

**What is Europe?**

***THE HISTORY OF  
THE IDEA OF EUROPE***

*Edited by  
Kevin Wilson &  
Jan van der Dussen*



**ROUTLEDGE**

# *THE HISTORY OF THE IDEA OF EUROPE*

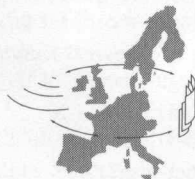
*Contributors*

*Pim den Boer • Peter Bugge • Ole Wæver*

*Edited by Kevin Wilson and Jan van der Dussen*



JOU



The Open University, Open universiteit, Jutland Open University, European Association of Distance Teaching Universities



London and New York

## ***A note for the general reader***

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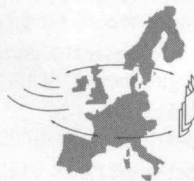
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# **General preface to 'What is Europe?'**

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*Kevin Wilson, Chair of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) Humanities Programme Committee*

The four books in the *What is Europe?* series are the product of a collaborative enterprise under the direction of the Humanities Programme Committee of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU). The universities involved in the project are:

- The Open universiteit, The Netherlands
- Jysk Åbent Universitet (the Jutland Open University)
- The Deutsches Institut für Fernstudien an der Universität Tübingen
- The Centre d'Analyse des Savoirs Contemporains at the Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg on behalf of the Fédération Interuniversitaire de l'Enseignement à Distance
- The UK Open University

The Humanities Programme Committee of the EADTU was established in late 1988 with a brief to promote joint course development. The four books in this series were designed as the academic core of its first course which was first presented by the Open University in 1993. For this new edition, the course team have revised and updated the original materials so that they can be made available to students of European Studies at universities and colleges not involved in the EADTU programme in Europe, the United States and beyond.

Starting to plan a course on Europe in the heady year of 1989 was both a challenge and an opportunity. With Europe in a state of flux, we quickly rejected as too narrow the idea of a course focused only on the European Community. We dismissed just as quickly the idea of a European history course, not on grounds of irrelevance, but because numerous such courses were already available. Instead we agreed to write a course on European identity in its various historical, cultural, social, political and economic aspects. This topic was at the centre of the debate on Europe, called for a wide-ranging approach across academic boundaries and stood to benefit from the different national perspectives that could be harnessed to the project.

The course has four objectives:

- 1 To provide a context for the understanding of contemporary European developments through a consideration of the history of the idea of Europe.
- 2 To consider aspects of European cultural diversity through investigations into language, education, mass-media and everyday culture.

- 3 To examine the theory, function and practice of democracy as, arguably, fundamental components of European culture.
- 4 To locate Europe as a political and economic entity in a context of global change.

These objectives – and the European nature of the course – are reflected in the titles and provenance of the respective books:

- 1 *The History of the Idea of Europe* is a Dutch–Danish collaboration.
- 2 *Aspects of European Cultural Diversity* emanates from Germany, though one of the authors is British.
- 3 *European Democratic Culture* is a French product, though there are Italian, German and British, as well as French, contributors to the book.
- 4 *Europe and the Wider World* comes from the UK.

We have framed the title of the series as a question – *What is Europe?* – yet we are under no illusion that there is a simple, straightforward answer, or even a series of agreed definitions that satisfy. Nor are we making the assumption that Europe is stamped with a unique identity, or that it has a manifest destiny, or that a singular meaning is revealed in its history.

We follow in the footsteps of Hugh Seton-Watson, who tells us that ‘the word “Europe” has been used and misused, interpreted and misinterpreted in as many different meanings as almost any word in any language. There have been and are many Europes...’<sup>1</sup> The question, then, is a provocative device to set you thinking, and to prompt further questions. Instead of rushing into definitions we have approached the topic from a number of points of view and from the standpoint of various methodologies, raising questions as we go about how ‘Europe’ has been conceptualized, organized, structured and utilized, both in the past and in the present. The contributors to this series do not have any particular axes to grind. The essays are not propaganda pieces for a ‘European spirit’, cultural unity, a single market, political union, or any other European project. On the contrary, they are scholarly explorations designed to enhance our understanding of the many facets of European identity.

So, the essays cover a wide canvas. They deal with various ideas of Europe in the past and present; with different aspects of everyday life and associated tensions making for cultural uniformity or accentuating cultural difference; with a political culture founded on public opinion, law and democracy; and with Europe’s relationship with the United States, Russia and the developing countries and with its place in the world economy.

The series as a whole presents Europe as a work in progress rather than a finished product, a construction yard rather than a museum. As a project Europe can never be completed. It will always need to be re-made, emancipated from the past, re-invented.

<sup>1</sup> SETON-WATSON, H. (1985) ‘What is Europe, where is Europe?: from mystique to politique’, *Encounter*, July/August, vol. LX, No. 2, p. 9.



# Introduction to Book 1

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The Europe of the 1990s has become a major focus of public discourse. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union has opened up the possibilities of re-connecting western and eastern Europe; and the quickening of integration processes within the European Community/Union has raised the prospects of economic, monetary and political union. What kind of Europe are we building and why? How does this new Europe relate to the patterns and experiences of European history? Are there distinctive European values? Is there a coherent, recognisable European identity? What do Europe and being European mean? These issues are not new but, since they are now being variously addressed by politicians, journalists and academics – both inside and outside Europe – they have a sharp contemporary relevance.

Accordingly, there is a strong inclination to re-examine the history of Europe and to search for a European idea in history. The quest is not an easy one. Borders have fluctuated, institutions have waxed and waned, nations have formed, disappeared, re-formed. There is even a temptation to presume that the purpose of history has been for East and West to come together in an EC-like Greater Europe where self-satisfaction, democracy and progress rule, although, as you will see, such presumptions are not espoused by the authors of Book 1.

Investigations into the meaning of Europe, into European values, into European identity inevitably have raised – and continue to pose – a number of conflicting questions. Does the European ‘project’, as represented by the European Union, ultimately rest on a sufficiency of shared values, culture and history? Does this commonality explain why we have come so far; is it a precondition for the stability of a European community that it is rooted in a cultural unity, in a strong sense of ‘European-ness’? Or is the European project destined to come to grief on the rocks of the nation-states? Is the mainspring of Europeanness the very diversity of national and regional cultures and, if so, is not the pursuit of *one* European identity *per se* a chimera? Are shared values mainly to be found at the level of political principles – the state under the rule of law, democracy, human rights – and not in political and social practices? Does the making of Europe depend on finding solutions to certain inherited problems – the problem of nationalism for example? Or can the European Union, as the latest manifestation of a European project, be driven by a desire to build a new Europe, the legitimacy of which is geared to the future and not to the past? Such questions point to sharply contrasting notions of what Europe represents but, irrespective of the answers, they rest on the assumption that the idea of Europe is embedded in a mix of three related concepts:

- There *is* something called ‘Europe’ (some kind of European ‘specification’).
- Europeans *hold* a perception of themselves as being European (they have something of a European ‘self-identity’).
- History *reveals* schemes for European unity (politics *for* and *in the name of* ‘Europe’).

The essays in this book recognize but do not draw their inspiration from such positive assumptions. Instead the authors set out to explore the history of the idea of Europe within a welter of political, social and cultural processes and, in so doing, inevitably raise questions that cross the boundaries of history, culture and politics.

In the first essay Pim den Boer argues that a distinct, self-reflective idea of a Europe with a history and meaning of its own only emerges with the French Revolution. Before the French Revolution the term Europe had been utilized as a geographical concept and had been associated with the concept of liberty in the time of the ancient Greeks, with Christendom in the fifteenth century, with balance-of-power politics from the sixteenth century and with civilization in the eighteenth century. But these notions are not perceived as constants. Rather they are fragments that enter and then leave the dominant discourse on Europe at various historical stages. After the French Revolution and its associated turbulence and change, it became normal to look historically at phenomena and concepts as the products of historical development. An historical vision was used both to defend traditional European values and the *status quo* and to encourage new prospects for Europe and hence promote change. Pim den Boer contends, therefore, that the emergence of a strong concept of Europe in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century is linked to changes in the concept of history and in the ideas of culture and civilization. He also indicates that these ideas became increasingly active within the context of various nationalisms.

The culture and civilization issue is pursued by Peter Bugge in his consideration of the idea of Europe between 1914 and 1945. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War and the Russian revolution, Europe appeared to be a culture in crisis; old values disintegrated and politics and society seemed to rest on shifting foundations. In this climate intellectuals projected different visions of a new Europe though the nationalism of old Europe still dominated political thinking. Bugge organizes his essay around the notions of *perceptions* of Europe and *projects* for Europe – between how Europe was seen, described and analysed on the one hand and how, even in a period when the nation-state stood supreme, there were a number of plans and schemes for the organization of the continent prior to Hitler's attempt to hijack Europe in the name of Fascist Germany.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, with nationalism generally discredited and with the USA and USSR dominating the political and ideological scene, moves were made in the direction of economic and political co-operation in Western Europe. In considering the idea of Europe since 1945 Ole Wæver builds his argument on the *fusion* between perceptions of Europe and projects for Europe. The fundamental difference from the inter-war period is that, post-1945, there is now a process of European integration and the term 'project' means participating in this process rather than just proclaiming idealistic schemes for Europe. Wæver approaches the idea of Europe from the perspective of international politics and international relations. This is not to say that he ignores history but essentially he is concerned with political action and his approach imparts a strategic dimension to the concept of Europe. Wæver examines various political constellations – EC,

nation-states, regions – in contemporary Europe, explores the issue of European identity and assesses the contemporary relevance of the European idea.

Taken together the three essays in the book range over the idea of Europe from the politics of ancient Greece to contemporary plans for economic and political union. Over time the concept of Europe can be said to have evolved at two levels and around two broad themes: on the one hand Europe and its *others* with Asians, Turks, Russians and Americans variously functioning as an antithesis (external discriminators); and on the other Europe as a *commonwealth of nations*, a Europe of shared political, social and religious values, of an affinity in diversity constituting a synthesis (internal characteristics). As we move towards the twenty-first century the past identifications of Europe – the geographical definition, the equation with political freedom, the association with Christendom, the connection with culture and civilization, all still have a contemporary relevance.

In general discussion, the description of Europe perhaps most in vogue is that of ‘unity in diversity’. Europe is presented as the continent that never bowed to a single ruler, that never made culture uniform, that never settled for final truths, that kept questioning, debating, remaining self-critical thereby generating a unique dynamism. The paradox of the underlying reality of Europe containing no singular European essence is not lost on the authors of this book. The exploration into the history of the idea of Europe is both a fascinating and frustrating enterprise. The present book reveals that there is a rich reservoir of ideas linked to Europe but it also illustrates that there is no stable core, no fixed identity, no final answer.