

Adrien Candiard ~ De islam begrijpen - Of beter gezegd, waarom we er niets van begrijpen



Adrien Candiard - Ills.
Joseph Sassoon Seman

'*De Islam begrijpen*' is gebaseerd op Adrien Candiards lezing in de basiliek van Sint-Clothilde in Parijs op 19 november 2015. Hij hield zijn lezing vlak na de zes terroristische aanslagen van 13 november (o.a. in de Bataclan) waarbij 130 mensen omkwamen.

Het is 'klaarblijkelijk onvoldoende aan islamitische autoriteiten te vragen dat ze via protestborden 'not in my name' afstand nemen van terroristen.' Candiard constateert dat we dringend behoefte hebben aan de theologie, een theologie die een islam kan aanreiken die vrede heeft gesloten met zijn traditie, evenals met de vragen van deze tijd. Hierbij voldoet het niet een gematigde islam aan te bieden tegenover het extremisme. Candiard gelooft dat er 'in de islamitische traditie een diepere en authentiekere radicaliteit bestaat die een spirituele radicaliteit kan worden, een zoektocht naar God in zichzelf, de ontmoeting met God, meer in het persoonlijke gebed dan in de zelfmoordaanslag. Dat zou waardering afdwingen, het zou een manier zijn de bloedende conflicten die de wereld verscheuren te verlaten.' Het woord is aan de moslims zelf, 'het is aan de profeten om erover te

praten, en niet aan de leraren.'

Candiard stelt dat de tragische actualiteit en de verregaande veranderingen binnen onze samenleving vaak wijzen in de richting van de islam, waarbij we worden overspoeld met informatie en meningen. Maar hoe kunnen we het 'ware gezicht' van de islam achterhalen? Is het lezen van de koran genoeg? Verrijkt of belaagt deze godsdienst met een miljard gelovigen onze levenswijze en de wereldvrede? We kunnen de islam alleen begrijpen als we accepteren dat er grote interne verschillen bestaan. De islam is divers, je moet spreken over islam in meervoud, de essentie van dé islam bestaat niet.

Het geloof dat moslims alleen maar moslim zijn, dat hun religieuze identiteit al het andere zou bepalen, dat de islam een totale godsdienst is die alle aspecten van het leven omvat, is niet juist.

De islam kent een grote diversiteit, zowel in cultureel als theologisch opzicht. Een van de belangrijkste schisma's is die tussen de soennieten en sjiieten.

De sjiieten zijn onderling verdeeld. Wat de ontelbare groepen bindt is het conflict met het soennisme. Ook het soennisme kent verschillende stromingen, zoals de wahabieten van Saoedi-Arabië en de machtige soefi-broederschappen van Senegal. Stromingen die onderling nauwelijks raakvlakken kennen.

De overeenkomst tussen alle moslims is het geloof in één God, dat Mohammed de profeet is, dat de koran een getuigenis is van de wil van God voor de mensen, dat ons een goddelijk oordeel wacht op de laatste dag, en het geloof in engelen. Moslims lezen de koran als poëzie: de woorden zijn uniek, onvervangbaar. De islam bestaat ook uit enige duizenden Hadith, anekdotes over vrijwel alle denkbare onderwerpen. In de praktijk is de islam vooral Hadith, en die kent ook weer verschillende tradities en interpretaties.

Candiard ziet de koran niet als een gewelddadige tekst, maar de teksten kunnen wel als zodanig worden geïnterpreteerd. De koran is mysterieus. De tekst heeft geen letterlijke betekenis en biedt derhalve ruimte voor verschillende interpretaties.

Candiard stelt de vraag of de sharia inzicht kan geven van wat de islam is. In het Arabisch wijst het op de wil van God, op Gods geboden. Een moslim zal altijd voor de sharia zijn, maar het betekent nog niet dat hij voor het afhakken van handen is. De sharia is niet te vergelijken met een wetboek van strafrecht of burgerlijk

wetboek, er bestaat geen unieke algemeen aanvaarde versie. Het gaat om recht dat uit jurisprudentie is ontstaan. De sharia is zowel een geheel van interpretatie procedures van het islamitisch recht als de regels zelf.

Vaak wordt onderscheid gemaakt tussen islam en islamisme; islam is vredelievend, tolerant en islamisme is het tegendeel. Maar het islamisme is een geconstrueerde realiteit, een academisch concept, een term die westerse onderzoekers hebben bedacht voor politiek gestructureerde organisaties die de macht willen grijpen en een regime willen instellen dat als islamitisch wordt beschouwd, zoals bijvoorbeeld het Moslimbroederschap (opgericht in 1928 in Egypte) of de Jamat-e-Islami van Maududi (gesticht in 1941 in India).

De islam is een diversiteit die naar eenheid verlangt, dat is de oorzaak van de huidige crisis die de islam verscheurt. Het betreft in de eerste plaats een interne crisis: de oppositie tussen soennieten en sjiieten en ook binnen het soennisme wordt een harde strijd gevoerd om de definitie van orthodoxie. Dit conflict is niet zo zichtbaar in Europa en er wordt nauwelijks aandacht aan besteed. Sjiieten zijn niet echt aanwezig in Europa in tegenstelling tot Soennieten, maar ze vertegenwoordigen wel zo'n 15 procent van de moslims, hoofdzakelijk in Iran en in het Nabije Oosten, ze hebben een meerderheid in Irak.

Het grote conflict tussen de twee grote vijanden Saoedi-Arabië en Iran is onderdeel van geloofsrichtingen of -gemeenschappen. De tegenstelling tussen soennieten en sjiieten kleurt alle oorlogen in de regio. Zo heeft het succes van IS in Irak te maken met het gemarginaliseerde gevoel van de soennieten uit het noorden (de staat wordt door sjiieten gecontroleerd). De sjiitische wereld is nog steeds georganiseerd rond staatkundige eenheden en heeft nog een zekere stabiliteit, terwijl de soennitische wereld meer dan ooit in losse delen is uiteengevallen. Het Westen begrijpt dat conflict niet, we denken vanuit het Verlichtingsmodel, denken dat traditie ouderwets is en dat de moderniteit open en rationeel is, en dat heeft niets met de huidige situatie te maken. Het gaat nu om de definitie van de soennitische islamitische orthodoxie, aldus Candiard.



Je hebt de traditionele Soennitische islam, de rijks-islam, de islam die zich heeft ontwikkeld binnen de Arabische en Ottomaanse rijken en daar diende als religieuze, wetgevende en spirituele structuur. De rijks-islam wordt vooral als referentiepunt gebruikt door hen die willen aantonen dat de islam vredelievend is. In de 19e eeuw toen het Westen superieur werd, heeft men binnen de islamitische wereld deze islam ervan beschuldigd de oorzaak te zijn van de decadentie. Er ontstonden hervormingsbewegingen die de islam wilden moderniseren, door het seculier en westers te maken, of te moderniseren door terug te gaan naar de

bron als mogelijke vernieuwing. In die laatste beweging kwam het salafisme op aan het eind van de 19de eeuw. Onder invloed van het wahabisme, met een zeer strikte interpretatie van de goddelijke uniciteit, stichtten zij in 1932 het huidige Saoedi-Arabië. Zij stelden propaganda-organisaties in, erop gericht om moslims uit de hele wereld te bekeren tot de salafistische opvattingen van de islam. Het leven van alle mensen moet worden geregeld door religieuze voorschriften. Ze zijn overtuigd van een letterlijke opvatting van de koran en verbieden interpretatie van de teksten. Het is sektarisch en beveelt onderwerping aan de autoriteit aan. De terroristische acties komen voor uit de salafistische ideologie.

De crisis in de islam gaat over het model van de islam tegen de achtergrond van de klassieke islam en het salafisme, twee heel verschillende en concurrerende manieren om islamitisch te leven. De invloed van het salafisme breidt zich uit, in de Arabische wereld en in Europa.

De autoritaire excessen van de Turkse machthebbers, de structurele belemmeringen in Libanon en de kwetsbaarheid uit de Tunesische ervaringen legitimeert de vraag of de islam wel verenigbaar is met de democratie, aldus Candiard. De islam als politieke religie kan geen ruimte geven aan democratisch functioneren. 'De landen met een islamitische cultuur kunnen alleen een politieke moderniteit bereiken ten koste van een uitgebreide secularisering waarbij de grondbeginselen zelf van hun godsdienst worden afgewezen. Men moet eerst erkennen dat de koran nauwelijks iets te zeggen heeft over de politieke organisatie. Een strijd tussen de feitelijke autoriteiten of de autoriteiten die legitiem worden geacht omdat de goddelijke openbaring hen heeft aangesteld.'

Het kalifaat dat de politieke en religieuze macht verenigt zoals bij IS, komt niet overeen met de historische en traditionele praktijk van de islamitische samenlevingen: de islam leidt niet noodzakelijk tot het kalifaat, aldus Candiard. De overgrote meerderheid van de islamitische landen heeft de burgerlijke wetgeving aangenomen, mogelijk geïnspireerd door religieuze voorschriften maar is ingesteld na parlementaire stemming of andere niet-religieuze procedures.

Ook stelt Candiard de vraag of je de koran mag interpreteren, een historisch-kritische studie zodat de islam toegang kan krijgen tot de moderniteit. Het betreft een onrealistische eis, aldus de auteur, want het impliceert dat je van hen eist de islam af te wijzen. Maar het eeuwige woord van god is ook geen tijdloze tekst: ze zijn onder speciale omstandigheden ontstaan, uit te leggen vanuit zijn context.

Het is een illusie dat er een objectieve letterlijke betekenis bestaat, aldus Candiard. De rede kan niet de pretentie hebben de tekst te interpreteren want ze is minder zeker of vast dan de tekst. Doen als of je van de rede een interpretatie instrument kunt maken is hetzelfde als deze tot maatstaf maken van de waarheid, alsof deze met meer zekerheid kan beoordelen wat waar is.

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Linda Bouws - St. Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten

Gerben Bakker & Gert Jan Geling

~ Over politieke correctheid



Ills. Joseph Sassoon Semah

Gerben Bakker en Gert Jan Geling onderzoeken in *'Over politieke correctheid'* de historische ontwikkeling van politieke correctheid, haar morele grondslag (waarbij de ideeën van Hannah Arendt centraal staan), de rol die het speelt in onze tijd in discussies tussen de 'bestuurlijke kaste' en de 'verontwaardigde burger' en wat de concrete gevolgen zijn van politieke correctheid. Ze constateren dat politieke correctheid niet onschuldig is, het bedreigt vrijheid van meningsuiting, het leidt tot (zelf)censuur en kan zelfs de veiligheid in gevaar brengen. Hoeveel politieke correctheid kan de maatschappij verdragen? Een pleidooi voor de legitimiteit van de westerse traditie en cultuur.

In de negentiger jaren stond 'politieke correctheid gelijk' aan de angst van bestuurders om minderheden te kwetsen, nu naar een doorgeslagen progressief moralisme en een uit Amerika overgewaaid 'identity politics'. Nederland is verschoven van een progressieve, antiautoritaire cultuur naar een sfeer waarin we 'benoemen', in hokjes stoppen. Dat betekent een verschraving van het politieke denken, zoals Hannah Arendt dat beschrijft: het bespiegelen van het eigen denken aan andere perspectieven, een 'enlarged mentality', een veel perspectivische engagement en zo te komen tot een weloverwogen oordeel.

Ook internet heeft een grote impact op de samenleving, het belooft veel vrijheid, een groot 'vrijgevochten politiek potentieel', maar in de praktijk is er sprake van

steeds meer gedragssturing. Mensen worden via algoritmes bevestigd in hun (politieke) keuzes. Internet is steeds meer in handen van kapitalistische ondernemingen in Silicon Valley, die de regie willen houden op de inhoud omdat ze niet aansprakelijk willen zijn voor incorrecte info, 'hate incitement' of het verspreiden van terroristische propaganda en dat heeft consequenties voor het bestaan van politieke correctheid, aldus Bakker en Geling. Later in het boek betogen de auteurs dat de absolute pluraliteit van politieke meningen op internet wél zijn gerealiseerd maar (nog) niet conform Arendts 'enlarged mentality'. In plaats daarvan lijkt het politieke inlevingsvermogen dat benodigd is ontaard in een digitale oorlog van allen tegen allen, waarin alle feitelijkheid dreigt te sneuvelen.

Bij politieke correctheid staan collectieve belangen op het spel, aldus de auteurs, waarbij zij twee vormen van politieke correctheid onderscheiden. Taal is hierbij zowel het instrument van de waarheid en smeerolie.

De dogmatische politieke correctheid heeft het doel is de 'foute' mening tot zwijgen te brengen. Zij is vooral ideologisch en moralistisch, en verdeelt de wereld in vijanden en slachtoffers. Dogmatisch politiek correcte mensen bevinden zich op 'moral high ground'.

De andere vorm van politieke correctheid is conformistisch, waarbij het aanpassen aan de dominante overtuiging, en het tot zwijgen brengen van de foute mening het doel is. Ook bij conformistisch politieke correctheid is taal het middel om welgevallig gedrag te tonen: mensen zeggen wat ze behoren te zeggen, in plaats wat ze denken.

Politieke correctheid is verbonden aan verschuivende waardenperspectieven. De Nederlandse geschiedenis omtrent politieke correctheid is verweven met een verjarende progressieve ideologie, die is ontstaan rondom tolerantie, multiculturalisme, waarbij de islam specifiek typerend is voor de Nederlandse situatie. De discussies zijn vaak gericht op het verbieden van kwetsende taal of cultuuruitingen. Zo ontstaat een kloof in het islamdebat over de manier waarop in de maatschappij wordt gedacht over de islam, en de manier waarop er in de samenleving over wordt gedacht.

De uit Amerika overgewaaide 'identity politics' leidt tot een ideologische clash tussen de social-justice-beweging, die de westerse erfzonden definitief van zich af willen afschudden, en de identitaire respons die juist kiest voor een nieuwe conservatieve koers.

Diversiteit, kunst en ook gender zijn omgeven van politieke correctheid. Diversiteit op de universiteit wordt vooral uitgelegd als culturele diversiteit, en geheel niet aan diversiteit aan ideeën. Als gevolg van een conformistische politieke correcte houding wordt dat vaak niet gerealiseerd.

Ook een symbolische waarheid bestaat, de symbolische ordening die de mens toekent aan de wereld. Nu is bijvoorbeeld sprake van nieuwe immoraliteiten van historische kunst, waarbij de taboeïsering van symbolische uitingen gepaard gaat met een zeker geweld tegen de veelkleurige betekenisgeschiedenis, in kunst en tradities.

De #MeToo-discussie vindt ook zijn weg in de museumzaal: het culturele geheugen wordt gereset. Net als ook koloniale standbeelden moeten worden verwijderd. Het verleden wordt gecensureerd in het heden.

Schaamte en schuld met betrekking tot de blanke westerse identiteit is een voedingsbodem voor het verzet tegen politieke correctheid, evenals de doorgeschoten progressieve moraal van het politieke establishment ten opzichte van het 'multiculturele vraagstuk', aldus de auteurs. Onder invloed van de identiteitspolitiek uit Amerika verwijst politieke correctheid vooral naar vormaspecten waarin zich sociale of culturele ongelijkheid zou manifesteren (Zwarte Piet, koloniale stadbeelden). Waar is vandaag de legitimititeit van de westerse cultuur nu het onderhevig is aan een zelf veroordelende blik, die ontstond toen de keerzijde van het vooruitgangsideaal zichtbaar werd, vragen de auteurs zich af? Ze halen hierbij de Franse filosoof Pascal Bruckner aan en zijn essay *'Tirannie van het berouw, Essay over het Europese masochisme'* (= boetedoening doen voor het leed dat het Westen heeft aangedaan). 'The West is the worst', zo luidt de boodschap van menig intellectueel, volgens Bruckner, een occidentale zelfhaat met een bijmaak van hypocrisie.

Politieke correctheid heeft ook consequenties voor de veiligheid als vrijheid van spreken en onderzoek worden onderdrukt. Een cultuur van sociaalgeforceerde taboes kan leiden tot onder de tafel vegen van tegendraadse meningen, hetgeen leidt tot een sterke polarisatie van het debat, zoals in het debat over de islam.

Door de huidige koers van links-progressieve partijen met hun geforceerde tolerantie wordt vooral extreemrechts in de kaart gespeeld. Het tot taboe verklaarde onderwerp staat op het spel, evenals de dynamiek van spreken en luisteren. Als men niet naar elkaar luistert, dan ontstaan nog strengere taboes.

De auteurs zien politieke correctheid steeds vaker terugkomen bij actuele

kwesties, in de media, de wetenschap, de politiek, de culturele sector en in debatten over de omgang met het verleden.

Hoe verhoudt het filosofisch ideaal van waarheid spreken zich met politieke correctheid, waarbij de auteurs kiezen voor de verantwoordelijkheid van vrijheidsdenken en een beroep doen op Verlichtingsidealen als individuele verantwoordelijkheid. Politieke correctheid kan ten koste gaan van minderheidsstandpunten en afwijkende meningen, waardoor vrijheid van meningsuiting en wetenschappelijke vrijheid onder druk komen te staan. Ook blijven tegendraadse feiten en uitspraken onder de oppervlakte wat tot concrete veiligheidsrisico's kan leiden. Felle reacties op politieke correctheid kan leiden tot verdere polarisatie.

Politieke correctheid is een reëel gevaar voor het aantonen en doorgeven van de waarheid.



Het idee van één universele waarheid is ongeschikt voor gebruik in de politiek, eeuwige en onveranderlijke waarheden bestaan niet in het publieke domein. Het monopolie op feitelijke waarheid kan leiden tot een 'tirannieke' lezing van de feiten, maar onkritische acceptatie van reeds gevestigde waarheden is ook gevaarlijk. De politieke ontarding, zoals ten tijde van het nazisme, dan zijn de denkbeelden als zodanig niet gevaarlijk, maar meer het gebrekkige kritische intellectuele vermogen van mensen waardoor ze te weinig weerstand bieden tegen deze denkbeelden en ze niet maatschappelijk pluriforme gezichtspunten analyseren, aldus Bakker en Geling. Hannah Arendt stelde een groot vertrouwen in een 'enlarged mentatlity'.

De auteurs sluiten het boek af met de constatering dat er niets belangrijker is dan het individuele denken: vrijdenken als voorwaarde voor een moreel rechtschapener wereld.

Dat betekent geen censuur, maar vrijheid van meningsuiting is geen vrijbrief voor het individu om alles maar te zeggen; het brengt een verantwoordelijkheid met zich mee. De auteurs zijn tegen demofobie als bescherming van de goede smaak of om het rechtvaardig ideaal te beschermen tegen het onredelijke volk. Ze bepleiten een absolute academische vrijheid, alle vormen van (zelf)censuur in de

media zijn onwenselijk en we moeten er voor waken om taboes te verabsoluteren tot onwrikbare morele waarheden.

Hierbij is een cultureel verstevigd moraal nodig, dat zich kenmerkt door bescheidenheid, weldenkendheid en zelfonderzoek.

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De auteurs Gerben Bakker en Gert Jan Heling zijn docent integrale veiligheidskunde aan de Haagse Hogeschool en zij illustreren hun onderzoek dan ook met veel voorbeelden waarbij de islam centraal staat. 'Over politieke correctheid' is een pleidooi voor de legitimiteit van de westerse traditie en cultuur.

Ze maken zich ook sterk voor een absolute academische vrijheid, die steeds vaker niet wordt gerealiseerd. En als de universiteit wel een verscheidenheid van meningen laat horen, leidt dat tot verstoring of zelfs bedreiging, zoals zeer recent enkele docenten van de UvA via de email-doodsbedreigingen ontvingen. Zij hadden opgeroepen stelling te nemen tegen het bezoek van de omstreden Canadese psycholoog en cultuurcriticus Jordan Peterson, die bekend staat om zijn scherpe kritiek op de politieke correctheid rondom onderwerpen als wit-privilege, feminisme en culturele toe-eigening.

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Linda Bouws - St. Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten

World Order In The Age Of Trump And Trumpism



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Based on lecture given at West Chester University, October 24, 2018.

The title requires a few words of explanation. By the ‘Age of Trump,’ I mean not only the current American president. The phrase is meant to encompass elected leaders like him around the world. I have a friend in India who refers to Narendra Modi as ‘our Trump’ and the newspapers have been full of commentary to the effect that the new leader of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, amounts to ‘a Brazilian Donald Trump,’ although some familiar with Bolsonaro’s worldview insist that ‘a Brazilian Joseph Goebbels’ is more accurate. This extension of Trump to Trumpism is meant to make us aware that Trump is not just an American abnormality. He reflects a structural conditions that seem global in character, although with significant variations from nation to nation.[i]

By referring to ‘Trumpism’ my intention to highlight several issues beyond this autocratic brand of ‘democratic’ leader:

- (1) To associate ‘Trumpism’ with a deliberate U.S. withdrawal from political and neoliberal globalization, without significantly challenging, perhaps even augmenting military globalism, enhancing capabilities to project destructive power anywhere on the planet, while weakening alliance commitments and multilateral trade frameworks;
- (2) Trumpism also refers to the populist base of support for a global array of strong leaders, and their accompanying right-wing social, economic, and cultural policies, with the threat of ‘fascism’ and fascist tendencies being increasingly feared and perceived, even in centrist discourse;
- (3) Trumpism also involves a shift of preferred worldview from globalist to nationalist centers of political gravity, with a loss of normative support for human rights, democracy, and multilateral diplomacy and cooperative forms of multilateral problem-solving and treaty making; and

(4) in the American setting, this phenomenon of Trumpism is not tied solely to the person of Trump; it could survive Trump if one or more of several scenarios unfold—for instance, in the 2018 and 2020 national elections the Republican Congress is reelected, even if Trump should be defeated or compelled to resign—in effect, the Republican Party has been effectively taken over by the ideas, values, and approach of Trump, and vice versa; it is difficult to disentangle ideological cause and effect as between party and leader.

The Kavanaugh confirmation hearings were one kind of straw in the wind, considering the iron party discipline manifested, and suggesting that the American judiciary will be Trumpist for many years even if Trump is defeated. Trump's judicial appointments would set the judicial tone for years, if not decades, were the Democratic Party to take control of the Senate as early as November.

There is one important confusion surround the global approach of Trump, which arises from the perception of Trump as incoherent, impulsive, and dishonest, and nothing more than an opportunistic narcissist. I think this confusion can be exposed by distinguishing between Trump as tactician and Trump as strategist. It is as if it is necessary to approach the identity of Trump as an either/or question: either Trump is completely ad hoc and opportunistic or he knows what he is doing, and has been effective in carrying out his plan. My view is that Trump is both an erratic personality and a right-wing ideologue.

To simply a rather complex set of questions let me suggest that when Trump acts tactically, or in dealing with the media, he is inconsistent, often lies, bobs and weaves like a professional boxer. He seems capable of being starkly contradictory without blinking, and above all, adopt positions that are both tasteless and detached from reality, as well as being supremely opportunistic, especially if he feels cornered by breaking news or is intent on capturing the news cycle. In such contexts, Trump seems ready to keep changing his story, retract compromises, defame the opposition, inflame his base by uttering deliberate exaggerations, and steer the ship of state with wild abandon without the steadying presence of a rudder.

However, when Trump acts strategically he seems quite a different person, above all, rather coherent, and methodical, almost pragmatic, in advancing an ideological agenda. His grand strategy is consistently reactionary in the sense of

being ultra-nationalist, anti-immigrant, anti-globalist, militarist, business friendly, and contemptuous of international law, the UN, human rights, constitutionalism, the rule of law, climate change, and environmental protection. Trump continues to be an avowed climate changer denier in the face of massive scientific evidence to the contrary and despite a series of daunting extreme weather events here in the United States. 'America, First' is Trump's signature slogan. For once, it is not 'fake news,' although it strikes many of us as imprudent and unacceptable in shaping American public policy. This kind of egocentric nationalism and unfettered capitalism is dangerously ill-adapted to serve as a geopolitical and economic compass for successfully navigating the 21st century.

To obtain a more complete picture of Trump's political style, it seems illuminating to make an assessment by combining perceptions from three different angles: as a *trickster* and con man when tweeting or dealing with the media; as a *demagogue* when he performs at his political rallies; and as an *ideologue* when it comes to policy decisions and influence peddling. It is this composite that makes Trump such a confounding and dangerous political figure. It also makes the past political experience of American presidents irrelevant. It is not an overstatement to observe that there has never before been an American president who handles the office in such a maverick fashion.

Normative Decline: As someone who has long associated his work with the critical tradition of International Relations (IR) theorizing, I am particularly sensitive to an observable normative decline in international behavior that can be partially attributed to Trump and Trumpism. For one thing, the US has acted as global leader, including as advocate of public goods, ever since 1945. Admittedly its *record* and *practice* has been mixed when it comes to international law and respect for the UN and its Charter. Nevertheless, the pre-Trump leadership role was vital in several key sectors of global policy, including climate change, nuclear arms control, development assistance, world poverty, and global migration. The United States Government was also a vital promoter of several less visible concerns such as negotiating a modern public order of the oceans, an international regime for Antarctica, and an international framework of rules, procedures, and institutions for trade and investment. There is no doubt that the U.S. carried out its leadership role so as to gain advantages for itself, but this was generally accepted by most other states because the U.S. contributed to policy results that were widely believed to be upholding the common interests of

humanity. Without this American role, there has emerged a leadership vacuum at the very time that the world order challenges can be met only with a strong and constructive exertion of leadership on global issues. The UN is incapable of providing such leadership. World order remains state-centric and is as dependent as ever on global leadership by dominant sovereign states. It is quite possible that some post-American form of collective leadership will emerge, and provide the world with an inter-governmental alternative to global governance under the watchful eye of Washington.

What Trump has done, and Trumpism endorsed, is to repudiate these normative horizons in global settings in a variety of contexts in which their relevance should be treated as greater than ever. Such behavior increases risks of catastrophic ecological and geopolitical events, ranging from accelerated global warming to a war with Iran. It also exhibits a kind of escapist evasion of the real challenges to national and global wellbeing that will grow more serious and impose ever higher costs on the future to the extent that they are being currently ignored. Furthermore, leaving these issues to simmer, accentuates the existential suffering of persons subject to cruel and oppressive conditions of strife and control, while consigning future generations to a dark destiny and heightened risks of catastrophic events.

By indicting the role of Trump and Trumpism I do not want leave the impression of a rosy picture of pre-Trump world order. In actuality, Trump has so far when acting internationally, except for global economic policy, mainly departed from the pre-Trump policy framework *discursive* level. To date the *behavioral* discontinuities are not clearly evident. Trump has definitely made moves to dismantle the international political economy, or what is referred to as 'the liberal world order' shaped after 1945, with its deference to the approaches taken by the Bretton Woods Institutions of the World Bank and IMF. Yet the Trump approach does not want to regulate capital flows beyond protecting the domestic American market. It has no trouble with an outlook that favors returns on capital over effects on people.

On other issues, as well, it is well to look back so as to gain insight into what has changed, and what has remained essentially the same. Pre-Trump foreign policy was steadfastly pro-Israeli all along, its idea of national security all along aspired to achieve global military and economic dominance, and Washington's approach to the UN, international law, and human rights was always highly selective, and

often subordinated to the pursuit of strategic goals. This was especially true after the end of the Cold War. During this period of 25 years pre-Trump leaders completely missed golden opportunities to improve the quality of world order by strengthening the UN, by seeking nuclear disarmament, by pursuing ecological stability, and by promoting global economic reforms that would ensure a more equitable societal sharing of the benefits of economic growth. It did none of these things, thus paving the way for the rise of Trump and Trumpism, which has to be sure intensified these regressive tendencies that preceded its occupancy of the White House. In this sense, it is a mistake of mainstream critics not to place significant levels of blame for Trump and Trumpism on the myopic priorities of pre-Trump global leadership. [See Stephen Gill, ed., *Global Crises and the Crisis of Global Leadership* (2012)] It is a reasonable conjecture that had the pre-Trump leaders taken advantage of the situation after the end of the Cold War to promote an ambitious program of global reform, there might never have been an 'Age of Trump,' but of course we will never know.

The claimed reality of normative decline can be better understood by looking at three illustrative instances both to understand and appraise the claim.

Ignoring Palestinian Rights.

One of the clearest instances of Trump's approach in action concerns the approach to the Palestinian struggle for national rights. Trump's one-sided moves over the past two years are indicative: appointing extreme Zionists to shape his policies toward Israel and Palestine, and even the region; Trump's break with the international consensus by moving the American embassy in Israel to Jerusalem; a blind eye toward unlawful Israel settlement expansion and its repeated use of excessive force and collective punishment; the defunding of UNRWA assistance to administer occupied Palestinian territories accentuating the ordeal endured by the civilian populations, especially in Gaza; and the attempts to deny refugee status to several million Palestinian refugees born in refugee camps.

These provocative policy initiatives appear to be part of a coherent endorsement of a 'one-state Israeli solution,' a feature of which is to deny completely Palestinian fundamental rights, including above all the right of self-determination. Along the way Trump and his minions bashes the UN for its supposedly anti-Israel bias and go so far as to threaten UN member states and the Organization with funding consequences if American policy demands are being ignored. It should be

understood that Israel and the United States are complaining about UN criticisms of Israeli policies that are flagrant violations of international humanitarian law and international criminal law.[ii]

Such geopolitical bullying at the UN is a total repudiation of the potential for creating a cooperative international order, which would alone be capable of serving the shared interests of the entire world. These interests include those challenges of global scope that no sovereign state, no matter how rich and powerful can hope to solve on its own. These bullying moves by the U.S. are also a shocking response to efforts at the UN to hold Israel accountable for flagrant violations of international law.

This in turn has enabled Israel to proceed ruthlessly with the last phases of the Zionist Project in its maximal form, which is to establish an exclusive Jewish state on the entirety of what had long been an essentially non-Jewish society. It is helpful to recall that at the time in 1917 when this Zionist Project received its first major international blessing in the form of the Balfour Declaration the Jewish population of Palestine was less than 6%. The repression and dispossession of non-Jewish residents that has followed for more than a century rips away the veil of deception surrounding the claim that Israel was the only democratic state in the Middle East. It gave a measure of plausibility to allegations of the apartheid nature of Israeli domination of the Palestinian people. This allegation has now been made less controversial due to the recent adoption in Israel of a new Basic Law known as “The Nation Staten Law of the Jewish people.” Despite the realities of the subjugation of Palestinians, prior to the Basic Law, the United States had joined Israel in insisting at the UN that an academic report concluding that the patterns and practices relied upon by Israel qualified as apartheid was nothing other than a crude attempt to slander Israel via an anti-Semitic trope.[iii]

My point here is to take account of a clear and prominent international situation in which American political partisanship is allowed to push aside normative considerations. To do this in such a high-profile setting, further diminishes respect for the rights of a dispossessed and oppressed people and for international law and the UN generally.

The Qatar Crisis.

The Qatar Crisis, which began in 2017, illustrates the tactical side of Trump as ill-informed and mercurial when it comes to American foreign policy and is again

confirmatory of the irrelevance of international law if its application is inconvenient in geopolitical crisis situations. In the immediate aftermath of Trump's 2017 May visit to Saudi Arabia, with its purpose of strengthening of the Saudi/Israel/US resolve to confront Iran, the Mohammed ben Salmon leadership in Riyadh chose the moment to confront the tiny state of Qatar with 13 Demands, coupled with a variety of threats as a prelude to coercive diplomacy in the form of a blockade, an embargo, and expulsion of Qatari nationals from residence and employment throughout the Gulf region.

The central charge against Qatar was its alleged support for terrorists and terrorism in the region. This was a perverse charge because the Gulf Coalition making the allegations was far more indictable for supporting international terrorism and promoting jihadism than was Qatar. The real motivation of the anti-Qatar coalition was to shut down Al Jazeera and the policies of asylum that Qatar extended to political figures seeking refuge, initiatives well within Qatar's sovereign rights, and steps that were actually supportive of internationally protected human rights and political pluralism.

In actuality, these countries seeking to overwhelm Qatar were more worried about *democratic* tendencies than they were about terrorism. Their Sunni governments are extremely hostile to all Muslim oriented political tendencies in the region in ways that are regarded as more threatening to their stability than is the Shi'ia sectarian rivalry. This form of threat perception was made clear by the counterrevolutionary support given by the Gulf monarchies to the military coup against the democratically elected Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt back in 2013. The hostility toward Shi'ism is less theological than geopolitical, a cover for its competition with Iran for regional hegemony.

At first, Trump conveyed unreserved U.S. support for these moves against Qatar designed to intimidate this tiny country. However it became soon clear that Trump had no idea about what he was doing. Upon returning to the U.S. Trump quickly discovered that the largest American air base in the region was located inside Qatar housing as many as 10,000 American troops. In an unexplained turnaround Trump dropped support for confronting Qatar and urged the parties to resolve the Gulf Crisis as soon as possible by negotiations, a position supported strongly by the Secretaries of State and Defense. After some months, when this shift of Washington tactics didn't succeed, Trump shifted again this time asserting that the U.S. does not interfere in such crises, and left it up to the parties to find their

own solution. I suspect that this second shift occurred because the Trump presidency didn't want to be associated with a position that appeared to exert no influence on the parties to the conflict.

My central point is that what didn't matter at all in such a tactical situation was the striking fact that Qatar, as with Palestine, had international law totally on its side with respect to all of the issues in contention. Even the international community and the UN failed to lend symbolic support to Qatar in reaction to the unlawful bullying tactics pursued by Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners. Qatar has seemed reluctant to insist on its rights under international law as its pragmatic response to the crisis was to seek a mediated compromise rather than an acknowledgement of wrongdoing by the Gulf Coalition. Perhaps such a posture was, and remains, a reflection of the power disparities, which meant that Qatar's only hope to end the crisis peacefully. Expecting the Gulf Coalition to admit its wrongdoing was evidently assumed to be unrealistic given its hard power dominance of the Gulf.

The Khashoggi Murder.

As has been widely suggested, the grotesque murder of the leading Saudi journalist, Kamal Khashoggi, shocked humanity in ways that tens of thousand of dead civilians in Yemen and Syria have not. There are various interpretations and piously phrased prescriptions about what must be done. Should the Saudi perpetrators be held responsible? And if so how? Should lucrative arms deals benefitting the American arms industry be cancelled costing American jobs and profits? Should the alliance with Saudi Arabia by the US and Israel go forward with its central plan of confronting Iran, while abandoning the Palestinians? What such a litany of questions ignores is the total neglect of the relevance of the most fundamental of human rights, the right to life, as well as the abuse of diplomatic immunity of consulates located in a foreign territory.

When contemplating the proper course of action the main consideration seems to be 'how to preserve national interests in light of the murder?' Trump and the Israeli leadership sought to explain away the Khashoggi murder by shamelessly advancing a series of scenarios that invoked 'alternative facts' to avoid pointing a finger of accusation in the direction of Riyadh—first, it didn't happen, and if it happened it was an accident, and then finally, if it wasn't accident it was not premeditated, and should be treated as a rogue operation of Saudi security people going beyond their orders. If some Saudis are punished this is enough to absolve

Mohamed bin Salmon from guilt, regional geopolitics after a pause can be resumed as if the murder didn't happen, and the United States can deliver the arms sold with a clear conscience as if nothing happened that should raise questions about continuing to treat Saudi Arabia as a valued ally. Not just the Khashoggi murder, but the broader record of human rights abuse and the major funding of Islamic militancy around the world should have caused severe doubt. Does not political realism have any outer moral limits? The alliance with Saudi Arabia carries cynicism about ethical decency to an extreme.

Taking World Order Seriously.

Leaders like Trump or Netanyahu whose global outlook are antagonistic to the values of the UN Charter and some form of humane global governance. Yet even they appear to value the UN as a prime time arena within which to articulate their preferred futures and aspirations, ironically including attacking the UN because it does behave as they would wish. In this sense, the priorities and values of leaders, especially those of authoritarian disposition, are often displayed in the annual series of speeches given at the UN. The media pays little attention to such presentations except to gain clues about immediate policy concerns, and this preoccupation with hot button issues overlooks their value as expressive of the worldview professed by current national leaders. This is not to suggest that such UN statements ignore immediate policy choices. The point is rather that it is more valuable to treat these annual statements as meaningful disclosures of underlying ideas about the nature and dynamics of world order.

Donald Trump's second UN speech was somewhat less belligerent than his 2017 speech, except with reference to Iran, which was threatening, misleading, and in violation of spirit and letter of UN Charter. Trump disturbingly conveyed a clear sense that recourse to war, at least for the US was discretionary, and need not necessarily be justified by advancing a credible claim of self-defense or even a reasoned justification. As such, without using negating language toward the relevance of international law, Trump is repudiating in form as well as practice the core undertaking of the UN to prohibit all aggressive threats and uses of force in international relations.

In articulating this conception of the world according to Trump a few quotations underscore the tone and substance of his outlook, especially his insistence on subordinating global concerns to national interests narrowly conceived. On all

questions, Trump accords priority to sovereign political will, thus repudiating the central efforts after World War II to promote a global rule of law and impose standards of criminal accountability on those who act on behalf of sovereign states. He also rejects the role of the UN Charter and international law as the rightful arbiter of when a state is authorized to use force internationally in situations other than responses to armed attacks.

On Anti-Globalism:

“America will always choose independence and cooperation over global governance, control and dominance.”

On Affirming Capitalism as the only legitimate path:

“America is governed by Americans. We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism.”

“All nations around the world should resist socialism and the misery that it brings.”

On UN Reform:

Denying the legitimacy to both HRC and ICC:

“We will never surrender America’s sovereignty to an unelected, unaccountable global bureaucracy.”

On a World of Sovereign States:

“Sovereign and independent nations are the only vehicle where freedom has ever survived, democracy, has ever endured or peace has ever prospered. And we must protect our sovereignty and our cherished independence above all,”

“So let us choose a future of patriotism, prosperity, and pride...We have a policy of principled realism rooted in shared goals, interests, and values.”

Dr. Mahathir Mohamed, the 93 year old leader of Malaysia gave the UN General Assembly an entirely different view of both the national interests of his country and his view of the global setting. This view reaffirmed the balance struck between the global and the national in the post-1945 initiatives as enacted by establishing the UN and holding the Nuremberg war crimes trials. Mahathir also recognized the gravity of the challenges that are presently confronting humanity. In my view, Mahathir’s responsible statesmanship contrasts with Trump’s anachronistic ideas of international order and American national interests.

On Malaysian national interest and values:

“Malaysians want a new Malaysia that upholds the principles of fairness, good governance, integrity and the rule of law. They want a Malaysia that is a friend to all and enemy of none. A Malaysia that remains neutral and non-aligned. A Malaysia that detests and abhors wars and violence. They also want a Malaysia that will speak its mind on what is right and wrong, without fear or favour. A new Malaysia that believes in co-operation based on mutual respect, for mutual gain. The new Malaysia that offers a partnership based on our philosophy of ‘prosperity-neighbour’. We believe in the goodness of cooperation, that a prosperous and stable neighbour would contribute to our own prosperity and stability.”

On respect for UN principles:

“These include the principles of truth, human rights, the rule of law, justice, fairness, responsibility and accountability, as well as sustainability.”

Toward a nonviolent geopolitics:

“There is something wrong with our way of thinking, with our value system. Kill one man, it is murder, kill a million and you become a hero. And so we still believe that conflict between nations can be resolved with war.”

On UN Reform:

“Malaysia lauds the UN in its endeavours to end poverty, protect our planet and try to ensure everyone enjoys peace and prosperity. But I would like to refer to the need for reform in the organisation. Five countries on the basis of their victories 70 over years ago cannot claim to have a right to hold the world to ransom forever. They cannot take the moral high ground, preaching democracy and regime change in the countries of the world when they deny democracy in this organisation.”

These two opposing worldviews should not be viewed as symmetrical. Trump adopts an extreme version of state-centric world order that might have been seen as appropriate for a dominant state in the nineteenth century. In contrast, Mahathir has views that take responsible account of twenty-first century realities, and a more globalized cluster of challenges and opportunities. In this regard, it seems appropriate to regard Trump and Trumpism as dangerously anachronistic, while Mahathir providing an illuminating example of what might be described as ‘the new political realism’ sensitive to the urgencies of the present.

Seven Conclusions:

- It is instructive to distinguish Donald Trump the person from Trumpism a global political phenomenon of right-wing populism and a structural reaction to neoliberal globalization
- It is also clarifying to distinguish Trump the gifted tactical trickster from Trump the right-wing ideologue;
- There has occurred a normative decline rendering irrelevant in most war/peace settings international law, the UN, and human rights; this decline began before the Trump presidency but has been accelerated by Trump;
- It would be misleading to overlook pre-Trump failings of American global leadership, especially in the period between the end of the Cold War and the 9/11 attacks; the pre-Trump continuities are more fundamental than discontinuities, especially in view of the bipartisan response to 9/11;
- Two lines of criticism of Trump's world order approach should be taken into account: I. blame by the established interests and the deep state for dismantling the liberal international order, damaging Western solidarity, retreating from hegemonic leadership; II. blame by political realists for abandoning the U.S. role as benevolent hegemon; such realist hold Trump responsible for his failure to do more to shape global policy along pragmatic and sustainable lines;
- War-mongering toward Iran;
- It would be in the human interest to be attentive to Mahathir's alternative worldview, which articulates a perspective sensitive to the claims of small states and responsive to the claims of planetary realism; such an outlook necessarily rejects regressive embraces of ultra-nationalism that are occurring in several key countries at the present time.

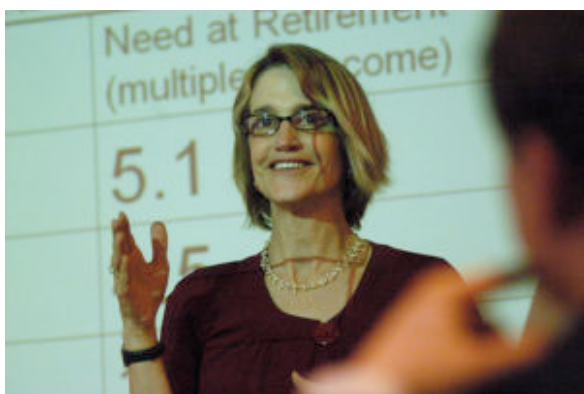
Notes:

[i] Based on lecture given at West Chester University, October 24, 2018.

[ii] It is always important to appreciate that the problems of the Palestinian people are a direct result of the failure of the UN to find a formula for peace that upholds Palestinian basic rights. No other situation in the world is so directly related to UN unrealized initiatives.

[iii] This study titled "*Israeli Policies and Practices Towards the Palestinian People: The Question of Apartheid*", was commissioned by the UN Economic and Social Council for West Asia (ESCWA), released March 15, 2017, and written by Virginia Tilley and myself.

The GOP Tax Cuts Are Already Hurting Social Security



Teresa Ghilarducci -Photo:
<http://teresaghilarducci.org/>

The GOP has been intent on destroying Social Security since 1934 when its creation was first proposed by the Roosevelt administration. This, however, remained always a rather remote possibility ... until now. With Trump and Congress transferring even more wealth to the rich and large corporations in the form of [tax cuts that will land the country \\$10 trillion deeper in debt](#), the party of pseudo-fiscal hawks is campaigning hard for legislation that will lead to sharp cuts in Social Security and other entitlements.

In this context, the 2018 midterm elections could be the most consequential midterm election in years, according to Teresa Ghilarducci, an internationally known economist on labor and retirement. In this exclusive interview, Ghilarducci — a professor at The New School for Social Research, as well as the author of numerous books including *Rescuing Retirement: A Plan to Guarantee Retirement Security for All Americans* and *When I'm Sixty-Four: The Plot Against Pensions and the Plan to Save Them* — shares her analysis of the GOP attack on Social Security.

C.J. Polychroniou: Senate Republicans (and possibly a few Democrats) have their eyes set on slashing Social Security and other entitlements in order to balance the

budget, although it is their own policies that have led to greater indebtedness. How serious is the possibility that they can succeed in undermining security retirement for millions of Americans?

Teresa Ghilarducci: During the 2012 presidential campaign, Republican politicians — [including then-Texas Gov. Rick Perry](#) and Sen. [Ted Cruz](#) — called Social Security a Ponzi scheme, which reveals a misunderstanding of Social Security finances and [Mr. Ponzi's 1920 investment fraud](#) swindle — when Mr. Ponzi definitely spent more than he took in.

Further, in September of last year, newly appointed White House Economic Adviser Larry Kudlow [commented](#) that, “We have to be tougher on spending.” Strengthening that view, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell — in what seemed to be a defense of the bad news surfacing in mid-October 2018 that the 2017 tax cuts will substantially deepen the federal deficit — claimed that the deficit ought to be blamed on the Democrats for their unwillingness to cut Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

The blame for the increase in the projected deficit falls on the tax cuts of 2017 that were a result of the Republican control of the federal government — almost all Republicans voted for the tax cuts and almost all Democrats did not. The cuts added \$1 trillion to the federal deficit and the nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation did not support Republican arguments that the \$1.5 trillion tax cut would pay for itself with economic growth. Senator McConnell's announcement today makes clear [political elites will use Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid as bargaining chips in budget negotiations and call for cuts in government spending.](#)

I feel this accretion of Republican statements means that after the midterms, the higher federal deficits caused by the tax cuts of 2017 will fuel the chronic attack to cut the programs.

As you mentioned in your question, it is not a surprise that the Republican Party would opportune to cut the system; as professor Max Skidmore from the University of Missouri-Kansas City has argued in his policy history book [*Social Security and Its Enemies*], the party has been ideologically opposed to Social Security since the program's founding in 1935.

But isn't it true that Social Security is an “off-budget program,” which means that

it does not add a dime to the deficit?

Social Security can't, by law, add to the federal deficit. Medicare and Medicaid can, but not Social Security. By law, Social Security is self-funded. Further, because Social Security must balance its books, Social Security is prudently and actuarially funded. It collects revenue and saves in a trust fund for expected costs.

Currently, Social Security has a [\\$2.9 trillion](#) trust fund built up by the boomer generation paying more in taxes than needed to pay current benefits. The trust fund is a vital way workers save for retirement. With tax revenues and earnings and principal from the trust fund, Social Security is estimated to be solvent until 2034. After that, if it doesn't get more revenue Social Security will only pay [77 percent](#) of promised benefits. Social Security can't add to the deficit because it pays for itself. If revenue falls short, benefits are cut.

And if you are wondering if the trust fund is real, here are facts to judge yourself. Workers do two things with their [Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA)] taxes: We pay current benefits and we save by buying US treasury bonds like many wealthy people, endowments, pension funds, foreign countries and foreign investors buy US treasury bonds. US treasury bonds are highly sought after by savers all round the world. For many reasons, the US enjoys an [exorbitant privilege](#) of all countries, considering dollars are the safest currency.

When we, through Social Security, invest in government bonds, the government creates [intragovernmental debt](#). When the Yale endowment buys the bonds, the government creates external debt. And just like all trust funds, when the Social Security Administration draws on the trust fund to pay its bills, it sells the bonds.

The US can't practically decide to default on Social Security's bonds or anyone else's US treasury bonds. Defaulting would "save" money for the government, but countries like Argentina default, not the US. It is hardly correct to say Social Security is "adding" to the deficit any more than any other holder of a Treasury bond. I disagree with the view that Social Security indirectly contributes to the on-budget deficit because the interest payments it receives from the general fund are on the unified budget and receives funding from income tax revenue on Social Security benefits, which is technically on-budget.

The money you pay for Social Security through the FICA contribution is not the

money you get out; you are paying mostly for the benefits of people receiving Social Security today. But for decades since 1983, workers were putting money in a “savings account” — the Social Security trust fund.

What about the claim that there are not enough workers to pay into the system in order to keep Social Security sustainable without major reforms?

Demography is not destiny, because we have good forecasts of population growth and decent models of future economic growth. Based on those forecasts — which have a range, of course — Congress makes actuarial decisions about how much payroll taxes should be and how high the earnings cap should be. The system is designed for flexibility, to tweak FICA contributions and the earnings cap to keep up with changes in economic growth.

Also, it is economic growth, not the number of workers and retirees, that determines the costs of benefits. In the 1960s, workers supported households with non-workers — children and non-working wives and retirees. The economy was growing and the wage base robustly kept base with productivity.

The economic reality is that Social Security is on sound financial footing. In fact, it’s a lean and efficient success. In 2015, its administrative expenses (as a percentage of all Social Security spending) were less than 0.7 percent; compare that with the average 401(k), which has expenses three times as high — which can erode lifetime benefits considerably by 20 to 30 percent.

Any clear-sighted look at Social Security’s finances, free of politically motivated spin, shows that the program is in strong shape. It has a reserve fund to pay all benefits until 2034 without any change in current policy. And with some small policy changes — for instance, raising the payroll tax by 2.83 percentage points (shared between employer and employee) or eliminating the earnings cap — we could put the system in balance for the next 75 years. (The earning cap means that only wage income up to a certain ceiling is currently subject to Social Security taxes. In 2019, it will be [\\$132,900](#), but that figure will rise in response to wage inflation.) [We are easily poised to keep the system healthy well into the future.](#)

Republicans and their billionaire supporters may surface the 2005 push by President George W. Bush to privatize Social Security. But, as [Chile’s disastrous experiment with the privatization of their public Social Security system](#) showed,

isn't privatization really a plan to dismantle Social Security?

We need more current income going to save for future consumption, not less. Privatization calls for less retirement saving and a reduced Social Security. The last plan was to carve out part of the 12.4 percent FICA tax — say 2 percentage points — for individual accounts. Retirement accounts are good things; everyone should have one to supplement Social Security — your readers should be saving at least 5 percent of their pay in a retirement account — but taking away from Social Security will just make retirement even more insecure.

The reason why taking money out of the system to fund private accounts is expensive is that you have to raise taxes somewhere else — equivalent of 2 percent of pay — to pay current benefits or reduce current benefits immediately by 30 percent.

This means after the midterms, the higher federal deficits caused by the tax cuts of 2017 will fuel the chronic attack to cut the programs. Last year, Congress added to the deficit, not Social Security. The deficit rose substantially because of the 2017 tax cut, which reduced total revenue by [5 percent](#) and revenue from corporate taxes by 35 percent.

Everyone should realize two key realities: First, Social Security is an essential form of insurance. It provides support for young families in the event of the death or disability of its breadwinners. It helps children with severe disabilities. It insures workers against old age, disability, or dying and leaving behind a survivor without adequate income. As a retirement benefit, Social Security is worth about \$300,000 for the average household. Equally important, its benefits are guaranteed. In contrast, 401(k) returns are not guaranteed.

Consider this: They are worth almost a million dollars to a middle-income American. According to economist [Eugene Steuerle and his colleagues](#) at the Urban Institute, a single man who retires in the year 2020 after a full career earning a median wage (about \$44,000) can expect to receive \$536,000 in Social Security and Medicare benefits. In a couple where each spouse earned constant “average” wages over a career beginning at age 22 and retired on his or her 65th birthday, [the pair] would have over \$1 million in health and retirement benefits. The expected benefits for couples turning 65 in 2050 — age 30 today — are scheduled to rise under current law to almost \$2 million.

And the second key reality: Social Security and Medicare benefit all workers, whether white-, pink- or blue-collar. In 2012, 55 million Americans (out of a population of 313 million) cashed Social Security checks. All households, rich and poor, have the government as an economic partner.

What will it take to stop the party from achieving its goal in destroying what has clearly been one of the most significant programs enacted in the 1930s as part of FDR's New Deal?

The lessons of the 2005 resistance to President Bush's push to privatize Social Security is that when people mobilized and the Democrats stayed solid, proposals to partially privatize Social Security found no support among Democrats in Congress and the president's popularity fell every time he appeared to push forward with the issue.

In the past, a solid and strong Democratic Party has stopped erosion of the program. Now several Democrats have sound proposals to expand and improve Social Security, a move overdue as elder poverty will be on the rise and private pensions have eroded.

Our country made a commitment during the Depression to make sure that everyone and their families would be protected as they aged and if they became disabled. But national commitments don't renew themselves. Voting does.

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The Brexit Nightmare: An Interview With Malcolm Sawyer



It's been more than two years since citizens in U.K. voted 48 to 52 for a split from European Union. Yet, the conservative government of Theresa May is still trying to come up with a workable Brexit plan, one that some may describe as allowing the U.K. to have the cake and eat it at the same time. Moreover, public

opinion in U.K. remains sharply divided over Brexit, and this includes members of the Labour party itself, with some trade union leaders and Labour representatives even warming up to the idea of a second referendum.

Will Theresa May's government be able to deliver an agreement before the U.K's exit date, which is set for March 2019? Will Labour vote down May's Brexit deal? And what will the British economy look like in the post-Brexit era? The renowned British economist Malcolm Sawyer, Emeritus Professor of Economics at Leeds University, sheds light on the Brexit conundrum in an exclusive interview below with C. J. Polychroniou.

C. J. Polychroniou: Professor Sawyer, let's begin by asking you the most basic question, which is: what's really holding up Brexit talks?

Malcolm Sawyer: There are the sheer complexities of unravelling the involvement of the UK in the European Union built up over 45 years, and the need for agreement over issues ranging from EU citizens rights in UK (and vice versa) after Brexit, the financial obligations of the UK on withdrawal, security co-operation, the nature of future trade relations etc.

There are the divisions within the government and the Conservative Party over the issues of the EU and leave or remain. There are basic differences between those who view Brexit in terms of 'taking back control' with little regard for economic costs involved and those who were Remainers seeking close trade ties and other co-operation with the EU after exit. It is then very difficult if not impossible to satisfy both and to arrive at any compromise.

Theresa May's Brexit plans have been facing a lot of opposition from rebels in her own party all along, but now it seems that even the Northern Irish party that is propping up her government is making it difficult for the Prime Minister. Is it

possible that U.K. could leave the bloc without any Brexit deal at all?

The process of UK leaving the EU involves two stages - the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement, sometimes seen as akin to a divorce settlement, which has to be settled within 24 months of the start of negotiations under Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon which means end of March 2019. The second stage will involve finalizing the future relationships between UK and the EU27 across a wide range of issues though the focus has been on the trade relations (e.g. a free trade area agreement, form of customs union), though it is intended that the broad outlines will be included in the withdrawal agreement. The intention has been for a 21 month transition or implementation period with further negotiations to establish the post-Brexit relationships.

A no-deal situation had been used to refer to no specific trade deal between UK and EU27, with trade between UK and EU27 operating under WTO arrangements with the tariffs charged by UK (EU27) on EU27 (UK) goods the same as charged by UK (EU27) on goods from countries with whom there was no specific trade agreements.

More recently no-deal has come to mean no withdrawal agreement between the EU and the UK, and hence the UK leaving at the end of March 2019 without any agreements over the nature of future relationships. Customs posts and checks would have to be quickly put into operation involving collection of new sets of tariffs and disruption to the just-in-time supply chains across countries, combining to lead to shortages in some key areas (agricultural products, pharmaceuticals often mentioned) and disruption of production.

It is clearly possible that UK to 'crash out' of the EU at the end of March 2019. A failure of the UK government to agree the withdrawal agreement with the EU, or a prospective agreement which is then rejected by the UK Parliament, would put the UK firmly on that path, and the chances of one of those coming to past looks to be significant.

Has Labour's stance on Brexit changed?

There are many currents of opinion within the Labour Party ranging from some Brexit supporters (including some Lexit with opposition to the neo-liberal nature of the EU), through leavers and some remainers who accept the result of the referendum and seek a close and co-operative relationship with the EU and onto

remainders who push to reverse the result of the referendum. The position of the Labour Party has been to accept the referendum result and hence support the triggering of Article 50 and the process of leaving the EU - a position from which 47 Labour MPs dissented when the vote was put in Parliament. And six tests on the acceptability of withdrawal and subsequent agreements were set out as early as March 2017 as the triggering of Article 50 took place, though the tests have received rather little political attention until recently. The six tests are:

- “1. Does it ensure a strong and collaborative future relationship with the EU?
2. Does it deliver the “exact same benefits” as we currently have as members of the Single Market and Customs Union?
3. Does it ensure the fair management of migration in the interests of the economy and communities?
4. Does it defend rights and protections and prevent a race to the bottom?
5. Does it protect national security and our capacity to tackle cross-border crime?
6. Does it deliver for all regions and nations of the UK?”

From the tests the negotiating stance which the Labour Party would have adopted if it had been in power can be inferred. Question marks hang over those tests including the feasibility of securing the benefits of the Single Market without being members of the Single Market (as in effect Norway and members of the European Economic Area are) which in turn would probably require budgetary contributions and acceptance of free movement of labour.

The stance has had to evolve to take account with the ways in which the negotiations between UK and EU have proceeded and now the prospects of a no-deal or a deal which is unacceptable (particularly with regard to the so-called Chequers proposals) for the relationships between the UK and the EU27 after the UK leaves. The support for a customs union with the EU has become more evident and the opposition to the type of withdrawal agreement which is being advanced by the UK government.

What has been the impact of the Brexit vote on UK's economy so far?

The impact on economic activity has been negative though not as large as some

were predicting before Brexit. The immediate effect was the decline in the exchange rate of sterling which fell immediately after the referendum vote in June 2016 by the order of 12 per cent against the euro and dollar, and the lower exchange rate has been largely maintained. This fall has contributed to some degree to higher inflation and provided some limited stimulus to net export. Before the referendum, some economists were forecasting economic slowdown — even recession of two quarters of negative growth. Although unemployment has continued to decline, UK economic growth has slowed by comparison with the recent record and with growth in the G7, and output looks to be around 1 per cent lower than it would have been without the Brexit vote.

Is there any chance that Brexit will be cancelled?

It is very difficult to envisage the political routes through which the cancellation of Brexit could arise. Cancelling Brexit would require a decision to withdraw the UK's notice of intention to leave the EU (the Article 50 process), and this would have to occur well before 29th March 2019 (the date set for withdrawal). This would clearly require the reversal of the government and the Labour opposition's position of accepting the referendum result of June 2016. It looks impossible that such a reversal would happen under the present Conservative government, whether led by May (whose position looks increasingly precarious) or a replacement. And even if it did, the political and social consequences with large protests and civil disobedience do not bear thinking about.

What will be Brexit's long-run effects on the UK's economy?

There would be many factors will influence the long-run effects (over say one to two decades) on the economy of the UK and its people, though two stand out.

First, the nature of the trading relationship between the UK and the EU 27 (the remaining members of the EU after UK exit)—whether close relationship with the internal market, customs union, free trade area or WTO rules. The macroeconomic modelling of bodies such as Treasury, IMF, OECD have generally argued that there would significant effects on output and incomes, with output being lower than it would have been of the order of up to 5 per cent spread over several years, and depending on the nature of post Brexit trading relationships between EU and UK. However, the work of [Gudgin, Coutts, Gibson and Buchanan \(2018\)](#) put the loss of output as much lower. They find that “in the baseline Brexit

scenario ...GDP is a little higher up to 2020 as the lower exchange rate and interest rates offset the negative impact of uncertainty. After 2020 the loss of trade results in GDP falling below the pre-referendum trend, ending up in 2025 some 1.2% below the pre-referendum forecast. Part of this reduction in GDP comes from lower migration. As a result, there is less of a fall in per capita GDP which ends up 1.5% lower in 2025 but becomes higher than in the pre-referendum forecast by 2030." I'm inclined towards those much lower estimates: the establishment of the single market in 1992 with the moves to remove non-tariff barriers for trade between EU member states does not appear to have had a significant boost, and think that reversal of membership of the internal market (which is a key element in UK leaving EU) would likewise have little long-term effect. This is a reflection of what Paul Krugman called 'economists little secret' - that while lowering trade barriers bring some gains they are rather small. And in the case of Brexit, the rise in tariffs between UK and the EU would be rather small - from the present zero level to average of 2 to 3 per cent, and there could be some reductions in tariffs depending on trade deals between UK and other non-EU countries. I also take the view that lowering or raising barriers to trade has little long-term effect on employment levels, which depend on the level of aggregate demand. This is not to say that the changes in trade arrangements do not cause disruption with declines in output and employment in some sectors which are potentially offset by rises elsewhere. A 'botched' Brexit which does not address the impacts of its uncertainty on investment and which does not ease the adjustment processes would have not only short-term detrimental effects but could set the economy on a negative path.

Second, a great deal depends on the economic and social policies which the UK government pursues in the aftermath of Brexit. The range of policies which have been advocated by the right wing free market Brexiters (notably the European Research Group of some 50 Conservative MPs) would have wide ranging detrimental effects, though the advocates would claim significant benefits from 'being unshackled from the European Union'. A de-regulation agenda with attacks on workers rights and product standards, and a tax cutting agenda on corporation tax and further shifts to a regressive tax regime would be pursued. Trade policies would be pursued seeking trade deals (notably with the USA) which lowers consumer protection standards and opens up NHS to privatization. The inevitably disruptive effects of changing trade regimes following Brexit would lower output and tax revenues, followed by tax rises to 'balance the budget'.

In contrast, fiscal and monetary policy could be used to boost demand to offset disruptive effects of Brexit and maintain high levels of employment. The UK government contributed £18.6 billion to the EU budget in 2017 of which nearly £9 billion returns to the UK through agricultural support, regional and structural funds and research support. There would be the opportunity to recast agricultural policies. Regional and structural funds could added to and used more effectively. In the early years following Brexit there would be transitional payments (estimated to be of the order of £38 billion), spread over a number of decades but concentrated in the first years, and there would not be a financial gain to UK budget from Brexit until 2022, but would be thereafter. If the fiscal decision was made, that the equivalent of £9 billion (around ½ per cent of GDP) were now spent domestically rather than ‘sent to Brussels’, there would be a domestic stimulus, which would also mean tax revenues higher and hence overall impact of £9 billion expenditure on budget deficit much smaller than £9 billion. This would also represent a (relatively slight) improvement in the current account deficit. A vigorous agenda to ease the adjustment processes, alongside enhanced regional policies, and policies for industrial support and worker protection would be highly beneficial, though most of those could be implemented within membership of the EU.

Reference

Gudgin, G., Coutts, K., Gibson, N., and Buchanan (2018). “The macro-economic impact of Brexit: using the CBR macro-economic model of the UK economy (UKMOD), *Journal of Self-Governance and Management Economics*, vol. 6(2), pp. 7-49, doi:10.22381/JSME6220181

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Stevo Akkerman & Christoph Schmidt ~ Kop op, Europa - Hoe kijkt de rest van de wereld naar ons?



Ills. Joseph Sassoon
Semah

De migratiecrisis, Griekenland-crisis en Brexit zetten Europa zwaar onder druk. De EU is vooral een economisch samenwerkingsproject en veel minder een politieke en helemaal niet een culturele unie. De eerste fase van de Europese samenwerking was het bezweren van oorlogsdreiging, de tweede het brengen van economische voorspoed, maar nu is de glans van het naar binnen gekeerde continent af. Het project hunkert naar een derde fase, waar jonge Europeanen zich achter kunnen scharen.

Wie geeft de EU haar derde leven? Hoe kijkt de rest van de wereld naar ons? In *'Kop op, Europa'* geven veertien niet-Europese prominenten antwoord op deze vragen. Aan het eind van het boek wordt Jean-Claude Juncker, voorzitter van de Europese Commissie, geconfronteerd met de blik van buiten Europa.

De tijd dat het Westen de wereld domineerde is voorbij, er vindt een verschuiving plaats van het politieke en economische zwaartepunt van het Westen naar Azië en we moeten ons aan dat feit leren aanpassen, zegt de Singaporese denker Kishore Mahbubani, auteur van *'Is het Westen de weg kwijt?'*. Het Westen moet leren macht te delen. Ook heeft Europa een eigen buitenlandse politiek nodig; het moet duidelijk maken dat het niet anti-islam is. Maar Europa belichaamt nog steeds de hoop van de mensheid, als continent zonder enkele oorlogsdreiging. Zie <http://rozenbergquarterly.com/kishore-mahbubani-is-het-westen-de-weg-kwijt-een-provocatie/>

Zijn landgenoot Parag Khanna, auteur van *'Connectography'* ziet vooral een toekomstige wereld met een mondiaal systeem van verbindingen, waarin geografische grenzen niet meer bepalend zijn. Europa speelt in dit netwerk nog steeds een belangrijke rol, want Europa is democratie, goede levensstandaard, vrijheid, politieke stabiliteit en 's werelds grootste economische zone. En vooral is Europa zeer verknoopt met alle uithoeken van de wereld.

'Het onderscheidende vermogen van Europa is dat het eerder dan andere regio's een systeem vormde, een samenwerkingsverband waarvan de leden meer met elkaar te maken hebben dan met externe partners'.

Achterkleindochter van de vroegere Sovjetleider Nina Chroesjtsjov vindt Poetins assertieve houding niet zo raar als ze kijkt naar het westerse Ruslandbeleid. Net als Mahbubani begrijpt zij niet dat Europa heeft gedacht dat het in zijn belang zou zijn om Rusland van zich te vervreemden door de NAVO uit te breiden. Het Westen reageert verkeerd op het post-Sovjet-Moskou. De historische afhankelijkheid van het naoorlogse Europa van de Verenigde Staten zou minder moeten worden, misschien kunnen EU en China op het terrein van handel en strijd tegen klimaatverandering intensiever gaan samenwerken.

Politiek wetenschapper Sergej Karaganov was jarenlang adviseur van Poetins buitenlandstrategie. Hij uit felle kritiek op het westerse overwinninggevoel na de Koude Oorlog; de vrede hebben ze na de Koude Oorlog verloren. Maar hij

beschouwt Europeanen wel als vrienden, net als Aziaten. Zijn ideaal is een Euraziatische unie, van Lissabon tot Vladivostok. Hij nodigt dan ook de Europese landen uit toe te treden tot de Shanghai-samenwerkingsorganisatie met het doel een nieuwe geopolitieke en ideologische samenwerking in Eurazië te vormen. In cultureel opzicht Europees, geo-economisch en geopolitiek Euraziatisch. Daarvoor is het Shanghai-samenwerkingsorganisatie opgericht. Machtsverhoudingen zijn verschoven en Europa moet zich daar bij aansluiten!

En Europa moet een militaire defensie opbouwen, niet tegen Rusland maar samen met Rusland, en tegen de radicale islam of de instabiliteit aan het zuiden van Europa.

De Amerikaanse veiligheidsexpert Ivo Daalder en leider van buitenland-denktank The Chicago Council on Global Affairs ontkracht de woorden van Nina Chroestjov en Sergej Karaganov dat Poetins machtspolitiek het resultaat was van de NAVO- en EU-expansie naar Oost-Europa. Want de NAVO en Europa wilden na de Koude Oorlog heel Europa, dus inclusief Rusland, ontsluiten. Poetin wilde de status als grootmacht herstellen, terwijl de economie enorm was gekrompen. En Europa is al de tweede militaire macht van de wereld.

Juncker en Mogherini zijn geen sterke leiders; zij nemen geen beslissingen. Krachtige personen kunnen doorslaggevend zijn. Maar Europa blijft belangrijk en is nog steeds de belangrijkste bondgenoot van de VS, economisch, militair en cultureel.

Zeev Sternhall, geboren in Polen, vestigde zich in 1951 in Israël. Hij beschrijft de EU als een gemeenschap van politieke waarden en zou het liefst zien dat Europa terugkeerde naar de zes landen van het begin.

Orwa Nyrabia, regisseur van de documentaire *'Return to Homs'* is vanwege de oorlog in Syrië uiteindelijk in Amsterdam terechtgekomen. Hij is geworteld in de Arabische cultuur en kijkt met een Europese blik, die zich naar Sternhalls idee beperkt tot een uitgekleed idee van vrede (we zien wel wat er gebeurt, maar we willen niet investeren in hulp). Muren betekenen het einde van Europa. De Europese filosofie ligt hem nauwer aan het hart dan de Europeanen met hun superioriteitsgevoel.

De verwachtingen over Europa blijven hooggespannen, met name als het gaat om democratie, mensenrechten, gelijkheid, vrijheid, strijd tegen klimaatverandering

e.d., maar ze worden vaak niet waargemaakt. De Turkse schrijver en Nobelprijswinnaar Orhan Pamuk zal echter altijd de Europese waarden verdedigen 'Europa was alles, bijna goddelijk.' Maar zonder broederschap zullen ook vrijheid en gelijkheid verloren gaan.

Politiek wetenschapper Turkuler Isiksel, auteur van *'Europe's Functional Constitution'*, groeide op in Turkije. Vooral praktische economische doelen dienen de EU-verdragen, geen hogere idealen als menselijke waardigheid, vrijheid en mensenrechten; het gaat vooral om handel. Ze staat ook kritisch tegenover het Europese Hof, dat vooral is opgezet met een politieke rol. Voor Isiksel moet de Unie sociaal worden, waarin alle burgers gelijke kansen hebben, een voldoende hoge levensstandaard en sociale bescherming. Dat is de richting die de Unie op moet gaan.

Voor romanschrijfster Leila Aboulela (Aberdeen), geboren in Cairo, moet religie meer aandacht krijgen. "Hoe meer Europeanen zich verwijderen van het concept dat God groot is, hoe kleiner ze zijn. Europa zal krimpen omdat het weggaat van de bron van kracht." De staat zou een actievere rol moeten spelen bij religie, dat zou kunnen helpen tegen terrorisme en radicalisering.

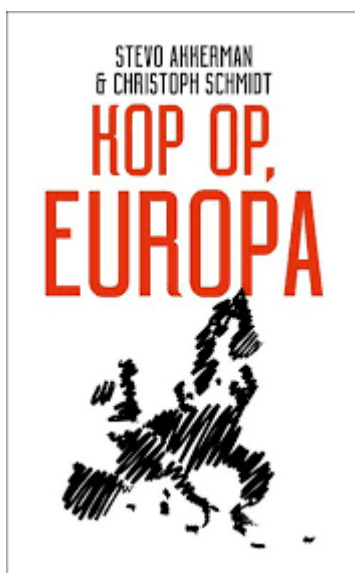
De Nigeriaanse topzakenvrouw Amy Jadesimi (Londen) maakt zich sterk voor Sustainable Development Goals en voor een krachtiger Afrikaanse Unie. Jadesimi vindt het onzin dat in de EU migratie als het belangrijkste probleem op de agenda is gezet. De meeste immigranten willen helemaal niet naar Europa komen, alleen Nigeria vangt al honderdduizenden migranten op. De migrantendiscussie leidt alleen maar af van de gevaren waar de EU voor staat.

De Colombiaanse schrijver Juan Gabriel Vásquez (België) constateert dat Europa als culturele entiteit is vervangen door de Verenigde Staten, zowel als culturele invloed en als politiek. Maar de EU, met al haar tekortkomingen en problemen, is een belangrijk onderdeel van het humanistisch project. Onderwijs kan een belangrijke rol spelen.

Voor de Iraans-Canadese filosoof Ramin Jahanbegloo (New Delhi), auteur van *'The Decline of Civilisation'* bevindt het humanisme zich op een hellend vlak: begrip voor andere culturen neemt af, empathie bestaat nog nauwelijks. Europa is er niet in geslaagd de derde en vierde generatie migranten te integreren. Nu investeert Europa vooral in economie en politiek en niet in cultuur. Er zou een

gemeenschappelijk Europees onderwijsprogramma moeten komen, met de hoogte- en dieptepunten uit de geschiedenis, Anders betekent Europa niets en wordt het een continet van verschillende culturen zonder dialoog. En Europa moet nadenken over een nieuwe vorm van secularisme, waarbij de religie een eigen plek heeft in het openbare leven. De dialoog tussen verschillende religies is in de meeste Europese landen nu geheel afwezig.

Ook professor Zhou Hong (Peking) betwijfelt of Europees burgerschap nog bestaat, Europe ontbeert 'een gemeenschappelijke mentale ruimte'. Ze gelooft niet in een kloof tussen Oost en West. De basis van de internationale samenwerking ligt immers in het Europese denken. In het Oosten is heel wat Westen te vinden. De EU is een geweldig iets, mensen weten niet wat ze op het spel zetten. Wat ontbreekt is een Europese mentale ruimte, een gemeenschappelijke cultuur. Ze hebben nog iets te ontdekken, namelijk zichzelf.



Uit de interviews blijkt dat Europa nog steeds een voorbeeldfunctie en voortrekkersrol kan vervullen in democratisering, rechtsstatelijkheid en gelijkheid tussen man en vrouw, tussen religies en dat beter moet uitdragen in de toekomst. De auteurs pleiten voor meer zichtbaarheid van de Europese democratie, door bijvoorbeeld bij de G7 -top één persoon naar voren te schuiven met een rechtstreeks democratisch mandaat.

Ook moet Europa socialer worden, minder marktgericht, een voortrekkersrol spelen in de strijd tegen klimaatverandering, gezamenlijk strijden tegen terrorisme en radicalisering, een rechtvaardig asiel -en migratiebeleid voeren, en bescherming bieden tegen gevaren van buitenaf (Midden-Oosten, Rusland, Turkije en (sinds Trump) de Verenigde Staten. Onderling zijn de EU-burgers het vaak niet eens zijn over de manier waarop; het vraagt bijna om een EU-leider in de stijl van autocratische Poetin of Erdogan. Macron en zijn collega-regeringsleiders zijn 'te democratisch', een zegen en een vloek tegelijkertijd, aldus de auteurs. Dat is de paradox van de Europese democratie. "De EU is gebaat bij een voortvarende doorstart, maar de wirwar van democratische processen vormt een hindernis voor het uitzetten van een eenduidige koers."

Maar, dat is de prijs die we willen en moeten betalen, want de zoektocht naar compromissen is nog altijd verre te verkiezen boven de 'democratie' van Erdogan en Poetin.

Het eerste en tweede leven van de EU stond of viel met grote persoonlijkheden (Winston Churchill, Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman tot Jacques Delors, Helmut Kohl en Francois Mitterand), zo zal ook het derde leven afhangen van waaghalzen en visionairen. Ingrijpende institutionele hervormingen, niet alleen in Brussel, maar ook in veel lidstaten zijn noodzakelijk. Macrons lef zal mogelijk een nieuwe generatie politici kunnen inspireren tot daden waarvan we nu nog niet weten wat ze zijn. 'Kop op, Europa.'

—

Stevo Akkermans schrijft columns en achtergrondartikelen in 'Trouw' en *Christoph Schmidt* is correspondent in Brussel voor dezelfde krant. 'Kop op, Europa' is gebaseerd op een interviewreeks met prominente niet-Europeanen in 'Trouw' (oktober 2017-april 2018). De oorspronkelijke interviews zijn herschreven en bewerkt.

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