to reconcile. The Eurosceptics are right in this respect: the much vaunted 'political union' will probably be never more than a ball, tossed about by all those different moods, views, disciplines and (scientific) cultures. The thing is, where from a Christian Democratic perspective we like to say that we 'embrace' what is small and diverse, we live in times that simplify and magnify. What many European countries embrace is machismo: the leader as hero, with heavy gestures and easy distinctions in good and bad. It is the reason why Putin is much more a role model than we give him credit for. Never mind that we live in a multipolar world that is at least partly governed by the most complex kind of algorithms. The populist understands that everything is as easy as the voter wants to it to be.

### **Phantom criticism of Europe**

This was all just to make you feel happy. No, really. In all of the above, there is already an answer to the challenge of populism and Eurosceptic. Still, the tale of our woe is not done

yet. Answering the criticism of Eurosceptics is a bit like chasing phantoms. The criticism is real – but not really. Look for instance at:

*The information gap.* ‘We do not know enough about Europe’, the criticism goes. Really? It could be that you do not get the right kind of information in the right dose, but when it comes to transparency most governments can learn a thing or two from the European Union. They certainly can when it comes to informing their citizens. Often it is too much, too one-sided or unreadable bureaucratese, but it takes two to bridge an information gap and it does not look like the EU is most at fault.

*The democratic deficit.* We are not able to influence the dictates from Brussels, the populist say. Really? Well, in a way they are just stating the obvious. A continent of over 500 million inhabitants is not truly to be influenced by a single individual. Not even by Frau Merkel. But as political systems go, this one is more transparent and accountable than that of most of the 28 member states. I dare to argue that it works better than its American counterpart, except for one thing of course: the central decision making at the top, at the Council. Training is my trade, and I know that you cannot expect to put 28 people in a room and to come to a balanced and quick decision just like that. Either someone has the solution in his pocket before entering the meeting, or you know it will become an ugly and drawn out mess. This and other fault lines in the democratic make up of the European Union, need to be addressed – and will be addressed, sooner or later. Probably this will happen when, at truly European elections, the voters of Europe will elect their Council Chairperson. But let me make a prediction: even then many will not admit the democratic deficit to be a thing of the past.

*A bureaucratic monster?* Yes it is. And vulnerable too, as an institute. In the literature of ‘resilience engineering’, the EU (this is the right moment to start using abbreviations) can be described as an RYF organization: Robust Yet Fragile<sup>4</sup>. It tries to handle all kind of challenges by writing and implementing rules and procedures, meanwhile creating its own problems and becoming more and more vulnerable to the kind of challenges it does not anticipate. So accidents will happen. But as large bureaucracies go, it is pretty straightforward. The complexity many people observe, has more to do with the way the individual member states trying to come to an agreement ‘en committee’ and having each their own agency, than with the fundamentals of the union itself.

### **Explaining does not help, nor does empathy**

All and all, it really it is not so bad as the Eurosceptics make out. But that is not the point. Explaining does not help. When you do not want to hear, you will not hear. It is more that we, representatives of the center right parties, are convinced that, taken as a whole and given the circumstances, the union works like it should.

From a Christian Democratic perspective the European Union has taken on too much burdens. If, like we do, you do not believe that big government or big business is the answer to our challenges, than the European Union has become too big for its breeches. More focus is necessary, also because people will not accept it when the Union grows in size and budgets while countries suffer austerity.

So explaining does not help, but neither does empathy. Why? What’s against empathy? Nothing, as such. But Europe has always been a project by the elite. Voters sense this, and their instinct is often to translate it into a sense of being subjected to arrogance. No matter that much of which was stated in this paragraph is true, yet not trusted. Europe has been built upon a number of ‘deals’. The first ones were very successful. Robert Schumann and Konrad Adenauer made the first deal, forging an unlikely alliance between France and Germany in 1950. François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl struck another very significant deal in 1989 when Mitterrand offered to go along with the unification of West and East Germany

and Kohl agreed to give up the Deutsch mark in exchange for the Euro. We are now going through a difficult phase in which it seems like the third major deal – budgetary discipline in exchange for reform – seems not to work. It is still early days, and no one can expect a deal like this to have immediate effect, but it is significant that not even the Northern countries do enough to reform their economy.

Let us be realistic here. Let us be fair here. This crisis is not going away for quite some time, though from time to time the economy will definitely look better. I am afraid this banking crisis is a crisis that will entwine itself with other, much more permanent crisis, as in climate-, energy- en food-crisis. Faced with all that, who needs some man from Brussels to tell you, he feels sorry for you. You do not want empathy. You want answers, action. Even tough talk is better than empathy.

So no new deals. No Big Words, no nice words. Straight words are better. And some faith. In each other, in you and me. And in society. It's powers to regenerate. And our faith in society.

### **Faith in society**

I am going to change focus here. The analysis is still important. Full answers are too soon yet. But the emphasis should move away from the populists and Eurosceptics. We know that their gain is our failure, so in a way we are staring in a mirror. No one should be afraid to stare into the mirror, but at some point you have to walk away and walk in the direction of your choosing.

This thinking about society is perhaps the farthest away from populist thinking. It is at the heart of both the Christian Democratic and the Conservative movement. There is old thinking about society – the self-organising powers of society in structures like church, school, cooperatives and associations. There is also new thinking – and suddenly we are in the modern networking society, with friends, followers and worldwide connectivity. In the combination of both we could perhaps find new answers to all kind of crisis, and not just that of the centre right.

In order to get closer to the subject of society, an illustration will be taken from the book of the British Conservative Party.

One of the most famous utterances of the recently deceased Ms Thatcher is this: '*There is no such thing as society*'. She was quoted slightly out of context, but in many ways her words definitely defined her thinking. She thought along the lines of the reciprocal society: if you do something for me, I will do something for you. According to thinkers like Ayn Rand, this ultimately selfish society will in the end produce a better society than the one guided by all kind of false moral pretensions. However, by the time Ms Thatcher left, her party, defined by scandals, was seen as morally bankrupt. The Conservative party became '*the nasty party*'. Her successors had the impossible task of erasing that image. An astute Tony Blair took the best element of her philosophy – aspiration – and put it at the heart of New Labour's message.

No amount of Saatchi and Saatchi advertising could undo the damage for the Conservatives. It was up to the thinkers in the party to try and undo the damage.

### **The incredible clumsiness of the state**

The undoing of the damage started in a little noted but very significant way. In 2001 a book got published titled .. '*There is such a things as society*', with the new party leader Iain Duncan Smith as one of the main authors. Imagine that in your own party a book like that would appear, denying the legacy of your most successful leader within years after her departure, and she still alive. It did not rock many boats though, as it was and is a serious book about the role of voluntary associations in the state. The argument of the book was summed up in this phrase: 'Top down is the wrong way up'. Most interesting was a

contribution to the book by Mr Oliver Letwin<sup>5</sup>, one of the future architects of the revival of the party. He wrote about 'The incredible clumsiness of the state'. In it he explains both why big government is doing all kind of micromanagement – and why it fails.

An image comes to mind of trying to repair a spider web. Have you ever tried? Impossible. Sticky threads cling to your clumsy fingers. Likewise it is with all attempts by civil servants to repair failures of regulation or budgetary mismanagement. In this, Letwin makes an interesting analogy with insights from biosciences. He says to trust the ability of natural adaptation and growth. If things are broken, do not intervene too soon or too much. When there is too much disruption you endanger the natural recuperation of biological systems and a downward cycle will ensue. So be aware of 'tipping points' that you should not cross by meddling too much in the systems of nature or of society.

This is what seems to be the problem in Britain, and not just there. In my words: the enemy to society is 'our bigger us'. Each intervention – a benefit, a rule to create a new oversight body, a school improvement scheme, a subsidy for small businesses - fuels expectations. The promise is that things will improve, get better. But what if they do not? New interventions will come, hiding the old 'mistakes' from view, creating support structures in the form of institutions that are robust – yet fragile. At some point each intervention become a goal in itself, a reward for doing 'something'. Until suddenly the system proves corrupt and all the mistakes, old and new, sort of take revenge on the system, poisoning all intentions to improve.

And this is not just the problem with big government. Big business has its own tendency of crossing tipping points and leaving a barren wasteland behind wherever it comes. Authors like Michael Sandel speak of 'the moral limits of markets'<sup>6</sup>, but in many ways it is not just about morals. Wish it were. It is the way it works. Large systems have much to gain – or so they think – by reducing complexity. By producing and delivering products and services that are truly 'lean and mean' they save costs, which in turn creates shareholder value. In that sense: the less diversity, the better. So there are many ways to make a phone call, but only one iPhone. Many destinations, but only one way of booking a flight. Many kinds of coffee, but only one way of ordering one in a Starr Bucks café. If the balance between diversity and uniformity is right then customers, shareholders and society benefit. If not, a multitude of failed small businesses and closed shops testify to the hubris of big business and their efficiency thinking.

### **The promise of diversity**

So then, should the message be that small is beautiful? Partly, yes. As taxpayers we are still supporting many banks that are considered 'too big to fail'. We truly have ransomed our society to these large institutions. And what goes for banks, probably also goes for other large corporations and institutions that are too big to fail. So breaking them up is the smart thing to do.

Even so, smallness should not be a goal in itself. Here are two reasons why this would miss the point. The first one is that with more than 500 million inhabitants in Europe, small is a very relative term. Big units will be needed, including a big European Union, for that matter. Subsidiarity, a key Christian Democratic principle, still has to be rephrased for this reality. The other point is that in this modern world, interconnectivity is as much a factor as size itself. What we need, the organisational scientist say, is 'loosely coupled systems'. Functional collections of smaller units that have good working relations with each other but are not completely dependent upon each other. We are talking about units that can take a hit when incidents happen. In many ways this is already happening through the opportunity that Internet has to offer. In ideological terms we still have some thinking to do if we want to embrace this development, as I think we should. Big thinking, not small.

The key word here is not 'small' but '*diverse*'. A society built on diversity works better than a highly uniform and centralised one. This word also lies at the heart of the 'Big Society', the

mistaken phrase that captured the new philosophy of the British Conservative party (for an idea history see Franklin and Noordhoek, 2013 A diverse, or pluralistic, society is a precondition for a society that is in the long term both vibrant and sustainable. And, as for instance Philip Blond says in 'Red Tory' (2009)<sup>7</sup>, "social eco-systems, including associations and churches, are our guardians of diversity, so let us cherish them". All in all, this should produce a different society, much more accomplished by interventions on the scale of micro-systems of society, while aided and supported by the means of modern technology.

## Answers

So granted, there is lots of ground here for scepticism. How then is diversity an answer to the challenge of nativism?

There are many answers, but I give you these:

- Political parties that capture the idea of pluralism
- The We-mancipation
- Renewal of Christian Democratic thought in a post-secular time
- Capturing the power of social media
- In Europe: a new deal between the generations

### *Political parties that capture the idea of pluralism*

We need political parties that dare to radically choose solutions that go against the trend of bigger and bigger. We should have policies aimed at more schools, not less. More hospitals not less. More little and mid-sized companies, less big companies. More small communities, less uniform cities. In the short term this might mean lower salaries and bonuses, in the long term it means more jobs and more vitality. Where efficiency truly counts, it should be pursued. In that case it is still good practice (subsidiarity) to put responsibility as low as possible, but if and when a European effort is needed, it should be pursued.

### *The We-mancipation*

Liberalism and Christian-democratic thought concur where they meet: in the individual. Each of us has value, is valuable and is much more than just his or her economic potential. Where the two diverge is in how each individual gains maximum potential. Liberalism states this is first through maximum freedom of choice. Christian-democratic thought states that individuals gain fulfilment of their worth in the interaction with others. In theory both approaches could meet, in practice both diverge. Whether it is liberalism, technological progress or the combination of both, fact is that individual choice is abundant in today's society. It might be a thing too good for today's society. There needs to be a re-appraisal of activities defining a common effort, a common destiny. In my view this is not about a renewal of old structures, designed to keep people in line. It is about on-line ventures, it is about new forms of co-operatives, it is about people getting together for part-time project designed to relieve immediate need. Everything that is about 'we' and not about 'me'. A 'We'-mancipation of truly collective or team efforts. Centre right parties should support this by making room for these initiatives, by keeping the government small and also by reducing the expectations people have of the state. Populism has only a crude idea of 'we', and is in fact most of the time about 'I, the leader'. Mr Wilders, the great populist leader in the Netherlands, has proven to be incapable of leading his own delegation. Voters might sympathise with his ideas, but they know this. It is partly the reason why in actual elections his results have been less than his potential. It might be that with the European elections coming up, he will reach his potential. Which is exactly why we need to build on a Europe that is not just about 'me'.

### *Renewal of Christian Democratic thought in a post-secular time*

In a 2013 report by the Scientific Institute of the CDA, and supported by CES, on 'Faith in society'<sup>8</sup>, this comparison was made between the Liberal and Christian-democratic view on religion. The distinction, in short:



- Liberal view: reductionist:
  - looking for the authentic self, stripped of constraints by faith and society
  - a hard break between church and state
- Christian-democratic view: relation-oriented:
  - sensemaking through the interaction with others
  - fulfilment in the building of family, group, society nation and continent
  - distinction, but no break between church and state

Both views would complement in each other in an ideal world. However, to counter populist rhetoric, the Christian-democratic view is in the long run more promising. It is the one counterpoint against a populist point of view that is ultimately selfish and narrow minded. However, this is a secular time, a post-secular time even. In a country like mine, being secular is a practically a given. Churches are turned into apartment buildings or stand empty as monuments to an older time. There is no turning back the clock. But this does not mean people have stopped looking for meaning to their lives, including something that is bigger than themselves. In parts of Europe you even see the growth of 'ethnic churches', where groups claim their own form of faith. In other parts you see that secular people start to develop new rituals and places for reflection. Christian-democratic thought should provide spaces for all of them, just not the narrow-minded ones. Good politics creates spaces for the meeting of minds, even and especially when it comes to religion. It should be part of the European People's Party to get this renewal of Christian-democratic thought on the road, as this is especially something that first or diverse continent.

#### *Capturing the power of social media*

Do politicians really understand the power of social media? Too many politicians on twitter or Facebook are boring in their self-promoting. European politics makes this tendency worse, not better. It is not that difficult, really. The rules for digital connections are not that different from ordinary communication. Just speak the universal language of humour, banter, real content and contact. This is where Mr Wilders and other populists are winning the battle. Through social media they talk to us like they are part of us, even though we all know they are not. It works. It also works because they have speed on their side. They are not as much bothered by consultation demands and other the niceties that slow especially parties in government down. We can and should speed up our act, at the same time we should hold on to our values. In the end this is the way populists blow themselves up, with speed. One more point. I am convinced that tomorrow's party conferences will only work when social media and physical meeting are joined. Populists are not very good at staging truly engaging meetings. On the condition that mainstream parties dare to take some risks, we should be able to do this, and social media can make them even more engaging.

#### *In Europe: a new deal between the generations*

Europe is considered to be an old continent, with less dynamic then for instance the American and Asian continent. The numbers tell a somewhat different story. In term of trade, buying power and economic impact, it is a very dynamic powerhouse. And a Euro that works. Tal Sadeh from the London School of Economics (one of those economists with an Anglo Saxon background ...) writes that research<sup>9</sup> shows that the EMU has more than doubled trade among its member states. Moreover, while the Eurozone crisis has created more substantial problems in Southern Europe, the trade benefits derived from the single currency have been disproportionately larger in Eurozone periphery states. So there is good economic reason to proceed with the Union and not be to negative about this continent and its prospects. Yet the demographics also show a pessimistic view on the future. Parents think their children will be less well off than they themselves, younger people are angry they face a future in which they have to provide for a much bigger older generation. Solidarity between the generations is a key principle of Christian democratic thought. We should not hide this problem, we should be the ones that come up with the answer: a new deal between the generations.

## Europe is not about Europe<sup>10</sup>

This is the trap that most politicians fall into when it comes to Europe: they start talking too much about Europe. When things are fine, Europe is where funds and status comes from. When things are not so fine, Europe is a convenient scapegoat. They should remember that in the end 'all politics is local'. Or, in other words, that when it comes to large numbers of voters, they start behaving like a flock of birds. Have you ever seen a bird 'leading' a flock? No. With all our admiration for strong leaders, we forget that much in nature does not depend on leadership, but on something else. Their swerving movements are basically determined by just three rules<sup>11</sup>: 1) you watch the birds closest to you, 2) you go for the centre of the flock, 3) you take care not to crash into each other. That is all.

In our human life, people echo people closest to them. What they pick up from the news is selective and filtered through the lens of approval or disapproval of friends and family. What really matter are the things that determine their status and relative position to each other. Brussels is far away. The dominant frame – Europa is good or Europe is bad – is echoed without much further thought. So national and local leaders should echo national and local themes, even when talking about Europe. No nation can do well in Europe when that nation is not doing well economically. So talk about restoring your own economy to be stronger in Europe. No president can negotiate successfully with his colleagues when he or she is failing to do so at home. So talk about coalitions and agreements in your own nation and how they affect us. And so on.

This is not a recipe for everything. When Ukraine tears itself apart over the question whether it is part of the European or Russian sphere of influence, this cannot and should not be reduced to a local theme. But on the whole it must be said: Europe is not about Europe. It is about you and me.

*Contribution by Peter Noordhoek to the conference on 'Eurocrisis, Ideological Reconfiguration in Contemporary Europe and Challenges for the Center Right', as held on June 7-9, 2013 in Vilnius, Lithuania. Organized by the International Republican Institute (IRI), the European Political Party Foundations and Institutes (EPPFI) Network and the Institute for Democratic Politics (DPI). His remarks here are his own.*

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organisation, June 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Kees van Kersbergen and André Krouwel (2008) - 'A double-edged sword! The Dutch centre-right and the 'foreigners issue'', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15:3, 398 – 414. Also other contributions by Mr. A. Krouwel to the conference on 'Eurocrisis, ideological reconfiguration in contemporary Europe and challenges for the centre right', as held in Vilnius on June 7-9, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Bale and André Krouwel (2013) 'Down but not out: a comparison of Germany's CDU/CSU with Christian Democratic parties in Austria, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands.' *German Politics*, Vol.22, No.1-2, March-June 2013, pp.1-30.

<sup>4</sup> Robust Yet Fragile (RYF): the system can deal with incidents it anticipates but not with incidents it does not anticipate (for instance: Zolli and Healy (2012), 'Resilience').

<sup>5</sup> Oliver Letwin (2002) 'For Labour there is no such thing as society, only the state.' In: Gary Streeter (ed.) (2002) – 'There is such a thing as society.'

<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Sandel (2013) – 'What money can't buy. The moral limits of markets.'

<sup>7</sup> Philip Blond (2009) 'Red Tory'.

<sup>8</sup> Scientific Institute of the CDA (2013) 'Faith in society. Christian Democratic reflections on religion and faith in the Public Domain.' CDA, The Hague / CES, Brussels.

<sup>9</sup> Tal Sadeh (2014) – 'Despite the crisis, the euro has more than doubled trade among Eurozone member'. LSE blog, 20-02-2014.

<sup>10</sup> Also read: Peter Noordhoek (2013) – 'Europe is not about Europe – A message for 2014'. Blog May 26, 2013. RSI conference, Budapest, or: [www.northedge.nl/blogs/europe\\_is\\_not\\_about\\_europe](http://www.northedge.nl/blogs/europe_is_not_about_europe).

<sup>11</sup> Philip Ball (2004). *Critical Mass*. How one thing leads to another.