

In 1955 the American Julie London set the standard for ageless crooning in the rock 'n roll era, in 1982 the British ex-punk Vic Godard and his band Subway Sect, with their *Songs for Sale*, made the perfect retro album in the midst of MTV 'synthpop', and Caro Emerald came along at just the right moment to liven up a fatally fatigued pop world with a well-tried recipe: making a new thing out of something old that has proven its worth, using the most advanced means.

In the Netherlands the Caro Emerald circus is invariably a sell-out. On 5 September 2013 she started on her first major European tour. In autumn 2014 she will do a wide-ranging tour of Great Britain, her second base. She thinks nothing of a cover of Amy Winehouse or Adele, and these remakes show just how subtle her imitations are.

Having been showered with prizes, and performing at venues that others can only dream of, it will be hard for Caro Emerald to continue surpassing herself. Once the first shine has gone off it, what awaits next is usually the circuit of musicals, casinos and dinner shows. Which is why the Emerald firm is making sure it milks the success now, with acoustic versions, remixes, dance versions, merchandise and apps. It may be that the lapse into dull routine is just around the corner, but Caroline van der Leeuw is now already legendary as a diva without the whims. With that mentality you can always start all over again.

LUTGARD MUTSAERS

*Translated by Gregory Ball*

### The Power of the 'Intermediate Sphere'

#### The Passage to Europe

The history of the European Union has been written many times. Books have been published in every language describing how in the years after the Second World War, six European countries signed a treaty to set up institutions which would henceforth manage the coal and steel industries in these six founding member states. More than half a century later, the radius of action of the European Union has expanded spectacularly, and the number of EU citizens has increased almost fivefold. The intervening period has been one of breakthroughs and new treaties, but also of arguments and conflicts.

Rarely has that history been written in such a penetrating, idiosyncratic and compelling way as in Luuk van Middelaar's *The Passage to Europe*, which was first published in Dutch-language edition (*De passage naar Europa*) in 2009. Van Middelaar has not been idle since then: he became a speechwriter for the first President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy. Time has not stood still within the European Union either, with the difficulties surrounding the euro plunging Europe into an existential crisis. That crisis forms a good test case for the book: in 2009, Van Middelaar described how the Union succeeds time and again in adapting to unforeseen situations. Every time a crisis arises, there are analysts who predict the break-up of the Union, but every time Europe manages to come out stronger and with a deeper level of unity.

The common theme running through Van Middelaar's book is the observation that the ultimate stimulus in European politics has always come from the collective of member states. It is not so much the institutions of Europe (what he calls the 'inner sphere') that are the driving force, nor is it the case that each individual member state (the 'outer sphere') has control. Rather, it is an 'intermediate sphere', in which member



The Berlaymont Building in Brussels, headquarters of the European Commission © TPCOM

states sit around the table together and are able to learn about coinciding interests, which gives direction to the integration. It is the challenges from outside the Union, such as the economic crisis in the 1970s, the fall of the Berlin Wall or the 9/11 attacks, which prompt member states to decide jointly on whether or not to give a new dimension to European integration.

Van Middelaar's take on history is more original than it first appears. Traditionally, there are two main theories about the history of European integration. One argues that the dynamic emanates mainly from the European institutions themselves: the European Commission or the European Court of Justice set the direction and create an ever more integrated Europe; whether or not the member states want this to happen does not matter very much. The other theory asserts that the individual member states ultimately always have the last word and each looks at whether it is in its own interests to take the next step.

The reality is rather more complex than either theory would suggest. Ultimately, member states decide to take new steps out of a sort of common realisation. This is perfectly illustrated by the euro crisis, which appears to demonstrate the ability of the Union to reinvent itself infinitely.

In the response to the crisis, taboos were broken and red lines crossed. Within the space of two years the power of the Union increased spectacularly: henceforth, the economic policy of the member states will be controlled from Europe. These decisions were taken in that 'intermediate sphere', especially during meetings of the leaders of the member states, who came to see that their common interests and the choices made in the past meant they now had no alternative but to work together.

This take on history explains why Van Middelaar is so interested in the intrigues, the discussions, the informal agreements, the details. It is during the debates and the wrangling between member states that this common realisation is born and grows. All this makes the book a very enjoyable read. It is anything but an encyclopaedic overview of dates, names and statistics. Rather, a number of key moments are highlighted and recounted using pleasing anecdotes: lots of 'little history', and largely based on memoirs. In order to place these events in context, it does help if the reader already has some awareness of the broad brush strokes of the history of European integration. When presented in this way, history emerges as a concatenation of intriguing, often tense and sometimes bizarre events.

Luuk van Middelaar also devotes a lot of attention in his book to a theme that has long been forgotten by European policymakers: public opinion. Europe has never been as lively a place as it is today. The same debates are raging everywhere and the same topics dominate the media across the Union. This is in stark contrast to earlier decades, when it was nigh on impossible to engage the interest of the public at large in Europe.

Europe has tried to engage that interest in a variety of ways. There was for example the 'German' strategy of trying to create a European sense of 'togetherness'. That strategy foundered on the distrust of the member states. Or there was the 'Greek' approach, aimed at involving the public in politics. That was also a failure, as

demonstrated by the low turnouts at European elections. And there is the 'Roman' strategy: the way to engage the public is to make better provision for 'bread' and 'games'. The 'bread' means the tangible things that improve people's lives: reducing the costs of mobile phone calls in Europe or subsidising farmers in deprived regions. Public enthusiasm remains limited, however. The 'games' are the political knockabout, the conflicts, played out on a knife-edge. The euro crisis produced sharp oppositions in public opinion in the different member states, but at the same time the crisis ensured that, for the first time in history, 'Europe' became deeply embedded in all national debates. In fact, the fiercest debates about Europe rage in a country where the euro has not even been introduced: Great Britain. In the English-language version of his book, Van Middelaar launches into a discussion of the referendum on Europe that has been promised by Prime Minister David Cameron. That creates an imperative to think carefully about the usefulness and added value of European integration, not just in Great Britain, but in all member states.

This book is much more than an academic quest to find the ultimate driver of European integration. It looks at events from sometimes surprising angles; it is an enjoyable read; it is very well documented; and it is written in an extremely witty style – something that is sadly lacking in the traditional literature on European politics. That alone makes *The Passage to Europe* worth reading.

HENDRIK VOS

*Translated by Julian Ross*

Luuk Van Middelaar, *The Passage to Europe*, translated from the Dutch by Liz Waters, Yale University Press, 2013 (ISBN 978 0 300 18112 8).

## **From Plato to the European Union** **The Road to Democracy**

Democracy is probably the most famous 'contested concept'. That means that there is quite some disagreement about what it exactly means. There are thus many good reasons for investing a bit in a good understanding of the concept and of its many components. One possible and always quite fruitful approach is to look back, to see how democracy came about, how it evolved, how aspects of it were criticized, changed and rethought along the way.

In *The Road to Political Democracy* Robert Senelle, Emile Clément and Edgard Van de Velde opt for that approach. They want to trace the history of political democracy from Plato to the fundamental Rights of the European Union. That is a long journey, and the road is winding and complex, with many side roads and dead-ends. One of the reasons for that is of course the multidimensional nature of democracy. For the authors of the book, political democracy means "[...] a formal democratic system wherein political and economic freedom is guaranteed and in which an equilibrium between equality and liberty can be established. The rule of law and the redistributionist principle are inherent features of such a system" (p. 26). That is a lot. Political democracy thus refers among other things to rules about participation and representation, to the right to govern the people, to a political culture of equality, to policy goals like redistribution, to (supreme) courts and their role in safeguarding the rules, and to human rights.

The book has an interesting and original format. Between the foreword of Stephen Breyer, Justice of the US Supreme Court and the postscript by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, there are two parts. The first one is written by the authors and describes the 'red wire' in the history of democracy from Antiquity till today. It does so by looking at four major issues. The first is the question whether there is