

Europe

The passage to Europe: how a continent became a union. By **Luuk van Middelaar**. Translated by **Liz Waters**. New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press. 2013. 372pp. Index. £25.00. ISBN 978 0 30018 112 8. Available as e-book.

Why Europe matters: the case for the European Union. By **John McCormick**. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave. 2013. 198pp. Index. Pb.: £14.99. ISBN 978 1 13701 687 4.

Despite some good news on the economic front the European Union is still in crisis. The bad news is that the credit crunch has been transformed into a political crunch. Across the Continent, established political forces are running for their lives when faced with the new kids on the block on the left (such as the Greek Syriza) or on the right (such as the Dutch Freedom Party). There is an ongoing conflict between the 'North Sea Alliance' and the 'Club Med' or, if you wish, creditor and debtor countries. The EU may well collapse as a result, or simply become marginalized like a once-famous football player condemned to sitting on the bench rather than playing on the pitch. In this context, Luuk van Middelaar's book may well be read as a beautiful farewell or even a funeral speech. It tells a story of 'turning a continent into a Union' in touching or even personal terms. His hero is 'tough' and 'patient' (p. x); there is even a reference to Gospel: 'A political body cannot emerge at a single moment: it takes time. Europe's founders understood this and resolved to harness time. They made the long wait bearable by emulating the feat of the apostle Paul: he transformed the present into a time of transition' (p. 310).

My remarks are not intended to be cynical. Van Middelaar tries to break with the infamous tradition of using bureaucratic jargon and perplexing acronyms when writing about the EU. His intention is to describe the Union's political life from its birth to adulthood in historical and philosophical language. He utterly succeeds in this endeavour. The book is intellectually rich and politically balanced. Its narrative is smooth and engaging. Its arguments are original and sophisticated. Its only weakness is its timing: originally published in Dutch in 2009, the author decided not to revise it from scratch. Yes, there is a new and interesting preface and an afterword, but Van Middelaar might have written a different history knowing the depth and scale of the ongoing crisis. The book tells us a lot about how the EU emerged and how it functions, but it hardly says anything about how it began to disintegrate and where this disintegration may lead us to. To use Van Middelaar's own analogy, Europe may well now be situated in purgatory and the question is whether the next move is into paradise or hell.

In fact, it is increasingly obvious that the story has not ended with the Fiscal Compact Treaty, regardless of Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble's intentions. There is growing criticism of this treaty, which envisages many strict rules, but not a government to steer Europe through the stormy waters on a daily basis. This defies Robert Schuman's dictum cited by Van Middelaar: 'From now on the treaties must create not just obligations, but institutions, which is to say supranational organs with their own independent institutions' (p. 16). In view of recent experiences, one could add that the treaties must also create obligations that reflect preferences of not only strong but also weak EU members. A Union without a certain degree of financial solidarity is doomed to fail.

John McCormick, the author of *Why Europe matters*, does not seem to have these kinds of dilemma. He makes a strong case in favour of the EU and presents a sort of manual for getting the Union out of the current mess. His list of the EU's merits is rich and long, and he points to opinion polls suggesting that Europeans share his strong convictions. The

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problem is that more recent opinion polls contradict McCormick's optimistic assertions. For instance, according to the November 2012 Eurobarometer, since the beginning of the euro crisis, trust in the European Union has fallen from positive 10 per cent to negative 22 per cent in France; from positive 20 to negative 29 per cent in Germany; from positive 30 to negative 22 per cent in Italy; from positive 42 to negative 52 per cent in Spain; from positive 50 to positive 6 per cent in Poland; and from negative 13 to negative 49 per cent in the United Kingdom. Can the Union emerge stronger, rather than weaker, from the crisis with public support as low as this? Moreover, McCormick's book fails to analyse in depth how the EU really works. He just points to some weaknesses of the Eurosceptic argument and offers the reader his correct views on everything related to European politics. Some of his views are indeed correct, others superficial and probably wrong. Moreover, McCormick's book is full of sweeping generalizations such as 'most Europeans are instinctively communitarian', 'distinctively cosmopolitan', 'sympathetic to the idea of constitutional patriotism' (pp. 102–103). In-depth studies of European values show that things are more complicated (see for instance, Neil Fligstein, *Euroclash: the EU, European identity, and the future of Europe*, Oxford University Press, 2008; or *European cosmopolitanism in question*, edited by Roland Robertson and Anne Sophie Krossa, Palgrave, 2012).

Luuk van Middelaar does not tell the reader what to think and he prefers metaphors to judgements. John McCormick is direct, partisan and judgemental. Some may argue that determined agitators are more useful for getting Europe out of the crisis than detached intellectuals. The problem is that agitators do not always understand the nature of the crisis and thus suggest unworkable solutions.

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Europe, strategy and armed forces: the making of a distinctive power. By **Sven Biscop and Jo Coelmont**. Abingdon: Routledge. 2012. 138pp. Index. £85.00. ISBN 978 0 41546 625 7. Available as e-book.

NATO's European allies: military capability and political will. Edited by **Janne Haaland Matlary and Magnus Petersson**. Basingstoke: Palgrave. 2013. 310pp. Index. £60.00. ISBN 978 1 13703 499 1. Available as e-book.

It would be hard to find two more different books addressing broadly the same subject. The Biscop and Coelmont volume is explicitly normative in ambition, seeking to sketch a political project aimed at turning the European Union into a more effective strategic actor in international affairs. The collection edited by Matlary and Petersson, on the other hand, is self-consciously analytical, as they attempt to identify the factors that explain Europe's contribution to international security.

To begin with the latter, the first thing that should be said is that it represents a remarkably coherent set of essays that bear all the hallmarks of tight and effective editorial control. It poses the central question of what role Europe can play in regional and global security and defence, and couches its analysis in terms of both military ability and the political willingness to use force. Above and beyond this, it seeks explanations of Europe's ability to play such a role, both at the international level and domestically, in the form of politics, ideology, military and strategic culture, and military capacity.

The findings are salutary and point unequivocally towards a declining European capacity to influence international security affairs. Underpinning the reluctance of many member states to use force are stark differences between national strategic cultures. Christopher