



# Politics and Science in Disguise

## Not Quite the History of European Integration

STEVEN VAN HECKE

In his *De passage naar Europa. Geschiedenis van een begin* [The Passage to Europe: History of a Beginning], Luuk van Middelaar makes European integration intelligible by applying a distinction between three spheres – the states, the community and the intermediate sphere of the Member States – to various events that have proven crucial in ‘the making of’. These events form passages that have made Europe what it is today; as well as what it is not. Van Middelaar’s writing is sensitive and inspired; his perspective is open-minded; the cases are well-documented (but not always adequate); and his book is innovative, as he introduces political/theoretical terminology into history, combined with insights from political science. He could even have gone further in narrowing the disciplines gap, however, and he has not always avoided the traps of history writing. In any case, he succeeds brilliantly in his ambition ‘to tell *another* story about the birth of political Europe’ (9; author’s own italics).

*De passage naar Europa. Geschiedenis van een begin* [The Passage to Europe. History of a Beginning]<sup>1</sup> is more than the latest in a series of books about the history of the European integration process. Not only does the author, Luuk van Middelaar, seek to recount the birth of political Europe in a different way; his primary objective is to ‘tell *another* story about the birth of political Europe’ (9; author’s own italics). He succeeds brilliantly in this ambition. Van Middelaar accomplishes this largely in two ways. Firstly, he extends an original conceptual framework within which the classic events of the past sixty years can be understood. Secondly, he applies this framework to offer the reader a new, clarifying perspective on a number of these events, which Van Middelaar considers to have proven crucial. These events form the ‘passages’ – passages that have made Europe what it presently is, as well as what it is not.

1 Luuk van Middelaar, *De passage naar Europa. Geschiedenis van een begin* (Dissertatie Universiteit van Amsterdam 2009; Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 2009, 531 blz., ISBN 978 90 6554 236 6).



On 25 March 1957, in the Hall of the Horatii and Curiatii in the Capitol in Rome, the representatives of the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) sign the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom). From left to right: Paul-Henri Spaak and Baron Jean-Charles Snoy et d'Oppuers (Belgium), Christian Pineau and Maurice Faure (France), Konrad Adenauer and Walter Hallstein (Federal Republic of Germany), Antonio Segni and Gaetano Martino (Italy), Joseph Bech and Lambert Schaus (Luxembourg), Joseph Luns and Johannes Linthorst-Homan (Netherlands).

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In order to understand Europe, we must first consider the manner in which we speak about Europe. According to Van Middelaar, this takes place through *three discourses*. According to the *Europe of the States*, European politics emerge through cooperation between national governments. In the *Europe of the Citizens*, the European institutions (as a component of the instruments of a European federation) play the primary role. Finally, the language of the *Europe of the Bureaus* emphasises the realisation of the European bureaucracy, as manifest in the form of directives, funds, programmes and other facilities. These three discourses are in constant conflict with one another. Given that politics is driven by discourse (even in Europe), the outcome of such conflict is anything but neutral. According to Van Middelaar, however, these discourses do not tell the whole story. They have no concept of ‘the actual historicity of politics’ (29). Unexpected events transverse and interrupt them. Although the three discourses are ‘historical’ (in the sense that they are oriented towards the past, future and present, respectively), they are not resistant to time nor, more accurately, to the facts that accompany time. Van Middelaar proposes that the past, present and future must therefore be connected to one another, as ‘only then can one do justice to both discontinuities and continuities’ (30).

#### Mapping Europe’s intermediate sphere of Member States

By this route (which was actually a detour, as it was not entirely necessary for the rest of Van Middelaar’s own discourse, which thereafter makes only sporadic reference to the three discourses), the author arrives at the true heart of his story: the *three spheres*. These are the three spheres within which European states have organised. ‘Each sphere has its own rules of movement and order’ (32) and its own public. These three spheres are not separate, however; they enclose one another. The outermost sphere is that of the *States* (plural). States are sovereign, *bounded*, act in their own interest and organise themselves in relation to one another in a permanent quest for a balance of power. This is the classic domain of international relations or, from the point of view of the states involved, foreign affairs. The innermost sphere is that of the *Community* (singular). This is the sphere of voluntary cooperation and integration based on treaties. Here, relations between states are driven by an orientation towards ‘the European project’. The third (intermediate) sphere is that of the *Member States*. This is the sphere within which states attempt to reconcile their sovereignty with membership of an integration project that undermines this sovereignty. This is the space of ‘give and take’, of common interest. Sometimes, the overlap with the outermost sphere is greater; at other times, with the innermost sphere. Member states, however, always operate in the intermediate sphere. According to Van Middelaar, the specificity of this intermediate sphere is manifested in the abovementioned ‘passages’.

The insight that European integration consists not only of states and common institutions is nothing new. In my opinion, the earlier political-theoretic terminology Van Middelaar adopts in this respect is indeed new, however. Describing European politics as a process that takes place primarily in this intermediate sphere meshes seamlessly with recent insights from the field of political science and, more specifically, EU studies. Van Middelaar is familiar with this discipline, making explicit reference to it (albeit not always in glowing terms) when discussing the combined forms of the three discourses. In supranationalism, the discourses of offices and citizens are brought together; intergovernmentalism refers to the discourses of offices and states; while constitutionalism combines the discourses of states and citizens. Van Middelaar does not systematically apply this or other theories (as is normally the case in political science); conceptualisations, hypotheses and case selections included. In this way, the book is not political science *stricto sensu*. Neither does he relate these theories to the three spheres – although he would have been perfectly capable of completing such an exercise. For example, *governance* (which appears on page 25) and *multi-level* theories offer frameworks within which the intermediate sphere can be analysed, both in proximity to and distinct from the innermost and outermost spheres. The three-way division emphasising the intermediate sphere is thus not new. What is new is that Van Middelaar does not restrict his exegesis on the intermediate sphere to political Europe as it currently exists (as political scientists do). Instead, he engages in an active search (after the fact, as he is applying recent insights) for the intermediate sphere in the history of the emergence of this political Europe. In this quest, in this literature, in his emphasis on the importance of the intermediate sphere, Van Middelaar clearly distinguishes himself from average historians and their classic books about the history of the European integration process.

The intermediate sphere, ‘the most prominent source and carrier of European politics’ (39), therefore also demands the leading role in the book. In which of the passages can this intermediate sphere be observed? These are certainly not many (but nonetheless, more than one, as the title of the book erroneously implies): according to Van Middelaar, there are seven, ranging from the Schuman Plan to the Dutch and the French, who rejected the constitutional treaty by referendum (discussed throughout, 499-500). The presence of the Schuman Plan on the list reveals very little. History has yet to show whether those who voted ‘no’ in 2005 also left a lasting impression on political Europe. To brand this as a new, definitive passage at this early stage seems somewhat premature (even more so, given that all the other passages revealed their true value only many years after the events concerned – a detail Van Middelaar convincingly negates). The passages that are not as old as the Schuman Plan, but predate the 2005 referenda, are of much more interest to the reader. After all, these events are less well-known, but nonetheless have set out the markers for the future. Van Middelaar demonstrates his artanship in

the multi-faceted and in-depth analysis of each of these passages. He provides the reader with an alternative perspective on history; a perspective that is hard to resist.

Let us, for instance, consider the Luxembourg Compromise of 1966 (86-108). This famous compromise, which (in the classic reading) offers no solution (*'agreement to disagree'*), is not only a conflict between two archetypes (De Gaulle and Hallstein) or a collision between two visions of the future of Europe. By creating the intermediate sphere between institutions and the state – a space within which a political Europe can be realised – it is also (and, according to Van Middelaar, primarily) an agreement in which Member States are protected against the will of the majority and the veto of a single Member State. Van Middelaar further argues that political Europe can continue to exist, not despite but because of the renunciation of both majority decisions and unanimity. The development of the Council of the European Union as a fully-fledged institution of the *Community of Member States* (which was not provided in the Schuman Plan) has provided an abundance of evidence to support this claim. In addition to becoming the mouthpiece of Europe (99), this body gave rise to the European Council, which subsequently became the motor of Europe. Each of these developments came at the cost of the European Commission. Along the way, the innermost sphere (*Community*) was overtaken by the outermost sphere (*states*), with the creation of a separate intermediate sphere (*Member States*) as the result.

### Explaining Europe with(out) theory

In sketching this and other passages, Van Middelaar spans the gap between political theory, law and history. The book therefore offers more than merely a summary of names, dates and facts. The *other* story is primarily the story of the author and the disciplines in which he is at ease. Political science is not one of them. Although the author is aware of and uses political science, he does not always integrate this, either explicitly or systematically. This is astonishing, as the intention of the book – to explain Europe as it is, as it works and as it does not work, with major roles for a variety of actors (and thus not only the Community institutions and/or the states), albeit through the detour of the past – is absolutely relevant to political science. This is also unfortunate, as the inclusion of political science could have made the book even richer and more multi-faceted. For example, consider the work of Simon Hix (*The Political System of the European Union* (Basingstoke etc. 2005)), who analyses the EU as a *political system*. This work pays considerable attention to such matters as strategic, anticipatory behaviour – behaviour that can explain why the formal transition from unanimity to majority actually resulted in consensus decisions. At the same time, the lack of an explicit and systematic political science framework makes Van Middelaar's work provocative for political scientists:

their challenge then consists of discovering the points of cross-reference with their own discipline.

More generally, the author takes a critical stance against plain and simple theory development. This also seems neither completely justified, nor consistent. In his work, Van Middelaar makes copious use of abstract concepts and ideas to order, distinguish and explain the historicity of political Europe. At the same time, his words are unilaterally positive with regard to experience, events, perception and personal involvement (as well as the value thereof), while remaining extremely critical with regard to theory development. Although both obviously have shortcomings, it may be wrong to set up a pure opposition in this context. (As early as page 20, Van Middelaar speaks of ‘The demand of the discipline’. A more appropriate phrase may have been ‘The temptation of the discipline’.) The book itself is the best proof of the combination of theory and ‘the role of events’ (29). Excessive receptiveness to events (428) brings a number of risks. In most cases, Van Middelaar avoids the trap of the anecdotal and the particular. Moreover, he refers the reader to the major potential of minor details (as with the general mood regarding the initiation of an IGC at the European Council of Milan (148 ff.)). Nevertheless, the attempt to explain the political Europe of today according to passages from the past *with the benefit of hindsight* indeed sets this trap. For example, the reader learns essentially nothing about the European Defence Community (EDC), even though it is also a passage that does not deserve to be relegated to the category of failures in the classic history of European unification.

### **Struggling with today’s Europe**

The book’s conceptual framework (i.e. the three spheres, particularly the intermediate sphere of the Member States) is applied and elaborated consistently. This is evident from the very beginning of the book, for example in the exposition of the transition between the spheres (47 ff.). Such attention enhances the book’s clarity and logic. The choice to focus on the Member States is obviously not only clarifying; this approach also encloses the role of other, non-state actors and institutions *within* the various Member States. Although Van Middelaar appears to be aware of this (see the comment above with regard to *governance*), the reader learns nothing about partisan politics (and thus about the role or absence of political parties). As the founder of neo-functionalism, Ernst Haas can count on little sympathy from the author with regard to his plea for increased attention to the study of *transnational* (and thus not *supranational*) partisan politics as an important perspective from which to analyse the development of Europe as a political system. The author also does not consider the *freedom* of the actor – states included – to make political choices. This freedom is nonetheless an important resource, and the author

uses it to conclude his book. The rulings by the European Court of Justice cited by Van Middelaar could obviously have been different. Or De Gaulle could have chosen not to initiate or continue his empty-chair politics. The historicity of political Europe is not determined by *events* alone (whether coincidental or non-coincidental); by choosing whether to act upon opportunities that may arise, actors also generate ‘coincidental’ behaviour, behaviour that might have far-reaching consequences. Those responsible for shaping the details of the birth of political Europe were (or are) neither passivists nor fatalists. On the contrary, they chose the *kairos* – the right moment to grasp and re-route in a direction advantageous to them. Emphasising the role of actors is important because organisations and institutions, states and Member States do not have the capacity to meet (or miss) dates with history (and therefore compose and colour it); in contrast, *à la limite*, people in these organisations and institutions, states and Member States do.

Van Middelaar does more than simply combine political theory, law and history. His writing is also sensitive and inspired, giving the impression that the disciplines flow into one another like streams into a wide river. The logbook (history) is presented to the reader through an open-minded perspective – the perspective of wonder (philosophy), in constant consideration of the way in which reality exists on paper (law) – as well as its negation. (Here, political science should find its place.) Unlike a multitude of historians, he does not lose sight of the big picture. He achieves this by emphasising the factor of time and the perception of or experience of time (8). His toolkit contains an abundance of metaphors and rich, illustrious language that sheds new light on such classic concepts as representation, unanimity and the right to veto. He knows both the classics and the *petites histoires* of European history. He refrains from answering the recurring and often sterile question of ‘*Quo vadis, Europa?*’ (‘Where are you going, Europe?’). Instead, he chooses to ask, ‘*Unde venis?*’ (‘From where have you come?’), 30). His work, however, only gives the appearance of charting the past. Van Middelaar’s book is primarily about the Europe of today. This volume of more than 500 pages (including a 70-page reading guide, which is quite useful to the reader) is highly recommended for any reader who wishes to know more about the history of the European integration process. The author achieves his ambition: to do more than simply tell the story of the birth of political Europe in another way, but to ‘tell another story about the birth of political Europe’. This book is therefore worthy of broad distribution, including translation into English. ◀

## DISCUSSIEDOSSIER

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# Time, Fortuna and Policy – or How to Understand European Integration?

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*De passage naar Europa* [The Passage to Europe] is an interesting book – creative, original and readable, but for a doctoral dissertation it is also remarkably devoid of theory. Van Middelaar introduces various interesting notions and ideas (European ‘discourses’, ‘policy spheres’ and ‘zones of interactions’), but these remain ambiguous, and therefore rather noncommittal. The book stands out for its interpretative richness, its analytical sensitivity and its imaginative prose. It lacks an overall theoretical framework, however. It fails to link up with the wider academic debate on European integration.

‘The EU’s greatest tactical advantage is that it is, in a word, so *boring*’, writes Andrew Moravcsik regarding the apparent ease with which the Member States of the European Union agreed on an alternative to the Constitutional Treaty following its rejection by the French and Dutch electorates, just a few years previously.<sup>1</sup> What goes for the European Union, also goes for much of the literature on European integration: as empirically rich and theoretically innovative as it might occasionally be, it is rarely exciting or particularly entertaining. Generally, the combination of social science terminology and EU jargon does not make for very enjoyable reading. *De passage naar Europa. Geschiedenis van een begin* [The Passage to Europe. History of a Beginning]<sup>2</sup> written by Dutch historian and philosopher Luuk van Middelaar (currently adviser to Herman Van Rompuy, president of the European Council), could be mistaken as another general history of European integration, from its earliest days to the Lisbon Treaty. However, this is one thing it is not. *De Passage naar Europa* is an extraordinary book; not so much because of its empirical or theoretical content, but because of its creative structure and individual style. This *is* a sparkingly written book: creative, original and highly readable.

### Discourse, disciplines and strategies

In terms of the splitters and joiners in EU studies, Van Middelaar is firmly in the latter camp. He does not shun the broad-brush view; he seems to enjoy the big picture. If every advantage has its disadvantage, in the case of *De passage naar Europa*, the drawbacks are twofold: firstly, topping one metaphor with another, Van Middelaar is occasionally guilty of stylistical overacting. Secondly – and more importantly – the book is well-argued and structured, but lacks a consistent theoretical framework. Van Middelaar introduces a series of theoretical – or rather abstract, analytical – notions, which the reader expects will guide him through the extensive empirical analysis (covering the full five decades of European integration); only a few of these notions are systematically applied throughout the text, however.

Van Middelaar distinguishes between three European ‘discourses’: the Europe of the ‘clerks’ (or the ‘offices’, as he puts it), the Europe of the ‘states’, and the Europe of the ‘citizens’. He couples these discourses with three academic disciplines. The Europe of the offices is linked with the traditional ‘scholars of integration’: economists, political and other social scientists. This discourse is primarily driven by bureaucratic instincts. It is Van Middelaar’s variation on neo-functionalism. The discourse of the Europe of the states argues that the interests of the Member States are best served by cooperation among national governments. This is how Van Middelaar rephrases the traditional approach of intergovernmentalism: the realm of historians and specialists in International Relations. Finally, the Europe of the citizens exemplifies the ambition to transfer specific power and prerogatives from the national states to European institutions. The Europe of the citizens is still under construction, however, practically as well as theoretically. Its discourse has no clear connection with any specific academic discipline, as yet.

Van Middelaar’s extensive and rather eclectic analytical exercise (discourses linked to disciplines and mixed with theories of integration) is not systematically followed-up in the descriptive part of the book. Although Van Middelaar seems to have most affinity with the historians’ approach, his book lacks a critical evaluation of the merits of the various disciplines in understanding the mechanisms of European cooperation and integration. In the final part of the book, Van Middelaar connects these discourses with three different strategies aimed at winning over the public, to generate public legitimacy. The ‘states’ follow what he perceives as the ‘Roman approach’, i.e. the attempt to create a sense of common ‘advantage’ through concrete

1 Andrew Moravcsik, ‘What can we learn from the Collapse of the European Constitutional Project?’, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 47:2 (2006) 219-241, here 238.

2 Luuk van Middelaar, *De passage naar Europa. Geschiedenis van een begin* (Dissertatie Universiteit van Amsterdam 2009; Groningen 2009).

achievements of a material or immaterial kind: from peace to a strong currency. This clearly resonates with the pragmatic, output-oriented quality of intergovernmental cooperation. The ‘citizens’ approach focuses on the attempt to forge a sense of belonging, of togetherness, dubbed by Van Middelaar as the ‘German’ strategy of creating common bonds or partnerships (the German language has a beautiful word for this: *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, or ‘community of fate’). Finally, the European clerks, ensconced in their steel-and-glass structures in Brussels, have devised another, ‘Greek’ strategy: the ‘choir’. This aims not so much at the creation of a common identity or a clear sense of advantage or common interest, but attempts instead to generate something like a ‘common cause’ – a Union in search of a people.

### Three policy ‘spheres’

Discourses, disciplines and strategies for legitimacy seem only indirectly linked with the major analytical novelty introduced by Van Middelaar: the differentiation between three European policy ‘spheres’. The European states interact on three different levels, he argues, or within three concentric circles, each having its own ordering and moving principles. The inner sphere is the community: the institutional outcome of the 1951 Treaty Establishing the European Steel and Coal Community. The inner sphere is the European project, the Commission, the bureaucracy: the ‘Europe of the offices’. The ‘outer sphere’ is the total of all sovereign states in Europe, within and without the Union. Politics in the outer sphere is driven by national self-interest; order is (traditionally) achieved through borders and balances of power. Inter-state relations in the outer sphere may be extremely dynamic, but they are least affected by the processes of change on the European continent. Concerning European politics in this outer sphere, Van Middelaar focuses on the question of representation: who speaks on behalf of Europe? Representation, he rightly argues, gives substance (the capacity to speak and to act) to geo-political entities such as states and international organizations, including the European Union. In this respect, he argues, nothing has really changed in the outer sphere. To date, no single actor can convincingly pretend to speak on behalf of Europe. (This is Van Middelaar’s way of saying that the European Union has little foreign policy to speak of.) The French president Nicolas Sarkozy, in his capacity as President of the European Council, came closest to playing the role of a true representative of Europe – during the August 2008 Russo-Georgian war. Van Middelaar seems, however, to slightly overstate the effect of Sarkozy’s peacemaking efforts. Sarkozy’s intervention was certainly instrumental in brokering a cease-fire between the warring countries, but whether it really stopped the Russians from occupying the Georgian capital of Tbilisi seems doubtful. The voice of Europe is heard in Moscow, but only to the extent that Moscow wants to hear it.

*De passage naar Europa* is primarily concerned with the intermediate sphere of European politics: the zone between the outer (non-EU) and the inner (EU) spheres. The intermediate sphere is where national states, governments and parliaments interact with one another and with the Community institutions in Brussels. It is the political realm of the Member States, driven by the pursuit of national interest, in combination with a growing awareness of commonality, of shared aims and ambitions. Van Middelaar's analysis, imaginatively and expressively formulated, concurs with the dominant academic interpretations of European cooperation: the member states continue to be the crucial actors in the building of 'Europe'. The power for (further) reform remains with the national states, Van Middelaar stresses. He does not discuss the challenging follow-up issue of whether the Member States have actually benefited from the process of integration in terms of capabilities and legitimacy – an argument famously posited by the economic historian Alan Milward.<sup>3</sup>

European policymaking in the intermediate sphere, crucially important to the integration process, largely lacks form and structure. Van Middelaar seems rather optimistic as to whether the Lisbon Treaty will provide the structure the intermediate sphere so urgently needs. He appears to attach great relevance to the newly created position of (semi-permanent) president of the Council. It is a 'revolutionary change', he asserts. The chairman of the Council does not speak on behalf of 'Brussels'; but he or she represents the *joint* member states, as the Treaty does not permit him / her to 'exercise a national mandate' (290). This will enable the chairman, Van Middelaar expects, to more effectively represent the European Union internally and internationally. It remains to be seen how revolutionary these changes will really be. It seems that the historian Van Middelaar gets somewhat carried away by the events of his own time. In any event, his optimistic interpretation has not yet been born out by events during the early days of Van Rompuy's presidency. Very few Europeans – the Belgians excepted perhaps – feel themselves represented by the new president of the Council. And very few non-Europeans consider the president to be *the* representative of Europe. And even if other countries were to perceive Van Rompuy as Europe's representative, this would not necessarily be a good thing for the European Union. More than Van Middelaar cares to admit, the appointment of Van Rompuy (and his 'foreign minister', High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton), is typical of the type of compromises entered into in the intermediate sphere. *Die Welt* characterized the appointment of these two relatively minor politicians to such crucial (i.e. visible) EU positions as an act of European 'Selbstverzwergung' ('self-dwarfing', or deliberately making oneself into a

3 Alan Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation State* (Berkeley, Cal. 1992).

dwarf).<sup>4</sup> As yet, it seems that the presidency has added another institution to the intermediate sphere of European politics, thereby creating less, rather than more, substance and structure. Being himself an adviser to Van Rompuy, Van Middelaar is however in a unique position to prove himself right, and to give greater import to his own optimistic prophecy.

### Time and *fortuna*

*De passage naar Europa* consists of three parts, all of which focus on the dynamics of European integration, and more in particular on the relations (in terms of power, influence, decision-making capacity) between Member States themselves, as well as between Member States and the ‘inner circle’, i.e. Brussels. Although Van Middelaar’s analysis largely concurs with the intergovernmental approach to European integration research, he seems to carefully avoid any explicit theoretical position. *De passage naar Europa* is analytically rich and creative: but for a doctoral dissertation – or for any academic study of the European integration process for that matter – the book is remarkably a-theoretical. This is particularly notable in the second part on the book, on the Union’s external relations. Van Middelaar shows little interest in the academic debates on the nature, the role and the relevance of the European Union as an international ‘actor’. How to define the ‘power’ of the EU: hard, soft, normative? How do others perceive the Union: as an irrelevant or declining actor, a new ‘empire’, a force for good – or as a predominantly conservative, inward-looking ‘institution’? And how do these perceptions impact on the external relations of the Union?

Van Middelaar introduces two notions which seem fundamentally incompatible with any approach to political change informed by theory, namely ‘time’ and ‘*fortuna*’ (the unexpected ‘visitor at the door’) (185). Machiavelli notwithstanding, time and chance/luck/coincidence are concepts which one rarely meets in political science or other social science texts. They are inherently imprecise and disputable, and extremely difficult to apply to any structural or comparative analysis. This, however, as Van Middelaar implicitly assumes, does not make these notions any less important. There are ample reasons to accept time and coincidence as relevant aspects of the drawn-out, complicated and faltering process of European integration. Van Middelaar considers time and *fortuna* as particularly relevant in the intermediate zone of European politics, which seems very reasonable. The EU has little controlling power in an area dominated by Member States and outside of its jurisdiction. However – and this is an important issue – it seems debatable whether Eastern

4 Die Welt, November 21, 2009 (<http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article5286203/Europas-Selbstverzweigung-schockt-die-USA.html>).

enlargement, the most crucial change ‘Europe’ experienced during the post-Cold War decades, is the most evident example of either time or *fortuna*, as Van Middelaar seems to suggest.

Europe and the European Union transformed dramatically during the 1990s and 2000s, and Van Middelaar rightly stresses the importance of the unexpected and unruly as aspects of these processes of change. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the enlargement of the Union were indeed neither inevitable, nor predetermined. His assertion, however, that the Member States of the European Union dragged their feet and hesitated before finally accepting the membership of eight (and later ten) post-communist countries seems unfair and unfounded. In my interpretation, the dual processes of the EU deepening and enlarging from the early 1990s represent a rather unique example of political imagination and brinkmanship. In comparison with the extended accession trajectory of the United Kingdom (which covered almost two decades), and taking into account the basic consensus among Western European elites and populations on the principle of enlargement, as well as the far more extensive and complicated letter, spirit and practice of European integration of the 1990s, Eastern enlargement occurred at a historic speed, and surprisingly smoothly. The fall of communism may have come unexpectedly and caused a great deal of confusion and uncertainty (in other words: *fortuna* hit the continent dramatically), but given the historic dimension of the changes, the European Union acted decisively and convincingly. If politics is



mostly about how states (governments) effectively deal with the time variable, with unexpected events and uncertainties, then the enlargement strategy – which covers the outer, the inner and the intermediate spheres of European integration – may be considered a prime example, perhaps even *the* prime example, of EU Politics with a capital P.

The history of European integration ‘has been told a thousand times’ (203), and it may be considered an act of intellectual courage to add another general study to the huge pile of books and articles already published. *De passage naar Europa* is far from an average academic study of European integration. It leaves the reader (this reader in anyway) with the question of why going through a book of more than 500 pages which covers the well-known territory of European integration is such a rewarding experience. *De passage naar Europa* is empirically sound (mostly based on written sources), and theoretically meagre, but particularly strong in terms of interpretation. And it is well-written. Van Middelaar links discourse, decision-making and legitimacy in an overall analytical framework which is intellectually convincing and esthetically attractive. *De passage naar Europa* is a great read. It cannot be easy to translate Van Middelaar’s rich and creative style, but the English version of the book currently in preparation will be an important service to all those who would otherwise have missed this significant contribution to the historiography of European integration. ◀

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◀ East Berliners drive their traditional Trabant, or ‘Trabi’ cars through Checkpoint Charlie and are greeted by cheering West-Berliners.  
Picture-alliance/dpa.



# Europe without Economy

HEIN A.M. KLEMMANN

Van Middelaar has written a thesis on the political aspects of the process of European integration, focussing on the Member States, the European institutions and the European Council. In doing so, he has ignored the most successful aspect of the process of integration: the economic aspect. This is a consequence of his philosophical point of departure. According to Van Middelaar, international policy is created at the highest political level, by prime ministers and presidents sitting together in the European Council, discussing power relations, war and peace. In Europe, however, low politics has often been more important than high politics; Van Middelaar's point of departure, however, makes him blind to some of the essential aspects of the process of integration. Big business, companies, organizations of farmers or consumers, trade unions and even individual citizens have international contacts and, in democratic states, try to protect their interests by influencing the foreign policies of their countries. These influences have been essential to the development of Europe. In Van Middelaar's thesis – which promises to give us the story of the passage to Europe – this is missed out along with the most successful aspect of Europe: the process of economic integration and the role played by factors other than the highest levels of politics.

## Introduction

In 1846, Prussia had strong objections against a further increase in import tariffs on textiles. Nonetheless, Berlin hesitated to use its veto against a proposal for such an increase by other members of the *Zollverein*, the German Customs Union. Although Prussia was by far the most powerful member of this customs union, in the end it accepted the increased tariffs because, as Prussian Minister of Trade Martin von Delbruck said,

1 C.P. Kindleberger, 'The Rise of Free Trade in Western Europe, 1820-1875', *Journal of Economic History* 35 (1975) 20-55 (there 44).

2 Luuk van Middelaar, *De passage naar Europa. Geschiedenis van een begin* (Dissertatie Universiteit van Amsterdam 2009; Groningen 2009).



a compromise was 'more important than the rationally correct measures of this or that tariff'.<sup>1</sup> In his PhD thesis<sup>2</sup>, Van Middelaar describes the development of the European integration process from three different perspectives: the outer circle of the sovereign European states; the inner circle of European institutions, and the intermediate circle of the meetings of representatives of the Member States. In a long introduction (Prologue), he emphasizes that, for all members of the European Union and its predecessors, the importance of keeping the community going was reason enough to do almost anything possible to find a solution to any disagreement; if possible, without creating conflict by exercising a veto. It was not the outer circle of sovereign European states that was decisive in this attitude, nor the inner circle of European institutions, but the third circle, consisting of the meetings of representatives of the Member States, he argues. Motivated by a growing realization of shared interests and a feeling of necessity to join forces and go on together, this circle of national political leaders sitting together in regular meetings was in itself enough to keep the integration process going. Von Delbruck's remark makes clear, however, that this was not a new phenomenon. By referring to it as the intermediate circle (*tussensfeer*), however, Van Middelaar suggests that he has made a new discovery, *sui generis* to the EU's history. In fact, he has merely given a name to wider pattern that no one, either in the *Zollverein* or the European Community, wanted to risk breaching the community or in any event having to take responsibility for such a breach. Members were therefore inclined to resolve problems that would otherwise threaten the stability of the community. It became more important to reach a compromise than to achieve a particular outcome.

### High politics or economic interests

The introduction to Van Middelaar's thesis is followed by Part 1, titled – as if it were part of a book by J.R.R. Tolkien – 'The Secret of the Table'.<sup>3</sup> Here, Van Middelaar describes the intermediate circle and the role it plays. First, however, he raises the question of the origin of the state. In the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, philosophers thought a state was created by accepting the authority of a king, thereby leaving the natural situation of anarchy and violence behind. Van Middelaar sees this as important for Europe, where anarchy and violence were also the guiding principles in the

3 Chapters are titled 'At the Table', 'The Ghost', 'The Empty Chair' and even 'The Magic Spell'. The language of Van Middelaar is often artificial and sometimes extremely bombastic.

relations between the nation states, until they accepted some form of union. Here, it is essential that every decision no longer is taken unanimously – as is the case in treaties between sovereign states – but rather that majority decisions are accepted. Only then can part of the sovereignty of states be handed over to the community. Anarchy, previously limited only by the balance of power between the states, can from then on be suppressed by the community.<sup>4</sup> By expressing matters in this way, Van Middelaar makes it clear that he believes that, for every state, high politics – the politics of war and peace – is essential, far more important than anything else. The world is anarchy, with aggressive states whose tendency to attack and destroy one another can only be held in check by counterbalancing the power of one state with the power of another, or a coalition of other states. The state suppresses anarchy and violence – the natural condition of human society – between its citizens, but can only do this within, not between, states.

But the question remains whether the European integration process, although it keeps its final aims hidden in clouds of words and memoranda, is not based on quite different political principles. After the failure of European political integration in the early 1950s, it was clear that the aim was no longer to suppress anarchy between the European states by means of political integration. This had been achieved by the Pax Americana, although more friendly relations between the peoples of Europe did of course help. However, it was not the ‘high’ politics of war and peace but the ‘low’ politics of protectionism, food prices, agricultural policy, trade destruction and currency dumping that was crucial, precisely the kind of politics ignored by Van Middelaar. This kind of politics was often more important for the daily life of the citizens, and that was regulated by European co-operation. The resulting process of economic integration also had enormous implications for the high politics Van Middelaar likes so much, but rather than focussing on Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau – the philosophers of the state and its position among other states – he could better have turned to the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant and his *Zum ewigen Frieden* [*Perpetual Peace*] (1795) – but this book is not even mentioned.

Kant suggests that quite a different sphere plays a major role in international relations. When, as happened in Europe, free trade develops among a number of states, while they remain protectionist to the outside world, a strong economic block is created. New economic interests become important: those of companies profiting from the common market, or farmers getting a good price for their butter thanks to the agricultural

4 Van Middelaar uses a too literally translation of the term Balance of Power, *machtsbalans*. This should be *machtsevenwicht*.

policy, and those interested in external tariffs or in subsidies. These interest groups will lobby for friendly political relations between the members of the block, as keeping the block intact is in their interest. In democratic states – and only such states were welcome in the European community – these kinds of lobbies, from big business to farmers and trade unions, will result in interest groups with transnational relations and interwoven interests. According to Kant, some international laws and organizations, together with a republican state (a state in which the voices of the citizens are heard) and economic interdependence will at least promote peaceful international relations, if not guaranteeing these outright. According to him, low politics can influence high politics. This idea is one of the points of departure of the process of European integration, and many empirical studies prove that the idea that democracies, and particularly economic interdependence, promote peaceful relations among peoples, is more than just an over-optimistic utopian concept.<sup>5</sup>

### High ranked politicians and economic interests

As all members of the European Union and its predecessors are democracies, the citizens in these countries have a lobby, and are heard: if not in the European institutions, than at least by the governments of the Member States. It is a serious weakness in Van Middelaar's thesis that, with one exception, all the actors in his book are politicians at the highest national level, or high-ranking European officials. The one exception to this is fundamental, however, because it illustrates the weakness of his argument. In 1965, French President Charles de Gaulle – Van Middelaar refers to him as 'the General' – left the French seat in the European Council of Ministers empty after a conflict on a majority vote. As a consequence, he almost lost the French general elections because farmers – 20 percent of the electorate – as well as other economic interests made it clear that, to them, Europe was important (94). For Van Middelaar, this was a conflict of political interests between France and the other members, as well as the Community. But it could also be more trenchantly analysed as a conflict inside France between conservative elements emphasizing high politics and French sovereignty, and French economic interests, with all kinds of transnational economic interests. The French farmers and other economic interests did not want

5 See: Katherine Barbieri, 'Economic Interdependence: A Path to Peace or a Source of Interstate Conflict?', *Journal of Peace Research* 33 (1996) 29-49; Dale C. Copeland, 'Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expecta-

tion', *International Security* (20) 1996, 5-41; Paul Schroeder, 'Historical Reality'; Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (New York 1997).

to lose their subsidies, the protection of the European market and the markets themselves, that European integration offered them. Europe had a direct link, if not to the hearts of the citizens, than at least to their purses. Interest groups did not want Europe because of any political ideal, but because it gave citizens of the Member States the freedom to develop cross-border economic contacts, to trade or found subsidiaries without great bureaucratic problems; or simply because it paid subsidies. In France, not only the idea that high politics was most important and should not be handed over to anyone else, but also the idea that international economic interdependence could prevent irresponsible politicians from entering into all kind of adventures, was an old one. As early as the early 1920s, Minister of Industrial Re-construction Louis Loucheur, a French businessman who became a minister in the cabinet of George Clemenceau during World War I, wanted to create international steel and coal cartels, not only (or even in the first place) for economic reasons, but to pass control of essential basic industries from emotional nationalist political warmongers to the rational, international business community.

The first part of Van Middelaar's thesis deals with discussions and conflicts concerning the political structure of Europe, and especially conflicts surrounding the handing over of competences to the Community through the acceptance of majority decisions, but he ignores what really happened – the fact that Europe became a major economic power, attractive to participate in, even without the associated political romanticism. The second part – titled 'Changes of Fortune' – is in fact a short political history of European integration, describing the failure to create a political union. The period in which a well-established economic organization developed is seen by him as a period of waiting. Van Middelaar only becomes interested again after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Europe was confronted by new political problems. Thanks to his sources – apart from some standard works, memoirs of and interviews with politicians and officials active at the highest political levels – Van Middelaar is able to describe the most important years of European integration – the years 1958-1989 – when Europe reconstructed itself as the European Economic Community following the failure of the political union, as years of waiting. The term European Economic Community is not even used anywhere in the book. This is typical of Van Middelaar's blindness to all economic and economic-political developments.

### **Wisse Dekker and Europe 1992**

Already before the political status-quo of the cold war period collapsed, however, as early as 1985 – the year Mikhail Gorbachev became Secretary-General of the Communist Party of the USSR, although no-one could foresee

what would happen in the next few years – a conference of European industrialists agreed with a memorandum written by Wisse Dekker, CEO of the Dutch multinational Philips. This memo on further European economic integration, aimed at achieving more flexibility and creating new opportunities for European economies, which had been stagnating since the 1970s, and the lobby of the business community to implement these ideas, resulted in the reconstruction plan known as Europe 1992. This all happened before the political collapse of the Eastern part of the continent. Europe reacted in the first place to the economic stagnation, and this was done at the instigation of its business community, not of politicians or European bureaucrats. Once again, the Community proved successful in the economic sphere. Upon the political collapse of the Soviet empire, the Community reacted with new attempts at political integration; attempts that in fact failed. Although Van Middelaar fails to recognize this, it is clear that, notwithstanding the fact that Europe integrated substantial parts of the former Soviet satellite states – and even former Soviet republics – into its community, and the union now even formally co-ordinates the foreign policy of its members at essential moments (during the wars in the former Yugoslavia and when the USA wanted to start a second Gulf War), Europe was hopelessly divided. Symbolic acts of unity were the only possible response.

### Enthusiasm for Europe

In the third part, ‘The Quest for a Public’, Van Middelaar describes three ways in which any enthusiasm for Europe could be stimulated among the peoples of Europe (or the European people), and makes clear that this was hardly successful. In signalling failure, Van Middelaar shows that he is looking in the wrong places. Enthusiasm for Europe exists, but not for the Europe of obscure political structures; a parliament whose political colour is not reflected by any executive power and whose competence is unclear to almost everyone; nor for the endless discussions between Member States. Bringing undemocratic pressure to bear on countries and their populations who refused to ratify a new treaty, or just symbolically changing the treaty and then implementing it without a new consultation anyway, is the worst way to win any kind of popularity. Symbols such as the blue flag with yellow stars or the hymn from Beethoven’s ninth symphony with Friedrich von Schiller’s mystical text cannot motivate the public to ‘enter, drunk with fire’ into the European ‘sanctuary’.<sup>6</sup> The single currency the Euro, introduced in the first place for its symbolic value, but in fact a very dangerous economic

6 Wir betreten feuertrunken, Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!

experiment that had been warned against by some of the most important economists in the world, now even threatens the very aspect of Europe that the public *is* enthusiastic about: the economic aspect. It is of the greatest importance that trade flows free within Europe and that economic relations are possible with as little hindrance as possible. It is likely that such freedom stimulates economic activity within the Member States, although it is not quite clear how much trade is really created and how much is turned around from the outside world. Anyway, this least spectacular part, which ended all kinds of daily frustrations for the citizens of the European countries, which stimulates their welfare and increases their chances of living in peace on this continent, is what makes them enthusiastic. The public does not care that this is not the enthusiasm some national politicians or European bureaucrats would like to see.

### Conclusion

Van Middelaar has written a thesis on the political aspects of the process of European integration, focussing on the Member States, the European institutions and the European Council. In doing so, he has all but ignored the most successful aspect of the process of integration: the economic aspect. This is a consequence of the point of departure demanded by his political philosophy. According to Van Middelaar, international policy is created at the highest political level, by prime ministers and presidents, as a consequence of their process of integration, sitting together in the European Council. They discuss power relations, war and peace. In Europe, however, 'low' politics has often been more important than 'high' politics, but Van Middelaar's point of departure makes him blind to some of the essential aspects of the process of integration. Big business, companies, organizations of farmers or consumers, trade unions and even individual citizens have international contacts and, in democratic states, try to protect their interests by influencing the foreign policies of their countries. These influences have been essential to the development of Europe. In Van Middelaar's thesis, which promises to give us the story of the passage to Europe, this is simply missed, and with it, the most successful aspect of Europe, the process of economic integration and the role played by other factors than the highest political levels. ◀

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