

Re:thinking Europe

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Introductory remarks on the history & future of an idea

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*Europe? Where is it? I do not know
where to find such a country.*
(based on Friedrich Schiller &
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE IDEA

From the beginning, Europe was an idea. For how else could a geologically completely undefined continent, which, if anything, represents an appendage of the vast Asian continental mass, be defined as an independent territorial identity? Geographically speaking, Europe is namely a subcontinent that together with Asia forms the continent of Eurasia. Yet Eurasia, as a territorial, cultural or even political concept, played and plays a subordinate role (see Maçães, 2018, 3ff.). More than the geographical conditions, the notion of Europe as an independent continent is much more likely to stem from a historical and cultural idea. This begins in ancient times with Greek historiography.

Herodotus – the first great historian – is considered the inventor of this demarcation between Europe and Asia (Meier, 2009, pp. 30ff.). The origin of these names adopted from Herodotus is unknown. He himself wrote in *The Histories* (4, 45): “As for Europe, no one can say [...] whence the name of Europe was derived, nor who gave it name [...]” One theory says that the word Europe could be of Semitic provenance and etymologically refer to *eref*, which means as much as “evening” or “west”, and in turn indicates that Europe could have originally served as a foreign appellation (Meier, 2009, p. 31). This indicates that the origins of the term, which has even found its way into Greek mythology and is firmly rooted in it, do not stem from Europe itself but from outside, from foreign territory, more specifically, from Asia (Minor) [see Liessmann, 1994, pp. 19ff.]: Transformed into a bull, Zeus kidnapped the eponymous Phoenician princess from Sidon (now Lebanon) to Crete. Europe – thus the philosophical consequence – can only be conceived of as a result of a confrontation with “the stranger”, “the other”, without which it simply did not exist (Brague, 1993, pp. 101ff.).

In *The Histories*, written in the 5th century BC and the discourse on the Persian wars contained therein, Herodotus defined the division of the world into a land of Orient and Occident and established the enduring myth of Europe or the Occident, the inhabitants of which – although small in number – could oppose the superior power of the “barbaric” Persians and were able to emerge victorious from this conflict (see Meier, 2009, pp. 36ff.). Herodotus placed the war of the Greeks against the Persians as a crucial line of demarcation between Europe and Asia. If you will, this separation of the Occident from the Orient is the birth of Europe as an independent world. And it is the birth of the influential idea that Europe is not part of a larger, more comprehensive Eurasia, but a clearly defined, independent part of the world with specific socio-cultural and political characteristics. Based on this idea the first maps were produced, in which this separation was manifested; the first known is that of Hecataeus of Miletus from the 5th century BC, which – quite remarkable, albeit hardly surprising for the Greek civilisation – defines the Mediterranean as the centre of the world (see Figure 1).

Since then, around 2,500 years have passed. Because, unlike the other continents, the geographical conditions have no clearly defined, irrefutable fault lines, the idea of the shape of Europe changed several times in the course of history. Of course, today we know that the world looks different to what Hecataeus or later ancient cartographers thought. And we know that Europe is part of a larger whole. But even with this knowledge and even if much has changed significantly since antiquity, the idea of a European continent and an independent Europe has remained unbroken since then – and in the aftermath of World War II it became even more substantiated than ever before in history.

“The history of Europe cannot, therefore, refer to an unequivocally defined space, but always remains that which Europe tells about itself. Thereby, the vague geographic term Europe need not even occur. [...] Less than ever, Europe can be defined territorially, but only procedurally as a mental though entirely real construct with different affiliations” (Reinhard, 2016a, p. 17). In principle, ideas as mental constructs can have substantial impact in reality (see, for instance, Harari, 2015, pp. 27ff.; Gellner, 1990, pp. 84ff., 122ff.). The power of the mental construct of *Europe* is thereby as obvious as the far-reaching consequences that were able to emerge from this original idea. Details can be found in the history books (in a short version, for example, in Hirst [2009]; in a slightly longer example in Salewski [2000], and in a version that focuses on the conception of the idea of Europe in Schmale [2000]).

That the idea of Europe as an independent part of the world differing from others above all culturally still exists today – as for example the results from the “Eurobarometer: 40 years”¹ suggest – is a definitive result of the common histo-



Fig. 1 // Reconstruction of the world map of Hecataeus of Miletus

ry that Europe itself keeps telling, as well as passing down in pictures and other cultural artefacts (see Burrow, 2009, and Schmale, 2008). A prominent example of the cultural and politically motivated visualisation of Europe is, for instance, the famous cartographic representation from the 16th century that exists in numerous variations, which presents Europe as a queen (“Europa regina”) and thus not only metaphorically emphasizes the continent as autonomous, independent, even sovereign (see Figure 2). It is obvious that the geographical characteristics only play a minor role in this representation of the continent. Rather, it expresses a multilayered symbolism that visualises early modern Europe as a political and cultural entity (Werner, 2009). Furthermore, it illustrates the idea of a clear delineation of Europe from other parts of the world.

In fact, even today Europe cannot yet be clearly defined geographically, especially at its eastern edges. The question posed at the beginning of this text as to where Europe lies can thus undoubtedly be answered only in such a way that it is everywhere “where people see themselves as Europeans” (Weidenfeld, 2017). This “understanding oneself as European” can be based on no other grounds than ideational ones – i.e. based on an idea. Etymologically, the term idea goes back to the ancient Greek *idéa*, which means “appearance”, “form”, “archetype”. Today, the term – found in almost all European languages – colloquially describes a thought or idea to act upon, as well as a mental draft or plan that can serve as model for orientation. Even if this is not conscious in its everyday use, there is always something ideal in the concept of the idea that can be pursued as a visionary goal. This is why there is always something utopian inherent within every idea in the sense of an “imaginary non-existent” (see Liessmann, 2009, p. 5). At the same time, an idea fundamentally also has a purely conceptual dimension (as opposed to the material), which inevitably includes the possibility that it can never really be reached and thus – in the negative sense of the term – must remain utopian.

Likewise, the concept of the idea, dominant since Plato in European philosophy, denotes “an essential resource, namely the capacity to produce non-material, ideational (abstract) notions and to elevate them to an “ideal” by making them the object of our aspirations (in Plato: the desire, *eros*, to connect with the *eidos*, the form model). The resource of the ideal was fundamental for the development of Europe” (Jullien, 2018, p. 60f.). For, as it seems, the conception of a world view orientated towards the future, dealing with the pursuit of a visionary goal or and “imaginary non-existent”, could in fact have been a decisive driving force for the development of Europe – also in the sense of its spatial expansion (see Landes, 1999, p. 59f.).

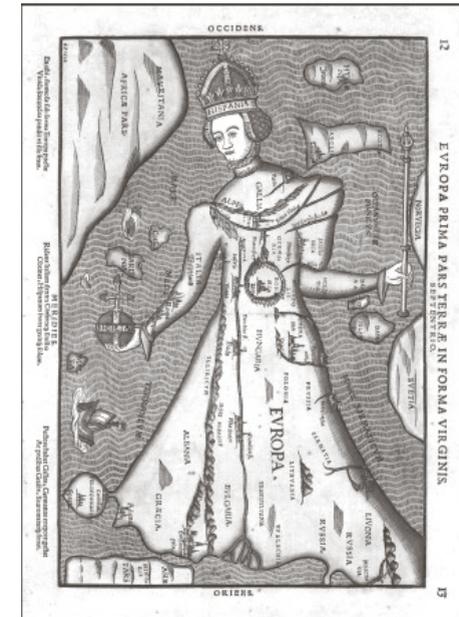


Fig. 2 // «Europa regina» in Heinrich Bünting's *Itinerarium Sacrae Scripturae*, 1582

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/topics/eb40years_en.pdf

FROM THE IDEA TO GLOBAL HEGEMONY

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The development of Europe is unparalleled in world history, for “European civilisation [...] is the only civilisation which has imposed itself on the rest of the world. It did this by conquest and settlement; by its economic power [and] by the power of its ideas” (Hirst, 2009, p. 5). The fact that the power of European ideas should one day establish itself worldwide was, however, anything but a foregone conclusion. Because, generally speaking, due to its position on the periphery of the Eurasian continent and following the collapse of the Roman Empire as well as the subsequent fragmentation of many small dominions, from a global perspective Europe only played a minor role for a long time. By 1492 – on the eve of the discovery of the “New World” and the beginning of European expansion – there was little sign that Europe was about to emerge from this insignificance as a worldwide power.

This only changed with the European expansion between the 15th and 20th centuries, when the European world system – fuelled by scientific, military, technical, administrative and commercial innovations (see Menzel, 2015) – continued to expand, supplanted other imperial and hegemonic systems or regulatory structures and, eventually from the 19th century onwards encompassed the entire planet. The geographic outskirts that were for a long time unfavourable have contributed to the fact that Europe has always striven to “reach beyond its borders” (Reinhard, 2016a, p. 17). But it was, above all, the “discovery” of America that led to the former peripheral situation being an advantage, and the Atlantic becoming the centre of the emerging “Atlantic World system” (Menzel, 2015, p. 1135f.), which henceforth became the engine of economic development and the mainspring of European advancement (Morris, 2010, p. 500). The power of geography can – depending on the respective level of development of societies – evidently have both negative and positive effects (see Marshall, 2015; Diamond, 1997); and for the European societies since early modern times the positive effects of the continent’s geographical position clearly outweighed the negative ones.

The most crucial contributions to these changed conditions were the constitutions of European societies and their innovations, which had developed out of specific historical constellations (see Menzel, 2015, for details). For it was the innovations in the fields of shipbuilding, navigation, cartography, astronomy, instrument making, the military or financing structures which created the prerequisites for the advantageous use of the geographic peripheral location and thus the European expansion with its predominantly “maritime character” (Reinhard, 2016a, p. 19). The role of European educational culture as well as the scientific-industrial-military complex in establishing European supremacy around the globe is undisputed today (see Androsch/Gadner, 2015, pp. 16ff.).

The peculiarity of Europe was that in the modern age – for the first time in history – education was no longer reserved for the elite, but was borne across the population. With the success of book printing (see Burke, 2000), the rise of the Renaissance (see Roeck, 2017) and the triumphal procession of the Enlightenment as well as the correlated radical transformation of the social order (see Gellner, 1990, 113ff.) began a veritable “explosion of knowledge” (see Burke, 2012), which eventually led to the scientific and industrial revolution, sparking unprecedented economic growth (see Mokyr, 2017) and facilitating Europe’s world supremacy as well as its cultural hegemony (also see in detail Menzel, 2015). *The European Miracle* (Jones, 1981) is characterised predominantly by the fact that the

enormous creativity boost initiated in modern times – “one of the great and profound revolutions of history” (Gellner, 1990, p. 117) – included all areas of European societies: philosophy, sciences, medicine, ethics, jurisprudence, economics, finance, warfare, literature, music, visual and performing arts, architecture, etc.

These developments not only resulted in the already proverbial “great divergence” (Pomeranz, 2000) of Europe and Asia, but in the almost complete European dominance of the global economy since the mid-19th century, which eventually led to the shift of the global political warehouse to Europe. In 1900 Europe undisputedly commanded the world economy and dominated most of the world politically as well (see Harari, 2015, p. 280ff.; Darwin, 2008, pp. 157ff.). In the inter-war period there existed no single country worldwide that was not under European rule, had once been a colony of a European power or was at least subject to massive economic and political control or the cultural influence of Europe (Reinhard, 2016b).

Even if Europe had already passed the zenith of its power at this time – and the final “Europeanisation of the world” remained reserved for the United States (see Menzel, 2015, p. 839ff.) – the world was already almost completely dominated by Europe: the colonial powers – most prominently Great Britain as the last European world power – had carried European ideas and worldviews around the globe (Simms, 2016, pp. 217f.). European expansion had given the world a new, modern face: under the aegis of Europe a new world order and world culture had emerged (Reinhard, 2016a, p. 1255ff.). The precolonial world was fundamentally different from the postcolonial, present one – and while many don’t want to admit it, “today all humans are [...] European in dress, thought and taste. [...] almost everyone on the planet views politics, medicine, war and economics through European eyes. [...] Even today’s burgeoning Chinese economy, which may soon regain its global primacy, is built on a European model of production and finance.” (Harari, 2015, p. 281f.)

THE DESIGN OF THE IDEA OF EUROPE

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The success of Europe, originally based on an idea and the “myth of separation” (Maçães, 2018, 17ff.), has radically changed the world in the past centuries. At the same time, however, Europe itself, or the idea of Europe has changed.

For in the course of this historical process the idea of the unity of Europe has repeatedly cropped up – first in the form of concepts of a unified Christian Europe or as utopias of a universal occidental empire and, finally, as decidedly modern political conceptions (see Schmale, 2016). Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the Peace of Westphalia signed in October 1648 in view of the complete devastation of vast areas of Europe by the Thirty Years’ War (see Münkler, 2017). For, in addition to the foundation of a globally applicable international order, it fundamentally allowed “in the first place the idea of a united Europe, in which such a war should no longer be possible” (Liessmann, 1994, p. 74). Thus, for the first time in history Europe demonstrated certain conditions under which it may be possible – in spite of conflicting religious or philosophical ideas and different systems of government – to establish a contractually fixed stability between contractual partners on the basis of neutral rules (Kissinger, 2014, pp. 11ff.).

Proposals on the further development of the idea of the unity of Europe were subsequently made by various sources. For example, by William Penn, who already in 1692 in his *Essay towards the present and future peace of Europe* proposed the establishment of

a pan-European Parliament and a federal assembly from representatives of all European governments. Or by Charles de Saint-Pierre, who in his *Plan for Perpetual Peace in Europe* in 1712 called for a fundamental reorganisation of Europe through a transnational international organisation. Finally, for example, by Charles Mackay, who developed the idea of the “United States of Europe” in several news articles for the London *Telegraph* in spring of 1848, thus influencing apologists of the Europe idea such as Victor Hugo or Giuseppe Mazzini. And last but not least, by Friedrich Nietzsche, who in the face of burgeoning nationalism, which he described as “madness”, in his 1886 book *Beyond Good and Evil* called for Europe to ultimately overcome the “comedy of its petty-statism” and “become one”.

Previously, Franz Grillparzer had already pointed out that this European petty-statism encouraged a dangerous development – “from humanity through nationality to bestiality”: How prophetic these words would be became apparent at the latest with the outbreak of World War I in a scope that was previously not thought possible. The ensuing collapse of the European multinational states further aggravated the situation: the fatal petty-statism assumed even greater proportions in the inter-war period – with well-known consequences. Overcoming this devastating, nationalism-promoting petty-statism was therefore a central element of European unity efforts before, but predominantly after, the end of World War II.

Several examples of pioneers of the idea of Europe up to the well-known recent concepts – for instance, the inter-war pan-European movement of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi; the vision of the United States of Europe, which the then British Prime Minister Winston Churchill sketched in his famous speech as an immediate response to the catastrophe of World War II at the University Zurich on 19 September 1946; or the so-called “Schuman Plan”, that the then French foreign minister Robert Schuman announced on 9 May 1950 – can be found in literature (see, for example, Timmermann, 2011, or Liessmann, 1994) and will not be further elaborated here.

In any case, whatever the differences in the specific conception of these European drafts, it should be noted that they all have one thing in common: they present the idea of a completely new Europe, based on long-term cooperation and aimed at stable peace building. Thereby two key cornerstones of a baseline are marked which reverting to in the future seems unthinkable. This is notable insofar as they were already laid down by Immanuel Kant in the year 1795 in his essay *Perpetual Peace*. At that time, of course, they were considered purely utopian. Today Europe is already well advanced on the path envisaged by Kant, and forms a legal community that has led to greater consistency through economic cooperation and to more mutual trust between Member States through cross-border communication (see Höntzsch, 2007).

The idea of Europe has long since taken shape. This does not mean, however, that Europe is in any way already finished; on the contrary, it is much more equivalent to a major construction site which needs work in all corners. Particularly noteworthy are the policy areas of economics and finances, foreign affairs, security and defence, refugees, asylum and migration, or social affairs. Merely owing to these construction sites, Europe is an “unfinished story” (Loth, 2014). Even if, for instance, in the area of science, research and innovation policy, the establishment of research framework programmes has created a positive dynamic, it must be noted that the EU is miles away from a common, strategi-

cally oriented RTI policy, which is not least reflected in the failure of the Lisbon strategy. Research, technology and innovation are of existential strategic relevance: For Europe, they could become a “geopolitical survival issue” in the foreseeable future (Rinke, 2018). In addition, even what has already been achieved in accomplishments must be maintained and defended repeatedly so that Europe will not be endangered by increasing secessionist tendencies (see Krastev, 2017).

In this context the question of where Europe lies obtains additional significance, for there is indeed no place where Europe as a political entity is actually tangible – neither in Brussels, nor in Strasbourg, let alone in Berlin or Paris. The former American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is said once to have asked: “Who do I call if I want to call Europe?” Even if there is disagreement over the authorship of this quote, it is the true crux of the issue. Because the EU has no single representative, no obvious president, not even a well-defined spokesperson. On the contrary, there are three organisations – the Parliament, the Commission and the Council – each represented by a president. In addition, there are the heads of government of the individual Member States, who, as a matter of fact, likewise have their say on topics concerning Europe.

The EU still does not present itself as a European entity today. More than ever, its ability to act, if not its ability to survive on a global scale depends on its common, purposeful demeanour. After all, it is likely – according to former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt – that “in this century the self-assertion of European civilisation is at stake” (Schmidt, 2013, p. 8). The dilemma Europe is facing was recently analysed by Henry Kissinger: “Europe has the capacity to be a superpower, but Europe has neither the organization, nor, so far, the concept, to be a superpower. And that, for the European idea, is a challenge” (Kissinger, 2012).

The individual European nation-states are almost completely powerless against the global challenges like climate change or resource scarcity, let alone the geopolitical developments. With the struggle of the US and China, but also India and Russia for world supremacy, the situation for Europe is further exacerbated. From a global perspective European nation-states face a return to insignificance in the light of these trends. It is all the more astonishing that the petty-statism already thought to have been overcome, is experiencing a ghostly return today – at a time when Europe can only assert itself in the dawning multipolar world order as united European states. It may be argued that Europe does not necessarily have to participate in the geopolitical struggle of the US, China, Russia and India for the new world order. However this is an extremely short-sighted perspective, as the consequences of the geopolitical transformation processes are already clearly emerging – and Europe is directly affected by them, especially due to the conflicts resulting from the erosion of the Western world order in Ukraine, the Balkans, the Caucasus, in the Near and Middle East or in Africa. Only a united and strong Europe can respond adequately to these developments, for instance, by finding a reasonable arrangement with Russia or a strategic approach to African countries.

At any rate, a return to Nietzsche’s “comedy of its petty-statism” will not facilitate effective European answers to the challenges of the 21st century. After all, even the largest European countries are barely significant globally. One simply needs to take a sober look at the numbers – such as, for example, the shares in world GDP. Similarly illustrative are other areas, e.g. population, R&D expenditures or patent applications, which are

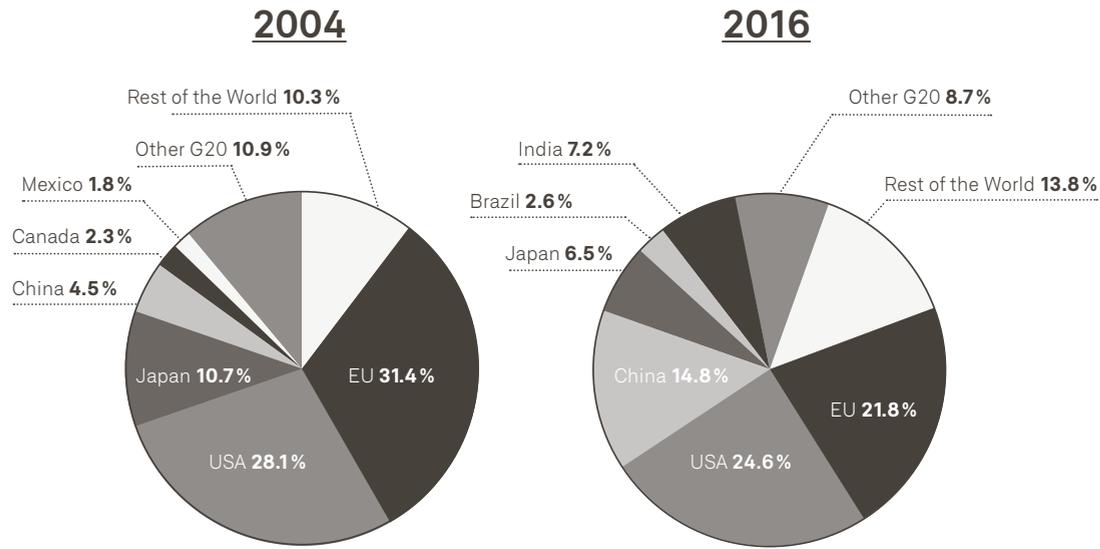


Fig. 3 // Share of world GDP of selected countries and regions, 2004 and 2016

documented by Eurostat in a global comparison and published in the online publication *The EU in the World*.² The statistic comparison shows that the EU as a whole is – still – the largest economic power in the world (see Figure 3).

This exemplifies that Europe in the entirety of the European Union carries totally different weight in the world than would be possible even for the largest Member State. Given the breadth and complexity of the challenges Europe and the world are facing today, it is clear that the EU can only succeed through the joint action of its members. Only in this way – in the European Union – Europe has the chance to remain a global player. With its population size, its gross domestic product, its scientific and innovative potential as well as its prerequisites for digitisation, the EU meets all the requirements, at least on paper, for being one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful actors in the international arena (Simms/Zeeb, 2016, p. 18f). Alone its inability to act together currently prevents the European Union from pursuing the interests of its citizens and preparing for the challenges of the globalised world.

Consequently, additional endeavours, effort and persuasiveness are needed in the future in order to realise the European idea and to continue to build Europe. In the actual design of the idea of Europe there are no limits to creativity. If, in the year 2019 some 400 million eligible citizens of the Member States of the European Union are called upon to vote on a new European Parliament, it may be assumed “that these active voters have some kind of idea of Europe in their heads” (Schmale, 2016, para. 8).

But what is this idea of Europe today? What concepts are there for the future of the European project? And how can or should, or, indeed, must the EU develop further in order to effectively and efficiently address the multifaceted and frequently debated challenges of the world of the 21st century – and not just the recent geopolitical upheavals (see, for example, Androsch/Gadner, 2018)?

² Eurostat: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/The_EU_in_the_world

About this – according to the common complaint – hardly any significant argument is taking place. With a few exceptions, there is currently no comprehensive conceptual discourse on the strategic development of the European Union. This strategic deficit – the “Achilles heel of Europe” (Weidenfeld, 2014, p. 109) – has currently led the EU to an impasse, from which there seems to be no way forward. The aporia of the project Europe sometimes seems insurmountable.

The outcomes are already apparent. Direct consequences include the strengthening of nationalist movements or the Brexit vote. Since the 2014 European elections, nationalist and Eurosceptic parties, some of which are openly calling for the abolition of the EU and a return to the nation-state, have been the third strongest force in European Parliament (Roll, 2016, p. 19). The Brexiteers, too, have conjured up the spirit of an allegedly golden age of the nation-state, in which they have repeatedly referred back to Rule Britannia, the unofficial, patriotic national anthem that expresses the longing for past imperial greatness. This return of nationalism as a response to globalisation is accompanied by doubts about the ideal of the Enlightenment and the desire for a clearly defined, national cultural identity (see Jullien, 2018).

And yet, diametrically opposed to these retrograde tendencies of isolation, openness, creativity, innovative power and the ability to completely reinvent oneself in order to overcome one’s own boundaries are a constitutive moment of Europe. Throughout its history Europe has shown on several occasions that it is always capable of innovative new beginnings from a wide variety of initial constellations. Today, in the face of growing scepticism about Europe, major global challenges and geopolitical upheavals, such a fresh start is needed more than ever before.

RE:THINKING EUROPE

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Re:thinking Europe. Positions on Shaping an Idea is the contribution of the Austrian Council for Research and Technology Development to the discussion on the reorientation of the common European project. The articles in this anthology present ideas and concepts for a Europe fit for the future. They point out ways and strategies to establish a competitive and dynamic European knowledge society, where innovation drives economic growth, digital transformation is successful and, at the same time, social cohesion as well as sustainable development are strengthened. The book provides ideas for the social, economic, digital and ecologic renewal of the EU. Continually, the fundamental question is raised about which role education, science, research and innovation can and should play. The 22 contributions reflect a wide range of positions that do not necessarily reflect the view of the Council. Taken together, however, they give food for thought and can thus be the starting point for debate about the new conception of the idea of Europe in the 21st century, as well as the necessary further development of the European Union.

The book is divided into three parts. The contributions in *PART ONE* deal with the beginnings of Europe from a global history perspective, European expansion and the resulting consequences for the historical developments not only in Europe. The emergence of the modern sciences and their influence on the conception of Europe are discussed, as well as the question of the continuity of historical processes in the present and the future. Consequently, the past in these historically oriented contributions is always understood as a bridge to the future.

In *PART TWO*, the contributions present positions for the specific shaping of the idea of Europe or for the political development of the European Union. The spectrum ranges from proposals for the further deepening of the EU to the development of a grand strategy to the overcoming of the nation-states and the creation of a type of United States of Europe or a European Republic. On the one hand, these approaches share the common understanding that in the face of global upheaval there can no longer be an effective policy of isolated European nation-states. On the other hand, they concur in their awareness of the strength resulting from the community of European Member States – a strength that is needed in order to overcome the challenges that face the world of the 21st century.

PART THREE of the anthology deals with the necessary prerequisites for maintaining or attaining the global leadership in the areas of the future, such as research, innovation and digitisation, and thereby succeeding in global competition. The focus is on topics that – like the sciences in particular – originated in Europe and once made the continent a global leader and which, the authors are convinced, are the most promising in terms of solving the global grand challenges as well as enhancing the competitiveness of the European economy. The topics of digitisation, artificial intelligence and robotics as well as sustainability and greening are addressed. These show the potential for making Europe a global pioneer also in the future. Consequently, the EU must define its role even more sharply than before in order to really leverage its existing potential. The book finishes with a *VISION* for Europe in the year 2050.

With America's withdrawal from its responsibilities for global affairs, a global vacuum is emerging, which until now has been openly sought by China in particular. The EU has little to counter with at the moment. Especially Europe, with its traditional humanistic values and principles for a sustainable society – above all human rights, democracy, rule of law, equality, freedom, tolerance, rationality, freedom of science, environmental protection, etc., as they appear in the Treaty of Lisbon or the Charter of the EU Fundamental Rights – should take more responsibility for global civilisation than ever before. But this requires a courageous vision and clear strategic goals. Although these have yet to be formulated and negotiated, this is not impossible. Europe must be rethought again today, just as it has been done countless times in the past. And even if it is often expressed, Europe is not at its end. On the contrary: “The European idea is as alive as ever” (Schmale, 2018). This book is intended to make a contribution to ensuring that it remains so in the future. —

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FIGURES

Fig. 1 // Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hecataeus_of_Miletus)

Fig. 2 // Wikipedia (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europa_Regina)

Fig. 3 // Eurostat (2018). *The EU in the world – A statistical portrait*. Luxembourg, p. 79.

