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In publications addressing literary reflections on Europe, little attention has been paid to emerging cultural networks, the role of EU subsidies, or literary organisations engaging writers in initiatives aimed at contemplating the challenges that the European Union faces.

This dissertation aims to explain the role of these new initiatives by presenting four recent, transnational literary projects as case studies: the “Literatur Express Europa 2000”; “The European Constitution in Verse”; “Narratives for Europe”; and “The Return of Europe”.

The projects were analysed through an examination of three fundamental aspects: the expectations held by the cultural organisations regarding their initiatives; the cultural artefacts resulting from the projects; and the effects of the projects in the public sphere. By selecting literary projects about Europe as case studies, rather than individual authors or texts, this research allows for an interdisciplinary approach that reveals the interaction between EU politics, civil society, cultural networks, and individual authors.
SHARED STORIES AND CREATIVE DISSONANCES

Transnational Literary Projects and European Identity

Anouk Zuurmond
Het hier beschreven onderzoek werd mede mogelijk gemaakt door steun van de Hogeschool Utrecht. De uitgave van dit proefschrift werd mede mogelijk gemaakt door steun van de J.E. Jurriaanse Stichting.
SHARED STORIES AND CREATIVE DISSONANCES.
TRANSNATIONAL LITERARY PROJECTS AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY

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## Contents

1. General Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 1

PART I. EUROPEAN IDENTITY, THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN (TRANS)NATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION, AND EUROPEAN CULTURAL POLICY ...................................................................................................................... 7

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 9

2. European Identity ..................................................................................................................................... 11

3. The Role of Literature in the Construction of (Trans-)National Identities .............................................. 21

4. EU Policy in European Identity Formation .......................................................................................... 33

5. Selection of Cases ...................................................................................................................................... 41

PART II. EXPECTATIONS OF THE TRANSNATIONAL LITERARY PROJECTS IN EUROPEAN IDENTITY FORMATION .................................................................................................................................................. 51

Introduction ................................................................................................................................................ 53

6. Cultural Diversity and Committed Citizens: Images of European Identity ............................................ 55

7. Shared Memories and Critical Narratives: Legitimising a Literary Perspective .................................... 73

Conclusion to Part II ................................................................................................................................... 85

PART III. A COMPARISON BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND RESULTS .............................................................................. 89

Introduction ................................................................................................................................................ 91

8. “So Then Tell Me, Where Is Kundera?”: the “Literatur Express” ............................................................ 95

9. Overcoming an Imaginative Failure: “Narratives for Europe” .............................................................. 113


11. From Plato to Everyday European Politics: “The Return of Europe” .................................................. 161

Conclusion to Part III ................................................................................................................................ 189

PART IV. THE EFFECTS OF THE TRANSNATIONAL LITERARY PROJECTS .............................................................................. 193

Introduction .............................................................................................................................................. 195

12. A Media Event and Its Fictional Re-workings: the “Literatur Express” ................................................ 197


15. A Vote for Thomas Mann or Oswald Spengler? “The Return of Europe” ............................................. 251

Conclusion to Part IV ................................................................................................................................ 265

16. General Conclusions .............................................................................................................................. 269

Bibliography .............................................................................................................................................. 277

Appendix 1. List of Quotes in German and Dutch .................................................................................... 305

Appendix 2. Itinerary: the “Literatur Express” ............................................................................................ 335
1. General Introduction

When British citizens were asked whether the United Kingdom should stay in the European project, the historian Hugh Thomas initiated a campaign in favour of remaining, entitled “Writers for Europe.” Three days before the referendum, he published an advertisement in *The Times*, signed by more than 200 authors and academics (Varouxakis, 2010). That was in 1975, when a “Brexit” was averted on June 5, with 67% of voters preferring to remain in the European Community. Whether the list of famous authors and intellectuals, such as Karl Popper and Harold Pinter, speaking out to remain in Europe had any influence on the results is difficult to assess. However, the initiative “Writers for Europe” reveals that authors were believed, by some at least, to have a voice in European issues, and that their perspective was deemed by some relevant to the process of European integration. The question posed here is whether contemporary writers are still perceived as playing an important role where matters of European unity are concerned. Is their opinion on Europe still relevant in the eyes of the general public—for example, during the most recent referendum on Britain’s position in the European Union in 2016?

The advertisement in *The Times* tapped into a longstanding tradition of writers and thinkers proposing visions of a united Europe. In *The Meaning of Europe*, Denis de Rougemont (1965), a writer and promotor of European cooperation, described this tradition by arguing that from a historical perspective, many poets and philosophers, such as Dante, Comenius, and Nietzsche, amongst other numerous examples, have envisioned utopian ideals of a united Europe. Taking our cue from De Rougemont, this list of authors engaged in reflecting on Europe and European identity can be extended into the 20th century, which saw numerous movements and conferences to discuss “the European question”, long before the creation of the European communities in the 1950s (Pasture, 2015). Amongst many examples, in October 1933 intellectuals gathered in Paris to discuss “the future of the European mind.” The discussions were chaired by the French poet and essayist Paul Valéry, who interviewed writers such as Aldous Huxley and Jules Romains, under the title “Les Entretiens sur l’avenir de l’esprit Européen” (“Interviews on the future of the European mind” (Mooij, 2006, p. 30). The “European mind” was also the topic of a conference in 1946 in Geneva, in which Denis de Rougemont was himself involved, together with poets and writers such as Jean Guéhenno and Stephen Spender (Mooij, 2006). A year after the Second World War, this conference represented the beginning of a period of intensive reflection on European identity and civilisation (Mooij, 2006). In May 1948, at the end of the “Congress of Europe” in The Hague, which brought together politicians and intellectuals discussing European integration, the establishment of a permanent European Centre for Culture was proposed (Mooij, 2006). Forty
years later, in 1988, a writers’ conference was organised that culminated in an open letter to European leaders (instigated by the Dutch author Harry Mulisch) with a plea for the free movement of European citizens and the abolition of censorship of literary works (Bax, 2013; Buch, 1988). Famous authors such as György Konrád and Claudio Magris —literary icons who were leading in public debates on Europe, for example by positioning the notion of Central Europe as a key term in the process of European integration—participated in this conference. These authors embody the classic ideal of the “great European writer”: they move between the distanced position of creating well-known literary artworks and the engagement of noticeably “intervening” in European politics via public statements and polemics.

Instances such as these have led scholars to argue that the role of intellectuals in the history of European integration has been significant (Giesen, 1999; Hewitson & D’Auria, 2012; Kaelble, 2001; Lacroix & Nicolaïdis, 2010). For example, the sociologists Klaus Eder and Bernard Giesen (2001) point out that “Europe has been, above all, a cultural movement” that was also “carried out by intellectuals and artists” (p. 256). Also in the humanities, the specific role of literary authors in this process has been underlined (Lützeler, 2007a). Literary scholar Anne Kraume (2010), for example, researching the relationship between European integration and 19th- and 20th-century writers, concluded that closely connected to the “real Europe” there exists a “literary Europe” through which authors and poets have paved the way for the unification of Europe (p. 363).

One can argue that contemporary writers continue to have an important voice in reflections on what binds Europeans together (Heynders, 2009). Issues such as the single market, immigration, solidarity, and expansion increasingly provoke discussions that go beyond technocratic perspectives. The question of European identity is addressed with a growing sense of urgency, not only in academic publications, but also in mainstream media, with intellectuals and authors continuing to participate in these discussions. For example, the philosophers Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida (2003) posed the question “What binds us together?” in an article, in which they reconstructed the birth of a “strong” European public sphere on February 15, 2003, the day of mass demonstrations in London, Rome, Madrid, Barcelona, Berlin, and Paris against European support for the Iraq war. Ten years later, on January 25, 2013 another French philosopher, Bernard-Henry Lévy (2013b), published a “writers’ appeal” in different European newspapers in a bid to prevent the European project from faltering. The appeal was signed, amongst others, by Claudio Magris, Umberto Eco, and György Konrád. This plea, entitled “Europe ou chaos? Reconstruire l’Europe ou mourir” [“Europe or Chaos? Rebuild Europe or Perish”], was debated by intellectuals during a televised event, organised by the European cultural television channel ARTE on January 28, 2013 (Lévy, 2013a). Another instance of writers acting on a European stage occurred in 2016,
when the Europe Endless Express departed from Amsterdam Central railway station. The train was filled with artists and members of cultural organisations and was initiated to celebrate European culture and history, in search of “a new narrative” for Europe (“Europe Endless Express,” 2016). As a final example, on May 20, 2016 a list of 282 signatures from the British “creative industries”—amongst them those of writers such as Ian McEwan and Hilary Mantel—appeared in an open letter in support of Britain remaining in the European Union (“Hundreds of Figures,” 2016).

Yet, despite the above as well as other instances, Yoeri Albrecht (2016) observes in his introduction to the publication _Re:Thinking Europe. Thoughts on Europe: Past, Present, and Future_ that there is a “striking absence” of artists, writers, and philosophers to nuance discussions on the future of Europe (p. 10). Given the examples of recent intellectual events on the European stage mentioned above, it is perhaps better to suggest that writers and artists still engage in European issues, but no longer as visibly or as prominently as in the past. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that the world of public intellectuals such as Paul Valéry does not compare to the present-day stage on which contemporary European authors feature. The role of “great European writers” has changed, as the German author Hans Magnus Enzensberger (2011)—an important voice in European issues himself—noted concerning the Congress of Europe in 1948, which, as mentioned earlier, consisted of poets as well as politicians: “such a constellation would be quite inconceivable today” (p. 41). The fact that writers are no longer invited to European political conferences is a reflection of the generally changing role of intellectuals and writers in society (Heynders, 2016; Posner, 2009; Vaessens, 2009b). Writers are no longer perceived as visionaries, entitled to have a say about a range of political topics. Whilst they might still speak up, their authority is no longer unquestioned, and they were certainly in no position to prevent “Brexit” in 2016.2

However, the starting point for this research is more specific than the changing role of the European writer as a public intellectual; it is based on the observation that these authors actually function in an emerging European literary field. Whereas Harry Mulisch and other great European writers had to create their own cultural platform by organising conferences and writing open letters, a “European literary space” is now slowly emerging, for example, in the shape of European literary awards, cultural organisations, a European infrastructure of cultural subsidies, and anthologies (Bax, 2013; Casanova, 2009). Furthermore, a united Europe is no longer simply the dream of

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1 Another train journey was planned for September 2018, however, the organisers could not gather enough financial support for this second edition (“Europe Endless Express,” 2016).

2 Regarding the televised debate on the future of Europe with Bernard-Henry Lévy in 2016, Heynders (2016) noted: “As Ullrich Fichtner from the German _Der Spiegel_ wrote afterwards, the debate mainly proved that Europe is in need of new intellectuals. The rescue of Europe will not come from the intellectual old guard focusing on tradition and not on transforming society” (p. 75).
intellectuals, but is in many ways now a reality.\textsuperscript{3} Interventions in European politics and reflections on European identity\textsuperscript{4} are therefore increasingly “institutionalised”: instead of initiating individual actions such as publishing letters, writers are increasingly engaged in debates on the realities of the European Union, instigated by cultural organisations with EU subsidies. With a budget of €400 million, the EU Culture Programme 2007–2013, for example, supported cultural projects that promoted intercultural dialogue and cross-border artistic mobility (“Culture Programme (2007-2013),” 2016). It is, however, not only a top-down policy to fund these types of initiatives: organisations independent of EU institutions, such as the European Cultural Foundation, also initiate literary festivals in, and websites on, Europe (see www.culturalfoundation.eu). In other words, a European civil society is in the making, for these cultural initiatives form part of the emergence of a larger European network of interest groups and institutions that engage with, question, or oppose EU policies. As a result of this process of institutionalisation, contemporary writers are thus increasingly becoming part of these European cultural networks and organisations.

Despite these changes within the European literary field and the institutionalisation of interventions in the form of (subsidised) transnational cultural projects, most research into contemporary literary reflections on European identity is focused on either individual authors as important voices in Europe (Heynders, 2009; Lützeler, 2007a), or on single works of fiction (Hollis, 2000; Vitse, 2011). Thus far, little has been published as such on emerging institutionalised literary contributions to the debate on European identity. This dissertation aims to explain the role of these new initiatives by presenting four recent, transnational literary projects as case studies: the “Literatur Express Europa 2000” (hereafter referred to as the “Literatur Express”, organised by the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin, 2000); “The European Constitution in Verse” (by Passa Porta and the Brussels Poetry Collective, 2008–2011); “Narratives for Europe” (initiated by the European Cultural Foundation, 2009–2012); and “The Return of Europe” (by the Nexus Institute, 2015). These cases have been selected for this research as they have all been instigated by cultural organisations, and their projects have an explicit literary character, as well as a European dimension. Furthermore, these case studies are of a recent date, and all are linked to the cultural space in the Netherlands and Flanders. The criteria that underpin the selection of the projects will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 5. For now, it is important to establish that these cases are instances of transnational literary projects. The projects are “transnational” in that they lean on principles of cross-border mobility and intercultural dialogue with writers from different European countries.

\textsuperscript{3} This is precisely the reason why Kraume’s (2010) research on writers and Europe ends in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, when literary visions of uniting European nations turned into a political reality.

\textsuperscript{4} The concept “European identity” is referring here to a form of understanding Europe as both a political project and a cultural community of values (see Chapter 2).
taking part in the various initiatives. The term “transnational” also “recognizes the significance of national frameworks alongside the potential of cultural production both to reinforce and to transcend them” (Rigney & de Cesari, 2014, p. 4). In these cases the project plans were indeed transnational, but also have a strong national dimension, by engaging, for example, with national debates (“The Return of Europe”); or by being tied to local or national subsidies and/or cultural organisations (“Narratives for Europe” and the “Literatur Express”); or by placing an emphasis on the importance of the city in which these cases were initiated (Brussels for “The European Constitution in Verse” and Berlin for the “Literatur Express”). The four projects are also “literary,” not only because writers took part, but also because the organisers have argued the importance of a literary perspective on European issues in texts such as interviews and applications for funding (ECF, n.d.-c; Gutberlet et al., 1999; Passa Porta, 2008; Riemen, 2016b). Even though some of the organisers might not refer to their initiatives as “projects,” this concept is deployed here to underline the fact that these initiatives entail not only texts, but also festivals, media performances, and websites.

The selected projects have been analysed through an examination of three fundamental aspects: the intentions of the cultural organisations behind them; the cultural artefacts resulting from the projects themselves; and the role played by the projects in the public sphere. Firstly, documents such as invitations, interviews, announcements, and applications for funding were analysed to reveal the intentions behind the projects. These documents were either publicly available online, or obtained by accessing the archives of the cultural organisations and project leaders. The research questions in the light of which these documents were considered are twofold: How is European identity presented in these texts? Why were literary approaches deemed a valuable contribution to reflections on Europe? The results of this first perspective are presented in Part II of this dissertation. The same points of interest—the image of Europe and the role of literature—structured the second dimension of this research: a close reading of the cultural artefacts that resulted from these projects. Part III juxtaposes the intentions expressed by project leaders with the outcomes of their projects in the form of prose, poetry, and essays by literary writers, aiming to answer the question of how these texts relate to each other on these specific points within each project. Finally, a reception analysis was performed for each project, focusing on the effects of these initiatives by asking if these projects have indeed been perceived as, firstly, a contribution to a discussion about European identity; and secondly, if their literary nature is acknowledged as a valuable perspective in this debate. All these projects aimed to engage the audience in discussions

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5 The project as a whole is referred to in quotation marks to differentiate between the project and the literary text resulting from it—i.e., “The European Constitution in Verse” (project) and The European Constitution in Verse (title of the resulting text).
on Europe. These discussions were not only furthered by the texts emanating from these projects, but also by the events organised as part of the projects, such as festivals, and the wider impact that the projects might have had on society. The findings of this third approach are discussed in Part IV.

By selecting literary projects about Europe instead of individual authors or texts as case studies, this research allows for an interdisciplinary approach that combines the fields of European studies and literary studies. Insights from research on EU cultural policies in the process of European identity formation (Sassatelli, 2009; Shore, 2000) are examined in light of the perceived importance of literature and writers in the creation of (trans-)national identities (Anderson, 1991; Heynders, 2009; Lützeler, 2007a). This theoretical framework is presented in Part I, which follows this General Introduction. By juxtaposing the expectations of transnational literary projects, their results as literary products, and the reception of these projects, these case studies exemplify how literature might function in the contemporary process of European identity formation, in which the fields of European cultural policy, an emergent European civil society, and the changing role of both literature and authors all intersect.
PART I. EUROPEAN IDENTITY, THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN
(TRANS)NATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION, AND EUROPEAN CULTURAL
POLICY
Introduction

The transnational literary projects referred to in the General Introduction allow for an interdisciplinary research approach that combines insights from various fields of research: European identity; the role of writers and literary works in the construction of (trans-)national identities; and EU cultural policy. Chapter 2 discerns two different views on European identity—namely, European political identity and European cultural identity—and relates both views with two different discourses on identity: the discourse of the “Europe of Citizens,” linked to European political identity; and the discourse of “unity in diversity,” which is related to European cultural identity. Chapter 3 focusses on national identity formation and the role of literary texts in the 19th century, and the commonalities and differences between this national process and current European processes of transnational identity formation. Finally, Chapter 4 examines European cultural policies as institutional approaches to identity formation, arguing that the discourses of European cultural and political identity do not only emerge bottom-up, but are also constructed top-down as part of these EU policies.

A recurring theme in the theoretical overview below is the extent to which frameworks on national identity formation and the role of literary works in this process apply in a European context. Mapping the most important differences between the role of literature in processes of national and European identity formation, these chapters argue that the concepts that emerge from theories on literature and nation building can indeed be applied to the European model, albeit with an awareness of the dangers of engendering “methodological nationalism.” The first three chapters thus provide a conceptual framework that addresses the three fundamental research topics: the intentions; the results; and the effects of transnational literary projects. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a more in-depth overview of the selected case studies presented in this research.
2. European Identity

In 1973, the members of the European Community became increasingly aware of the need to define their process of uniting states: should this integration be viewed as a peace project, or a power project (van Middelaar, 2013)? Great Britain joined the European Community in 1973, and the member states took this opportunity to undertake an attempt at “self-definition at the highest political level” (van Middelaar, 2013, p. 229). As the historian and philosopher Luuk van Middelaar (2013) describes,

The peace project lost its urgency as a new Franco-German war became less likely. At the same time, the power project gained in importance as the Cold War and decolonisation drew attention to Europe’s dwindling power in the world. These two gradual developments intersected when Britain joined in 1973. From that point on, the member states could collectively speak to the rest of the world “on behalf of Europe.” It is no coincidence that in December of that year, in Copenhagen, the leaders of the Nine [Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Denmark, Great-Britain, and Ireland] discussed who they actually were as a club of countries facing the rest of the world. The result was a “Declaration on European Identity.” (p. 229)

In this declaration, the member states reviewed both their common interests and heritage, and assessed the extent to which they were already acting together on the world stage (“Declaration on European Identity,” 1973). This attempt at self-definition would be followed by many more, and not only by political actors. An example of such an initiative is “A Charter of European Identity,” formulated in 1995 by a German non-governmental organisation after being inspired by Vaclav Havel’s speech to the European Parliament, in which he called for such a charter on what it means to be European. The Charter reads: “Europe is above all a community of values. . . . Fundamental European values are based on tolerance, humanity and fraternity” (“A Charter of European Identity,” 1995, “Europe as a Community of Destiny,”, para. 1). In 2002, the President of the European Commission set up a reflection group of “independent individuals” with “intellectual credentials” and “political experience” (Reflection Group, 2005, p. 3) to reflect on European solidarity, Europe’s religions, and Europe’s wider role in the world. This resulted in a document titled The Spiritual and Cultural Dimension of Europe, in which the importance Europe’s common culture is underlined:
European culture, that open space which must be forever redefined, does not, of itself, establish European unity. That unity also requires a political dimension and the decisions that it engenders. But the common European culture is what gives politics the opportunity to make Europe into a unified political entity. (Reflection Group, 2005, p. 9)

These initiatives reveal firstly how, despite the fact that EU citizens are confronted daily with a European currency, passport, or flag—the so-called “banal Europeanism” of the everyday reproductions of nations and citizenry as European (Cram, 2010; Trenz, 2016)—there is apparently nothing routinely familiar in referring to a European “we.” They also show how these attempts at self-definition are undertaken by political actors, engaged citizens, and sometimes by intellectuals assigned by European politicians, albeit each time with different aims: to position Europe from a geopolitical perspective; to legitimise European integration; or to engage citizens in this process of integration. Further, these instances illustrate that the concept of European identity represents neither a stable core nor an essence, but rather is constructed, contested, and re-constructed within specific social and discursive practices (Hall & du Gay, 1996). This approach to identity is in line with that of the sociologist Gerard Delanty (1995), who argues that Europe as an idea “has forever been in the process of invention and reinvention as determined by the pressure of new collective identities. What I wish to deconstruct is the Platonic-like vision of an immutable European ideal” (pp. 1–2).

The idea of Europe began to take shape in the Renaissance, during which “a renewed European awareness grew up, especially in juxtaposition with the ‘discoveries’ of the New World” (Wintle, 2009, p. 8). As Christendom began to decline as a unifying narrative, a cultural dimension emerged from the 15th century onwards that formed the basis for the European idea; one formulated in terms of humanism and universal values associated with reason, progress, and science. As a result, “the use, and the emotional content, of the word Europe . . . significantly increased” (Hay, 1957, p. 73). Despite the fact that this European cultural model was seen by some philosophers and writers as a reason to propose a new European political constellation—Delanty (1995) refers to Voltaire’s plea to replace the nation states, and Kant’s arguments for a federation of free states—the notion of a political Europe was not envisioned as an alternative for the nation state (Delanty, 1995, p. 71). Unlike the cultural model, such a political ideal—a “lofty idea” as the product of a group of intellectuals—“had little meaning for contemporaries” (Delanty, 1995, p. 71).

It is important to stress here that the cultural and the political dimensions of the European idea are thus separated spheres, yet crucially both gave shape to the modern idea of Europe.
many studies on contemporary constructions of European identity these two dimensions still inform the analysis: a European cultural identity is distinguished from a European political identity (e.g. Cerutti, 2008; Shahin & Wintle, 2000b). Indeed, both aspects need to be clearly differentiated. As Furio Cerutti (2008) cautions, a sense of sharing a political culture has repercussions for the legitimacy of political institutions, whereas sharing a cultural world is not in itself a pre-condition for the existence of legitimate political institutions:

To do so, a degree of homogeneity in the political culture (say, an orientation favouring liberal democracy) is needed as a pre-condition, while a convergence of the entire cultural world (language, religion, morality, images of the world and forms of everyday life) . . . is not. This is why to speak in the same sentence of the “European cultural and political identity” is flawed. (p. 7, emphasis in original)

To examine more closely these dual dimensions, both types of identity will be discussed in depth in the following sections.

2.1 European Cultural Identity

Given the starting point mentioned above—namely the notion of identity as constructed within social and discursive practices—Monica Sassatelli (2009) provides an apt definition of the concept of European cultural identity, stressing how its construction takes place via the interaction between public and institutional ideas on being European on the one hand, and individual processes of self-understanding on the other. She states:

So we talk of cultural identity when there are narratives and practices of subjectivization that at the same time create manageable individuals and give them a subjectivity capable of active resistance and interpretation. If we only concentrate on the institutional collective narratives and practices we see static objectivization only and miss the dialectic and active dimensions of identity. (Sassatelli, 2009, p. 5)

Sassatelli then offers a review of three key narratives of European cultural identity: approaches that enhance European unity; perspectives that underline European diversity; and narratives that aim

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6 In other publications the same idea is proposed, but in different terminology. For example, Willfried Spohn (2005) differentiates between a “civilization identity” and an “integrational identity,” whilst Michael Bruter (2005) refers to a political identity as consisting of a “civic” and “cultural” identity.
to formulate a synthesis—“unity in diversity.” These three narratives are explored in the following review of her argument.

The approaches enhancing European unity are based on the idea of a common destiny and a shared history in terms of heritage, such as the Renaissance, Enlightenment, Christianity, and humanism, often summarised by references to “the general terms freedom, civilization, democracy and science” (Sassatelli, 2009, p. 27). Sharing a cultural world implies a historical perspective and proponents of this historical outlook on European identity underline the fact that the notion of “Europe” has existed since the 7th century B.C. (Rietbergen, 1998). Already during the early Middle Ages, this concept, apart from its obvious geographical context, had acquired an emotional connotation—and therefore an identification in terms of values and beliefs. By the 14th and 15th centuries, forces such as the humanist literary tradition were well established and tended towards an identification of Europe with Christianity (Hay, 1957; Rietbergen, 1998). Denys Hay (1957) illustrates this perfectly as follows: “In Abraham Ortelius’s *Thesaurus geographicus* (1578) we have a telling entry under the word ‘Christiani’: ‘vide Europaei’” (p. 109).

Christianity in a contemporary context remains one of the elements used to describe European cultural unity as one that “consists mainly of a partially shared historical heritage and experience” (Wintle, 1996, p. 24). Michael Wintle (1996) concludes that—even though it is hard and “perhaps dangerous” (p. 13) to define such narratives in single sentences—there is a heritage felt in varying ways and degrees by those living in Europe. He offers a starting point to examine these influences further:

> A good shortlist of them was provided, more than a quarter-century ago, by James Joll, who focused on the Roman Empire, Christianity, the Enlightenment, and industrialization as key influences on the European experience. To that list might be added the influence of geological and geographical environment, and the issue of languages. (Wintle, 1996, p. 13)

Over recent decades, reflections on cultural identity and cultural policies by the European Union reveal how this idea of a shared historical heritage is highly relevant in defining European identity (Sassatelli, 2009; Shore, 2000). In the years before the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, the emphasis within EU institutional reflections was on the idea of integration and unity, which was mainly described in terms of a shared heritage of, for example, Greek and Roman civilisation and Christian values (Sassatelli, 2009; Shore, 2000).

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7 See Delanty (2010) for the different ways in which “European heritage” might be understood.
Yet, Sassatelli (2009) also discerns a second type of interpretation of European cultural identity in terms of the exact opposite—diversity—and cites Anthony D. Smith as a proponent of this perspective. In his article “National Identity and the Idea of European Unity,” Smith (1992) conceptualises the notion of collective cultural identity on a national level. He provides the following definition:

This [collective cultural identity] would refer not to some fixed pattern or uniformity of elements over time, but rather to a sense of shared continuity on the part of successive generations of a given unit of population, and to shared memories of earlier periods, events and personages in the history of the unit. From these two components we can derive a third: the collective belief in a common destiny of that unit and its culture. (Smith, 1992, p. 58, emphasis in original)

Drawing on this definition, he concludes that this type of identity cannot be applied at a European level, as Europe “lacks a pre-modern past—a ‘prehistory’ which can provide it with emotional sustenance and historical depth” (Smith, 1992, p. 62). European traditions and heritage are only partly shared, he argues, which means that attempts to formulate a specific unity are destined to fail. Smith (1992) therefore proposes the idea of a “family of cultures” to describe European cultural identity, consisting of “elements which overlap and figure in a number of (but not all) examples” (p. 70).

Given the ideas of European cultural unity and diversity described above, the third position that Sassatelli (2009) perceives combines these elements. In this formulation, European cultural identity is described as “unity in diversity.” Often underlining the strength of European plurality, this approach “becomes more and more enshrined in the official discourse of contemporary institutions” (Sassatelli, 2009, p. 35). For example, following the Maastricht Treaty, a European cultural identity was formulated in terms of unity in diversity: a motto in which the idea of one European culture is replaced by a plurality of European cultures with a shared heritage (Sassatelli, 2009). The rhetoric of “unity in diversity” is, however, highly ambiguous, which “means that it can be instrumentalized in different ways, and its meaning is particularly dependent on the context and the agency adopting it” (Sassatelli, 2009, p. 73).

The idea that European diversity is appreciated as part of what constitutes European unity can be traced back to the age of Enlightenment. The Bulgarian-French philosopher Tzvetan Todorov (2008) argues in his essay “European Identity” that the idea of plurality in a European context is most clearly expressed by the Scottish philosopher David Hume in his 1742 essay “Of
the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences.” In the essay, Hume contended that it is precisely in interconnected yet divided regions, such as ancient Greece, where science most flourished. Todorov (2008) interprets this essay as follows:

Before Hume, those who reflected on European identity sought to find it in one common trait: the heritage of the Roman empire or Christian religion. It seems that Hume is the first to find it not in any one characteristic shared by all, but in the plurality of countries that make up Europe . . . . The states that comprise it [Europe] have a unified set of common traits as well as political and economic ties, but they are at the same time sufficiently comparable in size and power that no single one among them could subject the others to its power: each remains independent. This balance between unity and plurality thus becomes Europe’s characteristic. (p. 8)

The sociologist Krishan Kumar (2003) contends that conflict and diversity do not present barriers to the study of a shared European culture: “European civilization marked itself off from all past civilizations precisely by its principle of diversity, which, paradoxically, also gave it its unity” (p. 37). To illustrate his point, he traces this line of thought back to François Guizot, who wrote in his work *The History of Civilization in Europe* of 1828,

Modern Europe presents us with examples of all systems, of all experiments of social organization; pure or mixed monarchies, theocracies, republics, more or less aristocratic, have thus thrived simultaneously, one besides the other; and, notwithstanding their diversity, they all have a certain resemblance, a certain family likeness, which it is impossible to mistake. (Guizot as cited in Kumar, 2003, p. 37)

The work of Guizot, which combines 19th-century nationalism and dreams of Europe, leans towards Eurocentric triumphalism (Sassatelli, 2009). This idea of plurality as a “humanitarian achievement” is problematic, according to historian Hartmut Kaelble (2009): “This celebration of Europe’s strength and its harbinger of modernity tends toward Euro-centrism. It typically presumes, quite erroneously, that in its internal differentiation Europe is unrivaled among the world’s major civilizations” (p. 201).

The slogan “unity in diversity” is taken up again in Chapter 4, which addresses how this phrase proved to be important to EU cultural policy as well, despite the fact that this slogan is highly ambiguous and therefore referred to by Luis Bouza García (2017b) as an “empty signifier”
Having discussed the emergence of these three narratives of European cultural identity—unity, diversity, and unity in diversity—the next section begins by addressing the second dimension of European identity: a shared political constellation.

2.2 European Political Identity

As indicated earlier, a sense of shared values and a common heritage—a cultural identity—does not necessarily lead to political legitimacy for the European Union. In this sense, cultural heritage and the “idea of Europe” should be differentiated from daily EU politics, as Wintle (2000) explains:

This kind of identity, however, is emphatically not the same as the collective identity from which a state—especially a nation state—derives its political legitimacy. . . . The other kind of “European identity,” beyond the one we have been discussing to this point, concerns a European version of the kind of national identity which is the driving force behind the nation state, and which legitimizes the political power of national governments. This is to transpose the nation state model to the European level, and to seek justification for European government, state apparatus, army and police in the feelings of loyalty and allegiance of Europeans. (pp. 18–19)

A political identity can thus be defined as “the overarching and inclusive project that is shared by the members of the polity, or in other words the set of political and social values and principles in which they recognize themselves as a ‘we’”(Cerutti, 2008, pp. 6–7). However, as Wintle suggests in the quotation above, when this model of political legitimacy is transposed from a nation-state model to a European level, it leads to the question whether this European “we,” recognised via shared political ideas, is even a possibility. Interpreting this process of European political identity formation from the perspective of nation states, the exceptionality of this process is clear: whereas nation states emerged as a political constellation created by a “demos”—the idea of a “pre-existing populace” (van Middelaar, 2013, p. 276), sharing a culture and a sense of cultural identity—this process seems reversed for the European Union. In the case of Europe, this can be seen as a political constellation attempting to create a “demos,” or, in the words of Cerutti (2008): “With regard to the history of modern nation-states, developing a purely political identity that is not backed by a unitary culture is admittedly an unprecedented challenge, one that is not yet clear if the Europeans are up to” (p. 7, emphasis in original). Cerutti’s cautious position on the possibility to develop a political identity is supported by scholars and intellectuals who have argued that there are important obstacles in the way of the emergence of a European demos (e.g. Balibar, 2004).
Kaelble (2009) lists some of these major obstacles: statistically weak identifications of citizens with the European Union; a lack of political solidarity; the potency of national symbols over European ones; the absence of textbooks on a European history in school curricula; the absence of a clear “other”; and the weakly developed public sphere. He concludes:

In sum, Europe is not a cultural nation (Kulturnation), which emerges before the establishment of a political nation (Staatsnation), as was true of historical developments in Italy, Germany, and Poland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Europe is not a demos in search of a state. Hence many social scientists and lawyers believe that the creation of European institutions without a European demos is neither likely nor perhaps, even possible. (Kaelble, 2009, p. 208)

Kaelble continues by stating that the perceived impossibility of any attempt to create institutions without a “demos” only becomes apparent from a national frame of reference, and many scholars have argued that this framework prevents one from fully understanding the distinctiveness of the process of European political identity formation (e.g. van Middelaar, 2013; Wintle, 2000). Applying the nation-state model, for example, to argue that the European Union is not a demos, as its citizens are not prepared to sacrifice themselves for its political good, is rather an argument about European political identity from the perspective of what we know about national identities themselves. Drawing on Hegel’s work on patriotism, Dario Castiglione (2009) therefore proposes “a post-national conception of European political identity” (p. 38) as a more promising frame of reference. He criticises the assumption that “we can reproduce the absolute demands of national citizenship at a European level” and concludes that

the European Union must cultivate its political identity neither in the heroic form of the “ultimate sacrifice,” nor in high-principled forms of constitutional patriotism, but in the more banal sense of citizens’ growing perception that the Union contributes to a fundamental (though multilayered) institutional and legal order within which they can exercise their liberty. (Castiglione, 2009, p. 51)

Importantly, Castiglione’s conclusion also indicates that a European political identity is not a fixed entity: it is re-formulated, negotiated, and developed over time. Events such as the rejection of the European Constitution and the financial crisis of 2009 influence the way in which people perceive themselves as citizens of the European Union and in turn, how they support EU institutions and
policy. As suggested by Juan Diez Medrano (2009), how this political identity evolves can be studied by reflecting upon “political self-understanding” on different levels: on the level of formal documents (treaties and laws); the behaviour of those interpreting the content of these documents; and the level of public discourse.

These reflections on political self-understanding can be further analysed by categorising different types of self-understanding. To this end Van Middelaar (2013) offers an approach that may prove useful in grasping the various types. In his work *The Passage to Europe*, he discerns three “basic discourses” in the “torrent of words devoted to European politics,” namely: the “Europe of States”; the “Europe of Offices”; and the “Europe of Citizens” (van Middelaar, 2013, p. 2). The “Europe of States” is a discourse in which speakers believe that European politics are best defined as a cooperation between different national governments. In this discourse, there is little desire to support more central institutions. The “Europe of Offices” is a discourse that aims at exactly the opposite: transferring specific governmental functions to a “European bureaucracy.” This bureaucratic perspective is in no need of a visionary idea of Europe; European unity can arise via changes in broad economic and social forces. Again, in sharp contrast to this bureaucratic perspective, the discourse of the “Europe of Citizens” offers a visionary perspective that leans on culture and citizenship instead of economic forces, as Van Middelaar (2013) explains:

> Here the idea is to detach certain powers from national executive, legislative and juridical authorities and transfer them to a European government, parliament, and court, paving the way for federation. . . . This approach therefore invests high hopes in a European parliament and Europe-wide public opinion. (p. 2)

Participants in this discourse of the “Europe of Citizens” are—besides scholars of the law (van Middelaar, 2013, p. 6)—mainly writers and intellectuals, speaking on behalf of the citizens of Europe, and aiming towards a Europe that is not only a political, but also a cultural entity (van Middelaar, 2013, p. 2). A Europe-wide, shared public opinion, elections, and a European parliament are necessary elements on the path towards more European unity. Van Middelaar (2013) thus explicitly proposes the involvement of writers and intellectuals in the process of gaining political self-understanding. The specific role of narratives and literary authors in the construction of (trans-)national identities is the topic of the next chapter.
3. The Role of Literature in the Construction of (Trans-)National Identities

This chapter attempts to understand if and how conceptual frameworks of literature and national identity formation might be transposed to a wider European context. Section 3.1 focusses on national identity formation and the role of literary texts in the 19th century. Section 3.2 then maps commonalities and differences between national and European processes. Finally, section 3.3 argues that these national frameworks can indeed provide a conceptual apparatus with which to understand the role of literature in European identity formation, albeit whilst also taking into account the specificities of transnational identity formation in the 21st century.

3.1 Literature and 19th-Century Nation Building

A crucial framework for understanding nationalism, nation-state formation, and the role of literature was developed by the political scientist Benedict Anderson (1991) in his work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Anderson defined a nation as an “imagined community” in the sense of a political community, perceived as limited and sovereign, which is “imagined” as members who will never know most of their fellow members. Anderson demonstrates how these communities became imaginable as a result of “the interaction between a system of productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communication (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity” (pp. 42–43). Print-languages were a means of communicating “below” Latin and “above” the diversity of spoken vernaculars; print-capitalism thus gave a new fixity to this language (Anderson, 1991). Anderson argued that this unified field of communication became the basis of a national consciousness, as the experience of simultaneity and the sharing of a mother tongue builds national solidarity via the sharing of past, present, and future: “Through that language, encountered at mother’s knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed” (p. 154). Like individuals, nations thus have biographies because not everything that happened in the past can be remembered and in order to grasp a concept of identity, this identity must be “narrated” (Anderson, 1991, p. 204). The past is created via narration—as novels, and newspapers—and Anderson approvingly follows Ernest Renan’s famous dictum that this national past is both a process of remembering and forgetting: “Or, l’essence d’une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses” (“the essence of a nation is that individuals have much in common and also that they have forgotten many things”, Renan cited in Anderson, 1991, p. 199).

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8 National identity is thus repeatedly reproduced, so that, according to Michael Billig (1995), the term “imagined community” becomes a bit misleading in established nations, as “the community and its place are not so much imagined, but their absence becomes unimaginable” (p. 77).
Anderson’s (1991) conceptual framework thus underlines the substantial relevance of literature in the creation of national identities, as the novel and the newspaper “provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (p. 25). Anderson continues: “The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of a nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (p. 126).

A similar approach to analysing the emergence of the nation state can be found in the work of Eric Hobsbawm (1983), who emphasised the importance of culture in this process as well. He coined the concept “the invention of tradition,” which he used in a broad sense for invented, constructed and instituted traditions,

taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historical past. (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 1)

During the 19th century, European nations transformed into nation states, and in doing so, emphasised their independence and political autonomy by inventing national traditions, such as public ceremonies and the production of public monuments to create social cohesion and a sense of identity. The creation of national flags and anthems were an important part of these developments, as Hobsbawm (1983) argued. A key element in this “mass production” of national traditions in Europe is storytelling. In this context it can be said that “nation is narration” (Berger, 2008, p. 1), and the construction and contestation of national history in narratives has been researched extensively (Berger, Eriksonas, & Mycock, 2008; Bhabha, 1990; Casanova, 2004).

Whereas Hobsbawm and Anderson approach the phenomenon of nationalism as an ideology resulting from modernisation, in his work National Thought in Europe, Joep Leerssen (2006) presents nationalism as a cultural phenomenon, “taking shape in the constant back-and-forth between material and political developments on the one hand, and intellectual and poetical reflection and articulation on the other” (p. 14). Again, literature—poetry, tragedies, and historical novels—is pivotal in the formation of national thought in this analysis (Leerssen, 2006). Leerssen traces the rhetoric of contrasting “Otherness” with a domestic standard back to Tacitus, and perceives how Aristotelian poetics is crucial for the emergence of a European taxonomy of national characters. Enlightenment and Romantic thinkers developed ideas on the individuality and
sovereignty of nations, which in turn led to the age of nationalism in the 19th century, in which nations rediscovered foundational epics in their aim to construct a national self-image. In the words of Leerssen (2006):

That self-image had been retrieved from ancient sources, updated and perpetuated in new cultural practices, and used propagandistically in public space to proclaim the nation’s identity and presence. The most important fields where this process occurred were, of course, those of literature and learning. The evocation of a national-popular culture whose traditions link the present with the past is to a large extent also a projection on the part of literati and folklorists; we have encountered the names, famous in literature, of the Grimms, Walter Scott and Tolstoy. (p. 197)

Thus, the models of nationalism and nation building developed by Anderson, Hobsbawm, and Leerssen offer a valuable vantage point from which to understand the role of literature in national identity formation. Their frameworks construct literary works as mediators of national narratives; as places in which traditions are invented, self-images gleaned from ancient sources are perpetuated, and historical narratives are translated for large audiences. The crucial question is to what extent these frameworks apply at a European level. Can culture also be perceived as an instrument in transnational identity formation? Is European literature possibly a source of invented European traditions and a shared self-image? The extent to which such a national framework also provides a tool for analysing literary works and their role in European identity formation, will be the focus of the next section.

3.2 Transposing Frameworks on Nationalism and the Role of Literature in Europe

In his article “Images of Europe: The (De)Construction of European Identity in Contemporary Fiction,” the literary scholar Sven Vitse (2011) discusses three novels and the ways in which these texts variously construct and deconstruct images of European history, cultural heritage, and philosophical concerns. All three novels deal with failures in European history, marked by warfare and oppression, and as such, Vitse reads these novels as a first step in the construction of European identity. The novels deconstruct Europe’s “complacent self-definition as a beacon of peace, rationality and civilization” (Vitse, 2011, p. 117). Even though only one novel has Europe explicitly as its main topic, Vitse concludes that “all three [novels] project a European dimension and a European frame of reference. In that way they contribute to the construction of a European
imagined community’ and open up possibilities for identity formation on a transnational, European level” (p. 117).

The quotation above reveals how Vitse’s approach draws upon Anderson’s concept of an “imagined community,” applied by Vitse to a European level in order to analyse literary texts from the perspective of European identity formation. However, as argued in Chapter 2, when transferring a national conceptual framework to a European level, one should take into account the differences between the 19th century and the early 21st century. Thus, when applying Anderson’s conceptual apparatus as a means by which to understand these literary texts, does one not fall into the trap of “methodological nationalism,” as Sassatelli (2009) warned, where an heuristic device to understand the nation state becomes a normative framework for Europe (pp. 4–5)? To prevent methodological nationalism and to appreciate the distinctiveness of European identity formation, this section argues that four crucial differences between the role of literature in national and in European identity formation need to be taken into account.

The first difference is based on the role of collective identity. Vitse (2011) contends that the shared memories of the Second World War are crucial to the construction of a European identity. He argues that

literary fiction contributes to the construction of collective memory by offering (parts of) a historical narrative that can be shared among the members of a transnational community of readers. The memories of the Second World War are of vital importance to the construction of European identity. (Vitse, 2011, p. 106)

However, compared to a national history, the Second World War in Europe is not a “shared” historical failure: one can also argue that it is precisely this memory that divides Europeans. The literary construction of national memory during the age of nationalism is not the same for contemporary transnational communities. As Aleida Assmann (2007) argues, “more than sixty years after the events, we Europeans are still far from a unified memory; on the contrary, we have to acknowledge that the Second World War and the Holocaust remain subjects of conflict and debate” (p. 14). Along similar lines, Klaus Eder (2006) summarises the difference between nationalism and transnational communities as follows:

Yet the creation of such a space of commemoration in Europe creating the boundaries of a collective identity is in one respect distinct from national commemoration: it does not rely on triumphant narratives, but rather on traumatic narratives. Remembering a traumatic
past will lead to a narrative space which requires special conditions for its reproduction. Triumphant histories are retold without losing the emotional appeal whereas traumatic histories have to be turned into a post-traumatic history which will not provide the simple emotional bonds characteristic of identifications produced by national collective identities. . . . Since this past cannot be invented in a positive sense as happened when the nation was invented “by getting its history wrong,” Europe is forced to construct this space “by getting its history right.”(pp. 267–268)

Thus, the construction of Europe as an imagined community based on shared historical experiences needs to take into account the differences between national and transnational memory, and the ways in which traumatic, conflictual memory is negotiated in literary works.

Besides the complexities of a shared European history, another relevant difference between identity formation on a national and transnational level is the importance of a shared language in the coming into being of national consciousness. Anderson (1991) argued that sharing such a language creates national solidarity. Yet clearly, this is lacking in the case of Europe, which is a multilingual community, imagined in many different languages. Therefore, the extent of the solidarity felt between nationals and Europeans differs as well. An important starting point for Anderson (1991) is his attempt to show why nationality and nationalism—as cultural artefacts—have aroused such deep attachments—even to the point of people willing to die for their country. It is precisely the fact that the European Union does not seem to arouse these grand feelings that has been observed by many—mostly as a form of critique. Referring to Smith’s Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era from 1995, Laura Cram (2010) explains that this heroic perspective has, however, taken a turn:

For many years a “heroic” understanding of identity was pervasive in the study of European Union identity, characterised by Smith’s provocative question, “who will feel European in the depths of their being, and who will willingly sacrifice themselves for so abstract an ideal? In short, who will die for Europe?” To some extent this heroic understanding of European Union identity continues to inform the practical efforts of the EU institutions and elites . . . However, the production and reproduction of European Union identity is much more

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9 An example is provided by Georgios Varouxakis (2010), who described the intellectual debates in Great Britain on Europe, in which Timothy Garton Ash is an important voice. Garton Ash proposed shared European goals to work towards, such as freedom, peace, law, and prosperity, and Varouxakis (2010) adds: “The question some may want to ask here (I can well imagine Roger Scruton raising it) is, would most Europeans be prepared to die for them?” (p. 164). This argument was also discussed during the Nexus Institute’s symposium “Je suis Européen!” (see Chapter 11).
extensive and much more mundane than these grand efforts and their critiques suggest. (pp. 13–14)

Chapter 2 examined how Castiglione (2009)—arguing in line with Cram—stated that the European Union should not cultivate its political identity on this idea of “ultimate sacrifice” (p. 51), but rather towards bonds with its citizens based on an experience of liberty in a legal and institutional framework provided by the European Union. This perspective brings with it new complexities—not least that current literary works, as part of European identity formation, do not function in a domain of deep attachments, but rather in one of abstract political principles. These texts might therefore be seen as attempts to mediate between these abstract principles and the more concrete feelings of their readers.

A third dissimilarity between national and European identity formation is the political instrumentalisation of literary texts. Leerssen (2006) explains this for the 19th century as follows:

The relation between cultural and political nationalism is complex but fundamental. In some measure, poetry and learning provided a reservoir of propaganda and rhetoric for politicians. In some measure, also, poets and artists... were actively motivated by nationalist fervour in their choice of topics, and actively attempted either to influence public opinion or the spheres of political decision-making. (p. 186)

Clearly, the age of poetry as part of “a nonstop multimedia cult of national self-articulation and self-celebration” (Leerssen, 2006, p. 203) is over; literature and politics have become independent, yet interrelated fields in which literature is constructed as a space of contestation and reflection on society, generally perceived as autonomous from a political agenda. The search for a “foundational epic” (Leerssen, 2006, p. 198) in the 19th century is therefore untranslatable to a European context. In addition, the instrumentalisation of literature to substantiate a certain political or cultural self-image, as in the age of nationalism, is now seen as either inappropriate, undesirable, or simply impossible. Bernard Crick (1999), for example, noted in his introduction to The Idea of Europe in Literature that, despite the fact that literature “is the main source of most people’s understandings of ‘Europe’” (p. xii), “attempts to use literature as a means of speeding political integration would, I suspect, lead to ludicrous and unwelcome results, both politically and aesthetically” (p. 13). Despite this sentiment, EU cultural policy aims to engage writers in subsidised transnational networks and organisations that promote the cross-border mobility and intercultural dialogue of authors and their audiences in Europe (see Chapter 4). Pascale Casanova (2009) therefore observes
that it is on “the level of the European Union that political and literary issues tend to be conflated” (p. 125), which leads her to warn that projects on the history of European literature might become subjected to “a political demand that could easily instrumentalize us if we are not careful” (p. 126). She continues,

At the outset of this gigantic undertaking, which will of necessity be long, hard and controversial, should we not therefore make independence our first rule of conduct? And should we not do this in the very name of our concern for European literature and the need to provide it with the means for an autonomous existence? (Casanova, 2009, p. 126)

So, even when these contemporary authors are being asked to partake in cultural projects financed by European institutions—as in some of the selected cases for this research—writers are perceived as independent intellectuals. Literary texts are constructed as spaces of criticism and autonomous voices, even though the topic might be political, or they might have been written in the context of a project subsidised by the European Union.

A final aspect that needs to be underlined here is the difference in the role of “the Other” and the articulation of a national identity or “auto-image” (Beller & Leerssen, 2007) on the one hand, and the European auto-image on the other. Leerssen (2006) shows how discursive patterns of national self-identification come into being by locating national identity in the differences between nations. National stereotypes—most effectively formulated in literature—are thus not empirical, but rather the result of intertextual constructions (Beller & Leerssen, 2007). This begs the question of whether these insights might be transferred to a European level. In his work on European culture, Leerssen (2011) indeed affirms that the observations in imagological research on national character can be stretched to encompass a European image. The characterisation of “Europe,” or its auto-image, is always in opposition to a significant Other, but the difficulty on this transnational level is that there are many significant Others—and also, that the European self-image consists of many national images (Leerssen, 2011). Compared to national auto-images, the European self-image in literature is thus necessarily more diverse, as it comprises many different national images.

This section sought to answer the question of whether conceptual frameworks of nationalism and national identity formation and the role of literature, developed by Anderson (1991), Hobsbawm (1983), and Leerssen (2006) might be transposed in the context of this research to a European level. Ann Rigney (2008), who has published extensively on cultural memory and literature, asserts that indeed, Anderson’s conceptual framework can provide a relevant means by
which to study novels from the perspective of the construction of a European “imagined community,” stating,

Anderson’s frame of reference was firmly a national one; however, there is no reason why novels’ power to produce “imagined communities” should always be applied in the service of a specifically national social frame rather than a regional or class-based one. Moreover, surely one of the most striking things about literary works, especially novels, is that they travel across borders with relative ease, both in translation and in the original. (pp. 91–92)

Christoph Parry (2009) defends a similar position on the use of frameworks on nationalism in his article on the current European crisis and its relationship to the colonial past, stating,

in my search for literary evidence for traces of a post-national European idea, I am—perhaps somewhat unhistorically—leaning on models derived from research on nationalism. It is my contention, however, that similar mechanisms are at work in both cases. (p. 281)

In line with the previous section—which drew upon the work of Kaelble (2001), who argues that a national model prevents the individual from fully understanding the distinctiveness of the process of European identity formation—the use of a national framework for this research indeed takes into account the specificities of this transnational process. Kaelble (2001) argues that, compared to national identity formation, European self-understanding is not based on military actions, but is rather more focused on diversity. Whilst being less focussed on emotional attachment, compared to the nation, the European Union is aimed at developing different institutions (Kaelble, 2001). In similar ways, literary works can be seen as contributing to a European imagined community, as long as the specific complexities tied to the differences between national and European identity formation, and the role of literature, are recognised. Europe with its traumatic history is difficult to combine with a triumphant narrative, and does not evoke the same emotional attachment in its citizens. Furthermore, literature positions itself as independent of EU politics, and constructs a self-image that is as diverse as the sum of all the national images that constitute it.

3.3 The Role of Literature in European Identity Formation
To understand the specific role of literature in European identity formation, firstly emphasis needs to be placed on how the cultural dimension in general has been one of the crucial elements in the
process of gaining a distinctly European self-understanding. Since the 19th century, an international debate emerged on Europe, in which many writers, and intellectuals in general, participated (Kaelble, 2001). The broad role of intellectuals engaged in the process of European identity formation, has been emphasised by many scholars.10

The role of writers and literary texts specifically in the process of European integration, has also been established in a number of recent studies. For example, Andrew Hammond’s work *The Novel and Europe* (2016) examines “Europe not only as a construct under continual revision but also as one that literature occasionally helped to forge” (p. 1). Similarly, the presupposition in Crick’s (1999) *The Idea of Europe in Literature* is that “imaginative literature is both the main source of most people’s understandings of ‘Europe’ and a potent factor from way, way back in the construction of the concept” (p. 12). In *Cosmopolitanism and the Postcolonial: Literature and the New Europe*, Sibylle Baumbach (2015) asserts that literary texts with “allusions and discussions of economic, political, and ideological issues, which are pressing in current debates within the European Union,” are indicators of the emergence of a “new European literature,” which she defines as “an expandable consortium of literary texts, which embrace, reflect, and promote European values, vistas, and ideals” (pp. 59–60). Finally, Paul Lützeler is one of the most important voices in this field of research. In his publication *Kontinentalisierung: Das Europa der Schriftsteller* (*Continentalisation: The Europe of Writers*), Lützeler (2007a) describes the European Economic Community, established 1957, as the first realisation of a European utopia that had been formulated over the course of the century by different literary authors in various manners. In a range of publications (e.g. Lützeler, 1993, 1998, 2007b), Lützeler emphasises the importance of literary texts and writers in the process of conceptualising and unifying Europe.

This section aims to provide an inventory of the arguments established in publications on Europe and literature, specifically, what the value of such literary texts and writers might be to the process of European integration. By juxtaposing the role of literature in national and European identity formation, the previous section established four specificities of this process on a European level: (1) compared to 19th-century nation-state formation, European collective memory is highly contested; (2) its citizens are less emotionally involved; (3) literature has gained an autonomous position from politics; (4) and any notion of a specifically European self-image is highly diverse. This section draws on these insights and discusses four categories in order to address the question of why, in current research, literature is understood to be such an important medium through which to reflect on Europe. Literature is perceived as being able to represent collective and contested

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10 For example, from a historical perspective by Bernhard Giesen (1999), whilst Justine Lacroix and Kalypso Nicolaidis (2010) focus on the visions and interpretations of European integration by intellectuals since 1990.
memory—capable of bridging the gaps between abstract principles and European citizens, providing a place for critical reflection on politics, as well as representing the diversity of Europe itself.

The first category of answers claims that literature is a medium that can represent shared memories across borders and is therefore capable of creating a European imagined community (Assmann, 2007; Heynders, 2009; Lützeler, 2007a; Rigney, 2012). Responding to the controversies that occupy shared European history, Rigney (2012) asks: “Is it possible for memory to become collective and yet be non-national? What are the imagined communities that will succeed the nation-state?” (p. 617). She contends that memory should not be abandoned as a resource with which to shape European citizenship, as long as Europe does not lean on a stable master narrative, but on memory as an “ongoing conversation about multiple pasts and just as many futures” (Rigney, 2012, p. 624). Literature is precisely a medium in which the cross-border creation of memory might take place:

In this way, creative narratives help to “thicken” imaginative relations with other groups with whom one is already economically and politically connected, along lines that transcend those of traditional memory narratives while helping to create alternative shared points of reference for the future. Given the nature of artistic production, this “thickening” of the relations between individuals across great distances is a largely unplanned and noninstitutionalized process, though it may be facilitizated [sic] by cultural policies. (Rigney, 2012, p. 622)

Lützeler (2007a) employs a similar approach when he argues that literature can disclose the similarities between different national narratives—and therefore bring to light a shared cultural heritage. Literature is based on an “underlying ontological structure” [I.1] (Lützeler, 2007a, p. 16) of European narratives, and is therefore a place where the idea of cultural memory as an exclusively national project might be questioned.11

The second category of answers suggests that literature is equipped with the capacity to mediate between the individual and the local on the one hand, and the global and the universal on the other (Lützeler, 2007a). Lützeler (2007a) explains that literature offers a way to resist the homogenising effects of globalisation, as it is always focused on particularities, albeit with a universal outlook: “Literature has a unique ability to make the individual appear universal and the

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11 I have provided the English translations for texts that have been published in either German or Dutch, where no other translations in English were available. For the list of the original texts, see the corresponding numbers in square brackets in Appendix 1.
universal, in the sense of ‘glocalization,’ appear individual” [I.2] (p. 14). In similar ways, authors have described Europe as a “space” and have focused on the ways in which literature negotiates between centre and periphery, and border-zones and principal cities (Cordeiro, 2013; Hollis, 2000).

The third category of answers to the question of the value of literature is the idea that literature offers a “safe space” for thought experiments and provides a potentially subversive approach to the intellectual debate on Europe (Büssgen, 2013; Heynders, 2009; Kraume, 2010). This argument is built upon the capacity of literature and writers to imagine an as yet unknown European future, and in doing so, to criticise current EU policies. Ante Büssgen (2013) sees a recurring juxtaposition of politicians and intellectuals, and economy versus “spirit” and cultural awareness in these critiques. Anne Kraume (2010), studying the different designs for Europe that literary writers created between 1815 and 1945, notices how literature is a place of both experiment and fantasy, and as such provides a valuable contribution to political discussions:

literature is always the medium of possibilities and alternatives, and all the more so because it does much more than merely providing literary or, by extension, cultural access to Europe; rather it continually takes up political and economic discussions in order to continue these discussions using literary means. [I.3] (p. 364)

The last type of answers can be found in research that suggests that literature as such is a place of diversity (Ivanovic, 2013; Kraume, 2010). It is precisely in literature that the richness of European cultural diversity can be expressed: the exchange of ideas, the different voices, and the diversity of literary texts and genres reflect the ever-changing idea of Europe. The construction of a European auto-image as “diversity” includes topics such as inclusion, exclusion, and exile (Cordeiro, 2013; Heynders, 2009; Leerssen, 2011). Kraume (2010) concludes her research by stating:

What both literature and Europe have in common is that their unity stems from the wide range of vastly different points of entry and approaches. That is why Heinrich Mann himself described both literature and Europe as a movement that has to be performed repeatedly, and yet never comes to a conclusion. [I.4] (p. 365)

In a similar manner, both Lützeler (2007a) and Kaelble (2001) approach literature from a historical perspective in their descriptions of the themes or basic forms of European self-understanding. Starting in the 18th century, they each discern different themes, however, the current age (since the 1980s) is labelled by both in the same manner. This is the era of “internal diversity” (Kaelble, 2005,
or “cultural diversity” [I.5] (Lützeler, 2007a, p. 11). During this time, the concept of “unity in diversity” becomes pervasive in the literary imagination of Europe. This can be interpreted in two different ways according to Kaelble (2001, pp. 46–51): either as a source of strength and the motor of European dynamics, or as a form of “protection” against the narratives of standardisation emanating from Brussels.

Having analysed the possibilities for writers and literature to be influential in processes of European identity formation, what can be said about the actual impact of these literary texts? How do these cultural artefacts play a role in debates on Europe? Odile Heynders (2009) argues that literature can have an impact on the public domain in Europe, but exactly how this impact should be studied or defined remains difficult. For example, its current impact differs from that during the initial period of European integration, not least because the role of literature has changed drastically in the current media landscape. Historically speaking, literary authors can be described as the pioneers of European integration (Kaelble, 2001; Kraume, 2010). However, Lützeler (2007a) concludes that recent literary publications (since 1989) are concerned less with providing answers and propositions in what he refers to as “literarische Europa-Diskurs,” or the “literary discourse on Europe.” In the Festschrift Der literarische Europa-Diskurs [The Literary Discourse on Europe], published on the occasion of Lützeler’s 70th birthday, Christine Ivanovic (2013) defines the type of texts that are part of this literary Europe-debate and that have been researched extensively by Lützeler as follows:

We must differentiate between a European literature that can be defined based on its aesthetic characteristics in this way and all other literature about Europe: texts in which Europe functions as a venue in a constitutive way or is treated as a topic. The characterisations of Europe and opinions on Europe formulated in this literature are the foundation of . . . the literary discourse on Europe. [I.6] (pp. 35–36)

According to Lützeler (2007a), the value of literary perspectives in current debates lies more in the signalling and problematising of important themes—sometimes in a polemical manner, designed to engage people in a dialogue.

Despite the fact that the specific societal impact of any given text is difficult to quantify, one can still argue that EU institutions perceive the literary perspective in debates about Europe as valuable, not only because literary projects have received funding from the EU cultural programme, but also because of the increasing prevalence of a narrative approach in academia and EU politics (Bouza García, 2017a), as the next chapter argues.
4. EU Policy in European Identity Formation

Chapter 2 argued, in line with Sassatelli (2009), that identity formation takes place in the interaction between public and institutional ideas on being European on the one hand, and individual processes of self-understanding on the other. Identity formation is thus not only a process that is constructed bottom-up by the participants of a certain group; this process can also be actioned top-down by institutions wishing to create a sense of shared identity amongst their members. Since 2000, the institutional approach to identity formation has taken shape in the form of cultural policies and funding opportunities for cultural projects and organisations (Staiger, 2013). Two of the selected cases in this research—“The European Constitution in Verse” and “Narratives for Europe”—received funding from this cultural subsidy programme. Another project, the “Literatur Express,” preceded the instigation of this cultural funding programme, but did receive a contribution directly from the European Union. A further examination of how European cultural policies have developed is therefore needed to understand these literary projects in the light of European identity formation.

From the perspective of the European Union, identity formation processes had already been shaped in policies well before the Maastricht Treaty in 1992—although a legal basis for policy in this domain was only created by the Treaty (Shore, 2000). In a sense, and as Van Middelaar (2013) suggests below, all these types of policies as deployed by the European Union can be seen as initiatives intended to create a feeling of “we, Europeans.” Van Middelaar distinguishes three different strategies with which modern states can create a sense of unity: the “German strategy”; the “Roman strategy”; and the “Greek strategy.” He notes that “European politics has taken shape by deploying these three strategies by turns” (van Middelaar, 2013, p. 223). The German strategy relies on the idea of a shared history and common values. These are expressed, for example, via an anthem and a flag. The Roman strategy is based on the benefits that people derive from living in a state, namely safety and economic opportunities. Whilst finally, the Greek strategy, in comparison to the Roman model, represents the other side of the coin: the benefits of being a member of a given society imply certain civic obligations. This strategy rests on the idea that citizens are able to evaluate their representatives. Central to this strategy are elections, public debate, and active citizenship (van Middelaar, 2013).

Whilst “European member states plucked ideas and elements from all these traditions” (van Middelaar, 2013, p. 224), this chapter connects these efforts with both a cultural and a political identity as discerned in Chapter 2: the German strategy aims more towards a cultural identity,
whereas the Greek and Roman strategies are able to shape a political identity. Both strategic approaches of identity in an EU context are discussed in greater detail below.

4.1 The German Strategy: European Cultural Identity Formation

Several analyses split the history of European cultural policy into two phases (Hamersveld & Sonnen, 2009; Sassatelli, 2009; Shore, 2000). In the years before the Maastricht Treaty, emphasis was placed on the joint ideas of integration and unity, which were mainly described in terms of shared heritage of, for example, Greek and Roman civilisation and Christian values (Sassatelli, 2009; Shore, 2000). The aim here was to “affirm awareness of a common cultural heritage” (Boxhoorn, 1996, p. 138). After the Treaty in 1992, a European cultural identity was formulated more in terms of “unity in diversity”: a notion in which the idea of one European culture is replaced by a plurality of European cultures with a shared heritage. Article 128 of the Treaty states:

1. The Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore.

2. Action by the Community shall be aimed at encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, supporting and supplementing their action in the following areas: improvements of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples; conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance; non-commercial cultural exchanges; artistic and literary creation, including in the audiovisual sector. (European Union, 1992, pp. 48–49)

This excerpt from the Maastricht Treaty reveals different elements of the German strategy as identified by Van Middelaar (2013). A common history and shared heritage—even though not specifically defined in this article—are underlined to create an image of unity in the diversity of cultures, which are increasingly perceived not as different nationalities, but as diversities within national cultures (Sassatelli, 2009). The Maastricht Treaty was translated into cultural policies, for example in the form of the Culture 2000 Programme (between 2000 and 2006, with a budget of €236.5 million; “Culture 2000 Programme,” 2007) and the Culture Programme (between 2007 and 2013, with a budget of €400 million; “Culture Programme (2007–2013),” 2016). These programmes offered funding for three types of activities: cultural innovation; cultural mobility; and special cultural events (Sarikakis, 2007). An important supposition in financing these types of activities is
that mobility and transnational cooperation promote the sense of a shared heritage and therefore the creation of a European cultural identity. The EU website on the Culture 2000 Programme reads:

Since the Treaty on European Union was signed, the Community has taken a number of initiatives, through which it has: shown that, apart from its achievements in the economic and monetary fields, the European project extends to the entirety of European society and must involve European citizens to a greater extent . . . . The Culture 2000 programme enhances the cultural area common to Europeans by promoting cooperation between creative artists, cultural operators and the cultural institutions of the Member States. . . . Culture 2000 emphasises the role of culture as an economic factor and as a factor in social integration and citizenship. (“Culture 2000 Programme,” 2007, “Summary”)

This “German strategy” of identity formation is based on the 19th-century model of nation-state formation, in which the creation of financial and juridical structures, combined with the creation of a common culture and a sense of a shared fate, laid the groundwork for modern nations in Europe. However, as discussed in the previous chapters, the transfer of a nation-state model to the European Union brings with it certain risks (Kaelble, 2001; van Middelaar, 2013; Shahin & Wintle, 2000). Van Middelaar (2013) describes how an attempt to stimulate a European dimension in education by the production of a European history book met with devastating critique in the early 1990s by media that denounced the project as Soviet propaganda. This example illustrates that “operation Nation State cannot simply be repeated at a different level. For one thing all the populations involved now have strong cultural identities . . . . And in modern European society, compulsory assimilation is no longer acceptable” (van Middelaar, 2013, p. 228).

Despite failed attempts along these lines, the German strategy has been employed regularly in the creation of common symbols, such as a flag and an anthem. Shared European history has been put on the agenda again as well, for example in the shape of a House of European History, which opened on May 6, 2017 (“House of European History,” 2016).12 The importance of culture in these policies is underlined frequently, for example by former President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso, who argued that Europe is not only about markets, but also about values and cultures (de Boodt, 2015). His call for the continuation of a narrative for Europe as a community of values and culture led to the “A New Narrative for Europe” initiative; a project that involved artists, scientists, and a range of cultural actors to engage in discussions on how to

12 See also Chapter 14.
reconnect the European Union with its citizens (see https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/new-narrative_en). In March 2014, a declaration entitled *The Mind and Body of Europe* was issued as a result of this initiative (Battista & Setari, 2014). However, Wolfram Kaiser (2015) is critical of both the initiative and its result, which he describes as no more than “standard Commission rhetoric about European norms and values” (p. 374). According to Kaiser, the fundamental problem with this type of project is the fact that it is an example of “top-down attempts at nation- and polity-building” (p. 374), resembling 19th-century strategies that do not apply in a contemporary EU context.

The initiative “A New Narrative for Europe” can be seen as part of the “narrative turn” that emerged in European studies and is reflected in recent EU cultural policies. As an example, in his article “Europe as a Shared Network,” Eder (2011) argues that a collective identity produces meaning for people, or a “robust shared narrative” (p. 39). Scholars have attempted to understand how Europe is narrated—whether it is constructed by European institutions or shaped by societal or cultural forces (Bouza García, 2017a). Chapter 13, which examines the effects of the selected literary projects, will discuss the initiative “A New Narrative for Europe” in greater depth in order to reveal the interrelatedness of institutions and cultural forces in the engendering of European narratives.

4.2 The Greek and Roman Strategies: Creating a Political Identity

Whereas the German strategy aims to create cultural identity, the formation of political identity is one of the goals in the Greek and Roman strategies, in which citizenship, elections, and political debate are key elements. Again, the Treaty of Maastricht represents a crucial moment, as the birth of the “European citizen” is proclaimed within its pages (van Middelaar, 2013). The important question raised here is how best to establish and promote active citizenship. Of central importance to this type of European identity is the emergence of a European public sphere, as for example Kaelble (2010a) contends:

The rise of the European public sphere is seen as crucial for European identity. If public spheres in Europe exist only as national public spheres, European identity will emerge either not at all or only in diverging and contradictory national versions. (p. 10)

Referring to the criteria formulated by Jürgen Habermas (1989), some authors deny the possibility of a true European public sphere, as neither shared media nor a common language exist on a European level (some examples of these pessimistic views are described by Kaelble, 2010b).
However, other publications (Frank et al., 2010; Risse-Kappen, 2010; van Middelaar, 2013) suggest that the emergence of a European public sphere has already occurred. From as early as the 1950s and the 1960s, national media are increasingly dominated by debates on European topics. This European public sphere should be conceptualised, not as a separate entity beyond the national sphere, but rather as the “Europeanisation” of various national public spheres. This sphere is socially constructed when people debate issues of common concern (Frank et al., 2010; van Middelaar, 2013; Risse-Kappen, 2010). Thomas Risse-Kappen (2010) underlines the importance of such debates, suggesting that a public sphere comes into being “when people argue about controversial issues” (p. 125). Instead of using a normative framework to measure the performance of existing public spheres—as proposed by Habermas (1989)—Risse-Kappen puts forward a set of empirical indicators to assess the extent to which we can observe the gradual Europeanisation of the public sphere:

Thus, we can speak of a transnational European public sphere the more a transnational community of communication emerges in which (a) European or other national speakers regularly participate in cross-border debates, (b) speakers and listeners recognize each other as legitimate participants in transnational discourses that (c) frame particular issues as common European problems. (Risse-Kappen, 2010, p. 126)

A transnational European public sphere can thus be built through the Europeanisation of various national media. Crucial to the emergence of this sphere are not only the media themselves, but also the interplay between political institutions, civil society, and those media. Between 2005 and 2009, the European Commission took concrete steps to enhance the dialogue between social actors and thus to improve the legitimacy of the European Union—a legitimacy that is no longer only based on the existence of a European internal market, but “today depends on involvement and participation,” as quoted by Cristiano Bee and Emanuela Bozzini (2010, p. 9) from the White Paper on European Governance. Citizen involvement in the European Union can be furthered by a civil society that allows people to take part in Europe-wide political and cultural organisations and interest-groups. Obviously, the emergence of this civil society does not rely on EU strategies. Rather, the development of a civil society builds on the possibility to challenge authority and thus on organisations that critically oppose EU institutions. Counter publics are a necessary element of civil society. Bee and Bozzini (2010) describe the ways in which civil society actors interact with institutions as follows: “through open debates, for example through the internet or open
conferences, through advocacy work to influence public policy and through criticism of, and expressing opposition to, institutional activities” (p. 9).

In his anthropological study of EU cultural politics between 1993 and 1997, Cris Shore (2000) underlines the fact that European cultural policy and the creation of a cultural identity cannot be seen as separate from the formation of political identity. Creating a sense of common heritage as a crucial element of cultural policy may enable people to identify more with EU institutions, which would be a possible answer to the perceived “democratic deficit” of the European Union (Shore, 2000). Shore (2000) suggests:

The attempt by European elites to invent the EU as an imagined community—to render it visible and appealing in the mind’s eye of the public—has been central to the cultural politics of European integration. The hope is that this will spill over into the formation of a fully-fledged European public sphere. Imagining Europe is thus an inherently political as well as a cultural enterprise. (p. 221)

Even though Shore’s conclusion can rightfully be criticised for underlining the “elitist” perspective too much—as recipients of institutional discourses are also actively transforming and translating this discourse, as Sassatelli (2009) has shown—the important lesson here is the interrelatedness of cultural and political identities in EU policies, as opposed to the strict separation suggested, for example, by Cerutti (2008) in Chapter 2.

From this theoretical overview of three different fields of research, two important insights can be gained for the analysis of the transnational literary projects that are the object of this research. Firstly, the framework of literature in national identity formation can be transferred to a European context, as long as the distinctiveness of the process of European identity formation is taken into account. These specificities are reflected in the ways it has been argued that literature might present a valuable perspective in European identity formation: literature can represent contested memory; bridge an emotional distance; provide critical opposition; and reflect diversity. With these specificities in mind, the literary projects are therefore conceived as contributions to a European imagined community. Secondly, in analysing the rhetoric on European identity, two discourses were identified: those of European cultural, and European political, identity. These discourses are formulated in EU cultural policies and institutional initiatives, but they also importantly emerge bottom-up, initiated by various actors in civil society. These literary projects are thus also considered as instances in which both political and cultural identity discourses are
instrumentalised—interpreted, transformed, contested—in the practice of cultural organisations, EU cultural policies, literary writers, and their audiences. These insights provide a starting point for the analysis of the three research questions on the expectations, results, and effects of the transnational literary projects. The methodological approach is further elaborated in the introductions connected to each of those questions as presented in Parts II, III, and IV. Below, the various criteria that governed the selection of the case studies are presented and explained.
5. Selection of Cases

The case studies selected for this research can all be seen as texts about Europe and as part of the literary debate on Europe that Lützeler (2007a) discerned in his work (see Chapter 3). This research can therefore be distinguished from the discussion about the extent to which we can speak of a specifically European literature, as reflected in, for example, De pen van Europa (The Pen of Europe, Dijkgraaf, 2006) or Writing Europe: What is European About the Literatures of Europe? (U. Keller & Rakusa, 2004). Texts in this literary debate about Europe encompass works by literary authors on the identity, unity, and integration of Europe, either in “direct” forms, such as essays and pamphlets, or “indirect” forms, such as poetry or fiction. However, what all these texts have in common is that they have been written by literary authors and aim to contribute to our understanding of European identity (Lützeler, 2007a).

Drawing on this categorisation, five criteria served as guidelines for the selection of the case studies. Firstly, all cases have been instigated by cultural organisations. This means that all cases can be researched in terms of the expectations held by the cultural organisations that inspired them. Therefore, the publication In Europa by the well-known Dutch author Geert Mak (2008)—as an example of an individual project—is not included in this research.

Secondly, the literary character of the cases constituted a principle of selection. To understand why literary approaches are considered a valuable contribution to the debate and understanding of European identity, it is essential that the organisers of the proposed cases refer to their projects in literary terms, and that literary writers are involved in these projects. Thus, this research does not depend on a particular definition of literature, but on the question of which reasons have been given for creating a place for literature and writers in debates on Europe. This might be by motivating their choice for literary authors as participants, or by arguing the importance of the literary form (a poem or a narrative). A range of essays by intellectuals on the European project have therefore been left out of this research, because their literariness as such is not put to the fore by the organisers or editors—for example, the multi-author publication Dromen van Europa [Dreaming of Europe], compiled by Henk Pröpper (2004).

Besides a literary dimension, the third criterion for selection was that the projects should also have a recognisable transnational, European dimension, as the research aims to gain insight into how these projects might contribute to the construction of European identity. This European dimension is reflected in the content of the projects, as the participants might have been asked to think about the question of what Europeans share, but also in their organisation, as all of the projects depend on European cross-border mobility or transnational dialogue.
The fourth criterion for selection was that the cases are recent. As discussed in Chapter 3, both Lützeler (2007a) and Kaelble (2001) approach literature from a historical perspective in their descriptions of themes or basic forms of European self-understanding. Starting in the 18th century, they each discern different themes, but the current age is labelled by both as the era of cultural diversity. To enable a comparison of the different cases and their contribution to European self-understanding, all date from between 2000 and 2016.

The fifth and final criterion of selection was that these projects are linked to the cultural space in the Netherlands and Flanders. All of them involved Dutch-speaking writers, and festivals, media-performances, and events cited were organised in the Netherlands and Flanders. Limiting the scope of this research to authors in Dutch-speaking regions is principally for reasons of feasibility. Furthermore, these regions feature less prominently in European studies. Opening up these Dutch cases to an international audience adds a different perspective on Europe. The Netherlands is traditionally one of the defenders of the European project, but has recently turned Eurosceptic, whereas Belgium as a country is very much divided, in the same way as the European Union at large might be perceived—namely, along the lines of language, culture, and politics. Each of the four selected cases is introduced in the following sections by briefly characterising the organisation that instigated them and highlighting the aims of these initiatives.

5.1 The “Literatur Express”

In the year 2011, the literary organisation Literaturwerkstatt Berlin celebrated its 20th anniversary. Over the course of the previous two decades it has developed into an international cultural organisation with a range of events and activities intended to expand their international network, engage audiences in dialogues with authors, discover talented young writers, and support cultural education. These projects and events include Poesiefestival Berlin, the “Lyrikline”-website, the open mike competition, and the ZEBRA Poetry Film Festival (see www.haus-fuer-poesie.org/de/literaturwerkstatt-berlin/home/). The organisation also houses the association eurobylon e.V., co-organiser of the “Literatur Express”, which supports “cultural activities which are primarily aimed at promoting the idea of Europe in the area of art and culture” (Nitzsche, 2011, p. 7).

The director of the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin, Thomas Wohlfahrt, organised a train journey around Europe in 2000 in which 103 literary authors from 43 European nations travelled for 46 days through 11 countries. Between June 4 and July 16, 2000, 19 cities were visited. To mark these visits, national cultural organisations created programs in the cities concerned, consisting of public
discussions, readings, festivals, tours, and receptions. The complete program of this journey can be found in Appendix 2. This large and transnational project was the result of years of preparation. The idea was born in 1996, when Wohlfahrt proposed a grand European project, based on the historical train route of the North-South Express.\textsuperscript{13} The project could be successfully concluded, according to the plans defined by the organisers, when three goals were attained:

- When around 100 authors from throughout Europe have travelled across the continent together on a book tour and work trip from 1 June 2000 to 17 July 2000 in order to see and understand both themselves and Europe.

- When all of the authors who took part in this experience have compiled their perspectives on Europe in a “European Timetable” anthology that will also simultaneously be translated into as many European languages as possible in time for the 2001 Frankfurt Book Fair.

- When readings of more than 1000 German poems and 1001 poems in other languages—2001 poems in total—and translations of all of these poems can be heard in their original language and read in translation on the Internet as a “lyrikline.” [I.7] (Literaturwerkstatt, 1999, n.p.).

Each national cultural partner organisation was asked to select two authors for this project, aiming towards participants “with a keen interest in the development of the continent. The authors enjoy recognized literary status in their countries of origin and have had their works translated into one or more languages” (Gutberlet et al., 1999, p. 15). Three Dutch-speaking literary authors were involved: Serge van Duijnhoven and Mariët Meester from the Netherlands, and Kamiel Vanhole from Belgium. The German jury also selected Dubravka Ugrešić, born in Croatia and living and working in Amsterdam, whose work is well known in the Netherlands, as several of her books have been translated into Dutch. The authors were asked to produce two texts: a “text 1”—a fragment of their work of at most 10 pages, and the available translations of this text. It was used as an introduction for the other authors and as material for public readings. Following the journey, authors were asked to submit a “text 2”—a literary text of a maximum of 15 pages based on the experiences of the trip and the European continent (“Contract for Service,” n.d.). The result was an anthology with contributions from the participants, titled \textit{Europaexpress: Ein literarisches Reisebuch} [\textit{Europe Express: A Literary Travel Book}], published in 2001 in Germany.

\textsuperscript{13} The “Sud Express” was launched in 1887 to connect Paris, Madrid, and Lisbon by train. Together with the “Nord Express,” covering the route from Paris to St. Petersburg, the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits (CIWL) and its founder Georges Nagelmackers designed a luxurious train route through Europe (Wohlfahrt & Lange, 2001b, p. 10).
The Literaturwerkstatt Berlin worked mostly with national, Berlin-based cultural sponsors, in which the Hauptstadtkulturfonds offered the majority of financial support (Literaturwerkstatt, 1999). The reason for this national approach might be that, on a European level, the cultural programmes funding European artistic initiatives only came into being in 2000. The European Commission did fund a relatively small amount—€200,000 euro in a budget of 4 million for this project (Wohlfahrt & Aillagon, personal communication, n.d).14

5.2 “Narratives for Europe”

The European Cultural Foundation (ECF) was instigated in 1954 to support Europe-oriented educational and cultural initiatives. With this idea in mind, the Swiss philosopher Denis de Rougemont aimed to gather influential European individuals who were committed to the unification of Europe. The first meeting was held in Geneva under the presidency of Robert Schuman (Autissier, 2004). The ECF developed into an organisation that works together with many European partners and offers grants to artists, organises lectures and festivals, and provides a digital platform for discussion. In 1960, the (then) president of the ECF, Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, proposed to move the foundation to Amsterdam, where it has been located ever since. The ECF has a yearly budget that ranges between 6 and 6.5 million euros and its income is based largely on contributions from the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds. The foundation’s other sources of income include subsidies from profit and non-profit organisations, national governments, and the EU Cultural Programme.15

In her historical overview, Anne-Marie Autissier (2004) identifies four stages in the development of the ECF. She summarises its current mission—in which it has been engaged since 2002—as “the development of a cultural policy for Europe” (Autissier, 2004, p. 3). This can be illustrated by the way in which Katherine Watson (the current director of the ECF) and Wolfgang Petritsch (the former chair of the ECF) described the goals of the ECF in the 2009 Annual Report:

We want to help shape Europe through a cultural contribution. We realise this in three ways: by linking cultural policy and practice, by empowering people through arts and culture, and by connecting sources of knowledge for the future. ECF is well positioned to do this—we are independent and pan-European. (ECF, 2010a, p. 6)

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14 This sum was meant as a daily allowance of €30 for the participants of the train journey. It was requested in a letter from Jean-Jacques Aillagon (Mission 2000 en France, the French partner in the organisation) and Thomas Wohlfahrt (eurobylon) to Nicolaus van der Pas, director-general Education and Culture (Wohlfahrt & Aillagon, personal communication, n.d.).

15 Financial statements can be found on the website of the ECF, as part of its Annual Reports (see www.culturalfoundation.eu).
In their reports and statements, the idea of a “catalyst” is frequently used to describe the role of the ECF. The current president, Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, views the aim of the foundation as follows:

At ECF, we seek to be a catalyst: to use the power of culture to open up, deepen and widen public debates and civil engagement. In doing so, we want to reach policy-makers, influencers, artists, cultural operators and the broader public in Europe. (ECF, 2010a, p. 5)

Over the last decade or so, the ECF has worked with a changing thematic focus towards a range of activities. Between 2002 and 2004, this was “Enlargements of Minds,” whereas 2005 to 2008 was labelled “Diversity, the Power of Culture.” The years between 2009 to 2012 were named “Narratives for Europe,” and from 2013 until 2016 the theme was “Connecting Culture, Communities and Democracy.” In an interview in 2012, director Katherine Watson stated that current scepticism about Europe and the European Union represents the biggest challenge to the ECF (Kammer & Van Os, 2012).

The research presented in this dissertation focusses on the thematic approach “Narratives for Europe.” In the years between 2009 and 2012, a range of activities were deployed referring to this theme, which the ECF divided into various different levels: the mobility funds; intercultural dialogue (the Princess Margriet Awards); the European Union’s external relations (More Europe Debates); the EU neighbours (Arab Cultural Policy Conference); and Europe as a cultural project (ECF, n.d.-a). The focus here will be on the level of Europe as a cultural project within the thematic approach of “Narratives for Europe.” On this level, three projects are named that are all explicitly related to the idea of narratives for Europe: firstly, the “Narratives for Europe” online space; secondly, the publication Remappings: The Making of European Narratives (Chenal & Snelders, 2012); and finally, the closing event for this theme, “Imagining Europe,” held from October 4 to 7, 2012.

The ECF aimed at four goals with this project, which are listed in an informative text for contributors to the publication Remappings as follows:

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16 An example of the changing times at the ECF can be seen in the change of email addresses in 2012 from “@euro-cult.org” to “@culturalfoundation.eu.” Katherine Watson explained in an interview: “When we received this email address, about twelve years ago, it did not have such a strange connotation. It tells us something about the changing time and atmosphere we work in” [I.8] (Kammer & Van Os, 2012, p. 51).

17 Between 2009 and 2012, this website was available via http://www.narratives.eu. Recently, it has been archived on http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/library/narratives-for-europe.
• opening spaces for expression of European narratives across geographies, cultures, generations and disciplines;
• contributing to the expression of new European Narratives, from different perspectives and to debating these narratives . . . ;
• stimulating debates about Narratives and stimulate the sense of belonging to a European public space;
• influencing European (cultural) policy makers. (ECF, n.d.-c, n.p.)

These goals imply that the ECF does not aim for specific content, nor to make a certain statement. Rather, the role of this project is to facilitate—the creation of a space for narratives to emerge and to be debated.

The closing event “Imagining Europe” was partly funded with a two-year subsidy of €200,000 from the EU Culture Programme that ran between 2007–2013 (ECF, 2013). The title of the funding application was “Re-mapping Europe: A Remix Project 2012–2014.” One of the performances linked to this specific project—the live cinema performance “European Souvenirs”—was staged during the “Imagining Europe” event on October 6, 2012 in De Balie.

5.3 “The European Constitution in Verse”

On December 8, 2010 a verse was inaugurated on a wall in the Justus Lipsius building, the headquarters of the Council of the European Union. It reads: “Order emerges again and again from the magma of chaos”18—a line taken from The European Constitution in Verse, a long poem based on texts by 54 European poets, published in 2009 by Passa Porta—Brussel’s international house of literature—and the Brussels Poetry Collective. This collective had been initiated by writer David van Reybrouck and poet Peter Vermeersch, who developed this “multicultural and multilingual poetry collective” (“Brussels Poetry Collective,” n.d., “About”) in keeping with many other cities with a “city poet.”

The project “The European Constitution in Verse” was financed via the international project “Shahrazad – Stories for Life,” which had received a grant of almost €4 million from the EU Culture Programme (2007–2013) (“EU Grant Agreement Shahrazad,” 2007). Passa Porta was one of the six international partners in this grant agreement.19 The project description of “Shahrazad” is formulated in the EU grant agreement as follows:

18 Also depicted on the front cover of this dissertation.
19 Other cultural partners were based in Stavanger (coordination), Barcelona, Frankfurt, Norwich, and Stockholm (“EU Grant Agreement Shahrazad,” 2007).
The Shahrazad project will bring new, original and challenging stories from all over the world into Europe. These are stories created, told and passed on by poets, journalists, novelists, editors, cartoonists, translators and essayists who, persecuted and silenced in their homelands, have been or will be granted refuge in European cities belonging to ICORN, the International Cities of Refuge Network. . . . Human rights, freedom of speech, diversity and solidarity are core values within the project. Shahrazad will be a unique tool for integration and for understanding between insiders and outsiders within communities, countries or even continents. . . . At the peak of its long-term ambitions, the Shahrazad project aims to supply Europe with a new, more open and sustainable narrative about itself. By opening up to human and artistic impulses from the outside, Europe can regain and revitalize some of its capital values: freedom, democracy and solidarity. (“EU Grant Agreement Shahrazad,” 2007, pp. 1–8)

“The European Constitution in Verse” was launched in 2008 in the European Parliament. Following this presentation, Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch sent out invitations to many poets residing in Europe to contribute to this document by supplying one to five poems to be remade into “articles” for this poetic constitution. From each European country at least one poet participated. The organisers also involved poets from the ICORN network (“EU Grant Agreement Shahrazad,” 2007). Amongst the participants were poets living in Europe from Algeria, Turkey, Zimbabwe, India, Morocco, and Afghanistan. Diversity was also aimed for by inviting both young and upcoming poets, and the established poets of older generations.

Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch merged stanzas, re-shuffled verses, and combined images according to the level of editorial freedom they were granted by the poets themselves in order to create a long poem consisting of a preamble and a constitution divided into six parts, each containing several articles. The European Constitution in Verse was published in 2009 in Dutch, English, and French. These texts are also available online, including the “Urtext” in almost 30 different languages. The editions in book form (produced by Passa Porta in 2009) quickly sold out, and the Dutch text has been re-published by De Bezige Bij in 2011, titled Neem bijvoorbeeld graniet: De Europese grondwet in verzen. The official presentation of the 2009 editions was on March 27 in the Flagey Centre in Brussels during the Passa Porta Festival of Literature, two months before the European elections. Of the poets who contributed to the constitution, 27 participated in this presentation, flanked by a Brussels choir, to read from their texts. Various performances and readings were organised afterwards, for instance, in Prague (2009), Paris and Berlin (2010), and
5.4 “The Return of Europe”

In 2004, the Nexus Institute was at a turning point. It had been founded 10 years earlier to “offer a counterweight to nowadays society and its mere one-dimensional focus on science, technology and commercial values through making the world, culture and philosophy of life of the European humanist tradition accessible to a general audience” (Riemen, 2016a, p. 3). The institute had gained an international reputation for organising symposia, master classes, and conferences featuring world-renowned thinkers, musicians, politicians, and writers, such as Amos Oz, John Gray, and Slavoj Žižek. Three times a year, the journal *Nexus* is issued with essays from both nationally and internationally renowned thinkers and authors. Despite its international orientation, the journal appears in Dutch, which has to do with the institute’s initial goal: preserving the Dutch language and national cultural heritage (Riemen, 1991, p. 1). A quote from Marguerite Yourcenar’s 1951 novel *Memoirs of Hadrian* serves as the institute’s motto: “Each man fortunate enough to benefit to some degree from its legacy of culture seemed to me responsible for protecting it and holding it in trust for the human race (Yourcenar as cited in The Nexus Institute, 2016, p. 11)”

The institute was mainly subsidised by Tilburg University, and the provincial and local councils, but generating income has always been a struggle. By 2004, founder and president of the institute Rob Riemen suspected that subsidies might be terminated. He seized upon the EU presidency of the Netherlands as an opportunity to organise a conference on European civilisation and identity, titled *Europe, A Beautiful Idea?* Jan-Peter Balkenende, the Dutch prime minister at that time, was actively involved in the conference. The prestige of this successful event guaranteed Nexus subsidies for the coming years (Riemen, 2008). Since 2004, the Nexus Institute has become increasingly focused on the idea of Europe. *Nexus 50* is a special edition on European humanism, and Riemen (2008) concluded about his previous work that everything the institute has achieved, has been a variation on the same theme: European culture, European humanism, and the European spirit (p. 26).

However, in 2016 the Nexus Institute found itself at another turning point. After Riemen’s publication on Geert Wilders (published in Dutch in 2010, translated into English in 2018)—in which he argued that the Dutch politician and his political party are “prototypes of contemporary fascism” (Riemen, 2018a, p. 84)—Wilders’s political party had been keen to cut provincial and local subsidies. Moreover, in 2014 Tilburg University announced that they would end their subsidy of €500,000 per year (Steketee, 2015). A strategic partnership with the European Cultural Foundation,
including a grant during the year 2015 (ECF, 2016), did not prevent a large budget cut. These circumstances might have contributed to the institute’s current process of transformation, seeking long-term institutional and private investments both inside and outside the Netherlands.

To mark its 25th anniversary, the Nexus Institute published a collection of essays and historical texts on European identity under the title De terugkeer van Europa: Haar tranen, daden en dromen (2016). The introduction by Riemen to this volume later appeared in English as an essay titled “The Return of Europa: Her Tears, Deeds, and Dreams” as part of his publication To Fight Against This Age: On Fascism and Humanism (Riemen, 2018b). Despite the analysis of profound crises in the European Union, the tone is hopeful and Riemen sees how it is still possible for Europe to return. De terugkeer van Europa was published in line with the international symposium “Je suis Européen! Meeting in Café Europe” on June 6, 2015. Many participants in this symposium contributed afterwards to De terugkeer van Europa: Robert Skidelsky (historian, politician); Aykan Erdemir (academic, politician); Adam Zamoyski (historian); Arnon Grunberg (writer); Caroline de Gruyter (journalist); Apostolos Doxiadis (writer); and Androulla Vassilou (politician, former EU Commissioner). The goal for the symposium was set out in a personal invitation to the participants:

On the 6th of June, a theatre will be transformed into Café Europe, a coffee house in which intellectuals and politicians meet. They will resurrect the old debate and seek an answer to the urgent and all-important questions: Who is European? And what does it take to be a European? (Riemen, personal communication, n.d.)

These four cases—the “Literatur Express”, “The European Constitution in Verse”, “Narratives for Europe” and “The Return of Europe”—will be the focus of this research, which revolves around the intentions, results, and effects of the selected transnational literary projects. The following Part II will address the first research question, looking at the expectations that were formulated by the organisers of these projects.
PART II. EXPECTATIONS OF THE TRANSNATIONAL LITERARY PROJECTS
IN EUROPEAN IDENTITY FORMATION
Introduction

This second part of the dissertation will focus upon a reconstruction of the expectations cultural organisations have when they launch projects that reflect on shared notions of European identity from a literary perspective. In documents as diverse as project plans, interviews, and applications for funding, organisers present an image of Europe and argue the importance of literary commentaries on the state of Europe. Such plans, in other words, are textual sites in which organisers construct a European identity and explicate their views on literature’s role in its construction. Analysing these paratexts can offer answers to two questions: Firstly, how is European identity presented in these texts? Secondly, why were literary approaches deemed a valuable contribution to reflections on Europe? Below, the analytical framework to answer both questions is provided. Chapters 6 and 7 address the above-mentioned research questions separately for the four selected cases—namely, the “Literatur Express”; “The European Constitution in Verse”; “Narratives for Europe”; and “The Return of Europe.”

The corpus for these research questions consists of the formative and conceptual documents that define the selected projects—the intended outputs and the overall goals of these initiatives as formulated by the organisers themselves. The documents used include: invitations to participants; requests for subsidies; project plans; interviews; newspaper articles; personal emails; and speeches. Whilst some materials were found online, most of the documents were obtained as a result of the following cultural organisations offering access to their archives: the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin (the “Literatur Express”); the European Cultural Foundation (“Narratives for Europe”); and Passa Porta (“The European Constitution in Verse”). Further information was provided via personal communication with the organisers: Peter Vermeersch (“The European Constitution in Verse”), and Rob Riemen (“The Return of Europe”).

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of the images of European identity presented in the selected paratexts. Drawing on the work of Sassatelli (2009), who points out how the dominant rhetoric on identity can be instrumentalised in different ways, these paratexts are analysed as textual instrumentalisations of the rhetoric of cultural identity and the rhetoric of political identity—as discussed in Part I. On the one hand, European cultural identity is closely related to the discourse of “unity in diversity”—consisting of values and histories that supposedly bind Europeans together—and interpretations of what European cultural diversity actually entails. On the other hand, European political identity is linked to the rhetoric of the “Europe of Citizens” and presents a political self-understanding in terms of democracy, citizenship, and dialogue in a shared public sphere.
These paratexts can also be read as containing a range of argumentative strategies with which to legitimise their literary contributions to wider discussions on European identity. Chapter 7 provides an overview of the strategies deployed by cultural organisations in order to argue the importance of literature in the process of European identity formation. The four different strategies regarding the value of literature in reflections on Europe (identified in Chapter 3) provide the analytical framework: literature is perceived as being able to represent collective and contested memory; capable of bridging the distance between abstract principles and European citizens; providing a place for critical reflection; and as representing the diversity of Europe. In the conclusion to this part II, the relation between the findings on both questions will be explored in order to formulate the expectations of the cultural organisations in the selected cases.
6. Cultural Diversity and Committed Citizens: Images of European Identity

This chapter addresses the question of how European identity is presented by the organisers of selected literary projects. The cases are compared and structured via the ways in which the cultural organisations concerned instrumentalise various discourses on European identity—both cultural and political. This chapter offers an overview of the findings for the four selected cases in chronological order (6.1–6.4), followed by a brief summary in which these case studies are compared and contrasted (6.5). Two repeated elements that constitute the images of European identity will structure these subsections. In each case, Europe is understood in the context of space and time, whilst the myth of the abduction of Europa20 forms a second constituting element—interpreted differently in these cases, dependent upon the image of Europe that comes to the fore in the paratexts.

6.1 The “Literatur Express”: A Historical Train Route

An analysis of the paratexts pertaining to the literary train journey from 2000 shows how the organisers of the “Literatur Express” presented a geographical image of Europe that reaches far beyond the borders of the European Union. In this portrayal, Europe extends from the Atlantic to Azerbaijan (Literaturwerkstatt, 1999). In the paratexts, this particular European identity is formulated predominantly in terms of its cultural commonalities and differences. As the train journey made its way “from the Romance language area of the south-west via the German-speaking countries of Central Europe to the Slavonic north-east of the continent” (Gutberlet et al., 1999, p. 5), European diversity is instrumentalised via references to the various regional languages and cultures. This diversity provides the foundation for the European project. As the organisers remark: “The cultural wealth of Europe is accepted by people in culture, politics and the economy as forming the basis of European integration” (Gutberlet et al., p. 23). The initial plan (Gutberlet et al., 1999) was to publish an anthology based on the journey in as many European languages as possible—an act intended to reflect Europe’s cultural wealth.21 This multilingual approach is in line with the motto of the Council of Europe, which supported this initiative, as the organisers explain by referring explicitly to the rhetoric of unity in diversity:

20 The abduction of Europa refers to the story of the Phoenician girl with whom the Greek god Zeus fell in love and abducted in the form of a bull.
21 In the end, only a German edition of the anthology was published (see Chapter 11).
When the organisational structure of the Literatur Express Europa 2000 ensures that the “European Timetable anthology” will be published and translated into as many European languages as possible in 2001, this will amount to an aesthetic “report” for both the Literature Express Europe 2000 and the public. (The Council of Europe, one of the sponsors of this project, has named 2001 the European Year of Languages.) [II.1] (Literaturwerkstatt, 1999, p. 6, emphasis in original).

This multilingual interpretation of diversity positions European unity as being suggested via shared historical experiences, not least as the idea for this project is based on the historical train route of the North-South Express, launched at the end of the 19th century to connect St. Petersburg, Paris, Madrid, and Lisbon by train. The Director of the Literaturwerkstatt, Thomas Wohlfahrt, explained this in an interview with a Belgian newspaper as follows: “The North-South Express was launched in 1896 and looks back on a highly eventful history . . . : the transportation of Jews, soldiers who invaded Belgium, the Russian aristocracy fleeing from the October Revolution, the Iron Curtain” [II.2] (NR, 1999, para. 2). The “Literatur Express” came to an end on July 15, 2000 with a literary festival on Berlin’s Bebelplatz—the place where National-Socialists had burnt books in 1933. In the year 2000, this historical dimension “provides an opportunity to look back on events of the past 100 years and to look forward to what lies ahead in the new millennium” (Gutberlet et al., 1999, p. 5). Regardless of this brief reference to the future of Europe, one can argue that the focus in this example is on the past, as we can find commonalities in shared history, and it is this historical perspective that provides a starting point for future ideas. This is also apparent from the “Final Statement” (2000) that was issued by the organisation in the final days of the journey—a direct reflection of the authors’ experiences during their trip.\(^22\) This final statement, which is mainly concerned with European cultural policy, was addressed to the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and UNESCO, and reads: “The essence of the cultural and historic character of Europe is based on ‘unity through diversity’” (“Final Statement Literatur Express” 2000).

Despite this focus on Europe as a cultural entity, the organisers of the “Literatur Express” also aimed to incorporate a political dimension into the project. The participating authors on the train journey took part in an intensive program of readings, receptions, and discussions—often on political topics—such as borders and exile. However, in addition to noticing that the “continent is growing closer” due to the European market and a shared currency (Gutberlet et al., 1999, p. 5),

\(^{22}\) Even though the statement was presented as informed by the views of the authors, some of them were vehemently against the text (see Chapters 8 and 12).
references to the European Union as a political construct are notable by their absence in these documents. A telling example can be found in the project’s plan for potential sponsors: “Taking part will be 130 authors from the 45 countries of Europe—all of them well-versed in the ways of the world, fond of travelling, communicative and with a keen interest in the development of the continent” (Gutberlet et al., 1999, p. 23). The expression “the development of the continent” implies a depoliticised image of Europe—a project that positions Europe as a geographical area, and not specifically the European Union. This is not only in line with the fact that the train journey encompassed more than just the countries of the European Union, but is also a result of the absence of a political dimension in the documents in general.

The “Literatur Express” thus participates in a discourse of European cultural identity—one of “unity in diversity.” Hence, this discourse of cultural identity is instrumentalised by interpreting “unity” as a shared historical heritage, and “diversity” as multilingualism. This construction of European identity also leans on a spatial image of Europe—a geographical indication of its natural borders—and a timeframe that in this case emphasises the past as a source of commonalities. However, most importantly, the “Literatur Express” documents show how European cultural identity is really only understood in vague terms. References to historic events and a plurality of languages are indeed very general interpretations of what it is that binds Europeans culturally. These somewhat vacuous indications of cultural identity might have resulted from the fact that the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin relied mainly on the authors coming up with their own (literary) representations of shared history and cultural diversity, to then be collected in their anthology (see also section 7.1).

6.2 The Stories of Tomorrow: “Narratives for Europe”

The spatial scope of “Narratives for Europe,” organised by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF), is comparable to that of the “Literatur Express.” Yet instead of referring to natural borders—as in texts on the “Literatur Express” (“Atlantic to Azerbaijan”)—the European space in the paratexts of this project is constructed as extending beyond the political borders of the European Union. The ECF (2011) envisions “an open, democratic and inclusive Europe embracing the European Union and its neighboring countries” (p. 6). In other words: the spatial image of Europe is constructed by referring to the political project, its borders, and the areas beyond these borders. In line with this image of Europe, the title of the publication Remappings: The Making of European Narratives (Chenal & Snelders, 2012) reveals that the project’s leaders aimed to engage participants in visualising different geographical and mental maps of Europe. The image
of Europe explored by the ECF is thus one of openness and diversity, including both the European Union and its immediate neighbours.

This vision also led project leaders to conclude that the notion of identity is not one that is suited to reflections on Europe. The ECF opted instead for the concept of “narrative” to replace “identity,” as “narratives are dynamic and open (unlike identities)” (ECF, n.d.-c, p. 1). To reflect on this notion of “narratives,” the ECF partnered with the Department of European Studies of the University of Amsterdam to organise meetings that gathered together scholars, journalists, and people in the art world. One seminar took place on May 10, 2010 in Amsterdam—with, amongst others, Joep Leerssen, Ann Rigney, and Monica Sassatelli. Another round-table discussion took place in Sofia on November 18, 2010 mainly with academics from Sofia, Budapest, and Paris (ECF, 2010b, 2010c). Most scholars from the first seminar in Amsterdam were invited to contribute to the publication *Remappings*, amongst them European studies scholars Monica Sassatelli, Wolfram Kaiser, and Paul Scheffer.

This different spatial interpretation already indicates how the “Literatur Express” and “Narratives for Europe” express different discourses on European identity. The ECF specifically positions Europe as a political entity, yet before turning to the ways in which the ECF adopts this discourse of political identity, another dissimilarity between these two opening cases—this time in terms of timeframe—should also be discussed. Whereas the organisers of the “Literatur Express” frequently refer to shared values and a common past, such references are absent in the paratexts on “Narratives for Europe.” In her contribution to *Remappings*, Odile Chenal (2012), Head of Research & Development at the ECF, suggested a possible reason for this absence:

Yet one question concerning institutional narratives continued to puzzle us: how might European political narratives avoid reusing (but with a European gloss) those very instruments of 19th-century nation-state building—the exclusive identity discourse, monolinguism, culture of borders, centralism, etc.? What narratives could be woven for a European space with flexible borders, a multiplicity of languages, and yet strong national frames? How can European institutions develop narratives that are shared by people of all backgrounds and generations in Europe, without denying differences, dissonances, and even conflicting memories and perspectives? (p. 24)

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23 The notion of identity is, however, not completely absent: in the afterword to the publication *Remappings*, Katherine Watson (2012), director at the ECF, observed: “we do believe that now, when Europe’s confidence is shaken and it is facing perhaps the most severe assault on its identity, both internally and externally, the key role of culture in building Europe could not be more urgent” (p. 190).
The ECF thus aims to avoid associations with nation-building activities, since representing a shared history and framework of values and ideas are on a par with the strategies of national identity formation—the so-called German strategy of creating unity, in Van Middelaar’s (2013) terms. This perspective might explain the elements missing from the paratexts.24 This type of strategy does not correspond to the image of Europe that the ECF constructs, namely a multilingual space with flexible borders, not restricted to the European Union. More specifically, the ECF aims to reach people with a migrant background and engages, for example, in EU neighbourhood projects, with a focus on the Middle East, North Africa, Belarus, Moldova, Turkey, and Ukraine. The previous quotation also shows how this avoidance of associations with nation-building activities does not suggest that the ECF adopts a post-national perspective. Indeed, Chenal (2012) mentioned a European space with “strong national frames,” which indicates how in this case, the texts carefully navigate between steering away from 19th-century nationalism without denying an important role for nations both in and outside of the current European Union.

This image of Europe is constructed as a political entity in the making—as opposed to a European cultural identity with a shared history—and thus, the rhetoric of European political identity is frequently adopted in these paratexts. The documents show how the ECF values the idea of a shared public sphere as vital to the consolidation of a civil society and a sense of belonging to Europe as a political project. A perceived lack of this sense of belonging constituted the starting point for “Narratives for Europe” and hence, project leaders aimed to bridge this gap between the people and politics:

People of this continent are experiencing Europe every day; they live in Europe but do not feel like belonging to it. Many of them are part, or strive to become part, of Europe as a political project—the EU—but feel disconnected, if not excluded. (ECF, n.d.-c, p. 1)

The fact that the ECF argued how the power of storytelling and the arts create opportunities for a public sphere and a sense of European citizenship led literary scholar Astrid van Weyenberg (2016) to conclude in her description of the project that “Narratives for Europe” extends the causal relationship of narration to nation . . . to that of narration to the formation of the larger imagined political community of Europe. The future of Europe, in this interpretation, hinges on its ability to connect (with) its citizens. (p. 166)

24 In the introduction to Remapping, Chenal (2012) described, for example, how “history” is one way to explore new narratives for Europe, but that the “ECF has not yet ventured into this territory,” however, in the future they might take up this perspective to bridge the gap between different generations (p. 26).
Within the recurring timeframe—between past and future—the focus in this case is on references to the future, zooming in on new perspectives and “stories of tomorrow” (Chenal, 2012, p. 27). Chenal (2012) expressed this idea as follows:

The stories of tomorrow indeed must also be looked for—and perhaps first looked for—among local, groundbreaking initiatives where young, and older, people develop new political languages and practices and experiment with new models of civic participation, joined by artists whose imaginative approach sharpens the challenge of such initiatives. (p. 27)

At the same time, one can argue that the ECF does take part in the cultural discourse of unity in diversity, as a prevailing metaphor used to strategically position the role of stories in their documents is that of “weaving.” Catherine Watson (2012), director at the ECF, noted in her afterword to Remappings: “Narratives are journeys, and ECF’s work has been to trace some of these journeys, to follow their twists and turns, their intersections, convergences, and confluences. The individual lines traced form the intricate web that is Europe” (p. 190). Similarly, Odile Chenal (2012) looked back on this project with a classical reference: “What narratives could be woven for a European space where flexible borders, a multiplicity of languages, and yet strong national frames? . . . Which of Ariadne’s threads would we follow?” (pp. 24–25). The comparison between narratives and threads being woven together suggests that a certain unity can be discovered—or created. The metaphor is further extended by a reference to the myth of Ariadne, in which the thread also becomes a lifesaver in a maze of dead-ends and manifold perspectives. Threads or narratives are presented as a means to find a way out of the labyrinth and an instrument to gain clarity—or a certain unity—in this complex multiplicity.

Despite these instances, this case demonstrates how the emphasis is on European political identity. This discourse on political self-understanding is often instrumentalised to explain the goals of the project. In this case the focus is on the public sphere, and the expectation of this organisation is to engage citizens in new, alternative narratives. The components of space and time, as discerned in the paratexts on the “Literatur Express,” also constitute this image. However, instead of a historical perspective and a geographical space, in this case “Europe” is a political space in need of remapping, this time by telling stories of the future rather than of the past.

6.3 The Public Sphere of Involved Citizens: “The European Constitution in Verse”
Europe as a political entity is also the image that comes to the fore in the paratexts on the third case—“The European Constitution in Verse,” organised by Passa Porta and the Brussels Poetry Collective. The political dimension in this instance is immediately apparent from the reference to a constitution in its title, and the project is indeed placed on a par with the troublesome referenda on the proposed European Constitution in 2005. Peter Vermeersch explained the project in his invitation to the poets:

After the referendums in France, the Netherlands and Ireland, the idea of a European constitution or reform treaty seems more remote than ever. Yet, if there will not be any political constitution for the European Union, we believe there should at least be a poetic one. (Vermeersch, personal communication, October 31, 2008)

This quotation also reveals how the European space—in this case the European Union—is in need of a poetic constitution. The project plan referred to the intention of creating a dialogue between Europeans by means of their poetic interpretation of the constitution: “Rather than being a frivolous reworking of a political fiasco, this is an initiative that places the debate on the foundations of Europe squarely where it belongs: in the public sphere of free and involved citizens” (Passa Porta, 2008, n.p.).

The project launch also revealed the political ambitions of the organisers. Presenting their first texts in the European Parliament, Van Reybrouck (2008) asserted in his multilingual opening speech: “This parliament is ours. You wouldn’t think so with such severe security checks, but this is our open forum. L’Europe sera nous, ou elle sera pas. Het soevereine volk is de hoogste instantie” [Europe will be us, or it will not be. The sovereign people are the highest authority.] (Reybrouck, 2008, n.p). Van Reybrouck continued by explaining why the Parliament is the right place for this project to be launched by comparing poetry and the idea of a constitution. Whilst the texts do not appear to have anything in common, he argued both are remarkable in their effect: they do not only describe, but also create and constitute new realities.

The readers of the poetic constitution are frequently referred to as “European citizens,” in line with the project’s focus on the European Union. A journalist explained in the *EP Newsbound* (a digital newsletter for MEPs) that this project “is a question, by means of the poets, of allowing citizens to reappropriate a European project from which they today seem distant” and, quoting Van Reybrouck, “to dream, think, negotiate this true Europe” as “free and committed citizens” (“The European Constitution is Back,” 2008, n.p., emphasis in original). This re-appropriation by citizens of a European project that is too abstract, too distant, and failing to engage citizens in a lively
debate is presented as the starting point for this poetic constitution by the organisers. In an article on “The European Constitution in Verse” in the Belgian daily newspaper *De Standaard*, Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch (2009b) argued:

The European institutions themselves are making frantic efforts to bridge this gap and to involve citizens in politics and policies. Those attempts are without a doubt well-meant, but, to be honest, also a bit pathetic . . . . But this does not mean that we as habitants of Europe should then wait in silence. Instead of quietly standing by, we can help shape and transform Europe. Critical debate, it can start with us, and it does not need to be showed to us by Europe-enthusiasts or -sceptics with an electoral or commercial agenda. [II.3] (p. 26)

The importance of the public sphere and a lively debate between committed citizens, as often underlined by Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch, are key elements in the discourse on European political self-understanding, according to Van Middelaar (2013). As discussed in Chapter 2, Van Middelaar (2013) argues in *The Passage to Europe* that to promote an active citizenship, Europe does not only need elections, but also a public arena of debate and stories. This is precisely what the “The European Constitution in Verse” project aimed to contribute to.

However, attempts to interpret Europe as a cultural unity can also be found in these documents. In the project plan formulated by Passa Porta (2008), the story of the abduction of Europa is called upon to shed a light on the concept of European culture. As noted in the project plan, a sculpture by the Flemish sculptor Koenraad Tinel bearing this title functioned as an “emblem” for this project. In the introduction to the 2009 edition, which featured a picture of this sculpture on the front, Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch (2009a) explained their choice as follows:

In Greek mythology, Europa was the daughter of a Phoenician monarch who was abducted by Zeus, the supreme god, and carried off to Crete. So even then it all started outside Europe: Phoenicia was where the present countries of Syria and Lebanon are now. The Belgian sculptor Koenraad Tinel made a monumental sculpture of the abduction of Europa in sheet steel. It is eight metres high and almost nine metres long. It is proud and enthralling. We could not imagine a better emblem for this Constitution.25 (p. 7)

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25 The Dutch edition from 2011, *Neem bijvoorbeeld graniet*, was published without this sculpture on the front cover, due to the fact that the Belgian sculptor is relatively unknown in the Netherlands. Therefore, the reference to this emblem is not part of the introduction to this edition.
The organisers of “The European Constitution in Verse” also perceived an important link between the myth of the abduction of Europa and the larger project of which this constitution is part: “Shahrazad – Stories for Life”. This wider project aimed to be a tool for integration and understanding between different communities in order for Europe to “regain and revitalize some of its capital values: freedom, democracy, and solidarity” (“EU Grant Agreement Shahrazad,” 2007, p. 8). The organisers concluded that this myth reveals to us that the birthplace of European culture is outside of Europe, and continued: “This is interesting: the Mid-East as the mother of European culture. Or in other words: Europe is the result of influences from outside. This is what the Shjahrazad [sic] project is about: introducing new stories in Europe” (Passa Porta, 2008, p. 2). The myth of Europa’s abduction has been used many times as an example of shared European heritage, and moreover, the mythical figure of Europa has come to symbolise the continent of Europe (Wintle, 2003). These classical references to Europa often function as an interpretation of European cultural unity, rooted in ancient Greek civilisation. Linking Greek civilisation with modern European identity issues is, however, “shot through with problems,” as Wintle (1996) argues, because “it wrenches Greek history out of its Middle Eastern and oriental context” (p. 11).

Yet in this case, it is revealing how this myth is immediately interpreted as an inclusive image of European culture. The birthplace of Europe lies in the Middle East, and this leads the organisers to conclude that the perspective of the outsider is an important one. This conclusion—of a mythological European past—has repercussions, not only for the image of the present, but also for ideas concerned with the future of Europe. In a list of project activities for the years 2008–2009, Passa Porta organisers underlined how the initial texts by the Brussels Poetry Collective conceptualise themes such as “hospitality” and “the borders of Europe,” which “made clear that Europe should be a generous area, open for ideas and cultures from all over the world” (Passa Porta, 2009, “The European Constitution in Verse: The Launching”). Van Reybrouck expressed this idea in an interview as follows: “That this initiative is born in Brussels (a truly multicultural place), is not unimportant: “Brussels, says David [van Reybrouck], is not only the capital, it is also the model of Europe” (“The European Constitution is Back,” 2008, n.p., emphasis in original). The reference to the myth of Europa’s abduction is therefore not only a representation of European cultural unity; it functions first and foremost as an image with which to underline the interrelatedness of European and non-European cultures, and as a plea for political values to strengthen the European Union as a multicultural society.

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26 This line of thought is also discussed in the proceeding section 6.4.
6.4 “Je Suis Européen!”: “The Return of Europe”

In recent years, Rob Riemen—the founder of the Nexus Institute—has, in various media, been outspoken on issues of European politics and identity (see for example his interviews with Jan Prij [2009]; Marnix Verplancke [2015]; and Marc Janssens [2016]). The volume that resulted from the project “The Return of Europe”—De terugkeer van Europa—contains not only an introduction, but also a substantial contribution by Riemen himself (2015a, 2015b). Compared to other project leaders, Riemen’s personal views on Europe—and thus those of the Nexus Institute, as he is actively involved in the publications and symposia organised by this cultural institute—form a significant part of the project. For this reason, this section is more extensive than the other sections in this chapter.

Riemen’s contributions to the public debate have always been marked by the humanism in which Nexus is rooted: according to him, the values and ideas that were formed in this tradition define Europe (Riemen, 2008). His ongoing concern is that “being European” is not a political, but rather a cultural identity (Riemen, 2016b). It is therefore unsurprising that in celebration of 25 years of the Nexus Institute, a special edition of the journal Nexus was issued, entitled De terugkeer van Europa. This issue was preceded on June 6, 2015 by a symposium titled “Je suis Européen!” Participants were asked to contribute to this special edition of the Nexus journal based on their findings during the symposium. An interview in the Flemish magazine Knack on De terugkeer van Europa exemplifies Riemen’s stance on Europe:

The Dutch European Commissioner Frits Bolkestein once said that you are European from the moment that you have a passport from one of the EU member states. He made this statement in the fall of 2004, a couple of months after the Union was enlarged with ten new countries. He was in the presence of quite a number of people from Poland and the Czech Republic, who were brand new EU citizens. Aggravated, they asked if Bolkestein truly meant to assert that they only became Europeans on 1 May that year. Had they not been before? And what about intellectuals such as Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig or Ludwig van Beethoven: were they not Europeans, perhaps? To Rob Riemen, this anecdote reveals how far the EU drifted from her European roots. According to him, being European does not have anything to do with a political or economic unity, and even less with a passport. “To me, being European is a cultural identity,” he says, “knowing that you belong to a humanist tradition that unites the brightest ideas from Alexandria, Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem.” [II.4] (Verplancke, 2015, p. 85)
Riemen thus participates explicitly in the discourse of European cultural identity. Being European, he argued in the same interview, is a “state of mind” (Verplancke, 2015, p. 86), in the sense of striving towards a civilisation in which values that constitute the essence of “European humanism” (Riemen, 2008, p. XV)—truth, justice, beauty, righteousness—can flourish.

With this stance, Riemen’s position can be characterised as an attempt to revive the ideal of 19th- and early 20th-century humanism and its “Bildungsideal”27 to confront current political issues. This humanism, characterised by Thomas Vaessens (2009a) as an ideal that over the last century has relied on a cultural elite to promote universal values that might civilise the lower classes or oppose mass-culture, is thus re-invented to fit contemporary issues. In this case, the cultural elite is presented as a means by which to remind Europeans of the values that constitute the European “soul.” One can, of course, argue that this reliance on universal values or grand narratives has been discredited by postmodern thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard. Yet this does not necessarily lead to a relativistic conclusion that such notions are of no importance anymore in contemporary culture and society; indeed, the latest generations of writers in the age of “late postmodernism” (Vaessens, 2009a, Chapter 3) can be seen as an attempt to go beyond postmodern irony in order to re-engage with society and with values such as authenticity and sincerity. However, these late postmodern authors work from the assumption that their authority in public debates needs to be earned, as the authority of the cultural elite is in a contemporary context now far from self-evident. Simultaneously, they acknowledge postmodern critiques of values and grand narratives (Vaessens, 2009a). This is why Riemen’s position is more of a return to early humanism, rather than being in line with late postmodern aspirations: the appeal to the authority of a cultural elite, and the legitimacy of universal values, remains unquestioned in these documents.

This perspective of universal values is one of the key insights in Riemen’s contribution to De terugkeer van Europa. In this context, Europeans are defined as engaged in “cultivation of the soul” (Riemen, 2015a, p. 47). Here, Riemen evoked the memory of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, whose pupil, Radim, an old Czech professor, is a participant at a conference attended by Riemen. The conference, on the question of “What’s Left for the West?,” addressed the issue of European identity, and in a monologue, Radim speaks of Europe in similar terms to Riemen’s:

27 A concept from the German tradition of thinking about education, referring to the general development and cultivation of an individual through the arts and philosophy.
Europe is not a tradition of customs passed down—no, Europe is first of all that quest for true humanity. What is the essence of the human being? Well, this is what Socrates stressed in almost all his conversations: it is the soul, the immortal soul, that makes us a human being . . . . At the same time, we have our souls to thank for our greatness, because our souls enable us to know the absolute, the eternal, that which is not transitory: truth, goodness, beauty, love, and justice . . . . This search, this care for the soul, this endeavour to live in truth and to make the world just, will never be completed. Which means that being a European is above all a state of mind, and Europe is never completed. (Radim as cited in Riemen, 2018, pp. 163–165)28

Juxtaposing this interpretation of European cultural identity with the one offered by the “Literatur Express,” one can see how different the two approaches are. Whereas the “Literatur Express” views cultural identity as a sharing of memories of historical events across different language regions, “The Return of Europe” leans on “metaphysical” interpretations of what Europeans share—a soul, a state of mind, or an essence. However, this metaphysical interpretation has consequences for how Europe is defined geographically. Positioning Europe as a state of mind rather than a political constellation, Riemen speaks of the European mind in an interview with Verplancke as extending far beyond the borders of the European Union:

> The European spirit has settled down in America, in the north obviously, but also in Argentina. This spirit is universal . . . . The European spirit has already spread to Russia and Turkey and seems to expand further and further. [II.5] (Verplancke, 2015, p. 86)

This led the interviewer to remark: “dat klinkt heel eurocentrisch” (“that sounds very Eurocentric”; Verplancke, 2015, p. 86). Riemen responded:

> I have no problem with defending a number of fundamental values that also underpin European humanism. Democracy, the general validity of the law, individual freedom, education and human rights are universal values. They lead to world citizenship. There is only one alternative to civilisation, and that is barbarism. That is why I appeal to all right-minded people: unite, because it is no longer five to twelve anymore. [II.6] (Verplancke, 2015, p. 86)

28 Here I have used Riemen’s (2018) To Fight Against this Age, which includes an English translation of his contribution to De terugkeer van Europa.
The (perhaps overconfident) view of European identity presented by Riemen above leans on broad Eurocentric and essentialist assumptions. Taking Eurocentrism as the idea that the world is perceived from Europe as a power centre—in which Europe is treated more favourably than non-European parts of the world (Delanty, 1995; Wintle, 2009)—Riemen argued for a form of Eurocentrism of the mind, in which “the European spirit” is assumed to spread universal values such as democracy, equality, and liberty. The argument that values such as truth and justice are exclusively European problematically renders non-European countries dependent on a European mind-set in order to attain these values. This mind or soul is at the same time the “essence” of being European, which denies the social constructedness of a collective identity—the fact that a collective identity emerges as the result of social interactions, and that this identity is contested and reconstructed over time, as discussed in Chapter 2.

The return of Europe, as the title of this collection of essays suggests, lies in the possibility of a cultural turn in the European Union. This is because, as Riemen notes in an interview with Janssens, Europeans are not only members of a political union with a passport, but rather members of a cultural and moral tradition:

Please, let us not neglect those spiritual values that have developed precisely in Europe from classical antiquity via Christianity and humanism. Only when we share those values on this continent, people will be able to identify as a European citizen and to leave behind the current division. [II.7] (Janssens, 2016, n.p.)

This return is urgently called for, as Riemen views the current European crises to be a result of the European Union, choosing to ignore these common values as the foundation for processes of integration. In an interview with Twan van Lierop for a local Dutch newspaper, Riemen explained: “The EU is only an economical and a political union. That is not enough to create a community of citizens . . . . To shape a solid society, you need culture and an identity that transcends nationality” [II.8] (van Lierop, 2016, p. 13). The publication *De terugkeer van Europa* is therefore an attempt to revive this European spirit, and to thus solve the fundamental existential crisis that the European Union finds itself in following Brexit and the rise of populist anti-EU parties and nationalism, as argued in a recent brochure by the institute (The Nexus Institute, 2016). The invitation for the participants to the symposium “Je suis Européen!” framed the event in similar terms:

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29 Liesbeth Eagelink (2011) discerns a similar form of Eurocentrism in her review of Riemen’s *Nobility of Spirit* (2009).
A European Union without Europeans cannot continue to exist. If a future for Europe is feasible, then it can only be based upon a united Europe; upon a renaissance of the cultural-moral awareness that every form of *Blut und Boden* transcends race and faith; upon an ideal of civilization that may inspire countless of millions to speak up with passion and conviction, saying in their own language: “Je suis Européen!” (Riemen, personal communication, n.d).

Notably, this quotation also shows how this case is placed on a timeline between past and future: the renaissance of a tradition is a condition of any possibility for the future of Europe. It might even be more appropriate to argue that the timeframe “past–future”—a constituting element in the discourses analysed in these cases—shows how the “metaphysical” approach of the Nexus Institute leads to a perspective of timelessness in this specific case. Riemen appeals to eternal values, a soul, and the essence of being European.

The discourse of European cultural identity, summarised by the slogan “unity in diversity,” is, in this case, instrumentalised with a clear focus on unity rather than diversity. Common values such as freedom, truth, justice, and beauty—rooted in European humanism, which can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy—are central here to the construction of European identity, rather than a celebration of the diversity that exists in the myriad local traditions that Europe encompasses. This view of European cultural identity also entails a linear tradition from ancient civilisation to contemporary Europe—an idea that has been heavily criticised by European scholars, who have pointed out that this interpretation is both exclusive and historically incorrect. For example, Wintle (1996) argued that any notion of the continuity of a European tradition is a myth stemming from the 19th century.

In multiple documents in this case study, the European Union is set against this vision of Europe, in which the European Union entails soulless economy and politics, whilst Europe refers to humanistic values under threat from neoliberal policies. According to Riemen, Brussels is therefore a synonym for the European problem; its bureaucracy, prevalent economic thinking, and tendency to reduce problems only to what is quantifiable are the cause of recent crises (Riemen as cited in Verplancke, 2015). Current political leaders therefore face harsh criticism from Riemen, who perceives them as part of the problem rather than part of the solution—the fact that currently only 0.15% of the EU budget is reserved for the cultural programme already indicates, in his view, they are on the wrong track (Riemen as cited in Janssens, 2016). Guy Verhofstadt exemplifies the
problem, according to Riemen, who referred to the well-known MEP as a “political charlatan” (Riemen as cited in Verplancke, 2015, p. 86). He contended:

He [Verhofstadt] thinks that we should not allow ourselves to be locked up in our own national identity, and with this I at least agree. But he ignores the fact that of course there is a cultural identity, the European identity that springs from the intellectual tradition that came to us from Socrates via Spinoza, Thomas Mann and Albert Camus. He reduces a human to merely an economic being, contends that the dilemmas this human being is faced with can only be solved in a political manner, and posits himself as the perfect solution. The Verhofstads of this world—and I include the entire European Commission—present a great threat to Europe. They will not solve the crisis. They are the crisis. [II.9] (Riemen as cited in Verplancke, 2015, p. 86, emphasis in original)

Despite this firmly oppositional language, the Nexus Institute does seek to establish connections between the cultural and the political domain. The 2004 conference on European identity and civilisation aimed towards an agenda for the political leaders of the European Union (Riemen, 2008), and this latest project intended certain political outcomes as well. Both the publication De terugkeer van Europa and the symposium “Je suis Européen!” featured not only intellectuals (writers and academics), but also politicians—even a former EU Commissioner, Androulla Vassilou.30 One of the questions in the invitation to participants—What kind of policy should the European Union embrace to reverse this anti-European spirit?—indicates that the Nexus Institute had not turned its back on politics, but was instead trying to engage with political issues from a humanist point of view, participating in a discourse of European cultural identity, as shared traditions and common values are, in Riemen’s view, key to understanding Europe.

This analysis of European identity thus leads to the conclusion that in this case, the discourse of cultural identity is deployed. This discourse is tied to a political perspective, without explicitly displaying elements of the discourse of political identity, such as references to institutions, democratic procedures, voting, and the public sphere (van Middelaar, 2013). In other words, Europe, viewed as sharing a cultural heritage, is contrasted to the current European Union, but in these paratexts both discourses are also conflated, since the heritage of European humanism is at

30 Without, however, the long-term results that the Nexus Institute hoped for, as Riemen explained in an interview with Prij: “In 2004, we have organised conferences on Europe, mind you, at the request of the government, resulting in a number of recommendations. It is typical: since then not a single politician has ever referred to them. Never. Are politicians searching for a European vision with ideals? There it is! Why do you remain silent about this?” [II.10] (Prij, 2009, p. 51)
the same time proposed as a solution to the political and economic problems of the European Union. Thus, according to the Nexus Institute in its brochure, politics and culture belong to the same domain (The Nexus Institute, 2016). Tapping into the humanistic tradition in an attempt to solve current problems of EU legitimacy is therefore justified: “In short, to humanists, politics, technology, science and economics on the one hand and philosophy, theology and the arts on the other are not separate worlds. Together they form the essence of what it is to be human” (The Nexus Institute, 2016, p. 9). This line of reasoning is, however, problematic, as “Europe” in this cultural sense is not the same as the European Union. A sense of sharing values and a common heritage—a cultural identity—does not lead the European Union towards political legitimacy. As Wintle (2000) explains, cultural heritage and the idea of Europe should therefore be differentiated from daily EU politics: a collective cultural identity is not the same as an identity from which a state derives political legitimacy, as the latter has more to do with seeking justification for a European government and creating feelings of political loyalty (p. 27).

The Nexus case demonstrates how the discourse on European cultural identity is instrumentalised in a metaphysical way. A soul or a state of mind is what binds Europeans, however, this has consequences for other constituting elements—namely, time and space. In this case, a definitive map of Europe is difficult to draw, as the European spirit extends to Turkey and Latin America, and is continually expanding. Here, the past is constructed as an important source of inspiration, although not so much as a historical sense. Rather, it is the eternal values and the European spirit that need to be revived. In other words, in an attempt to go back to a form of humanism not yet critiqued by postmodern thinking, timeless concepts and ideas are called upon to create an opportunity for “The Return of Europe.”

6.5 Comparison Between Case Studies
This chapter addressed the question of how European identity is presented in the paratexts related to the four selected case studies. A comparison of these paratexts suggests that the organisations involved have different outlooks on European identity. The general image that emerges is of a divide between those that participate in either political or cultural discourses of European identity. On the one hand, the “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” adopt the rhetoric of cultural identity in their different interpretations of unity in diversity. Whilst the “Literatur Express” instrumentalises unity as European historical experiences shared by a diversity of cultural regions with an emphasis on the Second World War, “The Return of Europe” adopts a similar historical perspective, but in this case, unity is interpreted as a shared heritage of European humanism. “The European Constitution in Verse” and “Narratives for Europe,” on the other
hand, participate in the rhetoric of political identity. “The European Constitution in Verse” aims to bridge the gap between Brussels and “the people” by stimulating discussion between involved citizens. Engaged citizens and the importance of a European public sphere are also the focus of “Narratives for Europe,” which presents an image of Europe as rooted in openness and diversity. At the same time, this case showed how the discourse of European cultural identity is criticised by comparing this rhetoric to 19th-century nation building, which the ECF seeks to overcome.

The analysis of these cases has also shown how, whilst all the paratexts contain the same basic constituting elements constructing and formulating European identity—space and time—the interpretation of these elements varies depending on the discourse that is presented. We have seen how Europe can be defined as a geographical area (the “Literatur Express”), or a space defined by the political borders of the European Union (“The European Constitution in Verse” and “Narratives for Europe”), as well as a space that extends as far as a certain state of mind would go (“The Return of Europe”). The focus of the “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” is more on the past as a source of unity in shared history and philosophical roots. Meanwhile, “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse” are aimed towards engaging citizens in order to build a better future.

A notable example of another constituting element in the images of European identity in these paratexts is the famous myth of Europa’s abduction, referred to in both “The European Constitution in Verse” and “The Return of Europe.” Here as well, one can see how the interpretation and function of this myth is dependent upon the prevalent discourse of identity. In “The Return to Europe,” the mythological figure personifies the philosophical, moral and cultural unity rooted in ancient Greek culture, indicating a specific interpretation of the discourse of cultural identity. The myth functions as an articulation of the classical heritage that Europeans share, which is often referred to by using metaphysical terminology such as “the soul” or “essence.” However, in the paratexts on “Narratives for Europe,” the Europa myth was brought to the fore to underline the importance of political values such as tolerance and European openness, in line with prevalent discourses of European political identity. In this case, the myth was not interpreted as a unifying European tradition, but rather as a reminder of the fact that the perspective of the outsider is important, not least since we can conclude from this story that the Middle East is actually the birthplace of Europe. Drawing on the work of Derrida, Sassatelli (2009) argues that it is precisely this perspective—that of the other—that prevents triumphalist accounts of unity in diversity or other forms of Eurocentrism:
Derrida . . . sees Europe’s specificity in being constituted by its other. Or, to put it differently, Europe can find itself not in a given cultural content, but in its “eccentricity,” in its transformative ability, the ability to transform both itself and what it encounters to produce an always dynamic cultural form that is not challenged but nurtured by its containing of alterity and derivativeness. (p. 38)

With this analysis, the ways in which these cases might contribute to European identity formation according to these cultural organisations can be summarised as follows: the “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” aim to contribute to European cultural identity formation by focusing on the memory of shared historical experiences such as the Second World War, and by reviving the tradition of European humanism. “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse” participate in the emergence of a Europe-wide public sphere in their goal to engage European citizens in discussion and debate to further European political identity formation. The ways in which literature might contribute to attain these goals are discussed in the proceeding chapter.
7. Shared Memories and Critical Narratives: Legitimising a Literary Perspective

This chapter focusses on the second dimension of the expectations of these projects: Why have the organisers invited authors of literary works to reflect on the issue of European identity? To answer this question, the paratexts of the selected case studies were also analysed from the perspective of being textual sites that contain a range of strategies able to legitimise the literary contribution to European identity formation. The strategies discerned in Part I inform this analysis: literature is perceived as being able to represent collective and contested memory; capable of bridging the gap between abstract principles and European citizens; providing a place for critical reflection; and of representing the diversity of Europe.

The previous chapter on European identity showed how an analysis of the paratexts revealed recurring components in the case studies: time, space, and the myth of Europa's abduction structured these texts, albeit interpreted differently as part of both cultural and political discourses on European identity. The same holds for the analysis of arguments to legitimise the literary contribution to European identity formation. In this section, a further two recurring components will be revealed: firstly, the juxtaposition of culture with European politics and economy; and secondly, references to the long-standing tradition of great European writers. Different cultural organisations invoke this image of great European writers in order to argue that current authors might still have such a position in European society. The case studies are again presented in the sections below (7.1–7.4), followed by a comparison in section 7.5, which looks at their differing lines of argumentation.

7.1 Literature as Cultural Memory: the “Literatur Express”

In the paratexts on the “Literatur Express,” literature and culture in general were presented as geared towards the same goals as politics and economy. The latter domains paved the way for European integration and interaction, but for the emergence of a European identity a cultural approach is required in order to complement these political and economic efforts. Thus, the first type of argument that is deployed for the importance of literature is its capacity to mediate between the local and the personal on the one hand, and the global and/or the abstract on the other. Literary imagination can offer a concrete experience and a way to the hearts and minds of Europeans, as the following quotation illustrates:

A single European market and a single European currency will be clear external signs that the continent is growing closer. However, bringing Europe to the hearts and minds of the people is a very different matter. Culture will play a crucial role in the establishment of a
new European identity. Culture alone has the power to instil in people an interest in their fellow Europeans, which transcends territorial and linguistic barriers. (Gutberlet et al., 1999, p. 5)

In the above quotation, culture is placed in a mediating position between the European world of regulations and finance, and the individual emotions and interests of its citizens. As such, culture is needed to complete the process of integration and to establish a common identity. Whereas the single European currency and a common market can bring people together, it is only culture that can establish a true relationship between European citizens—between hearts and minds. Thus, the economy creates the possibility to interact easily on a European level, and culture paves the way for a true interest in fellow Europeans—and will therefore play a crucial role in the establishment of a European identity. This same notion of culture being close to hearts and minds can be found in the introduction to the Europaexpress, in which the organisers remarked that one of the questions leading to this literary project was: “Wie machen wir Europa er-fahrbar?” (Wohlfahrt & Lange, 2001, p. 9, emphasis in original). With a pun that relies on the double meaning of “er-fahrbar” (“to experience” or “to travel”), the organisers connect literature to the domain of the concrete and the experience. As phrased in the German application form for subsidy: “Authors discover Europe concretely through their writing” [II.11] (Literaturwerkstatt, 1999, p. 7). However, these documents do not specify what it is about literature that renders it capable of touching the hearts and minds of Europeans; this assumption is not substantiated, but more taken for granted in these documents.

Besides the mediating capacities of literature, the organisers also rely on two other strategies—literature in its capacity to represent stories of cultural memory, and literature as a space of diversity. The introduction to Europaexpress: Ein literarisches Reisebuch explains how “literature utilises, plunders, processes, alters and preserves these historical memories” [II.12] (Wohlfahrt & Lange, 2001, p. 9). The organisers embraced the idea that Europe contains a network of cultural memories connected to different communities across the European continent. The justification for the use of literature in the debate on European identity is therefore that literature creates the possibility to connect with different cultural memories. An application form for subsidy reads:

Languages are the places where people’s cultural and collective memories are stored. Literature is the appropriate art form for language. . . .
For this reason, literary translations are of vital importance not only for the transfer of literature as art, but also as the only way for people to learn about other cultural memories and memory structures at all. [II.13] (Literaturwerkstatt, 1999, p. 3)

Literature is presented here precisely as a medium that works with the memories of different nations and peoples. The quotation reveals how this memory is not constructed as transnational, shared, or European; the focus here is more on the idea that Europe’s diversity is constituted by a range of different cultural memories connected to diverse groups of people in Europe.

However, the project aimed to foreground not only the diversity, but also the commonalities of Europe. The organisers stated: “Culture plays a crucial role in a politically and economically unified Europe because it enables people to understand the ways in which they differ, but also to appreciate the things we have in common” (Gutberlet et al., 1999, p. 23). The train journey resulted in a collection of writings, and the project leaders underline how all these stories of a collective experience reflect personal interpretations, different styles of writing, and many national backgrounds. The anthology Europaexpress: Ein literarisches Reisebuch in itself thus represents the slogan “unity in diversity.”

One aspect that these diverse participating authors had in common, was the fact that they were not best-selling writers. The selection of authors for this project relied on the idea that the great authors do not need a stage—the focus here was placed firmly on lesser-known authors. This is reflected in the previously cited final statement as well, which was aimed at EU institutions and addressed European cultural policy—specifically the importance of translations:

The richness of European culture depends on its long tradition of many languages flourishing side by side and influencing one another. Therefore, we must protect the lesser spoken languages if we are to preserve our common European cultural heritage and values. If we do not vigorously support translation, the future of European literature will be very much the poorer. We urge the financing of translations, the establishment of translation centres in every country of Europe, and the creation of a network to connect publishing houses, libraries, writers, and translations centres. Also, the importance of the translator’s role must be stressed. (“Final Statement Literatur Express,” 2000, n.p.)

The Literaturwerkstatt argued that this new generation of writers is different from their iconic predecessors such as Günter Grass and Milan Kundera—canonical European authors who were also described in the General Introduction to this dissertation. Wohlfahrt explained in an interview
with Helmut Schödel for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: “With all due respect, we did not want Grass and his contemporaries involved. They have already said their piece” [II.14] (Schödel, 2000, n.p.). For young and upcoming authors in an increasingly global European market, the need for an expanding network of translators, readers, and publishers is of great importance. Günter Grass is a prime example of one of the great European writers who have been outspoken on European politics (Lützeler, 2007a). In this reference to Grass, the “Literatur Express” is placed both within and outside of this tradition of European public intellectuals: as the great writers have had their say, it is now time for upcoming authors to follow in their footsteps.

7.2 Provoking Unconventional Thinking: “Narratives for Europe”

According to the Literaturwerkstatt, the ways in which literature is deemed to provide a valuable contribution to reflections on European identity are (at least in part) comparable to those put forward by the ECF. The ECF explained the need for a human dimension in Europe as a ground for their project “Narratives for Europe,” which also utilises the mediating capacities of literature. The ECF’s 2010 *Annual Report* stated:

> It is the disconnect between “Political Europe” and “People Europe” that we seek to address . . . . We believe that there is a personal, human dimension that is currently missing from the European project. And that the stories that can provide this missing dimension are already being created all around us. (ECF, 2011, p. 6)

Again, we find the juxtaposition of culture on the one hand, and European politics and economics on the other. Artistic expressions, especially stories, are capable of fostering a feeling of belonging—in order to open our minds, “we have to use words that have real meaning and that touch our emotions” (ECF, 2013, “Towards a New Europe”). A similar statement was made in the paratext on the “Literatur Express,” in which literature was conceived as a way to bring Europe to “the hearts and minds” of people (Gutberlet et al., 1999, p. 5).

There are, however, some important differences between the strategies of the two organisations. Whereas the focus of the “Literatur Express” is more on the strategies of cultural memory and diversity in order to legitimise a literary perspective, the emphasis of “Narratives for Europe” is on the subversive use of literature as a site of opposition to official EU narratives. Project leaders at the ECF defined “narratives” as “collective stories and representations, which are made of people’s memories of the past, experience of the present, and above all imagination of the future” (Chenal, 2012, p. 23). To the ECF, the attractiveness of the concept lays precisely
in its openness and diversity. Comparisons are made between institutional EU narratives on the one hand, and new and emerging narratives on the other—which are the primary focus of the ECF. In this context it is telling that the ECF does not aim to be “a space where politically correct stories about values and hopes of Europe are distilled from above,” but first and foremost, a space in which narratives can emerge (ECF, n.d.-c, p. 1). Their 2011 Annual Report states that “art and culture provoke unconventional thinking and unconventional approaches” and that “Narratives for Europe” “brings together unheard or less heard voices” (ECF, 2012, p. 4, p. 40). The 2010 Annual Report summarised the contestational capacities of narratives as follows:

We are not talking about a single, overarching “grand narrative.” On the contrary: living stories, those that really tell us about the lives we lead and what Europe means to people, are multiple and multilayered. We do seek to identify common ground, where this exists; but we also seek out the creative dissonances, even the downright contradictions. (ECF, 2011, p. 6)

Clearly, the ECF has committed itself to a bottom-up strategy that presents culture and the power of stories as a preferred means by which to oppose institutional narratives, or at least as a possible way to present different narratives that exceed or contest the institutional story. However, the assumption that writers and artists excel in unconventional thinking, and that this might lead to counter-narratives in the domain of politics, is neither specified nor substantiated. The argument apparently leans on an image of writers and literature that does not need further explanation.

The emphasis placed by the ECF on diversity, and its interpretation of the narrative concept as dynamic and open, are underlined by a reference to the tradition of great European writers in a project description of “Narratives for Europe” by Chenal (2011). This text by the ECF concludes with a quotation from the Dutch author Abdelkader Benali, who was actively involved in the project:

It’s time to come up with a new idea of what Europe is, drawing on the humane Europe as defended and described by writers such as Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht. A Europe that newcomers consider a refuge, not a hell. If not, Europe will not die for a lack of immigrants, it will die for lack of light. (Benali cited in Chenal, 2011, n.p.)

Benali’s call upon Brecht and Mann emphasises the image of Europe that the ECF constructs; a Europe open to newcomers, in line with the ideas of the great writers extolling a humane Europe.
In similar ways to the “Literatur Express,” participating contemporary authors in this project are thus placed in the long-standing tradition of the great European writers who have intervened as public intellectuals in European politics. However, evoking this tradition also creates a tension in this specific project. Whereas the ECF seeks new narratives bottom-up with which to imagine the future of the European Union, it leans on the historical examples of the cultural elite in order to argue for the importance of the literary imagination. This tension is a recurring theme, both in the results and the reception of the project—as will be discussed in Chapters 9 and 13.

7.3 The Unacknowledged Legislators of the World: “The European Constitution in Verse”

In his invitation to poets to participate in “The European Constitution in Verse,” Peter Vermeersch cited a famous line from Shelley in order to argue for a link between poets and a constitution:

Constitutions are supposed to be signed, but we propose an alternative and more lyrical form of signature. The very last article of the constitution will start with Shelley’s famous line: “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” We would like you to add your own definition, beginning with “Poets are...” (in your language of choice). (Vermeersch, personal communication, October 31, 2008, emphasis in original)31

We can see how, once again, the tradition of the great writers serves as an instrument by which to understand these current literary projects, and in this case more precisely, to argue for the importance of a poetic intervention in a constitutional crisis.

Compared to “Narratives for Europe,” Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch perceived a similar power in such a poetic approach to oppose institutional narratives. The fact that their (poetic) constitution is not a “political statement,” but primarily poetry, is frequently underlined in the paratexts on “The European Constitution in Verse.” As such, the text of the constitution is neither in the form of a pamphlet, nor essayistic prose, but explicitly poetical in its language, and it is precisely this type of text that creates a non-institutional perspective on Europe. This poetic approach to a European political issue is legitimised via a range of different arguments in the paratexts. The capability of literature to overcome a certain distance or to mediate between global

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31 Vermeersch also gave a TEDGlobal talk on “The European Constitution in Verse,” referring to this quotation by Shelley (TEDGlobal, 2010).
and local levels is argued by the organisers as one of the reasons for this initiative. The introduction to the final text reads:

If the present European institutions cannot manage to inspire, charm, stir or touch the people, or if necessary anger them, then we [the poets] shall have to do it. Europe is currently stumbling from one crisis to another, is floating somewhere high above the heads of its citizens, and at certain times suffers from arrogance and hypocrisy, at others from confusion and anxiety. (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 5)

The juxtaposition of culture and politics is also a fundamental component in these paratexts, in similar ways to the previous case studies. Again, the abstraction of the European Union needs to be brought back down to earth by poets, in a project in which “the grand gesture rubs up against poetic intimacy” (Passa Porta, 2009, “The European Constitution in Verse”).

The diversity of literature is reflected explicitly in this project as well—not only in the many different languages, but also in the range of poetic backgrounds from which the participants came. In the invitation, Vermeersch formulated their goal as follows: “The Brussels Poetry Collective wants this constitution to be a polyphonic document that does justice to the diversity and wealth of European languages and poetical traditions” (personal communication, October 31, 2008, emphasis in original). In the introduction to the result of the multifaceted collaboration The European Constitution in Verse, the organisers explained that all of the participating poets had something to say about Europe, and they all say it in many languages. Poets who were born here and others who fled here. Poets with citizenship and without. Poets with literary prizes and poets with traumas. . . . Several of the poets who take part in this Constitution [sic] had to leave their native countries because of their opinions or dreams. They now live and work in Europe. Their voice counts too. This was also the conviction held by Shahrazad, the European cultural programme that wants stories from outside to be heard in Europe, and thus to question Fortress Europe from within. This programme’s financial support helped make this Constitution possible. (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, pp. 5–6)

The result is “a collection of contemporary European poetry that is more than just a collection. It is more than fifty individual voices from every corner of Europe. And at the same time it is a single poem” (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 6). Echoing the discourse of “unity in diversity,”
the poet Geert van Istendael stated in an interview with Gijs Moes for a Dutch newspaper: “With a gang of over fifty anarchists you get very different styles. Still, it has become a unity, in which one can see the incredible diversity of Europe” [II.15] (Moes, 2009, p. 9). Van Istendael explained in the same interview how the participants were not necessarily demonstrating their love for the European project in this text: “Everything is written with a passion for Europe, but not necessarily for European institutions. It contains quite a lot of Euroscepticism” [II.16] (Moes, 2009, p. 9). The use of literature as a place of critique and subversion—another of the strategies discerned in Part I—is often reflected in the ways in which the organisers envision their projects. Passa Porta (2009) saw the text as “a long poem in which European enthusiasm is tempered by a critical attitude . . . and seriousness is rhymed with satire” (“The European Constitution in Verse”). In his personal invitation, Vermeersch underlined the freedom that poets will have in this project: “The final document will be earnest, critical as well as playful. There should be space for dreaming, as well as screaming” (personal communication, October 31, 2008). Precisely because this document is poetry, a perspective that goes beyond and exceeds the European institutional approach is created. The constitution is, as previously stated, first and foremost poetry, yet also “political,” albeit in a different, non-institutional sense, according to Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch (2009b). Displaying a broad interpretation of what politics might entail, the authors stated:

It is political in another sense: it resolutely transforms Europe again into a source of artistic inspiration, creativity, and cultural cooperation without involving the institutions. The European Constitution in Verse is more a story than a solution, more a stroll than a signpost. But we do not remain silent. [II.17] (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009b, p. 27)

Even though this initiative is crucially linked to the EU Culture programme via the subsidy for the larger “Shahrazad” project, the organisers underlined their independence from any institutional approach to European issues. It is the power of storytelling and poetry to create the conditions and possibilities through which a public sphere and a sense of European citizenship can emerge.

7.4 Those Brilliant Men and Women of Yore: “The Return of Europe”
In the paratexts on “The Return of Europe,” references to great European writers and philosophers—the recurring elements in all of the paratexts—feature prominently to explain the goals of the project. In an interview with Michele de Waard in the Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad in 2004, Rob Riemen referred to these writers as an “intellectual compass” (de Waard,
and argued that only by returning to works of great writers from the past might Europe be able to steer away from its problems in the present. In the same interview, Riemen stated:

The least we can do is to open a conversation about the meaning of the idea of Europe. The true Europe is always, read Milan Kundera, the Europe of culture. In Thomas Mann’s words: it is the great humane ideas, it is the nobility of spirit, it is a Bildungsideal. This Europe cannot exist without cosmopolitanism and in Goethe’s beautiful definition: an exercise in respect, respective for the divine, the earth, our fellow human beings and our own dignity. [II.18] (de Waard, 2004, p. 2)

This tradition of European humanism forms the basis of common values that constitute the self-image of Europe in this project, and the importance of literature and writers in thinking about Europe follows logically from this image. Here, the essence of Europe is a meaningful life, moral consciousness, and wisdom—in other words, according to Riemen, the domain of culture (Riemen, 2016c). Moreover, the main exemplar of this tradition of European humanism is a writer: Thomas Mann. The works of this writer have had a great influence on Riemen, and in the 50th issue of Nexus, which dealt with aspects of European humanism, he observed:

Thanks to his work I got acquainted with the European spirit and if one would have asked me then what Europe is, I would have replied: The Magic Mountain by Thomas Mann. By the way, I still deem this to be a valid response. The European humanism to which Mann would dedicate his life, is not philology, nor has it to do with scientific scholarship. It is first and foremost the counterpart of fanaticism in any form. It is a way of life. [II.19] (Riemen, 2008, p. 14)

Riemen argued that this cultural foundation, and literally the fact that “Europa” refers to a story, has today been forgotten. The myth of Europa, as discussed in the previous chapter, is called upon in De terugkeer van Europa to remind readers of the literary origins of the continent. Riemen writes in the preface:

Calling upon a tradition of great writers and intellectuals might be perceived by some as an elitist approach to very practical problems (e.g. ten Hooven, 2015). However, Riemen defended his approach by stating that all great art is social and deals with problems of everyday life, offering the example of The Death of Ivan Ilyich (Tolstoy, 1886) to illustrate his point (Riemen, 2016c).
The whole idea that solidarity can exist between 500 million people, that they can derive their identity from merely economic interests and political values—and that the EU as a “political project” is in fact no more than the sum of these interests and values—is a folly resulting from the fact that Europe has been forgotten. Europa is the princess, abducted by Zeus disguised as a bull. As a drowning person she washed ashore on Crete and there, she became the inspiration for a great, humanistic civilisational ideal, devised and praised by thinkers and poets, realised by brave and bold people who fought the tyranny of power, wealth, and stupidity, for a world of truth and justice. [II.20] (Riemen, 2015b, pp. IX–X)

This quotation shows how Riemen argues the importance of intellectuals and poets: they have formulated and praised the values and ideas of European humanism. Without philosophers and writers such as Baruch Spinoza, Thomas Mann, and Albert Camus, we would not be able to take part in this tradition (Riemen as cited in Verplancke, 2015, p. 86).33

By inviting contemporary authors and intellectuals to the stage in order to discuss issues such as European identity, Riemen intends to continue this literary tradition of European humanism. His strategies by which to argue the importance of literature as a means of reflecting on Europe rely mostly on the need for conservation and tradition. In the light of the strategies discerned in Part I—literature as mediating between global and local levels, as memory, as subversion, and as diversity—the focus in this case is thus on memory, interpreted as a tradition of intellectuals and artists from the past whose works hold solutions to current European crises. The brochure by the Nexus Institute from 2016 therefore includes a reference to Stephen Spender, whose speech is also included in De terugkeer van Europa. Riemen notes that, “to summarize in essence the aims of the Nexus Institute,”

[...] the spiritual future of Europe will depend on the extent in which Europeans are successful in implementing the values—inherent in architecture, art, literature and creativity once made by those brilliant men and women of yore—into their own lives, behaviour and thoughts. The gems of the past should be reborn in each of us as intrinsic values: as altruistic truth, as love for beauty, as human brotherhood. (Spender as cited in The Nexus Institute, 2016, p. 29)

33 In an interview with Hans Steketee in NRC Handelsblad, Riemen refers to them as “moral heroes”: “They knew they were responsible for the dignity of the human spirit, the world of ideas, the best that human existence knows” [II.21] (Steketee, 2015, p. 23).
In this case study, the tradition of European humanism and its values are interpreted as homogenous, in line with the previous conclusion on the significance of European cultural unity over diversity in the image of Europe constructed by Riemen. Thus, “memory” is not, for example, interpreted as a patchwork of different cultural memories from a range of European communities, as was the case in the paratexts on the “Literatur Express.” Rather, it is conceived as a shared cultural and philosophical heritage—one not necessarily tied to different communities or nations. Reprinting these classic texts next to the contributions of contemporary authors and academics shows how the Nexus Institute aims to keep this tradition alive and to create opportunities to reflect critically on these classics.

Besides the importance of conserving memory and tradition to reflect on European identity, another type of argument is used in this case to underline the importance of literature. According to Riemen (2008), literature is the “soul” of Europe (p. XIV); the source of inspiration for a moral and cultural awareness that might lead Europeans out of a politico-economic deadlock. With a classical reference, he argues that De terugkeer van Europa might be a way out of this “soulless” economic project:

So that the now still young generation will penetrate the soulless, mindless Economic Union with the European spirit again, ten classic speeches have been gathered for Nexus 70 (among which those by Victor Hugo, Stephen Spender, and Robert Schuman!) that, like Ariadne’s thread, will lead us away from a dead Union. [II. 22] (Riemen, 2015b, p. X)

Again, an interesting juxtaposition is presented in these paratexts between culture and politics. Literature is interpreted as being capable of projecting another idea of what European integration might look like. The strategy of literature as subversion—its capacity to create opposing images and narratives—is thus deployed in this case as well. The European Union is criticised for relying on only one narrative, namely economic benefits, as one that will neither inspire nor lead to solidarity.

7.5 Comparison between Case Studies

The value of literature to the process of European identity formation has been analysed in a range of publications by highlighting its capacity to mediate between the local and the global; represent diversity; construct cultural memory; and oppose existing narratives both critically and creatively. This overview aimed to show how all of these strategies can be mapped via the ways in which the importance of the literary projects for current reflections on European identity is argued in the
selected paratexts. Despite the fact that multiple arguments are deployed by these organisations, it is striking how few specificities or concrete examples are offered to argue the importance of literature. What is it in literary representations of Europe that will be able to touch the hearts of readers? What makes literature precisely the most appropriate way to imagine a shared heritage? How is poetry exactly capable of providing counter-narratives? It seems that the organisers tap into an image of writers and literary texts that does not need explication or too much argumentation: the importance of literature for reflections on Europe goes almost unquestioned.

Besides these strategies, the analysis of these texts also yielded two recurring components in the case studies. Firstly, in arguing the importance of literature, the domain of literature and culture in general is juxtaposed with the domain of EU politics and economics. This finding can be traced back to Bernhard Giesen’s (1999) conclusions on the history of intellectual intervention in the process of European integration. Giesen discerns how intellectuals have opposed the discourse of economics from a position of moral critique and Bildung. Literature might be framed as the next necessary step in the politico-economic integration process, or as a solution to current political and economic crises. A second important recurring theme can be discerned via the concise (or sometimes more elaborate) references to the tradition of great European writers in the paratexts of all four case studies. As discussed in Part I, reflection on European identity has been a task that intellectuals have taken up throughout modern history—a task that can be traced back to writers and thinkers proposing utopian visions of Europe, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Ortega y Gasset, Menno ter Braak, and Thomas Mann (Giesen, 1999). Project leaders place their initiatives in the tradition of these authors to construct participants as the heirs of public intellectuals intervening in European politics—as contemporary exponents of a tradition of humanism, or as a generation of writers that needs to find an audience in order to become the next Milan Kundera. This recurring theme reveals how the organisers do not only lean on the established capacities that literary texts might have, but also on the image of authors as public intellectuals in order to create a certain credibility on the European stage.
Conclusion to Part II

Part II has focussed on the examination of the expectations cultural organisations have when they launch projects intended to reflect on a shared European identity from a literary perspective. The chapters aimed to answer two research questions in order to shed light on these expectations: Firstly, how is European identity presented in the selected cases? Secondly, why have the organisers invited authors of literary works to reflect on these issues? Paratexts surrounding these projects were researched in order to reveal discourses on European identity and the strategies employed to argue the importance of literary texts and authors in European identity formation.

The findings in these chapters suggest that cultural organisations currently function as agents that instrumentalis different discourses on European identity. On the one hand, in general terms, the paratexts on the “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” reproduced the discourse of cultural identity via their interpretations of “unity in diversity.” On the other hand, “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse” aimed to contribute to European political identity formation and to reproduce the discourse of a “Europe of Citizens.” The analysis of these different discourses in all cases also revealed important similarities—the recurring building blocks in the texts via which Europe is interpreted in the context of time and mapped out in geographical space. The myth of Europa’s abduction—a crucial recurring image in the paratexts of both “The Return of Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse”—exemplifies how the image of the classical figure of Europa is interpreted differently within both discourses (cultural and political) of European identity. Thus, whilst this myth may not function as foundational to either, as the link between Europe and the mythical figure of Europa is instantly recognisable, a reference to this myth can convey certain perceived qualities of Europe (Wintle, 2009). On the one hand, Europa might symbolise a cultural unity, as she personifies the classical roots of European humanism—roots that are presented in the texts by the Nexus Institute as the essence of European culture (Riemen, 2008), and that have shaped a literary tradition to the present day. On the other hand, in the case of “The European Constitution in Verse,” this same mythological figure is constructed as a reminder that European culture is not necessarily unified, nor indeed even “European,” as this princess from the Middle East might signify the interaction between European and non-European cultures. In this interpretation the myth becomes a political message of tolerance and openness, and a call for literary voices from outside to shape reflections on European identity.
The value of literature in the process of European identity formation has also been analysed in these paratexts by focusing on strategies that were informed by the theoretical framework in Part I—literature’s capacity to mediate between local and global levels; to represent diversity; to construct cultural memory; and to critically and creatively oppose existing narratives. All of the cases have been found to rely on one or more of these strategies. Furthermore, the analysis has shown how these strategies are also linked to recurring themes, namely the juxtaposition of culture and politics, and the tradition of great European writers. References to this tradition range from ways to legitimise an intervention by authors in European politics (“Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse”), to an appeal for the conservation of a literary and philosophical tradition to solve contemporary European issues (“The Return of Europe”), and the argument that iconic predecessors have had their say in order to create an audience for a new generation of writers (the “Literatur Express”).

Yet how do these discourses on European identity relate to the ways in which the importance of literature is argued in these cases? Juxtaposing the answers to both research questions in this Part II on discourses and strategies allows for the expectations of these projects to be formulated as follows: Organisers of the “Literatur Express” expected a literary perspective to contribute to European cultural identity formation, as stories give readers access to the cultural memories of communities across the European continent. This argument is based on the assumption that, in addition to political and economic relations, we need these “imaginative relations” (Rigney, 2012, p. 622) with other national and regional communities for a European identity to emerge. Literature is considered to be a prime representation, not only of this type of diversity, but also of a shared European past that unifies different communities, symbolised by the historical train journey. In texts on “The Return of Europe,” literature is perceived as the medium in which values of European humanism are expressed. Europe is constructed as a cultural unity, rooted in this European humanism. “The Return of Europe” was therefore expected to create a sense of belonging to Europe as a community of values and thus to advance European cultural identity formation. Whereas the organisers of the “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” reproduced the discourse of unity in diversity, the organisers of “Narratives for Europe” transform and dismantle this narrative on cultural identity because of its undesirable connotations with the process of nation-state formation. The ECF reproduced a discourse of European political identity. Literature’s subversive character—its capability to imagine new, opposing, and different narratives—was expected to contribute to the creation of a transnational public sphere and thus to European political identity formation. “The
Constitution in Verse” had a similar aim, but instead of the general notion of narratives, this project was more focussed on the poetic form: the project leaders argued that it is exactly via this genre that we can break away from the institutional perspective. This artistic perspective provided both criticism and creativity, or “dreaming and screaming,” as phrased by Vermeersch (personal communication, October 31, 2008). Poets are perceived to be more capable of engaging citizens in a critical conversation and establishing a European public sphere where distant institutions failed to do so.

Taken together, these findings thus suggest that the type of discourse these cultural organisations participate in, is related to argumentative strategies to legitimise a literary contribution to European identity formation. Both elements shed a light on the expectations held by the organisers of these projects. The “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” are expected to contribute to European cultural identity formation, as literary texts reflect European diversity and represent historical unity. “The European Constitution in Verse” and “Narratives for Europe” are expected to become part of European political identity formation, as organisers rely on the critical and non-institutional narratives that literature might bring to the European public sphere. Recurring elements in the paratexts, with the myth of the abduction of Europa and references to the great European writers—in a sense, writers with a mythological status as well—as key examples, show how these contemporary cases are constructed as part of a tradition that is re-interpreted and re-evaluated differently by each of the organisers.
PART III. A COMPARISON BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND RESULTS
Introduction

The next part, Part III, juxtaposes the findings from the previous chapter, which looked at the intentions of the organisers, with the texts and performances created by the authors in each of the selected projects. It does so by asking how the views expressed by these two distinct groups on the identity of Europe and the perceived role of literature in European identity formation compare with, and relate to, each other. However, comparing the intentions and the products of these projects poses some methodological problems. For instance, the views on Europe and the role of literature are expressed by writers working, not only in different genres, but also in different media. The texts associated with the selected projects range from poetry, to prose and essays. Some projects have also yielded public appearances by the authors, in the form of television performances or interviews. The corpus of this research is thus diverse.

Following the practical approach used in other research on literature and European identity formation, this analysis of the various positions of authors on Europe and the role of literature takes into account all of these different genres and media appearances. As Heynders (2009) notes: “Not only in the fictional novel, but also in genres such as epic poems, columns, pamphlets, blogs and journal articles, literary writers engage in discussions on social issues” (p. 7). Researching the “input of literary authors in debates on societal issues representative of present-day Europe” (Heynders, 2009, p. 13), she also takes into account media appearances, as well as text forms ranging from essays and pamphlets to travel writing and fiction. Heynders’s approach is in line with the position Lützeler (2007a) takes in his research on literary authors and the identity, unity, and integration of Europe, as discussed in Chapter 3. Lützeler's starting point is not only the literary text, but also public interventions by writers in the form of essays, articles, and interviews. He thus concentrates on the role of literary authors in reflections on Europe, independent of their chosen genre:

These authors understood that there is an underlying ontological structure, a cultural sediment, a foundation of tradition in Europe that we can look to in times of crisis. . . . Over the centuries, Europe has not only experienced the construction of various national “imagined communities” (Benedict Anderson), but also produced a discourse that has kept the commonality and unity of the continent in mind. . . . But we want to remember more than just the authors who have been directly involved in a discussion about European identity and unity;
we also want to remember the authors who, in their works, have generally characterised European culture as supranational. [III.1] (Lützeler, 2007a, pp. 16–17)

What all these texts thus have in common, according to Lützeler, is that they have been written by literary authors and aim to contribute to our understanding of European identity. This is how the contributions of the authors to the projects under examination here are approached: instead of only looking at their literary output, all of the texts and performances created during the course of these projects are understood as contributions to reflections on European identity and the perceived role that literature and writers play in understanding Europe and the European Union.

As well as comparing the intentions voiced by the organisers (as discussed in Part II) to the contributions from the participating authors, this part will focus on one specific author from each project in order to analyse his or her contribution to the project in the light of the more general findings for the case study concerned. These “focus authors” have been selected on the criteria of being both well read in, and connected to, the cultural space of the Netherlands and Flanders, but also outspoken in their oeuvre on European issues. Applying these criteria resulted in the following selection: Dubravka Ugrešić (the “Literatur Express”); Geert van Istendael (“The European Constitution in Verse”); Abdelkader Benali (“Narratives for Europe”); and Arnon Grunberg (“The Return of Europe”). Choosing these specific focus authors not only enables a thorough analysis of the results of these projects, but will also shed more light on the types of authors that partake in these projects, their views on literature’s role in society, and to what extent their contributions to these projects are representative of the views they have expressed on other occasions on similar topics. Focussing in this way on the position of contemporary writers in the domain of politics and on the practice of cultural organisations and (EU-subsidised) projects, this analysis follows other current research on the changing role of intellectuals in the public sphere (Heynders, 2009; Vaessens, 2009a). By reading the contributions to these projects by the selected authors in the light of their earlier work on Europe and the role of literature, the ways in which authors affirm or criticise the expectations of cultural organisations, and how they negotiate the framework of a given project with their personal views, come into view.

Contrasting the intentions of the organisers with the texts and performances of the participating writers, illustrated in each case by one carefully chosen participant, provides an answer to the more general question that will be the focus of this part of the research, namely: how do the contributions made by the authors to these projects relate to the expectations of the organisers? To
answer this overall question, three sub-questions further structure this research. Firstly, how do these authors view Europe? Secondly, how do they assess the role of literature in their reflections on Europe? Both of these first two questions will be addressed using the same analytical framework as in Chapters 6 and 7. To this end, the contributions are read as instrumentalisations of the rhetorics of cultural and political identity. Further, they are read as containing a range of argumentative strategies that position literature as being able to represent collective and contested memory; being capable of bridging the distance between abstract principles and European citizens; providing a place for critical reflection; and representing diversity. In these ways, they are shown to help legitimise the literary contribution to wider discussions on European identity. The third sub-question asks how these ideas compare to those presented by the organisers. Every chapter in this part opens with a brief recapitulation of the findings in Part II, followed by three sections. The first two sections compare the expectations and results from the two main perspectives on the image of Europe and the role of literature. The final section expands the analysis to the focus author and his or her contribution to this project.

In Part III it is argued that, even though the overall discourse of the organisers on European identity tends to correspond to the results, the contributors often take the opportunity to engage in a process of self-reflection and to critically “talk back” to the organisers—both on the level of the image of Europe, and on the idea that literature and writers might have an important role in the process of European identity formation. This is exemplified in the contributions by the focus authors, who are all (apart from Grunberg) outspoken critics of the European Union, and in some cases hesitant about their capabilities, as writers, to participate meaningfully in European politics.
“So Then Tell Me, Where Is Kundera?”: the “Literatur Express”

As argued in Part II, the organisers of the “Literatur Express” expected a literary perspective to contribute to European cultural identity formation since, from the Atlantic to Azerbaijan, stories supposedly give readers access to cultural memories across the European continent. Literature, according to the organisers of the “Literatur Express,” is a prime representation, not only of cultural diversity, but also of a shared European past—one symbolised by the historical train journey—with a particular focus on the Second World War (Gutberlet et al., 1999). Arguing the importance of literature, the organisers juxtapose the domains of literature and culture with the domains of EU politics and economics. The project did so with the express understanding that, whilst the latter paved the way for European integration, a cultural approach is required for the emergence of a European identity. This project is not only perceived as a contribution to European identity formation; the cultural organisation, the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin, emphasised the importance of a large European network to upcoming authors. Thus, the project leaders placed their initiative in the tradition of great European writers in order to construct participants as a generation of writers that needs to find an audience in order to become the next Milan Kundera. This is also reflected in the final statement that was issued, expressing to European institutions the importance of financing translations and supporting European networks of writers, publishers, and translators (“Final Statement Literaturexpress,” 2000).

After completing the train journey around Europe, the participants of the “Literatur Express” were asked to submit a literary text of a maximum of 15 pages based on their experiences of the journey—the result of which was a large anthology of 755 pages. Published in 2001, the volume was titled Europaexpress: Ein literarisches Reisebuch [Europe Express: A Literary Travel Book], with contributions ranging from non-fictional essays, to short stories and poetry (Wohlfahrt & Lange, 2001a). The analysis of this anthology is, as outlined above, structured around three themes: the image of Europe and European identity; the perceived role of literature in European identity formation; and, in this instance, an interpretation of the contribution of Dubravka Ugrešić, who is an apt focus author, as she has been part of many European cultural initiatives and reflects explicitly on the underlying assumptions of European cultural policy. This chapter argues that the anthology reveals how the writers only partly met the expectations of the organisers—to establish how Europe is culturally unified; to interpret “unity in diversity” (although this unity is instrumentalised in texts by the organisers themselves in only very general terms); and to engage in networking opportunities. Firstly,
whilst the authors do take European cultural identity as a starting point, they also explicitly contest the official discourse of “unity in diversity.” Secondly, they struggle with the tension inherent to this project between the tradition of great European writers on the one hand, and current literary marketing strategies on the other. The analysis of Ugrešić’s contribution highlights both findings, and reveals how the discourse of European cultural identity is intertwined with the workings of the literary market. Her essay foregrounds how she does indeed (as the organisers hoped) envision a European unity—albeit a very different one from that put forward by the project leaders.

8.1 “There Are Two Europes”: The Image of Europe and European Identity

The comparison between the image of Europe presented by the organisation on the one hand, and the construction of this image by the writers in the anthology BookCoversTo on the other, brings to the fore how both actors share an interest in the idea of Europe as a cultural project. In line with the image of Europe that was put forward by the organisers of this project, there are only a few contributions to BookCoversTo that address Europe as a political construct. However, as this analysis will show, the discourse of “unity in diversity”—identified in Chapter 2 as prevalent in the construction of European cultural identity—is instrumentalised differently by the authors. Whilst the authors do indeed perceive diversity as a unifying characteristic, a number also problematise this discourse on the grounds of cultural identity.

Many of the contributions start from the premise that Europe unites a plurality of cultures. Turgay Fişekçi (2001) observed the differences in European countries during the train journey and argued in his contribution: “This once again highlights the fact that whilst European ideals are shared, European cultures are different. Europe is a community of different cultures” [III.2] (p. 620). Numerous instrumentalisations of the discourse “unity in diversity” are found in the contributions to BookCoversTo (e.g. Bondar, 2001; Friggieri, 2001; Hrubý, 2001). Authors often approach European unity from a historical point of view; the train journey is aligned with the transport of Jewish people during the Second World War as a means by which to convey the shared historical weight (e.g. Haverty, 2001; Ormaetxea, 2001; Tuor, 2001). Adrian Popescu (2001) argued that, despite historical “bridges over the abysses,” collective memory did not divide the participants, “but rather fundamentally reinforced the feeling that Europe is a single entity” [III.3] (p. 398). European cultural diversity is celebrated by references to both linguistic diversity and local traditions (e.g. Casares, 2001; Fişekçi, 2001; Saumont, 2001). Several authors argued that this plurality of cultures needs to be guarded from the homogenising effects or the “spectre of globalisation” [III.4] (Marenčin, 2001, p.
Often interpreted as the increasing cultural influence of the United States of America. The technique of “Othering” is deployed here to describe how the USA is in this respect the opposite of European culture: the USA are “a uniform culture” (Fişekçi, 2001, p. 621), and their cultural influence should be resisted. Opposed to this homogenous American culture is the precarious diversity of European cultures in need of protection (e.g. Ciobanu, 2001; Hrubý, 2001; Marenčin, 2001; Métellus, 2001).

The emphasis on Europe as a cultural unity and the discourse of “unity in diversity” correspond with the image constructed by the organisation. The aims of this project are formulated in terms of this discourse and as a search for that which binds Europeans. As Thomas Wohlfahrt and Christiane Lange (2001b) asked in the introduction to Europaexpress: “Everyone talks about a Europe of cultures, of unity in diversity. It is quoted ad nauseam. But what is it, this continent, 10 years after all the walls have fallen?” (III.6) (p. 9). As discussed in Chapter 6, the ways in which “unity in diversity” is instrumentalised by the organisation are very general: references to the Second World War as a binding factor, and a vague interpretation of diversity in terms of linguistic plurality, provide the general framework.

This loose framework, based on the (somewhat open to interpretation) slogan “unity in diversity,” provided the authors with the freedom to define these key notions themselves. This led not only to many different instrumentalisations of both European unity and diversity in the contributions, but also to critique by the writers on the generalisations made by the organisation on the idea of European cultural unity and the fundamental differences that are thus overlooked. Firstly, some participants argued that it is precisely European history that, instead of being a source of unity, complicates interactions during the journey: The Armenian author David Muradyan (2001) does not see his Turkish colleague as an enemy, but “we both knew deep down that the past was raising questions for both of us” (III.7) (p. 318). The Swedish Inga-Lina Lindqvist (2001), who grew up with her Jewish grandfather in Minsk, is more explicit in explaining how memories of war are interpreted differently, depending on their perspectives: “I am simply a racist. For me, all Poles are camp commanders. It is something I am ashamed of. But I cannot escape my past” (III.8) (p. 161). Secondly, a large number of participants perceived European cultural unity as an impossibility, as the East-West divide forms an “invisible barrier” (Evaristo, 2001, p. 27) that is difficult to cross. These authors, from both sides of this divide, try to phrase the difference between West and East as capitalism versus communism (Evaristo, 2001, p. 27); non-religious versus religious (Casaeres, 2001, p. 74); or the future
versus the past (Varlamov, 2001, p. 427). Despite the aims of this project—one of which was, according to organisers Wohlfahrt and Lange (2001b), to discover the “spiritual affinity of the authors” [III.10] (p. 10)—this divide gives authors the impression of travelling in two worlds (Varlamov, 2001, p. 427), or in two distinct groups: Western and Eastern writers (Casares, 2001, p. 72). The Slovakian Ján Lenčo (2001) draws a cynical conclusion from the perceived impossibility to overcome this divide:

In one respect, this whole journey is actually a waste of money. A whole lot of money. Europe, which is not rich enough to eliminate the poverty of its poorest citizens, is still rich enough to pull the wool over its own eyes. The East idealises the West, and the West fails to understand the East. In reality, there are two Europes... [III.11] (p. 295)

The Swiss author Leo Tuor (2001) and the Latvian Roald Dobrovenskij (2001) draw similar conclusions: there is not one, but at least two different Europes, and this attempt to discover cultural unity did not overcome that divide. Thus, whereas writers were asked to contemplate that which culturally binds Europeans in this project, these same writers argue the impossibility of such a view.

These critical statements need to be contextualised, firstly by the fact that the organisation called upon the authors to reflect on Europe a decade after the fall of the Berlin wall, which had divided a whole continent (Wohlfahrt & Lange, 2001b). The fall of the wall and political upheaval during the 1980s and the 1990s had brought about crucial changes in the European East-West divide (Wintle, 2000). Thus, exploring this East-West axis is one of the reasons behind this project. The fact that many authors expressed disillusionment about overcoming this divide corresponds to the overall sentiment 10 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Looking back in 2000, Jamal Shahin and Michael Wintle (2000a) explain:

With the lifting of the Iron Curtain, Europe could be reunited, basking in a new Golden Age of harmony and toleration, understanding and shared prosperity. Many a noble speech was passionately delivered, and many a well intentioned scheme was launched . . . . However, the early euphoria was not entirely fulfilled. The generosity of West European states can be called into question: self-interest, caution and parsimony were in fact the order of the day, and the

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34 More profane images are used as well to illustrate the difference between both sides: in food and drinks, the quality of hotels, or in paying the bills: “Over the course of the one-and-a-half-month trip on the Literature Express, not a single westerner bought me a drink. The whole time I was there, only those of us from the Balkans offered to take turns paying the bill; for the rest of them it was every man for himself” [III.12] (Čar, 2001, p. 613).
economies of Central and Eastern Europe continued to struggle. . . . Europe has not been able to live up to its rhetoric, and the gap between expectation and results, or between idea and reality, has proved a painful one over the last ten years. (pp. 2–3)

This gap between expectations and results, or idea and reality, is also reflected in this project. Authors indeed juxtapose the reality of the journey with the lofty ideals expressed by the organisation to argue that they cannot possibly live up to these expectations, for various reasons. Referring to the often repeated statements by the organisation, the Hungarian author Christina Viragh (2001) exemplifies this type of reflection in her contribution:

You could say that you experienced European diversity and you had an overall image in your mind, “this is what Europe is”: something nested together like the matryoshka doll that you may have bought. But that is not how it is when you are on a mission. The overall image collapses into each person’s individual obstacles because missions by definition undermine themselves in that they are formulated a priori: “a new attempt to reach consensus in Europe,” “pan-European cultural understanding” . . . . But, under the banner of pan-European understanding, the traveller is confronted . . . with the painful realisation that they have been saddled with impossible expectations. [III.13] (p. 29)

A similar scepticism towards these lofty ideals is expressed by Stevan Tontić (2001, p. 120), who argued that he has grown suspicious of metaphors expressing the unity in the rich European diversity, as well as by Mahir Öztas (2001, p. 636), who concluded that one cannot define “European culture” without indicating the political borders of Europe. Amanda Aizpuriete (2001) considered the goal of this journey—described by her as “a new concept of Europe” [III.14] (p. 122)—naïve, given the many different participants, and Ján Lenčo (2001) sees the project as an example of “megalomania” and “self-deception” [III.15] (p. 287), as it aimed for too much. A similar overconfidence in this project is addressed by the Belgian author Kamiel Vanhole (2000a, p. 85), as he portrayed the organiser of this journey in his fictionalised report as someone who believes that simply via this journey, the hopelessly divided continent will be unified.

The impression of being on a “mission” to make these noble and perhaps unachievable ideals a reality is not only formulated by Viragh. The French author Jacques Jouet and his Finnish colleague Anita Konkka (2001) published their correspondence in letters in the anthology as well. This feeling
of being on a mission might be rooted in the fact that, although the project plays a part in the discourse of European cultural identity, the programme of the journey itself consisted of several activities that were expressly political—such as discussions on immigration and the expansion of the European Union. A visit to the European Parliament in Brussels during the journey was perhaps the closest the project came to engaging in European politics. Authors were asked to write a postcard to the European authorities on the future of Europe and some of them were invited to read their cards aloud in the Parliament. According to some participants (Khechoyan, 2001; Różycki, 2001), this was a rather futile activity, as there were only a few officials available to listen to them because the MEPs were in Strasbourg that day. Other authors felt out of place, wondering why they were invited in the first place and fearing they might have given the impression of self-importance (Candounas, 2001).

These findings from the anthology *Europaexpress* indicate that the ideal of a unified European identity only partly corresponds with the image that emerged from the texts of the “Literatur Express.” However, the authors clearly engaged in a similar discourse on Europe: that of Europe as a cultural project, united in diversity. This official line of EU rhetoric is a central theme in documents by the organisation, and when authors search for images of shared history by evoking the past of train transports during the Second World War, their contributions can be read, as Sassatelli suggests (2009), as attempts to instrumentalise this very ambiguous institutional discourse (p. 73). However, the contributors also take the opportunity to contest this official discourse in their texts, both by problematising the past as a source of unity, and by questioning the feasibility of overcoming the East-West divide. Their resistance to this narrative of cultural identity might be due to a more general sentiment of disillusionment in the decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, but it also stems from the grand aspirations behind this project, which extend the field of culture towards political statements—a goal that will be expanded upon in the proceeding section.

### 8.2 “Writers Are Bad Missionaries”: Writers and Literature

The previously noted scepticism and apparent discomfort expressed by these writers is not solely based on their general feelings of disillusionment towards the unification process and the East-West divide, or indeed the grand expectations of the organisation. It is also based on the fact that they participated as literary authors, as Anita Konkka explained in her exchange of letters with Jacques Jouet:

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“But in terms of the mission you mentioned, I think that authors make terrible missionaries, thank heaven!” [III.16] (Jouet & Konkka, 2001, p. 674). This section contrasts the image of writers and literature in the anthology with the texts of the organisation, focusing on contributions to the *Europaexpress* that engage explicitly with issues such as the role of literature and writers in Europe. This large anthology consists of essays on a range of topics written from many different perspectives, 23 of which are most explicit in their reflections on the relation between literature and writers on the one hand, and Europe and European unification on the other. The majority of those 23 essays (16) critically question, or in some cases even oppose, the project by asking: why literature, and why writers? These contributions show how this discomfort is rooted, not only in the fact that to some authors the expectations of literature are too large, but also in the fact that the authors feel that the organisation frames the participating writers in an ambiguous manner.

Some of the contributions lean on the idea that literature is capable of creating an “imagined community”: that European history has been created in literature, and the best way to get to know this continent is via books (e.g. Muradyan, 2001). Literature can represent the atrocities of war better than any other form of documentation, as the Irish author Glenn Patterson (2001, p. 49) explained in his contribution. This is in line with the image that the organisers of this project constructed—that literature is capable of representing shared memory and cultural diversity. However, most of the essays express doubt that literature has this unifying effect of imagining a European community, tapping instead into the problems that have been discerned in the theoretical framework of this dissertation as well. Contrary to narratives of 19th-century nation building, the European community lacks a single language, and its history might also be perceived as a cause for division. Konkka, for example, observed in a letter to Jouet that there is no European literature, only national literatures (Jouet & Konkka, 2001, pp. 668–669), arguing that it is these national languages that form a barrier to cultural integration. The Croatian author Jurica Pavičić (2001, p. 665) concluded her contribution with a paradox along the same lines, suggesting that in a globalised world, it is literature that refuses to cross borders. Even on a train where authors share so much, there is only one domain that divides them: that of literature. This view led some authors to claim that there is little hope for literature to create a form of cultural unification in Europe. They argued that it is not literature, but popular culture—

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36 These are the essays by Dubravka Ugrešić, Glenn Paterson, Carlos Casares, Kamiel Vanhole, Andrej Fedarenka, Vladislav Bajac, David Muradyan, Leo Tuor, George Christodoulides, Levon Khechoyan, Adrian Popescu, Aleksej Varlamov, Albert Marenčin, Xavier Moret, Peter Pišt’anek, Tomasz Różycki, Turgay Fışeckı, Mahir Öztas, Woľga Ipatava, Jurica Pavičić, Jacques Jouet & Anita Konkka, László Garaczi, and Neshe Yashin—all published in *Europaexpress* (Wohlfahrt & Lange, 2001a).

37 Mahir Öztas (2001) makes a similar observation.
specifically football—that seems to bring Europeans together (e.g. Pavičić, 2001, p. 665). Many writers referred to the uproar of hooligans they experienced during their stay in Brussels, which coincided with football games for the European Championship. Xavier Moret (2001) wrote:

On the street, no one was talking about literature, and the hooligans sang, yelled and threw chairs. The final score: 10 to 0 for football, a thrashing victory over literature . . . . After our experiences in Brussels, we knew that football was the actual foundation of European culture. Nothing binds the country together more than football. [III.17] (p. 478)

This humbling experience concerning the role of literature is mirrored in perceptions on the special position held by writers. Vanhole (2000a, p. 86) created a sense of estrangement by addressing this issue in his contribution in the form of a story about plumbers and bank employees being sent on a train journey around Europe with plenty of pocket money. Peter Pišt’anek (2001) created a dialogue in his contribution between a writer on the “Literatur Express” and the organiser, named “Klahrfahrt,” during which the writer asks about the participants: Why exactly authors? Why not dentists? Some contributors might argue that dentists and bank employees would have been a better choice, as the one thing a writer needs—solitude—was clearly lacking during the whole journey (p. 528) (e.g. Khechoyan, 2001; Varlamov, 2001).

Other contributors argued that writers have traditionally had the task of voicing the spiritual dimension of Europe, emphasising the power of literature, rather than powerlessness in the light of popular sports. Another important line of argumentation used by the organisers, and discussed in Part II—that of referring to the tradition of great European writers—is deployed by some of the authors. Adrian Popescu (2001) argued that reading Günter Grass and Milan Kundera makes one feel “at home in Europe’s intellectual landscape” [III.18] (p. 395, emphasis in original). Whilst Fişechki (2001) observed how Europe must turn to intellectuals to defend the tradition of humanism (p. 619), and Wolga Ipatava (2001) referred to Kundera’s dictum on the current task of writers to create Europe, having created national cultures in the 19th century (p. 645). Yet the comparison with these famous names in European literature made some authors uncomfortable, as they did not perceive themselves to be the heirs of these intellectuals, arguing that they are not sufficiently published (Pišt’anek, 2001, p. 529); that they see themselves more as translators or publicists (Marenčin, 2001, p. 441); or simply that writers no longer enjoy the same status (Muradyan, 2001, p. 315). The contribution by the Catalan author Xavier Moret (2001) takes the absence of the great European writer on this journey as a starting
point, as the protagonist suspects that these lesser-known authors are secretly transported by train to Siberia in order to prevent them from publishing ever again:

“We are authors, right? So then tell me, where is Kundera?” “What does Kundera have to do with anything?” “Well he is a European author, is he not? And one of the most successful ones, too. So why is he not here?” “I assume he could not make it.” She shrugged. “I see... and Martin Amis?” “He is probably working on a new book.” “And Günter Grass? And Umberto Eco? And Julian Barnes?” [III.19] (pp. 476–477)

This reference to great European writers—who indeed were not on this train—brings to light another tension in this project. As discussed in Chapter 7, the image of the canonical writer is called upon by the organisation to legitimise the project, yet the participating authors are simultaneously asked to view the journey as an opportunity to expand their network as upcoming authors. These opposing frameworks are further revealed in the final statement, which not only speaks of social oppression and freedom of speech, but also of the importance of a network of publishing houses, European copyright legislation, and the financing of translations (“Final Statement Literatur Express,” 2000). The discomfort some authors bring to the fore in their contribution thus leans on the fact that the expectations placed upon them by the organisation are ambiguous and therefore difficult to meet, as they are expected to become part of the tradition of critical great European writers, but at the same time promote themselves on the European literary market. It is precisely this ambiguity that is the topic of Dubravka Ugrešić’s (born in Croatia, 1949) contribution.

8.3 Cultural Stereotypes and Marketing Strategies: Focus Author Dubravka Ugrešić

The previous sections exposed the ambiguities in this project, resulting firstly, from the idea of Europe as a cultural unity and the political activities and debates during the journey; and secondly, from the expectations placed upon the writers by the organisers, grounded in the tradition of great writers and more mundane commitments such as the marketing goals imposed upon upcoming authors. These ambiguities provide the topic of Dubravka Ugrešić’s (2001) contribution to Europaexpress, titled “Kak eklær no vkusnee! Wei ein Eclair, aber besser!” [“Like an Éclair But Delicious! Like an Éclair, But Better!”]. Her essay, later republished in English with only minor alterations as “Europe, Europe” in
Nobody’s Home (Ugrešić, 2007b), allows for a more thorough analysis of the ambiguities in this project. Moreover, the focus here on an individual contribution will also shed light on how, in the words of Sassatelli (2009), a literary author attempts to “translate and transform” (p. 76) institutional rhetoric on European cultural identity into practice. This section is divided into three parts. First, Ugrešić’s contribution to the anthology is scrutinised in the context of its response to the project as a whole. Second, the findings of this scrutiny will be tied to her oeuvre, arguing that her contribution is part of a sustained critique of EU cultural policy and cultural projects. The third and final part of this section explores how Ugrešić envisions her role as a writer in such projects, given her opposition to these initiatives.

Ugrešić’s contribution consists of descriptions of events that occurred during the journey with critical reflections on European identity and on the outcomes of the project as a whole. The opening paragraphs draw attention to the genre of travel writing and the novel The Golden Calf (1931) by Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, from which Ugrešić quotes extensively, thus marking this essay as a literary text, rather than a straightforward report. She notes how “the travel writer has no choice but to fabricate reality”; “if the writer is good, the fabrications generally overlap with reality. We should add, that reality isn’t so stable. It, too, travels” (Ugrešić, 2007b, p. 101). Ugrešić takes up themes in this essay that were also identified in other contributions to the Europaexpress. She observes, for example, how colleagues on this journey emphasise the difference between Eastern and Western Europe with, yet again, little hope of overcoming the differences between them: “I believe that many writers brought along in their mental luggage a significant overweight of stereotypes about Eastern Europe, but they paid no mental fine for that” (Ugrešić, 2007b, p. 114). As did other authors, she perceived the influence of American popular culture (sitcoms, soap operas; the “revolutionary predecessors to globalisation”; Ugrešić, 2007b, p. 110) as an important factor in overcoming this opposition: “While Europe’s thinkers are searching for a harmonious formula for new European-ness, America has virtually settled in Europe, promptly unifying the European East and European West” (Ugrešić, 2007b, p. 119, emphasis in original). In the light of popular culture, literature is once more seen as having little impact on issues of integration. Furthermore, Ugrešić (2007b) expressed the same discomfort with their perceived important role as writers in the process of European unification in the project. This she characterised as a “postmodern quotation of the pioneering, victorious, boisterous Utopia of the twentieth century” (Ugrešić, 2007b, p. 103). She remarked ironically:

38 I will use the English translation in this chapter.
We were back in the retro-Utopia in Kaliningrad, which had, apparently, bought the idea that our train was bringing with it European unification, and that the Literatur Express Europa 2000 was magically going to zip up the rift that had been yawning for years, so unfairly. (Ugrešić, 2007b, pp. 103–104)

The scene in the European Parliament, described by several authors in the *Europaexpress*, is taken up as well:

From Brussels. . . . About a visit to the European Parliament and writers made to write postcards to the invisible authority, as if they were writing to Santa Claus. And then about how postcards were drawn from a hat and the authors were made to read one out loud, though there was no addressee to hear what they had written. (Ugrešić, 2007b, p. 116)

The excerpt above not only reveals the absurdity of this particular scene in Parliament, but foregrounds Ugrešić’s more general problems with the project as a whole: a certain childish naivety that lies at its heart, based on the assumption that writers still function as important voices in European politics.

These observations are linked to Ugrešić’s contribution and her explicit critiques of the outcomes, ideology, and commercialisation of this project—and of its participants. She argued that Europe is looking more and more like an “open market,” and “while ideologists of European unification are still tearing their hair out over a European identity,” the answer to what binds us today is simple: “money is the lingua franca of Europe and European unification” (Ugrešić, 2007b, p. 119).

In a poignant conclusion to her contribution, she argues that the world of literature is no different from the world of finance, thus exposing the ideological underpinning of this project and addressing the banal interpretation of authorship that underlies the much debated final statement (see Chapter 7) of the “Literatur Express”:

The old idea of Europe as the cradle of civilisation, art, and culture has survived only in Kaliningrad . . . or Murmansk. The idea of “culture against money” is essentially religious. Culture is about money just as religion is, after all. My fellow travellers from the Literatur Express Europa 2000 did not fail to understand this. Grumbling about their joint public
statements, about every manipulation of political engagement, about acting as a group, they gave the upper hand to the words: image, publicity, network, lobby, and management, and at the end of the trip, they made a joint public statement after all. It was essentially a statement about the practical nature of a writer’s work, about future transactions from one language into another, packaged in the *unity through diversity* Brussels ideology. (Ugrešić, 2007b, p. 120, emphasis in original)

In her essay “Having Fun,” which appeared in *Thank You For Not Reading* (Ugrešić, 2003), this conclusion on culture is repeated as Ugrešić discusses the role of intellectuals in society in the light of her experiences on the “Literatur Express.” Juxtaposing the writers on this journey with a previous generation of intellectuals or the great European writers, her criticism of her colleagues becomes clearer:

> We travelled through different European environments, some of which were “problematic.” Twenty years ago, a hundred writers would have leapt up to write some kind of petition, make some public statement, some kind of protest. In our train there were no activities of that kind. . . . Few seemed to show any interest in politics, in reflections about Europe or the investigation of the concept of literature itself. What brought the writers to life were words such as *lobby, network, cultural management.* (Ugrešić, 2003, p. 169, emphasis in original)

This reference to the European writers of the 1980s speaking out on political issues (a tradition discussed briefly in the General Introduction to this dissertation) shows how Ugrešić’s views differ radically from those of the organisers. Whereas Ugrešić referred to the earlier generation as politically engaged writers keen on making public statements, her current colleagues seem to have no interest in politics, only in networking—much to her dismay. At the same time, the organisers in this case place the authors in the footsteps of those writers, albeit not to intervene in politics, but rather to expand their network of translators, readers, and publishers, which is of great importance in a European market—a goal also emphasised in the final statement and, of course, the exact opposite of Ugrešić’s

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39 Interestingly, in her contribution to *Europaexpress*, Ugrešić (2007b) takes the opportunity to engage in precisely these topics: reflections on European politics and researching the notion of literature itself. With her references to the novel *The Golden Calf*, she explores “the similarities between literature and life” (Ugrešić, 2007b, p. 107) in order to “remind the readers that literature is a great cultural system” (Ugrešić, 2007a, p. 277), as she writes in an author’s note to *Nobody’s Home*, which featured her essay on this train journey.
sentiment. She thus shines a light on the project’s ambiguity as described earlier in this chapter, namely the tradition of great writers felt by the participating authors on the one hand, and the market-oriented approach favoured by the organisation on the other.

However, for Ugrešić, these ambiguities extend far beyond the case of the “Literatur Express.” In her view, the project exemplifies a larger problem in European policies and cultural projects in general. Ugrešić is no stranger to these types of European cultural projects; indeed, she argued in her essay collection *Europa in Sepia* (2015) that she has always been sympathetic towards European initiatives to stimulate integration and mutual recognition in the field of culture. Despite her enthusiasm, her contributions to, and reflections on, such initiatives are often highly critical. Her assessment of the “Literatur Express” is thus part of an ongoing reflection on Europe and cultural policies, and therefore needs to be interpreted in the light of her previous experiences.

The roots of her critique can already be seen in Ugrešić’s early work. She was a member of the Gulliver network, which was instigated in 1987 by Günter Grass in order to provide a platform for writers and intellectuals from Eastern and Western Europe to exchange ideas as individuals, rather than as representatives of their countries (Grass et al., 1998). In *The Time Is Out of Joint: Perceptions of Europe* (Grass et al., 1998)—a collection of essays by multiple authors to celebrate the 10th anniversary of this network—Ugrešić (1998) criticised the pervasive cultural stereotypes that exist between Eastern and Western Europe. Her discomfort at being framed as a national or Eastern-European representative—which brings with it expectations based on cultural stereotypes—increased as European unification and EU cultural policies developed from the beginning of the 21st century. Eva Karpinski (2013) emphasises in her analysis of Ugrešić’s work that it is precisely in the EU slogan “unity in diversity” that Ugrešić perceives a perpetuation of cultural stereotypes, and Ugrešić has contested this discourse throughout her work. For example, in 2003, she participated in a seminar organised by the European Cultural Foundation, entitled “Crossing Perspectives: South-Eastern Views on Enlargement.” She proposed a different view of European cultural policy, quoted in a report by the ECF as follows:

Great works of art also happen on their own. More often than not their authors are not representatives of national cultures, but the opposite: outsiders, rebels, exiles, lonely individuals. James Joyce, an Irish rebel, abandoned Ireland, his home, his church, the existing values and norms, the norms of language and of literary tradition . . . . Perhaps the answers to
these questions will help a bit in building a vision for a new European cultural policy! (Ugrešić as cited in Cameron, 2004, p. 27)

These rebel figures, or “dysfunctions in the existing literary system” (Ugrešić, 2007e, p. 171), are also defended in her essay “What Is European About European Literature?” (Ugrešić, 2007e), as the “people who erode the stereotypes about culture” and who “outgrow their cultural promoters, managers, the cultural bureaucracy of the EU which wrestles with issues of European cultural identity” (Ugrešić, 2007e, pp. 170–171). Comparing European literature with the Eurovision Song Contest in this essay, Ugrešić criticises the “ideology and practice of multiculturalism” of the EU; “a formula for acknowledging various cultural identities, encouraging regional and other differences, and, of course, integration, although no one knows what that actually means” (Ugrešić, 2007e, p. 170). It is this all too pragmatic practice of multiculturalism that keeps national identities and cultural stereotypes in place, as that is “how cultural products are exchanged, for the most part, that is how the market works” (Ugrešić, 2007e, p. 170). This leads her to the conclusion that “stereotypes are the ideological and commercial staple of a United Europe” (Ugrešić, 2007d, p. 25). She voiced a similar concern over European cultural policy in her essay “Literary Geopolitics” in which she writes that culture is “one of the key ideological cornerstones of European unification,” analysing “EU newspeak” thus:

In the context of the new Europa, culture should be traditional, national, and cosmopolitan, all, of course, in reasonable measure and balanced proportion. Culture should promote local colour, yet remain open; it should open borders, yet reinforce stereotypes . . . . She [Europa] treats culture as her principle [sic] ideological glue, to rearticulate and reshape herself. (Ugrešić, 2007c, pp. 179–180)

Ugrešić criticises Europe for the pervasiveness of its marketing discourse, or “the words of corporate Eurospeak,” as Nataša Kovačević (2013, p. 77) formulates it in her essay on Ugrešić. In Ugrešić’s view, this corporate approach is amplified by EU cultural policy. In a nutshell, the central point of her critique throughout her work is that EU cultural policy emphasises cultural differences as a marketing strategy (“whoever tries to make the market of stereotypes less stereotypical ends up bankrupt”;

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40 This essay is based on her contribution to the collection Writing Europe: What Is European About the Literatures of Europe? (U. Keller & Rakusa, 2004), which resulted from the conference of the same name.
41 In 2010, Ugrešić contributed to a Culture Report (Rodoreda, 2010) published by European cultural organisations on the question of how writers see the role of culture in Europe. Her answer to that question is based on this essay.
Ugrešić, 2007c, p. 179), turning the literary market into a phenomenon similar to the Eurovision Song Contest, characterised by Kovačević (2013) as “notorious for its transparent politicisation, spectacular kitsch, and affirmation of cultural stereotypes” (p. 73). Ugrešić’s contribution to Europaexpress is very much in line with her previous work: her engagement with “Brussels ideology,” questioning the discourse of “unity in diversity” and current cultural policy, and her fundamental critique of the market-based approach in this project are also key elements in this essay. Her oeuvre further reveals how the tensions discerned in the “Literatur Express” are therefore not uniquely characteristic of this project, but inherent to the wider workings of European cultural initiatives and the literary market.

Given the consistent critique by Ugrešić of these types of projects, one wonders why she participated in the “Literatur Express” at all. An answer to that question might be found in the earlier quoted essay “Having Fun,” as this sheds some light on her position as a public intellectual in contemporary society. In this essay, Ugrešić (2003) argues that she has no alternative but to participate in the group of intellectuals engaged in popular culture, cultural networks, and television performances, even though this, to her, is the same as entering a “world of triviality” (p. 164) and performing “intellectual kitsch” (p. 165). This is in line with the analysis offered by the Dutch author Arnon Grunberg (2013a) of her authorship in his speech of 2012, when Ugrešić was awarded the Jean Améry Prize for European essay writing. 42 He argued that to Ugrešić, there is no position possible outside “this world of kitsch” and “festivalisation of literature,” which she perceives as part of this world:

To become a master in the genre of silence, then, is not Ugresic’s ambition. She continues, however unwillingly, to take part in literary festivals, even as her essays speak out against the “festivalization” of literature. Nobody’s Home includes an account of “Literatuurexpres Europa 2000,” a project in which some one hundred writers from 43 countries traveled around Europe and visited eighteen cities. (Grunberg, 2013a, para. 2)

It is from this position as both participant and critical observer that Ugrešić contributed to the “Literatur Express”; a position that is reflected in her work, which, according to Heynders (2016), “implies listening to a polyphony of voices” (p. 71). She contends that Ugrešić complains about the current status of the intellectual as media performer, whilst simultaneously identifying with those

42 Grunberg is also the focus author in the analysis of “The Return of Europe” (see Chapter 11).
intellectuals, observing that “the only role left to intellectuals is that of entertainer” (Heynders, 2016, p. 71). This case study has highlighted how Ugrešić negotiates in similar manners both the demands of the project and her position on such European cultural initiatives.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the image of Europe and the role of literature and writers according to the participants of the “Literatur Express” relates to the perspective of the organisers. The focus on Europe as a cultural entity instead of a political project—which was apparent from the texts written by the organisation—is reiterated by many participants, who place the emphasis more on a celebration of the precarious cultural diversity that needs to be protected from globalisation, rather than EU-wide political issues. However, whereas the organisers aimed for an experience that instilled the image of a unified Europe with a shared history, the contributors formulated different images of Europe and expressed their doubts about the feasibility of this goal. The journey underlined the complexities of European history and the large gap between Western and Eastern Europe. As they argued, Europe consists of at least two parts, whilst one contributor even concluded that this cultural attempt to unite both sides had been “a waste of money” (Lenčo, 2001, p. 295).

This pessimistic perspective is partly due to a more general sentiment of disillusionment during the decade following the fall of the Berlin Wall (Shahin & Wintle, 2000a), but also due to the changing role of writers and literature in the process of European integration. As argued, the majority of the 23 essays reflecting explicitly upon the relation between European identity and literature, critically question the feasibility, or oppose the stated goals, of this project. Whereas the organisers deem culture to be necessary to the process of unification, and interpret literature as capable of conveying the cultural memories of different European communities, the authors emphasise the fact that literature is inevitably tied to national contexts. Some authors also expressed a certain discomfort at “being on a mission” to unify the continent. Moreover, compared to popular culture and sports, literature does not stand a chance: the power to unify Europeans should thus perhaps be sought elsewhere. Whilst the participants do not perceive themselves as heirs of Grass and Kundera, as a number of contributions pointed out, the shadow of this tradition still lingers over the project. Such doubts about the current role of writers and literature in European integration in the light of this tradition might stem from inherent tensions in the aims of this project.

These discrepancies in the “Literatur Express” are the central focus of Dubravka Ugrešić’s contribution, with which her well-documented, broader ideas on marketing strategies and EU cultural
policy resonate. Her contribution epitomises the findings that emerge from the analysis of this anthology: the contestation and transformation of the institutional discourse of European cultural identity, and the tensions between the current literary market and the tradition of great European writers. She adopts the stance that these tensions are not simply part of this specific project; rather, they are inherent to modern authorship and European cultural policy in general. Throughout her oeuvre, Ugrešić’s has argued that authors today have become depoliticised and participate in marketing jargon, stimulated by EU cultural policy that emphasises national and cultural stereotypes as a promising and profitable strategy under the slogan “unity in diversity.” Thus, Ugrešić’s essay in *Europaexpress* reveals how the discourse of European cultural identity is intertwined with the workings of the literary market, entangling the two fundamental perspectives of this research: European identity and the role of literary writers.
9. **Overcoming an Imaginative Failure: “Narratives for Europe”**

Between 2009 and 2012, “Narratives for Europe” was the thematic focus of a project by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF), during which a range of activities following this theme took place. In texts produced by the ECF explaining the project (e.g. Chenal, 2011; ECF, n.d.-c), Europe is constructed as a political entity in the making—one opposed to the idea of a European cultural identity with a shared history—and thus frequently adopting the rhetoric of the “Europe of Citizens.” The ECF considers the idea of a shared public sphere as vital, both to the consolidation of a civil society and to a sense of belonging to Europe as a political project. A perceived lack of this sense of belonging constituted the starting point for “Narratives for Europe,” with project leaders aiming to bridge the perceived gap between the people and politics. Emphasising dynamic and open narratives, the ECF has committed itself to a strategy that presents culture and the power of stories as a preferred means by which to oppose institutional narratives, or at least as a possibility to present narratives that differ from the institutional. With a quotation from Abdelkader Benali on the important humanistic tradition of Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht in their project description, the ECF constructed the idea of a Europe open to newcomers.

The main results from this project within the thematic focus “Europe as a cultural project” form the corpus of this analysis:

- The website Narratives for Europe: www.narratives.eu. This website consists of four subsites, each focussed on a different type of contribution from “thinkers, artists, writers and activists from Europe and beyond to share their thoughts and observations, to juxtapose, compare, dare, contemplate, open new perspectives” (“Narratives for Europe,” 2017, n.p.). The subsite “Voices” contains short articles on four topics: “Historical taboos”; “Labour force / humans”; “Flirting with stereotypes”; and “Next generation please.” The subsite “Duo” contains an exchange of letters between the writers Abdelkader Benali and Jan Brokken. The “Reading Room” is a section with longer texts “investigating and questioning European Narratives and their making in the present and the future” (“Narratives for Europe,” 2017, n.p.). The “Comics” section of this website offers narratives in drawings by comic artists. These texts form the basis for the publication *Remappings: The Making of European Narratives* (Chenal & Snelders, 2012).

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• “Imagining Europe,” the closing event for this theme (partly funded with a subsidy from the EU Culture Programme 2007) held from October 4–7, 2012 in De Balie, a 19th century courthouse in Amsterdam that hosts events and debates. The programme included a keynote speech by the Indian author Amitav Ghosh; a debate on the reinvention of democratic practices with, amongst others, Peter Vermeersch; a theatre play by the Belarus Free Theatre, entitled *Trash Cuisine*; musical performances; a film screening; and a live cinema performance by an artistic collective showing fragments of films from European archives (ECF, 2013).

Many writers, cultural actors, academics, and artists contributed to one or more of these activities. However, the focus in this chapter will be mostly on the writers and poets who participated in this project, as they are explicitly engaged in formulating ideas on the role of literature and imagination in European identity formation. The writers in question are: David van Reybrouck and Peter Vermeersch (both also organisers of “The European Constitution in Verse”); Rodaan al Giladi; Amitav Ghosh; Jan Brokken; and Niña Weijers. The Dutch author Abdelkader Benali is the focus author in this chapter as, compared to the other authors, his involvement in this project was the most significant, contributing to all of the activities listed above. The chapter will first explore the images of Europe and the role of writers and literature from the perspective of the project, arguing that the project’s intentions and results generally overlap: the authors share an interest in formulating creative ideas on the future of the European Union, starting from an attitude of openness towards its neighbouring countries. However, the analysis also reveals a tension between the ECF’s bottom-up approach versus the pitfalls of elitism. This chapter shows how the contributions of focus author Abdelkader Benali precisely underline this tension within “Narratives for Europe.”

9.1 Democratic Practices and Narratives of Migration: The Image of Europe
This section explores the images of Europe that are constructed by the participants of this project by focusing on two aspects that come to the fore in these constructions: the importance of “neighbours” for European identity formation, and its emphasis on current political issues instead of merely
focusing on the past. These building blocks will be discussed briefly, as this project also intended to
provoke new narratives that exceed Europe’s existing image, the focus of both Remappings and the
closing event being centred on these future narratives. As we will see, the two main proposals for
these new narratives are the creation of new democratic practices, and the establishment of new
narrative strategies for inclusion and migration. These topics correspond with the threads that Odile
Chenal (Head of Research & Development at the ECF) observed in the introduction to Remappings:
future narratives in the form of new political languages and social experimentation, and existing
narratives of “new geographies” and “Europe from the outside” (Chenal, 2012, pp. 25–27). As will be
discussed below, the outcome of these contributions is thus in line with the goals envisioned by the
ECF in their project description.

The first building block in the construction of the image of Europe in these texts is the
importance of “neighbours” to European identity formation. More so than the other case studies
examined in this dissertation, the project “Narratives for Europe” uses the perspective of neighbours
in order to ask which narratives are told, or should be told, about Europe. For example, the choice of
the Indian author Amitav Ghosh, who was asked to deliver the keynote speech for the closing event
“Imagining Europe,” is described in a special issue of the Dutch magazine De Groene Amsterdammer
dedicated to the event as follows:

Sometimes it may help to step out of your own world and take a renewed look at yourself
from considerable distance. A similar consideration may have been the reason for the
European Cultural Foundation to invite the Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh to come to
Amsterdam and speak about his view on Europe. At least, that is how Ghosh himself explains
the unexpected invitation. “My books are set far outside Europe—and are not about Europe,”
he says . . . “I think that the invitation tells us something about Europeans: they are trying to
understand their own continent. Not only from the inside, but also by discovering how the
rest of the world looks at them.” [III.20] (van Grunsven, 2012, p. 4)

The same sense of surprise was expressed by the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who
was invited to give a speech during the lecture series “Narratives for Europe: Stories that Matter” in
2011, an event organised by the ECF in collaboration with Spui25.44 In her talk, she claimed that she

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44 Spui25 is an academic-cultural centre, located in Amsterdam.
“knows nothing about Europe”, and that she was therefore in doubt as to whether the organisation actually meant to invite her (University of Amsterdam, 2013b). However, this was indeed the case; she was asked to give a talk about the stories that Europe tells itself about its colonial history. Adichie called for more historical awareness in Europe, struck as she was by the erasure of history in education so as to free Europe of its responsibilities.

In his contribution to Remappings, the Dutch publicist and Professor of European studies Paul Scheffer (2012) underlined the importance of the outsider’s perspective, as well as the need for Europeans to turn their gaze outward. According to Scheffer, existing narratives of European identity, based on memories of the Second World War, do not acknowledge the importance of current generations reflecting on the role of Europe in the world. He argued:

The story about unification is still primarily founded on what is sometimes termed the European civil war of 1914–1945: the self-destruction of the old continent in two world wars. But it remains to be seen whether that reference to the past still possesses the same power of expression. . . . “Never again!” . . . unintentionally but insistently turns the gaze inward, when an essential motive for integration lies outside the continent. (Scheffer, 2012, pp. 169–170)

The diminished role of the Second World War in contemporary European identity formation is also observed by Professor of European studies Wolfram Kaiser (2012), who argued that the “memory of the Holocaust definitely cannot be a source of legitimation for the EU and its present-day economic structure, political institutions or policies” (p. 80), as, for example, this collective memory might serve to remind us of the importance of minimum standards of the rule of law. However, this reminder is not only for Europe, but is equally relevant to other countries. Thus, this narrative needs to be complemented by narratives on “larger questions about our political and societal organization,” such as issues of democratic constitution, individual rights, and solidarity (Kaiser, 2012, pp. 80–81).

These first two building blocks that constitute the project’s image of Europe—the importance of “neighbours” to European identity formation, and the focus on current political issues instead of merely focusing on a shared past—immediately reveal how this construction by the contributors is in line with the way in which the ECF envisioned Europe in their texts on this project. The spatial scope of Europe extends beyond the political borders of the European Union, and the ECF envisioned “an open, democratic and inclusive Europe embracing the European Union and its neighboring countries” (ECF, 2011, p. 6). In the introduction to Remappings, Chenal (2012) explains how one can identify non-
institutional narratives by taking “perceptions of Europe from the outside” into account, where “former European colonies, especially, can cast an eye of critical empathy on the old continent” (p. 26). Within the timeframe described in Part II, the focus of the ECF is on the future, rather than the past. In effect, the ECF does not propose a reflection on what binds Europeans together culturally, given a shared history, but rather on what future narratives are needed if the European Union is to survive as a political project.

The project leaders concluded that the notion of identity is not a viable means by which to reflect on Europe (ECF, n.d.-c, p. 1). For the ECF, the main reason to avoid the phrase “identity” lies in the risk of reiterating processes of national identity formation, as discussed in Chapter 6. In the same way, many contributors worried about the pitfalls of the concept of identity and of leaning on instruments of nation building in the search for European narratives. For example, the Dutch author Niña Weijers (2012) summarised the different performances by writers and academics during the Spui25 discussions “Narratives for Europe: Stories that Matter.” A recurring theme, according to Weijers, was the so-called “myth of identity,” which presupposes unity and the belief in an essence, as expressed, for example, in the lecture by Jens Christian Grøndahl.45 Leaning on Grøndahl’s analysis, she summarises the dangers of such essentialist thinking on identity: “In other words, this is the peril of melodrama, which reduces European history to a conflict between modernity, democracy, tolerance, and progress on the one hand, and all their attendant negatives on the other” (Weijers, 2012, p. 96).

As previously discussed, the focus of this project is on new and emerging narratives. Other contributors thus go a step further than simply (re)constructing old images of Europe and take up the challenge formulated by Chenal, proposing new narratives that do not lean on established instruments of nation building. The two main proposals will be discussed below, namely new democratic practices, and narrative strategies of inclusion and migration.

An important first step taken in this search for new narratives for Europe is the rethinking of democratic practices in the European Union. David van Reybrouck (2017b) and Peter Vermeersch (ECF, n.d.-b) address new perspectives on democracy, largely based on their initiative entitled the “G1000”—a gathering of 1000 randomly selected citizens in Belgium to discuss urgent issues and the future of their country. The initiative leans on a new democratic model, as explained in the online “G1000 Manifesto”:

45 Grøndahl is a Danish author and a well-known voice in discussions on Europe.
Democracy is a living organism. Its forms are not fixed, but grow according to the needs of the time. Direct democracy was a perfect fit for the era of the spoken word. Representative democracy was a good solution at the time of the printed word, the newspaper, and later other “one-way media” such as radio, television and the first phase of the Internet . . . . Deliberative democracy could well be the democracy of the future. It is a perfect match for this era of user-generated content and Web 2.0. It harnesses the wisdom of the crowd. It’s the Wikipedia of politics. It realizes that not all knowledge about the future of a society must come from the top. The reason for that is simple: there is no top anymore. There are different branches of knowledge. A society is a network. The masses today may know more than the elite. (“G1000 Manifesto,” n.d., “An Alternative”)

During the closing event, “Imagining Europe,” Vermeersch explained this model of deliberative democracy in a discussion panel entitled “Imagining Europe, Reclaiming Public Space–Democratic Practices Reinvented?,” underlining how elections are a very blunt instrument for the government to enter into conversation with its citizens.46 Democratic practices need “creative changes” all the time, he argued, by explaining how deliberative democracy in the shape of the G1000 in Belgium was successfully implemented as an alternative alongside the more traditional model of representative democracy (“Imagining Europe, Reclaiming Public Space,” 2012). In the ECF publication Dwarfing Europe, Vermeersch (2013) is optimistic about the possibility of such democratic reforms on a larger European scale as well. He concludes his contribution by stating that

there’s still hope for a European zone that is principally based on something other than technocratic measures and the idea that the free market must reign supreme; that hope is primarily based on such goals as social equality, creative citizenship, participatory democracy and cultural cooperation. If that’s the case, then instead of remaining a thwarted history the expanded Europe might one day become the lived life. (Vermeersch, 2013, p. 37)

The reference in the “G1000 Manifesto” to the assumption that the masses today might know more than the elite resonates in the contribution of David van Reybrouck to the website Narratives for

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46 Tiffany Jenkins (sociologist and cultural commentator, UK) and Juan Freire (innovation manager, Spain) were on this panel as well.
Europe. On the “Voices” subsite, he responded to the questions “What was Europe’s biggest learning moment? What should we do with what was learned?” as follows:

Biggest learning moments are always painful moments: the Dutch-French-Irish NO to the EU Constitution certainly made clear that the old way of doing things no longer worked. That old way started in the post-war years when some of the brightest minds in Europe drew the outlines of a political project with far-reaching consequences. The idea that an intellectual, idealist and voluntarist elite could work out such a plan no longer holds, even it was [sic] originally designed for the benefit of all. Europe has become the continent of communication; one-sided decisions from above, even with the best intentions, are no longer experienced as legitimate. Communication has never been easier than today, yet the EU does so little with it. People are better educated than anytime in history, yet the EU keeps on playing its old-school paternalist, top down approach. Without genuine participation from below, the European project is bound to fail. (van Reybrouck, 2017b, “What Was Europe’s Biggest Learning Moment?”)

Clearly, Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch are far more explicit and concrete in their solutions to the perceived democratic malaise in the European Union in this project than in their earlier initiative, the “The European Constitution in Verse.” Whereas this poetic version of the Constitution was meant to open up a conversation and to engage citizens in a debate about Europe, in “Narratives for Europe” they propose concrete alternatives and explicitly criticise technocracy and free market principles. One of the reasons for this difference in approach might be that, whilst the “The European Constitution in Verse” leans solely on the poetic form, this latter project is broader in scope, encompassing different textual genres and media performances. This allows them to speak, not only as poets, but also as activists and academics. This more concrete critique of democratic practices is in line with what Wolfram Kaiser (2012) suggested in his contribution, namely to debate the political and societal organisation of the European Union from the perspective of the democratic constitution, solidarity, and individual rights. This approach would, as he underlined, be set apart from “the nineteenth-century foundation myths and master-narratives” (Kaiser, 2012, pp. 80–81).

A second perspective proposed by the authors on new narratives for Europe that avoid the pitfalls of nation-state building lies in the narrative practices of cultural institutions. The perspective of migrants travelling to Europe provides a viable way by which to gain self-knowledge, as researcher
Kerstin Poehls (2012) suggests: “Because of its European omnipresence, debates about migration reveal Europeans’ self-understanding” (p. 124). Both Poehls (2012) and Rainer Ohliger (2012)—a board member of “Network Migration in Europe”—emphasise the importance of narrative practices on migration and inclusion in museums in order to oppose current tendencies of othering immigrants. An example of this form of self-understanding evoked by narratives of migration is the contribution of the Dutch author Rodaan Al Giladi to the website Narratives for Europe. He points out how his extended asylum procedure reveals a painful national taboo in the Netherlands:

In the Netherlands, people believe more in their system than the words of others. Between 19 February 1998 and the end of 2007, I underwent an asylum procedure. Nine years. As long as WWI and WWII combined. It’s strange that no one believes that I’ve been through a nine year asylum procedure. When I tell people they cannot believe that their system has something like that on their conscience. (Al Giladi, 2017, “What’s Your National Taboo?”)

Moreover, these narrative practices of migration and inclusion do not rely on strategies of nation-state formation and essentialist identity myths, as “migration unveils the constructed character of geographic or political entities such as the nation or the EU” (Poehls, 2012, p. 128). Thus, “exhibitions on migration add a new chapter to the meta-narrative of museums: implicitly, they challenge the relevance of the nation,” and they “explicitly address future developments in society instead of reflecting primarily on the past” (Poehls, 2012, p. 129). Monica Sassatelli (2012; see also Chapter 4) warned that the notion of “inclusiveness” might be misleading, as “stories are, by definition, exclusive, they weave in certain narrative elements and exclude others” (p. 62). However, the narrative practices of museums regarding the subject of migration might answer her call for new ways to imagine diversity in Europe, instead of imagining a homogenous community, as in the national narrative. As Niña Weijers (2012) described in her contribution, the Dutch author Nelleke Noordervliet voiced a similar plea during the Spui25 debates. Journalist and writer Jan Brokken defended the same position in his dialogue with Abdelkader Benali (Benali & Brokken, 2017).

The core perspectives expressed by the participating authors in the resulting website, publication, and closing festival—an image of a contemporary Europe that understands the importance of “neighbours,” with its focus on current political issues rather than on a shared past, and including possible narratives for the future, such as democratic practices and stories of migration—all lean on an idea of European identity that is thus very much in line with the image put
forward by the organisation in the documents analysed in Part II. Europe is imagined as a political entity in close alliance with neighbouring countries, open, and with a focus on what future narratives are needed by the European Union instead of what Europeans might share based on a cultural or historical past, thereby avoiding the nationalistic framework of identity formation—which was indeed one of the challenges set by the organisation. In his keynote lecture, Amitav Ghosh argued in a similar way to the other participating authors that migration will be the main challenge that Europe needs to address in the future. Ghosh also considered the key question that will be the focus of the next section: what role should literature and writers play in the invention of new narratives?

9.2 A Pan-European Imagination: The Role of Writers and Literature in European Identity Formation

The project “Narratives for Europe” invited not only writers, but also cultural activists and academics to participate, and none of the resulting products—neither the website Narratives for Europe, nor the publication *Remappings*, nor the closing festival “Imagining Europe”—explicitly rely on literary texts or performances. Yet, one can still argue that the ECF employs a crucial literary notion—“narratives”—to frame their project, and that writers play an important role in the result: 11 of the 48 participants are novelists, playwrights, and poets.

In their project plans and policy documents, the ECF deemed artistic expressions—especially stories—as being capable of fostering a feeling of belonging; to open our minds, “we have to use words that have real meaning and that touch our emotions” (ECF, 2013, “Towards a New Europe”). As discussed in Chapter 7, they emphasise the subversive use of literature, as a strategy of opposition to official EU narratives. This section juxtaposes the capacities of literature and writers to reflect on European identity—as perceived by the organisers—with the statements made by writers themselves on this topic. The findings are structured around the two major themes in the paratexts: the importance of “creative imagination” to EU politics, and the literary tradition of the great European writers.

In his keynote speech and the interview that followed, Amitav Ghosh attempted to answer the question of why authors are needed by arguing that the failure of the European Union is an “imaginative failure” ("Imagining Europe, Keynote Speech and Conversation,” 2012). According to Ghosh, the old stories of nationalism have to be replaced—a task politicians are unable to fulfil.

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47 Ghosh perceived this topic as inextricably bound to the issue of climate change, in which Europe, according to Ghosh, needs to take a leading role (“Imagining Europe, Keynote Speech and Conversation,” 2012).
Considering the importance of poetry and fiction for national narratives, especially in the 19th century, he argued that we now need European writers to step outside of national frameworks to come up with new narratives. Even though languages, and thus literature, are identified with nations, this aim should not be too far-fetched. Ghosh suggests that there was once indeed a time of pan-European imagination in the work of, for example, Erasmus (“Imagining Europe, Keynote Speech and Conversation,” 2012).

In similar terms, albeit with rather more self-doubt, in his conversation with Benali, Jan Brokken saw the role of writers in terms of formulating a European dream:

Perhaps we writers, poets, thinkers, filmmakers, composers should more clearly formulate the European dream with words, images and sounds . . . . Perhaps, the real dream does not need to be formulated as long as it comes true without too much fanfare. (Benali & Brokken, 2017, “Part 5”)

However, the British author Adam Thirlwell problematised this call for a pan-European imagination during the Spui25 lecture series—a move described by Weijers (2012) in her contribution to Remappings. Thirwell pointed out how it is precisely the novel that is linked to nations (an argument also made by contributors to the “Literatur Express”; see Chapter 8), and that works from the “literary centre” (e.g. France or the UK; see also Casanova, 2004) are translated more often than titles from the periphery: “Literature is the art of language and languages are national and specific, and in the great majority of cases literature does not straddle frontiers” (Weijers, 2012, p. 100).

Ghosh’s call to the imaginative power of writers resembles the argument made by Peter Vermeersch to explain the importance of writers. During his talk on the discussion panel of “Imagining Europe, Reclaiming Public Space–Democratic Practices Reinvented?” (“Imagining Europe, Reclaiming Public Space,” 2012), he posited the idea that democracy needs creative change all the time, and to renew democratic practices, you need an “act of the imaginative.” No wonder, Vermeersch continued, that the initiative of the G1000 (described in the previous section) was taken up mostly by people engaged in “creative thinking.” However, his ideas on the capacity of the arts to foster political intervention in Europe were met with great scepticism from another panellist, the

48 Thirwell went on to discuss a utopian thought experiment to remedy the differences between major and minor languages in the form of a “truly democratic practice of translations” that “does not depart from the original but instead involves producing translations of translations,” which makes the translation “no longer a derivative but a new original,” as Weijers (2012) summarises his argument (p. 100, emphasis in original).
British sociologist and cultural commentator Tiffany Jenkins. During the same discussion panel, she expressed a critical stance on the possibilities of political art in general. “Most political art lacks bite,” she asserted: it is either didactic, mostly left-wing, non-ambivalent art, or ironic, playful art that deepens depolitisation. Jenkins suggested that the reason why politicians might be interested in funding art projects in the form of cultural policy lies mostly in a problem of legitimacy: they ask others to construct a view on society (“Imagining Europe, Reclaiming Public Space,” 2012). Her perspective is comparable to Cris Shore’s (2000) observations on EU cultural policy, who argued that cultural policy aimed at creating a sense of shared identity is perceived by the European Union as a possible answer to the assumed “democratic deficit” of the European Union, although Shore argues that this approach has not been very effective (p. 221).

The ECF similarly emphasises the capability of writers to open minds with original (counter-)narratives, but also stresses the emotional element: the search for narratives that “touch our emotions” (ECF, 2013, “Towards a New Europe”). Following the same line of thought, Jens Christian Grøndahl, during his talk as part of the Spui25 lecture series, explained how novels can open the reader’s horizon: in reading, you can be Greek, or Irish (University of Amsterdam, 2013a). In the same lecture series, academic Joep Leerssen described narratives as “empathy machines”: you can stand in the shoes of other people, in other places and other times (University of Amsterdam, 2013a). In Remappings, the artist Wietske Maas (2012) argued in a comparable way for the affective nature of art and its capacity “to understand, with empathy, other cultures and ways of thinking” (p. 150). Additionally, in his dialogue with Benali, Jan Brokken called on writers to take more initiative in order to counterbalance the power of banks with the beauty of Europe:

Besides the Europe of economists, another Europe must come of age: one of writers, poets, artists, composers and musicians. Right now they are in the margins—partially because that’s where they feel the safest. But it’s high time they showed more initiative. You said that you feel like an old-fashioned romantic when writing about the crisis in Greece and despairingly looking towards Homer and Kafavis. But no, Abdelkader, I rate you with the new avant-garde. The beauty of Europe is not her history . . . . No, the most impressive thing about Europe is your Kafavis or my Pessoa. I do know that the power held by banks will not be tamed by a couple of majestic lines of poetry from a Portuguese misanthrope. But at least it provides

49 Leerssen also stated that possibly the most important contemporary narrative is film (University of Amsterdam, 2013a).
counterbalance. So let’s get prepare for the worst and start our own crusade of the mind. (Benali & Brokken, 2017, “Part 3”)

One can observe in Brokken’s argument—and in other contributions to this project more generally—how this call for the imagination of current writers to come up with a narrative for the future of the European Union also importantly relies on classical references to writers of the past, such as Homer, Kafavis, and Pessoa. This tension also came to the fore in the analysis of texts by the organisation, which referred to Benali’s quotation—“It’s time to come up with a new idea of what Europe is, drawing on the humane Europe as defended and described by writers such as Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht” (Benali cited in Chenal, 2011, n.p.). This second recurring theme—the featuring of great European authors in texts by the organisation—can also be found in the authors’ contributions to this project. For example, Thijs van Nimwegen (2012), one of the artists in the Comixiade Core Team, who drew the comic strips for Remappings, explained how the team came up with the protagonist of this series, Osvald, named after Oswald Spengler, the author of The Decline of the West (1918):

While we may not have been fully aware of it, the choice of an inquisitive, yet somewhat antisocial (anti-)hero as our binding protagonist is rooted in a long and respectable narrative tradition in Western fiction. It’s the tradition of the individual against the collective and “the system,” the dreamer against dull everyday life. Edgar Allen Poe’s Auguste Dupin may have been one of the first in a long family tree. . . .

In literature, and later in film, the hero-against-the-world turned into more of an anti-hero and lost his positive outlook. Franz Kafka’s Josef K. (Der Prozess), George Orwell’s Winston Smith (Nineteen Eighty Four), and Doblin’s Franz Biberkopf (Berlin Alexanderplatz) are characters that have to find their way through an unknown, frightening world, and find out its hidden, secret truth—hidden by a system that has turned from dumb yet relatively harmless into a frightening, repressive machine. This searching in itself is what makes them part of the tradition—the need to find out what is the nature of that unseen thing in the dark. (van Nimwegen, 2012, pp. 41–42)

Referring to these canonical authors and classical characters, Van Nimwegen (2012) argued that the contribution of the Comixiade Core Team stands on the shoulders of literary giants. A similar inspiration from the past can be found in the contribution of the Indian critic and novelist Neel
Mukherjee, who, addressing the question of what Europe’s biggest taboo might be on the website, suggested it is

[t]he inability of some of its member states to come to terms with their shameful pasts. Austria has had practically zero reckoning, compared with Germany, about its deep complicity in Nazism. Does one not want to return to Elfriede Jelinek’s extraordinary book, *Die Kinder der Toten*, on the voluntary, willed amnesia afflicting postwar Austrian society, if only to remind us how rare that kind of book is in Austrian culture and mentalité? (Mukherjee, 2017, para. 1)

Jan Brokken also defended the importance of reading European authors in his dialogue with Abdelkader Benali:

With younger people I always sense some disdain around the subject of Europe. If they read, they read Jonathan Franzen and not Miklós Bánffy whose *They Were Counted* [referring to Bánffy’s novel, which was part of a trilogy that appeared between 1934 and 1940] goes a hundred times deeper than *Freedom* [referring to Franzen’s 2010 novel]. It’s as if they don’t want to know anything about Europe anymore. (Benali & Brokken, 2017, “Part 2”)

With references to Kafka, Orwell, Doblin, Jelinek, and Banffy, these authors either aim to pay tribute to the classic anti-hero in literature, or to show how literature in Europe has been able to address certain national traumas. In a similar fashion, the ECF relied on the image of humanism in the person of Thomas Mann to frame their intentions.

However, with the foregoing in mind, the contribution of David van Reybrouck is an interesting counter-voice. In the “Voices” section of the website Narratives for Europe, he answered the questions “Can you name a stereotype that has a negative influence on public debate? What are its consequences?” as follows:

Sicilians are lazy. Walloons are lazy, too. The Greeks are even lazier, not to mention the Moroccans! Not very helpful, this populist rhetoric.

But hey, there is also an elitist rhetoric that is equally problematic! “Europe is such a great and diverse continent!” “We have such amazing literature!” “Read Elias Canetti and you become a European advocate straight away! (or Kafka, or Kundera, or Celan: any Great Male,
preferably Central-European Author from Mid till Turn of the Century will do)” “People who
do not like the EU are so narrow-minded, nationalistic, fearsome, etc.”

If cosmopolitism is the best argument we can invent for Europe, I fear for the future of
Europe. If cosmopolitism is all we can come up with, I start losing my faith in Europe. Europe
is more than academics sipping Chardonnay from Burgundy to Varna. (van Reybrouck, 2017a,
“Can You Name a Stereotype”)

Van Reybrouck (2017a) warned in this contribution against the dangers of leaning on these great
European writers, suggesting that to do so is an elitist rhetoric that is as harmful to the public debate
in Europe as the populist rhetoric.

This section has demonstrated how the participants of “Narratives for Europe,” in tune with
the ECF, reflected on the power of literature in terms of a “creative imagination”—one that is needed
in order to rethink existing political practices and narratives. The emphasis on the tradition of great
European writers was, however, critiqued by David van Reybrouck. The contribution of the focus
author of this project, Abdelkader Benali, exemplifies an attempt to contest existing narratives by
opening up the image of Europe just as the ECF envisioned. Furthermore, Benali takes into account
the tradition of great writers as well. The following section argues that, in the contributions of Benali,
as he attempts to combine both perspectives, the tension between the elitism of this tradition on the
one hand, and the everyday political reality on the other, comes prominently to the fore.

9.3 Homer and Mademoiselle Andalus: Focus Author Abdelkader Benali

In their project description (Chenal, 2011), the ECF used an excerpt from the article “I Migrated to
Europe with Hope: Now I feel Nothing but Dread” (2010) by Abdelkader Benali (born in Morocco,
1975) in order to explain their intentions, in which Benali referred to the “humane Europe” of Mann
and Brecht. Benali’s letter appeared in The Guardian in 2010 and was later reprinted in Dutch in the
collection of essays Oost = West: Reizen door de Arabische wereld en het Westen [East = West: Travelling
Through the Arab World and the West] (Benali, 2011b). The fact that he took an explicit stance on societal
issues such as migration and terrorism in a newspaper is exemplary of the way in which this author
has developed during his career. Benali made his debut in 1996 at the age of 21 with a much-praised
and stylistically rich novel entitled Wedding at Sea. Subsequently, he turned increasingly towards essays
and public discussions—especially since the murder of Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands in 2002, which
sparked off an intense debate on multiculturalism in the country (Minnaard, 2008). Recently, he explained in an interview with Ann-Sofie Dekeyser for the Belgian newspaper De Standaard why he thinks it is important to speak up as a writer on such sensitive topics:

For a writer, life is one big crisis, that is to say, as a writer, you are thinking about life and death every day. You are constantly reflecting on crisis situations. Your creative urge brings you in a unique position between commitment and stoicism. Writers receive too little appreciation for this. We neutralise. That opinion article of mine neutralises. As soon as something is neutral, people start thinking again. [III.21] (Dekeyser, 2015, n.p.)

In such debates, Benali aims to “neutralise” unfair representations of Islam in order to prevent mutual misunderstandings, and to take responsibility as a writer to turn the ideal of a multicultural society into a reality (Minnaard, 2009; Riemersma, 2011). Benali featured prominently in the project “Narratives for Europe”—writing the foreword to Remappings and contributing to the website Narratives for Europe with two columns and five exchanges of letters with Jan Brokken. Finally, during the closing event “Imagining Europe” he interviewed the British-based filmmaker John Akomfrah (Akomfrah, 2012).

In line with the intentions of the organisation, Benali’s main focus in his reflections on Europe and European identity is on the issues of migration and borders. Just as the ECF is not only concerned with the European Union, but also with its neighbouring countries, Benali, in his fifth letter to Jan Brokken, stressed the fruitful coming together of West and East (Benali & Brokken, 2017). He witnessed this combination in a musical performance during the “Imagining Europe” event:

And then there were these countless encounters between people from EU’s bordering regions at the Balie. I never thought I would regard Syria as part of this region until I witnessed the duo performance of Eric Vloeimans and Kinan Azmeh. The seamless sounds of the Orient and the Occident coming together acted as a perky declaration of war against today’s polarisation. (Benali & Brokken, 2017, “Part 5”)

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50 Pim Fortuyn was a flamboyant Dutch academic and politician who explicitly criticised the Islam and the role of this religion in Dutch society. His opinions were perceived as highly controversial. He was murdered by an environmental activist.
This coming together of Orient and Occident is a recurring theme in the work of Benali, especially regarding Islam’s roots in Europe. The interconnected nature of the two is further stressed in his fictional contribution. In his column “Three Possible Dreams for Europe” on the Narratives for Europe website, Benali tells the story of a girl named Europe, visiting her ex-boyfriend called Homer in Sicily and asking a sorceress in Paris called Mademoiselle Andalus, not only about her future, but also about her past. Juxtaposing Homer and Andalus—the cradle of Western civilisation and a reference to Al-Andalus, a region in the Iberian Peninsula occupied by Arab people during the Middle Ages—Benali attempts to raise awareness of the fact that European culture is historically not only rooted in Greek, but also in Arabic civilisation. Benali has stressed on multiple occasions that the perceived divide between Islam and Europe therefore denies the history of Muslims in the European continent. He explained his position in detail in a short story about the Macedonian city of Skopje, where he was a writer-in-residence for the project “citybooks,” instigated by the Flemish-Dutch cultural organisation deBuren. The story, titled “Warrior on a Horse,” features an unnamed traveller reflecting on his first impressions of Skopje in his hotel room:

In these parts, faces were focused on the Ottoman authority in Istanbul, while the body yearned desperately for that other, Christian Europe. The traveller muses that this is a legacy for which there is little space in Christian-humanist Europe. The ideology of a Christian-humanist tradition, which enables parliamentary democracy and prosperity, doesn’t sit comfortably with the idea that a power had existed on the same continent for centuries, yet differed from it in every possible way. . . .

In terms of cultural history the heritage of the Middle Ages, Gothic and Baroque, effortlessly permeates contemporary architecture. What the Mussulmen built on the continent is intended to be admired, not emulated. The mosque, the bathhouses, the bazaars: they all add to the impression of a mystical, exotic Europe whose atmosphere can be sampled and easily transferred to restaurants and shopping malls. (Benali, 2011c, section 3, para. 2)

Benali repeated this observation at the Re:Create Europe festival in 2016, when he was asked, during a marathon interview with Rem Koolhaas, Luuk van Middelaar, and Yoeri Albrecht, what it would mean for his young daughter to be a new European now and in the future (Benali, 2016). Answering this question, Benali took the perspective of his unnamed protagonist in the previously quoted short story, explaining that it would be important for his daughter to be able to acknowledge her roots.
According to Benali, this would only be possible if the European project would become less self-centred, and not to leave aside the influence of Ottoman and Arabic culture; the fact that there is no consciousness of this influence in the European narrative nowadays is highly problematic (Benali, 2016).

In the same letter to Jan Brokken on the Narratives for Europe website, Benali addressed another topic—this time one that is not only on the agenda of the ECF, but also on his own personal agenda—namely, a critical assessment of the EU’s migration policies. He wrote how impressed he was with the speech by Amitav Ghosh, who linked climate change to migration flows: “Meanwhile Europe gets fuller. It’s a fantasy to think we can avoid the crowds” (Benali & Brokken, 2017, “Part 5”). In his letter in The Guardian, Benali (2010) explained how, in his view, the memory of the Second World War prevented Europeans from addressing problems in migrant communities. The result was that the idea that Europe is being kidnapped by an ever-growing non-western population is creating fear and populist parties are winning. But it will be impossible to stop migration. European populations are growing older, the workforces shrinking. But speaking in favour of migration—passionately, because I am a child of migration and make literature out of all its painful and comical contradictions—has become a form of blasphemy. Certainly there is something rotten in multiculturalism, but turning the stereotypical victim into the stereotypical scapegoat is cheap and does not do justice to reality. I know that the Netherlands of my childhood will never come back. We are entering a dark period. A generation is growing up with xenophobia and the fear of Islam has become mainstream. (Benali, 2010, para. 13—14)

Despite the fact that speaking in favour of migration is a form of “blasphemy,” as Benali asserted in 2010, he regularly does so, for example in “Freedom from Fear,” a lecture that was part of a lecture series by different publicists and academics on the notion of freedom: “It is my experience that migration gives people the opportunity to develop freely and that in the long run it will improve and strengthen society itself” [III.22] (Benali, 2013, p. 18). Benali kept calling for optimism in the polarised debate on migration, for example in his essay “Omar jr., de optimist, bezoekt zijn vader” [“Omar jr., the Optimist, Visits His Father”], originally published in a report by the Dutch Advisory Committee on Migration Affairs in 2008. In this story, he paints a picture of the Netherlands in the year 2030, with a well-integrated large European Muslim community, and negotiations between the Europeans.
and Morocco about its accession to the European Union on the way (Benali, 2011a). A similar stance can be found in a text he was asked to write by deBuren; an election speech as the President of Europe. Benali, speaking as “president” with a similar tone of optimism, reflected on his visits to refugee camps in the South of Europe and concluded:

Ultimately, the core of every culture, civilisation is its dignity. And the dignity that was taken from other people, was the erosion of that civilisation . . . . And he realised that . . . Europe had become the new house of many, and that he had to do everything within his power to furnish the house Europe in such a way that those who risked the crossing felt sheltered. [III.23] (“De president van Europa,” 2008, pp. 2—3)

In 2014, Benali published an article in De Groene Amsterdammer on the EU’s migration policy, which he deemed to be very “dark.” He described how the disinterested, technocratic attitude of “fortress Europe”—outsourcing migration policies to Northern Africa—leads to criminality, people in miserable circumstances, and more illegal immigration (Benali, 2014).

It is not only the failings of EU policies on migration that Benali addresses. When it comes to the question “Where is Europe?,” he answers in terms of culture, rather than politics. In the introduction to Remappings, he argued that the Europe that we find in the Saturday supplements of newspapers is not the Europe of cathedrals and books, but of money (Benali, 2012). As “president” of Europe, in the assignment from the deBuren, he is more explicit about a European identity:

Later, in his acceptance speech, he told the audience that he had always looked for the place where Europe was to be found . . . . “All this,” he concluded, “shows that the European mainly feels European in his strong awareness of language, culture and history in contemporary society. Even if the European wants to feel European, devotes himself with heart and soul to it, he will be lured back to his divine provincialism as soon as he smells his “Sauerkraut,” cuts his cheese “Parmigiano-Reggiano” or gobbles up a greasy “oliebol” [a quintessentially Dutch or Belgium delicacy, similar to a donut].

From that inability of the European to profile himself as European, grew, according to the president, an absurdity that was at the basis of every ambitious attempt. “You are not European, you are trying to be,” a quotation that sounded a lot better in French, “On n’est pas Européen, on tente de l’être.” [III.24] (“De president van Europa,” 2008, p. 2)
Reflecting on European culture, cuisine, and literature in the exchange with Jan Brokken on the website, Benali remarked:

You and I are the same: Europe is an experience, a trip, and, yes, also sometimes a burden. It’s a heap of intellectual mumbo-jumbo drowned in a rich and romantic béarnaise sauce. You and I share the same spectacles. When someone says Greece, we think of Pindaros. When Greece is mentioned in The Hague, people shout “Oh, Oh, Cherso.” (Benali & Brokken, 2017, “Part 2”)

This led Benali to the conclusion that

Europe is empathy, Jan. To put yourself in the position of others. To plunge yourself in the history, traditions and art of a culture until it becomes your own culture. It’s also way of relating with each other. . . .
It’s silly I know, Jan, but I am reassured by such vague, Homeric reflections. When history is busy teaching us a lesson, there’s little to do but eat, drink and talk about our shared history. But perhaps as an outsider from a totally different culture, I have the luxury of naivety. (Benali & Brokken, 2017, “Part 2”)

These “Homeric” reflections, references to classical literature and distancing from “the people,” seem at first to stand in stark contrast to the contribution of David van Reybrouck, discussed in the previous section, who argued that such an elitist approach—calling upon great writers—will not solve the current democratic crisis.

Still, one can argue that Benali does not refer to European literature as a facile way to bring shared cultural heritage to the fore, or to display an intellectualist approach to issues of European identity. He is convinced that literature is more than just shared classical culture; literature is, in his eyes, a key with which to solve current political issues of migration and extremism related to migrant communities in Europe. Benali’s perspective becomes apparent in his contribution to the series “Made in Europe,” broadcast in 2017 with the Belgian author Dimitri Verhulst as host. The radio show “Nooit meer slapen” (“Never Sleep Again”), a cultural program, provided background information and interviews on the themes of the series. One of its topics was “individualism,” which featured an
interview with Benali, who explained how important reading the essays of the 16th-century French philosopher Michel de Montaigne had been to him and his personal development. Benali said reading the book felt like talking to a friend and helped him to discover his own personality and individuality, alongside being a member of a pre-existing network of family relations (Benali, 2017). Earlier, Benali caused an international stir by stating how important it is for young people to feel understood in a Dutch newspaper article from 2015—the piece was reprinted in The New York Times and there was an interview on CNN. In the article, he explained how he as a young boy himself felt the temptation of anger and extremism, trying to combine a religious upbringing with a secular society that seemed to mock his culture (Benali, 2015b). Benali (2015b) described this situation as follows:

I felt orphaned. (para. 9)
And resolving that dilemma is much harder in a secular society that seems to have stopped struggling with these big questions altogether. In the end, I didn’t find the answers in holy texts. I found them in literature. (para. 11)
I read Kafka’s “Metamorphosis” and Camus’ “The Plague.” (para. 12)
But the only way to conquer your anger is to understand where its roots lie. For me the freedom to doubt, to not choose sides and to feel empathy for characters and people with whom I disagree was liberating. Today I still embrace my Islamic background, but without the dogma, repression and strict adherence to ritual. (para. 20)

In the same year, elaborating upon this argument, Benali wrote two letters to the BBC radio series “Letters from Europe” (Johnson, 2015). Referring to Kafka, he explained in the last of those letters how he read Kafka’s The Metamorphosis, which gave him a place to belong, namely literature. Feeling lonely might translate into anger at a young age, but, Benali concluded, it might also lead to creativity, if there are people around who understand these lonely youngsters. He found his way to libraries and university and chose his own path. This, he concludes, is my life, and my Europe (Johnson, 2015). This shows how Benali is not only engaged in issues of “Dutch multiculturality” anymore, as Minnaard (2008) argued in her analysis of his work: his reflections on migration and identity are set in a broader,

51 Benali’s fascination with this author can also be seen in his recent novel Montaigne, een indiaan en de neus van Max Kader [Montaigne, an Indian and the Nose of Max Kader] about a young man who liberates himself from his family, aiming to write a book about Montaigne (Benali, 2015a).
European perspective as well, in his attempt to argue the importance of European writers to current political issues.

Whilst these issues of migration and the literary tradition correlate with the intentions of the organisers, Benali does differ from the ECF in this project by virtue of his focus on the past, and not so much on the present and future. Where the ECF is focused on up-and-coming narratives, Benali not only leans on the great European writers of the past, but also encourages his readers to rethink the roots of Europe, emphasising the role of the Ottoman empire and Arabic culture in Europe as a key to issues of migration. His hesitance regarding future narratives can also be seen in his introduction to *Remappings*, in which he does not seem sure about the feasibility of formulating new narratives, as we are in the middle of a new, unfolding European narrative (Benali, 2012). Within a framework of references to classical literary characters, he explained:

So how far are we in the story? Are we Icarus or are we Don Quixote? Are we as desperate and heartbroken as Hamlet or are we more like a Dante shuffling through the underworld towards the light? Or, like Madame Bovary, are we dreaming of real life while not daring to put anything into it. (p. 8)

Would you ask Alice whether she already knows what kind of story she is figuring in as she wanders through Wonderland in the midst of that story? That is what it is like with Europe now: its narrative is still a great unknown, because it is taking shape right under our noses. At best we can say that the story is unfinished so it cannot be written down yet, however masterly the master-hand that dares to venture such a task. (Benali, 2012, p. 10)

Despite this difference in temporal focus, comparing the images of Europe and reflections on the role of literature with the intentions of the organisers of “Narratives for Europe,” one can see how Benali’s oeuvre as a whole, and this contribution more specifically, illustrates their wish to open up a political debate with cultural instruments. This section showed how Benali perceives it as his task as a writer to interfere in European political issues because he deems a writer to be in the privileged position “between engagement and stoicism” (Benali as cited in Dekeyser, 2015, n.p.). Concretely, this means that, in a range of texts, Benali shows a deep concern for European migration policies and extremism that might have been the result of immigration. Finally, this section argued that the importance of a cultural perspective is clearly visible in his emphasis on great European literature—Thomas Mann,
Kafka, and Camus—as a means by which to deal with complex issues such as integration and extremism.

9.4 Conclusion

This chapter argued that the publication *Remappings*, the website Narratives for Europe, and the event “Imagining Europe” generally realise the intentions of the organisers. As discussed in Part II, project leaders aimed to engage participants in the act of visualising different geographical and mental maps of Europe, leaning, not only on the borders of the political constellation, but also on the areas beyond the current borders of the European Union. The texts produced by the participants reveal how this image of Europe is constructed with an emphasis on neighbouring countries and current political issues, rather than on any specific contemplation of European cultural history. Their texts thus construct two things: firstly, a spatial image of Europe in close alliance with its neighbours; and secondly, a timeframe in which the focus is on the future, rather than the past. Alternative political practices (new forms of democracy) and narrative practices (of migration) are put forward by these participants. Here, literature is perceived by the organisers as an opportunity to (re)formulate these different narratives beyond existing institutional ones. Contributors confirmed their intentions by emphasising the importance of creative imagination in politics, whilst focus author Benali exemplified in his contribution how borders can be re-imagined by aiming to bridge the gap between East and West—something he attempts consistently throughout his oeuvre.

Yet, despite this correlation between its intentions and its results, this case study also reveals an important tension that came to the fore via this analysis. In his exchange with Jan Brokken, Benali observed: “When someone says Greece, we think of Pindaros. When Greece is mention [sic] in The Hague, people shout ‘Oh, Oh, Cherso’” (Benali & Brokken, 2017, “Part 2”). As indicated earlier, one can see how this argument might be read as an example of what David van Reybrouck (2017a), on the website Narratives for Europe, called an elitist European rhetoric. This section argued that, whilst Benali attempts to read these classics in the light of contemporary political issues of migration and extremism, his reference to great writers does not prevent him from losing sight of daily political issues.

One can argue that the “threat of elitism,” understood by Van Reybrouck (2017a) as the idea that only an intellectual elite could possibly work out a way to understand and solve European political issues, remains a challenge to literary projects such as “Narratives for Europe.” Clearly, the organisers
aimed for a bottom-up approach to build narratives for Europe, as Chenal (2012) indicates in her introduction:

institutional narratives will not work if they do not chime with people’s experience and imagination. For this reason . . . we decided to focus on primarily “bottom-up” narratives: cultural expression, ongoing storylines, and citizens’ voices that are less—or not yet—heard. (p. 24)

However, the framing of the ECF’s project with a reference to Thomas Mann, authors referring to Pindar to distance themselves from a general public, and the overall connotation of canonical writers engaging in European issues reflected in the contribution by Van Reybrouck, reveal how “elitism” is also a dilemma in “Narratives for Europe,” despite their bottom-up approach. This issue re-emerges in the project’s wider reception (discussed in Chapter 13).

Peter Vermeersch and David van Reybrouck, the organisers of this project and the editors of *The European Constitution in Verse* (2009), underlined in their plans the importance of the public sphere and a lively debate between committed citizens (e.g. van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009b). According to Vermeersch and Van Reybrouck, in order to promote active citizenship, Europe does not only need elections, but also a public arena of debate and stories, and it is precisely to this task that the project aimed to contribute. The project was part of a larger EU-funded initiative entitled “Shahrazad – Stories for Life”, and linked to the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN). The project aimed “to open up a free space in Europe for writers from all over the world to connect and release their stories” (“Shahrazad - Stories for Life,” 2010, n.p.). In calling upon the myth of Europa’s abduction in their project description, the organisers not only offered a representation of European cultural unity; the myth of Europa functioned first and foremost as an image by which to underline the interrelatedness of European and non-European cultures, and as a plea for political values that might strengthen the European Union as a multicultural society—goals that are in line with the “Shahrazad” project.

As explained in Part II, “The European Constitution in Verse” was inspired by the failed attempt to draw up a European Constitutional Treaty in 2003. The original document, entitled *Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe* (published in 2004), resonates in the poetic version, as the coordinators of this project structured the text in a comparable way (Witteveen, 2009). Both documents open with a preamble, followed by a section that defines the goals and definitions of the Constitution. The poetic text is then followed by part II, “Fundamental Rights” (in the formal document part II, “The Charter of Fundamental Rights”); part III, “Declarations”; part IV, “Policies and Action” (reflected in the formal document as part III, “The Policies and Functioning of the Union”); part V “European Hymn”; and part VI “Final Provision” (in the original document part IV, “General and Final Provisions”). This long poem thus consists of six parts, and a total of 77 numbered articles. Some of the articles are followed by “bis” or “ter” in order to indicate that the verses are to be read as comments on a previous article (e.g. article 73 “Freedom of Religion,” which is followed by four sub-articles). As described earlier, the poem is a collection of verses and stanzas submitted by 54 poets from all over Europe in over 30 different languages. The final text can be read as a single coherent poem, in which many different voices can be heard.

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[52] The index offers an overview of the authors of the verses and stanzas.
Whilst overall structure is thus comparable between the formal and the poetic constitution, the poetic version, as will be argued in this chapter, interacts with the EU document in more ways than just by copying these formal characteristics. Rather, the text reframes both the formal document and the institutional discourse on European cultural identity. This analysis opens with an examination of the images of Europe that are constructed in the text, arguing that, although the discourse of cultural identity initially seems to dominate, precisely these images of cultural identity enable political reflection. This section is followed by the perceived role of poets and literature in Europe, which focuses on intertextual references and interactions with legal documents. The final part of this analysis will focus on one of the participating authors and member of the Brussels Poetry Collective: Geert van Istendael. Van Istendael has published on the subject of European diversity and EU policies since the 1990s in the form of essays, novels, and poems, and is therefore an appropriate choice in this chapter. His contribution to *The European Constitution in Verse* exemplifies how the reframing of European cultural themes could become critique in the context of EU policies.

## 10.1 “The Dark Labyrinths of Collective Memory”: Images of Europe

The aim of the project leaders of “The European Constitution in Verse” was to bridge the perceived gap between Brussels and the people by stimulating a discussion between involved citizens. The discourse of European political identity thus prevailed in the paratexts. However, in the contribution of the poets, one can observe many instances of the celebration of European cultural differences. This section will show how both discourses come together in *The European Constitution in Verse* by arguing that the rhetoric of European cultural identity, as “unity in diversity,” is instrumentalised and reinterpreted in this poem from a political point of view.

The representation of European cultural diversity is, according to Odile Heynders (2016), central to *The European Constitution in Verse*. She argues:

> The power of the *European Constitution in Verse* lies in the cultural diversity, as can be illustrated with the seventh part of the poem, the European hymne [sic] based on Beethoven’s “Ode an die Freude,” which enumerates the word for “bread” in various languages and dialects . . . . Bread is what people eat and share, what is ordinary and consecrated (in the celebration of the Eucharist), it is the food that one needs in order to live, what keeps the mass of the people happy, and it is a typical product of Europe. (Heynders, 2016, p. 123)
The Dutch publication *Neem bijvoorbeeld graniet* [*Granite, For Example*] from 2011 foregrounds the multilingual nature of this text, as the original language of the excerpts is printed in this edition as well. Yet, this text is not just a simple celebration of the slogan of European cultural identity “unity in diversity”—it critically questions the feasibility of this ideal.

Firstly, some verses express hesitance regarding the extent to which Europe can actually be considered diverse. One can argue, with the stanza of the Belgian author Jean-Pierre Verheggen in article 31, “The Right to Language,” that the polyphony of the many languages in Europe is not unproblematic:

The right to build castles in the air in every
Language known to us: to build luftschlossen or
Luchtkastelen or even to construct castillos in the air,
In aria! En l’air! In der Luft! Everywhere castles in the air! (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, pp. 45–46)\(^5\)

5 Throughout this chapter, various articles by different authors will be cited, all of which are published in the volume edited by Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch (2009a). For conciseness, the articles will not be referenced separately.

This apparent celebration of a multilingual Europe also reveals a sense of disbelief or disillusionment—the right to deploy different languages is equalled to building “castles in the air.” These lines suggest that, in the light of the polyphony of voices and languages, the ideal that all languages are equal is perhaps untenable. Earlier in article 31, the Slovenian poet Aleš Šteger proposed: “Small and large languages do not exist, nor do small and large literatures” (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 45). For now, with English, French, and German as formal languages of the European Commission and the British, French, and German literary spaces in the centre of Europe (Casanova, 2004), this egalitarian approach does not correspond with existing power relations.

A similar sceptical undertone can be found in the references to European history as a source of unity. As discussed in Part I, compared to representations of national history as a source of unity and pride, the stakes are different on a European level: an imagined European community does not have an uncontested past to lean on. From a transnational, European perspective, wars do not offer the triumphant stories that were so relevant in earlier constructions of national identity. The idea that defeats might be more important than victories in Europe is alluded to in the penultimate article 76bis, entitled “Celebrating Failure”: 
May 7, 1945, Germany gave up, exhausted, defeated.
Nothing to cry about.

. . .

It would be necessary to look up the exact date
when the Austro-Hungarian Empire crumbled.
And to declare in each country a national holiday
on the day of its major defeat. (José Ovejero as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 87)

In *The European Constitution in Verse*, there are many other instances of references to a shared European past—especially in the context of wars and struggles. For example, images of war follow the opening verse entitled “[Nothing]”—“don’t say Europe they say say Death” (Leszek Szaruga as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 13)—later followed by article 49—“don’t say Europe they say Death / films have stopped libraries are burning” (Szaruga as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 57). Article 22 is entitled “The Right to Remember,” reading:

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The long nights in the shelters, the bombs,
the song of the sirens, it all comes back
to the sweet bourgeois dusk. Don’t you remember? (Narcís Comadira as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 38)
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That such a violent history might be a source of shared identity and a common destiny is doubted by some poets. Xavier Queipo takes a stance against shared memory in article 8ter, and its “dark labyrinths” that will not provide a basis for a European future:

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No one builds on the ruins of past wars
No one keeps up with the insults imposed with scorn
No one derives satisfaction from the return of thefts
From the dark labyrinths of the collective memory
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The future: where we all start to dream (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 26)
A similar perspective can be found in the contribution by the Dutch poet Gerrit Komrij, who suggests that European pasts disappear in the light of (perhaps naïve) dreams of a European future. His article 52, in the form of a sonnet entitled “The Consolation of Europe,” reads:

Amid a charred wasteland I sit and gaze
At a pink-fringed cloud that’s billowing higher
(The remnants of a long extinguished blaze)
And ancient embers from an ancient fire,

Ringed round by ashes, chant a song to me:
“From Lofoten to where Bosphorus flows
Dream-killers once criss-crossed our land and sea:
Upon our cinder cheeks their kiss still glows.”

Then the kisses fade and the story’s done.
But across the ocean, in a themed park –
There curious people can have a ball.

The great abundance of dreams in the Ark
Will quickly Europeanise them all,
And the song once again will have begun. (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 60)

The poem is an admirable balancing act between pessimism and optimism, union and division, and scepticism and praise. The first two stanzas call upon the memory of war and strife, the “dream-killers” of the whole European continent. Yet in these same verses, Komrij calls upon images of European cultural unity, via reference to a shared heritage of Christian imaginary and classical mythology: “A charred wasteland” evokes the opening lines of Genesis.54 Similarly, evoking “a pink-fringed cloud,” Komrij brings to mind the epitaph used by Homer to describe the sunrise as “the rosy-

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54 In the original Dutch texts, the reference “Amid a charred wasteland I sit” is more explicit: “Ik zit in een verkoelde woestenij,” bringing to mind the line “woest en leeg” in Genesis 1.2 (NBG-translation 1951).
fingered dawn”. These lines suggest that, despite sharing a cultural identity, Europe has been burnt to the ground. In a classical turn, the sestet shifts the perspective from the past to the future: the story of struggle is over and, as in the Bible, an ark appears to have survived the flood of war and misery. However, instead of animals, this ark is filled with dreams, “which will Europeanise them all”. Dreaming of unity and peace, Europeans thus come together once more. However, if one thinks that this is a case of “happy ever after,” Komrij’s final verse reveals a sceptical response: “the song once again will have begun”. This last line leaves the reader to contemplate the possibility of a never-ending cycle of war and peace in Europe, regardless of how much Europeans might dream in unison. Komrij’s sonnet exemplifies how multiple contributions by poets from Europe express doubt—even scepticism—about the feasibility of the EU’s ideal of cultural “unity in diversity.” On the one hand, the poetic articles in this constitution celebrate the diversity of many languages; underline a shared European heritage of classical mythology and biblical imagery; and reveal how a sense of unity is also brought about by the shared past of world wars. Whilst on the other hand, these contributions also suggest to the reader that the celebration of multilingual diversity might simply be “building castles in the sky”—that the ruins of history will not provide a firm base upon which to unite Europeans, and that even optimistic dreams for a European future will not prevent a repetition of sorrows passed.

This complex balancing act—of Europe as a cultural identity caught between celebrating diversity and shared classical heritage, and doubting the foundations and feasibility of unity—was not so present in the documents put forward by the organisers to describe their project and its goals, as they were more focused on European political identity, and contributing to political discussions on the European Union. However, in section 10.3 it will be argued that the contribution by focus author Geert van Istendael shows how this discourse of cultural identity is reinterpreted as a means to criticise the European Union as a political project, in line with the original intentions of the organisers. At this point it is important to note the sceptical tone of voice on European cultural identity—a tone that is also heard when the idea of European political identity is reflected upon.

The image of Europe as a political project constructed in this long poem is formed via a critique of its two major failures. According to the participating poets, these are firstly, the failure to constitute a European “we”; and secondly, a failure to implement a humane immigration policy. The poem can thus be read as a plea for either more democracy, or a more important role for the people

55 Again, the intertextual reference “a pink-fringed cloud” in the Dutch original is more evident: “een roze wolkenrand” and Homer’s “de rozevingerige dageraad” (Homer, n.d., book 3, verse 404).
56 “En zo begint het liedje andermaal” [“And the song once again will have begun”] in Dutch has stronger negative connotations of senseless repetition.
of Europe. The discourse of the “Europe of Citizens,” identified in Part I as a way of constructing Europe as a political project, is crucial. The poem attempts to pinpoint the birth of “we, the people of Europe.” The second part of the preamble is entitled “[Beginning],” and the second strophe reads:

We, it moans, we.
It listens.
The mouth is not dry yet.
Again it stutters.
An answer comes. (Van Reybrouck as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 14)

This stanza is followed by the third part of the preamble, “[We]:”

All of us together, people of Europe, Europe the old
Of warriors and bulls, Europe the new, slumber and peace,
We, people of Europe, so different, so much alike,
Of all professions, trades and crafts, humble and proud,
Costly and beggarly, labour and learning, sad and glad: (Van Istendael as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 15)

It is the constitution of a European “we” that forms the focus of this preamble, and the Dutch legal scholar Willem Witteveen (2009) underlined in his essay on The European Constitution in Verse how it contrasts with the formal European Constitution in this respect:

It already begins with the preamble [to The European Constitution in Verse] that is consciously contrasted with the controversial preamble of the draft European Constitution. This is the moment when, in a real constitution, the people are constituted: We, the people of Europe. The official version of 2003 has omitted this. The president and vice-presidents of the European Council submit a text that is by consensus adopted by the members of the European Convention, to which they express gratitude “because they have drafted this constitution on behalf of the citizens and states of Europe.” Thus, already at the start, there is no mention of a European people that manifests itself, it is a report of a procedure that is executed on behalf of the citizens and states that are represented separately and conceptually divided (in hindsight,
this can be seen as prophetic). Immediately, a unity is missing. Who reads the European Constitution, does not hear a people speaking. It is therefore a mystery who is speaking. [III.25] (p. 250)

Thus, this emergence of a European “we” from the people of Europe creates an important political act in a constitution—an act that the original European Constitution failed to perform. Whereas a poetic text cannot perform such a political act, this constitution in verse aims to remind the readers of what should have been at stake in the original: in the latter, it is thus unclear who speaks. The poetic constitution addresses this lacuna by presenting a list of specific individuals (in the contribution of Geert van Istendael), each from one of the 27 member states that comprised the European Union in 2009, for example: “Ole, the wind engineer, from Roskilde / Ines and her fish from Figueira da Foz” (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 15). It is a moment of a poetic *pars pro toto*, in which each individual symbolises an EU member state, yet in the context of a constitution, this list also addresses the issue of representation, and the right to have a voice. In the words of the Irish poet Theo Dorgan, in article 21, entitled “The Right to Citizenship”: “I am a citizen, not consumer, name not number” (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 37). It is therefore important to conclude that, in *The European Constitution in Verse*, it is this group of individuals from all member states that speaks with one voice. This means that the multilingualism of European diversity and the polyphony inherent to this poem is juxtaposed with a politically unified voice. Heynders (2016) argues: “This is a participatory work without one dominant voice, the consequence of which is a *heteroglossia* of European voices and discourses” (p. 122, emphasis in original), although, from a political perspective, the opposite—bringing different voices together into a single European “we”—is equally important.

Besides failing to create this European “we” in the original Constitution, the second failure of Europe as a political project addressed in the poem is the EU’s immigration policy. The contributions here range from poets who address the issue of refugees and immigration in their texts—for example in article 8ter (“The future: where we all begin to dream / Those who now arrive in canoes and sweat hope out of their pores”; Queipo as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 26)—to poets adopting the perspective of an immigrant, as in article 71ter, “Migration”: “I saw fear gripped against the cold nightface / on a boat scratching its course on a Mediterranean blue” (Clare Azzopardi as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 80). Poets from outside Europe, some of them in exile, add their voices and personal experiences to this chorus as well, as in 72bis, “Exile”: “Far away from home. . . / of the land of my birth” (Tahar Bekri as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch,
However, these voices are not just different stories and perspectives: The European Constitution in Verse might be read as a “j’accuse” towards EU policies on immigration. The Belgian poet Bart Vonck expressed this critique most poignantly in the penultimate article 76, “The Failure of Europe,” as follows:

Fortunate Europe has failed:
vain, vacuous project, whose core
was a real force, unutilised, betrayed.
Fortress of Europe, inhospitable stronghold
that refuses to share its lost dream
with others. But those who, obsessed with Europe,
because they have nothing,
undertake one last suicidal attempt,
are headed for a death by drowning.
Death girds up this continent with water,
like an elastic chastity belt.
Europe doesn’t hand out life belts.
It subsidises its cows till they are
bloated, and leaves the sea alone. (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, pp. 86–87)

The poem thus becomes an accusation voiced by representatives of the European people, and as an attempt to address European policies.

It should be noted that both perceived failures—the lack of a European “we” and the EU’s inhumane immigration policies—do not seem to be rejections of the European Union per se, despite the explicit critique of this “failed project.” An argument for this interpretation can be found in the fifth part of the poem, “European Hymn,” which consists of a list of translations of the word “bread” (see also the earlier quotation from Heynders, 2016, p. 123). The editors introduced this enumeration as follows:

57 See also the articles 50 “The Damned and the Pilgrim Fathers” and 50bis “Gastarbeiteurs” [“Migrant Workers”] (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, pp. 58–59).
The European hymn receives new words. Beethoven’s *Ode an die Freude* is to be sung using the word for bread in a large number of European languages, official as well as lesser used ones. The major world languages and several non-European minority languages will also make their appearance. (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 91)

Here, the interaction with the formal document provides an interesting insight into the poem. It is striking that of the most contentious elements in the original European Constitution, the proposed EU anthem *Ode an die Freude* is selected to conclude this poetic constitution. Together with the flag, the European anthem was proposed in the formal Constitution as one of the important symbols of the European Union. The rejection of the original Constitution by the Netherlands and France might have had to do with this proposal. After complaints from the governments of the UK, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic about the “nationalistic” associations that these symbols might evoke, the revised text in the Lisbon Treaty from 2007 refers neither to a flag, nor to an anthem (van Middelaar, 2013). Still, this poetic constitution reinstalls the anthem in the shape of a European “hymn.” The presentation of *The European Constitution in Verse* in 2009 during the Passa Porta Festival even contained a performance by a choir, singing the list of words for bread to Beethoven’s *Ode and die Freude* (PassaportaBRXL, 2009). By replacing the word “anthem” with “hymn,” and using in total 76 languages, this anthem is effectively turned into a song of praise, not only for linguistic diversity, but also for diversity, polyphony, and openness between Europeans and non-Europeans in general—one that draws specifically on a critical assessment of European immigration policies. At the same time, set to the melody of the proposed and rejected anthem of the European Union, the European hymn also alludes to the other failure: that there is nothing yet that binds Europeans into a political “we.”

It is from this perspective, by addressing the failures of EU policies, that the poem aligns itself with the general intentions of the organisers, as well as attempts to engage citizens and to open up discussion on issues of democracy and border control. From this point of view, *The European Constitution in Verse* aims to contribute to the construction of a European political identity. The institutional discourse on cultural identity, “unity in diversity,” is also critically questioned by other poets, as the articles by Queipo and Verheggen have shown (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 26, pp. 45–46). The European hymn thus exemplifies how *The European Constitution in Verse* negotiates between on the one hand, the call for “more Europe”—a constitution that creates a European demos—and the emphasis on diversity and the sensitivities towards possible nationalistic
connotations and exclusiveness that an anthem and a constitution might bring on the other. Balancing optimism and scepticism on European cultural unity whilst simultaneously propagating a political European “we” and an openness beyond its political borders, The European Constitution in Verse thus creates a multifaceted image of Europe. The next section addresses precisely the ambiguity of poetic language that provides an opportunity to construct an image of European identity that negotiates different and sometimes opposing perspectives.

10.2 “Myths Past and Future”: The Role of Literature

The organisers of this project have frequently underlined the importance of the poetic form: that the text was never meant as a political statement or a pamphlet. Rather, the poem was meant as an example of how poetry can question institutional narratives, as argued by the organisers in documents outlining their intentions (e.g. van Reybrouck, 2008; van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009b). How the participating authors in this project perceive the role of literature in European identity formation will be illustrated by highlighting two aspects of this poem: the intertextual literary references, which bring well-known European literary texts to the fore, and its interplay with the genre that inspired this poem—a formal constitution.

The importance of literary stories, poetry, and myths in the construction of European identity is called upon often in different contributions through many intertextual references. An example is article 14, “The Members,” by Xavier Queipo:

So many tones, so many hidden stones and waters and pastures,
so many pulsing voices, so many myths past and future
My Cid dead and on horseback, Siegfried defending the Ring of the Nibelung,
Beowulf against all the powers, and Roland sounding the hunting horn.

. . .

The sea announces new myths, and the force of the wind stops in the empire of
blending to wait for Godot. (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 31)

The members of this European community are literary figures from the past and the future who do not exhibit any homogeneity; it is “the empire of / blending” that is constituted by these mythological

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58 In Dutch: “het mestiezenrijk.”
heroes. In line with the argument made by the organisers, who referred to the abduction of Europa, mythical imagery is used to open up borders and extend the horizons of Europe. The story of Europa’s abduction also features prominently in the contributions, comparable to the role it had in the texts by the organisers: as a means by which to open up a public debate on Europe’s identity and future. The Romanian poet Mircea Dinescu, in article 44, defended “The Right to Marriages of Convenience” by calling upon Shakespeare’s *Othello* and the myth of the abduction as follows:

Since Shakespeare can afford  
to blow his nose in Desdemona’s handkerchief,  
why can’t I play toreador with the bull that abducted Europa?  
I’d like to slay it with my invisible-ink pen thrust right between its horns,  
so I can contract with the damsel a marriage of convenience  
and get without a hitch a French, a Belgian or a German passport (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 52)

Desdemona’s handkerchief prompts the storyline of Othello, a character depicted as someone of “Moorish” (i.e. North-African) descent in a Venetian community, through whom the dual topics of borders and inclusiveness are raised. In the same way that Shakespeare can provide his interpretation of this story of love and racism, the poetic “I” proposes to twist the myth of Europa as well, by killing the bull that abducted this girl. A marriage of convenience might then lead to a much-needed document: a passport from a North-European country. These lines reveal how intertextual literary references and acts of rewriting address current political issues of undocumented migrants. Whilst this article is set in a humorous tone, the contribution by the Tunisian author Tahar Bekri, who evoked the image of the abduction of Europa to draw a parallel with current refugees attempting to cross the border in article 71bis on migration, is less light-hearted:

What to tell you Princess Europe  
Daughter of Agenor king of Phoenicia  
In your father’s country  
The sea still encircles the cedars  
That languish among the birches  
The ships still depart charged with the earth’s damned
In documents produced by the organisation, the myth of Europa functioned as a plea for political values able to strengthen the European Union as a multicultural society. The same reinterpretation can be seen in the contribution by the poets here as well. Whilst Europa was taken to another continent by a bull, as the poem by Bekri suggests, for example, current individuals cross the border in the claws of wolves—the people smugglers. As literary scholar Sibylle Baumbach (2015) points out, this reinterpretation is part of a general development: how European myths—and especially the story of Europa—are experiencing a revival in 20th-century European literature,

first and foremost because they epitomize three key concepts fundamental to the idea of Europe, namely alienation, liberation, and invention . . . . To read the myth of Europe not as a story of separation but of the unification of differences and to re-evaluate its cosmopolitan roots in antiquity is both the task and the opportunity of “new European literature.” (pp. 65–66)

Intertextual references in this poem not only call upon literary characters and myths: the poem also engages in an interplay with the language of formal, juridical documents. It does so by underlining the major differences between poetry and this juridical genre, mostly in the recurrent theme of chaos, uncertainty, and imperfection. Article 10 by the Hungarian poet Péter Kántor, entitled “Truth,” expresses doubts about the firm basis of “truths” that are not as self-evident as one might expect from a constitution:

Then again, it’s the kind
of thing one might want to possess all the same,
and would readily proclaim: My truths, our truths!
Well then, that’s a basis one can build on. Although
it’s not for certain, although we must build all the same. (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 27)
Article 12, entitled “Constant Incompleteness,” points out in similar fashion that

as much time as we have
time to live, time to share
we will live in uncertainty and imperfection (Ališanka as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 30)

This state of imperfection also counts for “The Rule of Law”, which is the title of article 13: “Laws that are light-years from reality. / Oceans of doubt” (Queipo as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 30). All of these instances can be juxtaposed with juridical language and the firm basis, beyond doubt, that is suggested in these texts. Eternal truths are thus exchanged for “this new rainbow of doubt” (Chenjerai Hove as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 72). The idea that nothing is everlasting is central to the contribution of the Catalan poet Narcís Comadira, who wants “to sing of some harder stones” (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 32) in article 16, entitled “Power”:

Granite, for example, a difficult stone,
with its seams of quartz, sparks of mica, grey
or pink in colour. . . .
No, granite
only breaks, jagged, and ends up as sand,
or before that, dragged by a rush of whitewater,
pieces crash into each other, clatter and become round
and turn into gravel and pebbles and eventually,
even smaller, a carpet of rocky jawbreakers. (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, pp. 32–33)

This poem, of which the verse “Granite, for example” became the title of the Dutch edition from 2011, expresses the idea that even things that might seem timeless and firm, such as a stone as hard as granite, are destined to be pulverised and disappear. The rule of law, existing power structures, eternal truths—despite our attempts to create these institutions via texts such as constitutions, this poetic constitution suggests that these attempts should not be taken for granted, not least as article 1 states that “[s]ince the beginning everything has sweated with chaos” (Queipo as cited in Van
Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 21). Perhaps only in verse might a constitution be created that truly offers no firm hold on reality; one that is able to express doubt and deny absolute truths.

These intertextual references to both literary characters and legal texts thus reflect the role of poetry and literature in European identity formation, as also envisioned by the organisers of this project. By drawing parallels to urgent political discussions of identity, borders, and migration policies, the texts enable discussion. At the same time, the specificity of poetry as a genre is underlined, as—contrasted with the original Constitution—a poetic texts leaves room for interpretation, disorder, and imperfection. The final article, number 77, on “The Statute of Poetry”, contains explicit comments on the role of poetry in society and illustrates the observations in this chapter on the role of literature in European identity formation. As discussed in the previous chapter, Vermeersch (personal communication, October 31, 2008) invited the contributors to come up with alternatives for Shelley’s famous dictum “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” This final article consists of three verses by three different poets.\footnote{As every participating poet was asked to offer their own interpretation, this final article is perhaps less extensive than originally planned.}

Poets are will-o’-the-wisps: they illuminate nothing but recall that light exists.

Poets are the cough and the stutter, the murmur and the silence of the world.

Poets are the Echoes of Tomorrow. (Francis Dannemark, Franzobel and Péter Kántor as cited in Van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 87)

In the light of Shelley’s high regard for poets, the final article of The European Constitution in Verse reveals a humbler interpretation of the role of poets in the world: namely that contemporary poets are merely recalling, murmuring, and echoing. However, this chapter has argued that it precisely in the process of recalling, murmuring, and echoing that this poem attempts to interact with society. Recalling classical mythology, the myth of Europa’s abduction is reinterpreted as a contribution to the political debate on the EU’s immigration policies. Echoing the slogan “unity in diversity,” the institutional narrative of cultural identity is addressed by critically questioning the sources of unity and the equality of different languages. The poem engages with the official European Constitution, however, compared to the loudness of this extensive institutional document and its proclamation of eternal truths, this poetic version seems to be just a murmur.
10.3 “Europe Will Be Belgian, or Will Not Be at All”: Focus Author Geert van Istendael

The Flemish poet, novelist, essayist, and columnist Geert van Istendael, born in 1947, was a member of the Brussels Poetry Collective during the development of *The European Constitution in Verse*. However, his interest in European culture and the workings of the European Union pre-dates this. Already in the 1990s, he was engaged in critically analysing his “neighbours” (e.g. van Istendael, 1989). He lives in Brussels, only a short distance from EU institutional buildings. His fascination with Europe might have developed from his well-known analysis of Belgium in *Het Belgisch labyrint* [*The Belgian Labyrinth*], in which he concluded:

> This country that has for the past one hundred and seventy years stubbornly kept peace, that for the past one hundred and seventy years has solved insoluble problems, that for the past one hundred and seventy years has chosen peace and democracy over civil war . . . that Belgium is not only a miniature of Europe . . . that Belgium is also a shining example for polymorphic Europe. [III.26] (van Istendael, 1989, p. 302)

Van Istendael contributed to *The European Constitution in Verse* at a very earlier stage. He composed the preamble both as a way to introduce the project to a wider audience and as an invitation, asking other poets to participate. His various media performances (van Istendael, 2008; van Istendael & van Reybrouck, 2008) connected with this project thus date from before the publication. Afterwards, Van Istendael toured around Europe with other participants, attending readings. His contribution to this project was republished in its entirety in 2010 under the title “Van de Europese Grondwet in verzen” [“Of the European Constitution in Verse”] as part of his collection of poems entitled *Sociale zekerheid en andere gedichten* [*Social Security and Other Poems*] (van Istendael, 2010). Large fragments of this poem are found in the final text of the constitution, mixed with the verses of other poets by Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch. Juxtaposing this complete text, other (literary and non-literary) texts, and interviews on Europe with the fragments in *The European Constitution in Verse* enables a more in-depth reading of Van Istendael’s contribution to this project. In this analysis, the focus will be on showing how Van Istendael’s contribution transforms and translates the institutional discourse of cultural “unity in diversity” into a critique of EU institutions and policies. It thus combines a focus on European culture (prevalent in the whole poem, as discussed in section 10.1) with the intended aims of the organisers to engage in a political debate.
The European history of death and destruction is the starting point for *The European Constitution in Verse*, and one of the most compelling strophes in the first part of the preamble, entitled “[Nothing],” is by Van Istendael:

Europe that flickers and stifles and bleeds,
Horsewhips and burning, gas chambers, gallows,
Europe, history, turbid filtration,
Battlefields, poppies, gravestones, hatred. (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 13)

These explicit images are crucial, as explained Van Istendael in the Dutch political talk show “Buitenhof” in 2008 (see also Chapter 14), where he read from his preamble by way of an invitation to poets to participate in the project (van Istendael, 2008). Interestingly, the original text of the Constitution falls short in that sense, as one can only find a brief reference to Europe’s “bitter experiences” in this legal version. Van Istendael (2008) argued during this talk show that it represented a rather weak expression of the many wars, witch hunts, and other miseries in Europe, which he suggested should have been mentioned more extensively and explicitly in the formal document. In “[We],” he compared past and present as follows: “All of us together, people of Europe, Europe the old / Of warriors and bulls, Europe the new, slumber and peace” (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 15). The use of the word “slumber” here suggests that this state of peace and rest might only be temporary. This observation calls to mind the contribution of Gerrit Komrij, discussed earlier, also warning that the time of dreams and unity might not be everlasting, since “the song once again will have begun” (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 60).

A prominent theme in Van Istendael's thinking, both on Europe and in *The European Constitution in Verse* in general, is the defence of diversity: “We, people of Europe, so different, so alike” (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 15). He instrumentalises this diversity in his contribution as multilingualism and different communities of faith. Article 73, “The Freedom of Religion,” is also by Van Istendael and corresponds in significant part to the poem “Wat bevrijdt ons?” [“What Liberates Us?”] from *Sociale zekerheid en andere gedichten* and can be read as a plea for (religious) tolerance:

For here, in our city,
there dwells beneath each one
another god. . . .

_Hier muss ein jeder nach seiner Façon selig werden_ [Here everyone has to be blessed in his own way]
(van Istendael, 2010, p. 41)

Together with other poets, he also praised the linguistic diversity of Europe, in line with the multilingual “European hymn.”

His stanza for article 31, “The Right to Language,” reads:

Taste every language on your tongue,
Hiccupped, coughed, cursed, sung,
Show your vocabularies with pride,
Do not yield a single word, be it grey as dust,
Yellow as yolks, red as lovers, not one word (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 45)

In the context of his original poem, Van Istendael’s emphasis on multilingualism becomes more apparent, as he created an opposition between Europe and the “Other” (which is in this case the United States):

Those who demand one language, expel themselves, want white houses in America, betray Europe’s black algebra. [III.28] (van Istendael, 2010, p. 38)

In an essay of 1996, he defended a similar position:

Europe would lose its most important characteristic, namely its diversity, if the major languages, the major cultures, the major states would assert themselves at the expense of the smaller ones… We hardly exaggerate when we state that Europe will be Belgian or nothing. [III.29] (van Istendael, [1996] 1999, p. 50)

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60 In his poetry collection _Sociale zekerheid en andere gedichten_, Van Istendael explained that this last verse is a quotation from the Prussian King Frederick the Great, who wrote this remark in the margin of a formal document in 1740 (van Istendael, 2010, p. 82).

61 He also praised his home city of Brussels precisely for the many languages spoken. In 2000, Van Istendael was asked to recite a poem to open the festivities in Brussels as one of the European Capitals of Culture that year. The long poem he wrote, “Taalmachine” [“Language Machine”], contains different languages, dialects, and quotations from other poets throughout history, and calls upon the city as follows: “Speak, Brussels, speak, / you have so many mouths, / in not one of them lives the truth alone/ not one of them speaks nothing but the truth” [III.27] (van Istendael, 2001, p. 37).
Essays and columns show how Van Istendael is increasingly concerned about the fact that the European Union is losing its “Belgian” character; due to unifying regulations, lack of solidarity, and the ubiquitous discourse of capitalism, the European Union loses the cultural diversity that is so cherished by this poet. Over the last few years, Van Istendael has therefore become an outspoken critic of the European Union. In similar ways to *The European Constitution in Verse* as a whole, he attempts to address the problems of the current European Union, and to oppose institutional narratives. His contribution to this project shows how he took up issues that he has raised in his other publications as well. Below, four of these concerns voiced regarding the European Union will be discussed. His starting point for these concerns is the protection of cultural diversity, and thus the discourse of “unity in diversity,” but this diversity is presented as a critique on EU policies.

Firstly, he addressed the lack of solidarity, and a certain harshness in EU policies. He contributed article 25, “The Right to Housing,” writing:

Here, everyone has the right to dry hair,
To a roof, no more than that, to keep
What makes us people, a fireplace, a chair,
Sheltered from hailstorms and barbaric scare. (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 39)

For Van Istendael, the current lack of solidarity—of people not having the right to a roof over their heads—is tied to the fact the European Union is turning monolingual and thus less diverse. In an interview with Hans Steketee for the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, meaningfully entitled “I Am Disappointed in This Arrogant Europe,” Van Istendael explained: “If you adopt English as working language, as is currently going on, then you take on a whole ideological model. The Anglo-Saxon harshness collides with the social-democratic model and it collides with the European solidarity” [III.30] (Steketee, 2012, n.p.). A similar worry can be read in his stanza in article 63, “Currency”:

Long gone, the seasons of raw blood,
gone, gone, gold dubloon and ducat,
past too the frank, guilder and mark.
We glide now each in like rigged bark
across this tideless sea of unity,
Even though the sea of unity may be tideless, the sense of loss is tangible in these verses, and this sea, or the shared “Mare Nostrum,” is merely the terrain of merchants and commercialisation—a second concern of Van Istendael. He voiced his criticism of the euro as well, for example, in an essay of 1999, referring to this currency as “collective madness” [III.31] (van Istendael, 1999, p. 218), and the European Commission only serving the interests of present-day merchants (van Istendael, 2002).

A third concern for Van Istendael is addressed in the seemingly friendly article 24bis, again by his hand. In “The Right to Apple Trees,” he writes:

Here, everyone has the right to apple trees,
On mighty trunks from long forgotten dreams.
Bramley and knotty russet, golden noble,
Tart flesh from now on shall the palate please. (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 39)

However, read in the light of an earlier essay from 1996, Van Istendael’s concern appears to be not so much about apple trees, but about the right to refuse standardisation resulting from EU policies. The focus is thus on the variety of apple trees—the older types of apples referred to in the third verse. He has witnessed the disappearance of this variety of trees in the area where he grew up, due to EU policies that encouraged farmers through subsidy to choose only one type of apple:

Orchards with pear and apple trees, high and deep, covered the walled farmhouses with their mighty archways. And then came Europe, or rather eurocracy. From the start, eurocracy only has had one goal: everything that is beautiful about Europe, all that European citizens appreciate, has to be destroyed… Old-fashioned, unprofitable and consequently destined to disappear, were the acidulous “Belle de Boskoop” apple, the bright-red “Sterappel,” the humble “muttonheads,” the “Keuleman,” the “Brabant Bellefleur.” [III.32] (van Istendael, 1996, pp. 176–177)
This essay by Van Istendael places his stanzas in *The European Constitution in Verse* into the context of criticism of the uniformity that is the result of decrees and regulations from the European Union.62

Van Istendael’s fourth and final concern is the sovereignty of the people in Europe. The emergence of a political “we” in this poetic constitution—as opposed to the original document, as Witteveen (2009) pointed out—is crucial in this text. In the final edition of *The European Constitution in Verse*, the preamble starts with “[Nothing]”, to be followed by “[Beginning]”, and then “[We].” However, in the original contribution by Van Istendael (2010), the preamble immediately opens with “we”: “All of us together, those who love us, those who hate us” [III.33] (p. 25). This indicates his personal emphasis on the idea of representation and citizenship in the European Union. As discussed in the previous section, this “we” consists of a concrete group of citizens, each representing their own country, with short descriptions of their occupation: “Ole, the wind engineer, from Roskilde / Ines and her fish from Figueira da Foz” (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009a, p. 15). In the interview in “Buitenhof” mentioned above, Van Istendael (2008) read from this passage and explained how the original European Constitution appeared to be a document dated from before the French revolution, as the concept of sovereignty of the people was nowhere to be found. This cornerstone of democracy, he argued, is therefore the reason he opened his preamble with a “we” (van Istendael, 2008). Again, this issue of representation has been taken up by Van Istendael before. He worried in 1999 that the emphasis on business and trade in the European Union might lead to a lack of democracy (van Istendael, 1999), and afterwards, in his Huizinga lecture in 2012, entitled *De parochie van Sint-Precarius* [The Parish of Saint Precarious], he made it clear that technocracy instead of democracy rules in the European Union (van Istendael, 2013). He explained this analysis in an interview with Steketee in *NRC Handelsblad* as follows:

I think that they go with the technocratic flow, which, by the way, is a design fault from the very beginning: too little democracy. Europe depends on the interplay of forces between, what is called, the will of the people, as pronounced in parliaments, and ideas that come from the top. I think that the will of the people is completely ignored these days. [III.34] (Steketee, 2012, n.p.)

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62 In his dystopian novel *De zwarte steen* [The Black Stone], Van Istendael (2003) conveyed a similar message; it depicts the European Union in the year 2092, which has dissolved into two large blocks: the overregulated South, with safe and flavourless products for consumption, and the North, or the free economic zone, where one’s life is at risk, but at least the food still tastes great.
These concerns voiced by Van Istendael in his oeuvre in general, and in his contribution to *The European Constitution in Verse* specifically—the lack of solidarity and democracy, and the increasing uniformity and capitalist values—all correspond to the ways in which this poem attempts to open up a dialogue about the workings of the European Union.

Taking cultural identity as a starting point—defending diversity and multilingualism as crucial to the idea of Europe—this section aimed to show how Van Istendael reinterprets this institutional discourse of “unity in diversity” as a form of critique on Europe as a political project. His oeuvre shows how Van Istendael is highly critical of the European Union: “Speaking for myself, I would not mind if the European Union, destroying systematically what is dear to me in Europe, would collapse today . . . . Down with the European Union, long live Europe” [III.35] (van Istendael, 1999, p. 121). As this quotation already suggests, to Van Istendael, Europe is a plurality of cultures and languages. “Europe will be Belgian, or will not be at all” (van Istendael, [1996] 1999, p. 50), as he summarised his analysis in earlier work. Heynders (2016) characterised Van Istendael’s position as follows: “The EU denies everything that makes Europe precious: cultural diversity, humanism, small-scale structures and democracy, it undermines differences, and moulds everything into one economic and English blur” (p. 134). Van Istendael’s contribution to *The European Constitution in Verse* can indeed be read as a firm critique of European political institutions that are a threat to diversity: they undermine solidarity, implement uniformity, and impose monolingualism and “monomonetaryism” (van Istendael, 1999, p. 228). Europe, in other words, cannot be found in institutions, but rather lies elsewhere—for example, in books: “I read European thoughts in half a dozen languages, in books that are centuries older than the European Economic Thought which thrones on towering dogmas” [III.36] (van Istendael, 2002, p. 181). A meeting with a Hungarian schoolboy, who is able to converse with him in different languages, thus provoked Van Istendael (1999) to complain:

In his thin little body is more Europe than in the entire European Commission. The true Europe comes from a farming village at the gates of the Balkans. It speaks six languages, accessible and difficult ones, classical and contemporary ones. The true Europe is not even fifteen years old, that is to say, it has a future. [III.37] (p. 196)

This observation from 1999 foreshadows his sustained critique on EU institutions that do not represent the “true Europe” (van Istendael, 1999, p. 196), as discussed in this section; a critique that he voiced in *The European Constitution in Verse* as well.
10.4 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to answer the question of how the image of Europe and the role of literature in European identity formation in *The European Constitution in Verse* compares to the aims and images initially formulated by the organisers. Regarding the construction of European identity, the organisers of *The European Constitution in Verse* aimed for this polyphonic document—consisting of a range of different voices and stories that at the same time constitute a European “we”—to open up a debate between engaged citizens and to contribute to the emergence of a European public sphere. The discourse of the “Europe of Citizens”—an important narrative with which to reflect on European political identity—was therefore prevalent in their documents. Heynders (2016) perceived Van Istendael and Van Reybrouck as examples of how “[t]he project of active European citizenship . . . can be incited by intellectuals, who reconsider the role of nations, democratise borders and margins of Europe, and try to overcome interior divisions” (p. 138).

However, *The European Constitution in Verse* initially seems to diverge from these stated intentions of the organisers, as the discourse of cultural identity (cultural diversity, linguistic plurality, historical unity) is as important as the political discourse of citizenship. However, this chapter has argued that precisely the images of cultural diversity open up political reflections on the European Union. The contribution of Van Istendael exemplifies such a strategy: in his praise for multilingualism and concern about areas where cultural diversity is at risk, he simultaneously critiques EU policies such as unifying regulations, neo-liberal strategies, and the lack of democracy. In his lecture *De parochie van Sint-Precarius*, another instance of this reframing of European culture as a point of critique of EU institutions can be found. Here, he argued that social security is the cornerstone of European civilisation: “But then we, Europeans, should have the courage to proclaim to the world: organised solidarity is a master piece of European civilisation. Such as Beethoven’s Ninth” [III.38] (van Istendael, 2013, p. 27). The reinterpretation of the institutional discourse of European cultural identity as a means to criticise the European Union as a political project is thus pivotal in this reading of *The European Constitution in Verse*.

The second perspective—an analysis of the role of literature—resulted in the conclusion that the project’s poetic constitution is neither about the individual poets themselves, nor about the importance of the tradition of great European writers. This stance is perhaps reflected in the selection made by Vermeersch and Van Reybrouck from Van Istendael’s contribution. Whilst most of it is used in the poetic constitution, a list of well-known as well as lesser-known poets from the literary history
of every member state (ranging from Dante to Ida Gerhard), called upon to inspire this constitution in the original text by Van Istendael (2010, pp. 29–30), was left out of the selection. Rather, *The European Constitution in Verse* draws attention to the poetic form in which existing narratives and European identity formation are transformed and translated. This corresponds with the aims of the organisers as discussed in the previous chapter: their goal was to challenge institutional narratives that have failed to inspire people, not by providing a straightforward political pamphlet, but by using multi-interpretable, poetic language that shifts between pessimism and optimism, and national interests and a post-national political “we.” This poetic intervention thus aimed to bridge the gap between European people and EU politics. Intertextual references to literary figures and classical myths draw parallels with, for example, political discussions on borders and migration. Interactions with institutional narratives and the “official” European Constitution also reveal how in the end, this poetic constitution resists becoming a legislative text: doubt, chaos, scepticism, imperfection, and a celebration of incompleteness are all recurring themes.
In 2015, Nexus organised a one-day symposium in Amsterdam entitled “Je suis Européen!” as part of their project “The Return of Europe.” A café was constructed on stage, including a bar, people reading newspapers, playing chess, and even a waiter serving drinks. The brochure accompanying the symposium explained that the reference to a café was based on the famous Nexus lecture The Idea of Europe by George Steiner (“Je suis Européen! Nexus Symposium,” 2015), which he opened with the observation: “Draw the coffee-house map and you have one of the essential markers of the ‘idea of Europe’” (Steiner, 2015, p. 17). Thus, according to Steiner, the “café” is where European intellectuals gathered to discuss issues of culture and politics; this is why the symposium was staged as an informal meeting in a café. The symposium is described on the Nexus website as follows:

In June 2015, some of Europe’s foremost intellectuals and politicians gathered at the Nexus Symposium in Amsterdam, addressing the current state of affairs in Europe. The European Union is based on the illusion that the market will unite Europe. This leads to an existential crisis, with the EU resembling a house without a foundation. What kind of policy should the European Union embrace to reverse the anti-European spirit? How can we create a more confident Europe—a Europe that is more than an economic vehicle or a museum of past glory? Who is European? And what does it take to be a European?

Their conclusion was that a future for Europe is feasible when based upon a united Europe; upon a revival of the cultural-moral awareness that transcends race and faith; upon an ideal of civilization that may inspire millions of citizens to speak up with passion and conviction, saying in their own language: Je suis Européen! (“Je suis Européen! Nexus Symposium,” 2015, n.p.)

This short summary exemplifies the findings in the previous chapter on this project: Europe as a shared cultural heritage is contrasted to the current European Union, but in the paratexts by the organisation, both discourses are also conflated, since the heritage of European humanism is at the same time proposed as a solution to the political and economic problems of the European Union. European cultural identity is instrumentalised in a metaphysical way: a soul, or state of mind, is what binds Europeans. According to Rob Riemen, founder of the institute and organiser of the symposium, literature forms this “soul” of Europe, the source of inspiration for a moral and cultural awareness that might lead Europeans out of a politico-economic deadlock (Riemen, personal communication,
n.d., Verplancke, 2015). Literature is thus interpreted as being capable of projecting an alternative idea of European integration. The European Union is criticised for relying on only one narrative—economic benefits—which can neither inspire nor lead to solidarity. Riemen (2015b) argued in his introduction to De terugkeer van Europa—published in the same year and containing contributions from the participants of the symposium—that the publication might offer a way out of this soulless economic project.

The publication De terugkeer van Europa consists of 27 essays by writers, academics, politicians, musicians, and members of European cultural organisations, such as Europa Nostra.63 In the light of the research question regarding the role of literature, the focus of this analysis will be on the contributions of seven authors and poets: the Irish novelist Colm Tóibín; the Polish poet Adam Zagajewski; the German historian and novelist Philipp Blom; the Spanish author Javier Marías; the British historian and writer Timothy Garton Ash; the Greek writer Apostolos Doxiadis; and the Dutch novelist Arnon Grunberg. Grunberg, who has voiced his opinion on issues of European identity and integration on many occasions, will be the focus author in this chapter. Whilst the other focus authors have been highly critical of the European Union, Grunberg defends the European project. Intertwined with these contributions are lectures and essays by the following European writers, politicians, philosophers, and essayists published between 1849 and 1963: Victor Hugo; Robert Musil; Stefan Zweig; Joseph Roth; Francesco Flora; Jean Guéhenno; Karl Jaspers; Stephen Spender; Winston Churchill; and Robert Schuman. This historical outlook provides a framework within which to understand current crises in the light of the origins of the European Union. De terugkeer van Europa thus aims to provide insights into the goals and thoughts underpinning the history of European integration, in a bid to lead Europeans out of the crises envisioned by Riemen (2015b). Many of the contributions to this publication therefore adopt a broad outlook—for example, by providing a brief history of the European Union. However, one can see how there is little agreement between the contributors on how to describe the birth of the European Union, as differing images of Europe lie at the basis of such historical overviews.

This first section of this chapter will address these images, followed by a section that examines how the contributors view the role of literature and writers. This second section contends that some participating authors question the grand narrative of humanism and warn against investing hope in culture to deal with current political issues in Europe. This chapter thus argues that a number of essays,

63 Europa Nostra is an organisation aimed at the protection of European cultural and natural heritage (see www.europanostra.org).
including some by the selected writers, diverge fundamentally from the initial intentions formulated by Riemen, both in their analysis of the problems of the European project, and the envisioned capabilities of writers and literature in solving these issues. Grunberg’s contribution exemplifies such a critical stance towards the ideas behind this initiative.

11.1 Rome, Athens and Jerusalem? Images of Europe

The process of European integration is described by the contributors from both a political and a cultural perspective. At times, both types of account lead to contradictions within De terugkeer van Europa. This section will show how some of the contributors aim to combine cultural and political perspectives of Europe, as Riemen (2015a) proposed in his contribution, whilst at the same time, a number of essays argue precisely against such an approach.

Europe as a political project is described by historians Adam Zamoyski (2015) and Philipp Blom (2015) as both a product of the Second World War, and of more pragmatic transnational developments that pre-dated it. Blom (2015) underlines the importance of the European Union as a peace project; as a political constellation based on the lessons learnt, not only from the Second World War, but also from colonialism, slavery, and racism. The writer Javier Marías (2015) voiced a similar concern in his contribution:

It is only 70 years ago that the Second World War ended. All those centuries before our countries did nothing else but fight each other, those continuous massacres are a sad part of our identity. Strangely enough, the younger generations seem to have no idea of this tradition and they do not realise what an incredible step forward it is that all this has been stopped . . . . You wonder why there is no knowledge of this achievement anymore and why there are so many parties in too many countries that would rather demolish the Union and go back to nefarious nationalism. [III.39] (pp. 202–203, emphasis in original)

These authors perceive the lack of historical awareness, and especially of the memory of the Second World War, as the root of current crises, such as populism and anti-European sentiment. To them, the question is how we should keep the memory of the war alive, as a reminder to future generations.

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64 Pierre Hassner (2015), Marnix Krop (2015), Robert Skidelsky (2015), and Colm Tóibín (2015) adopt a similar political perspective in their essays, addressing issues related to the European Union, such as legitimacy, rising populism, and democracy.
of the importance of the European Union. Historian and essayist Timothy Garton Ash (2015), who frequently publishes on Europe and the European Union, warns that the current generation of Europeans—the “Easyjet- or Erasmus-generation” (p. 220)—is the first one without personal memories of times of war. It was the memories of previous generations that led to support for the European Union, although this support might now erode due to a lack of historical awareness (Garton Ash, 2015).

Adam Zamoyski (2015) takes a more pragmatic approach to the process of European integration and the foundation of the European Union. He argues that the spirit of reconciliation after the Second World War does not do justice to the fact that European cooperation already pre-dated the war:

Yet the realisation of what we now call “Europe” was started and worked out in a reluctant, casual way quite in contradiction to the ambitious visions that we currently cherish. The European Coal and Steel Community of 1951 was no more than what it was called, and did, in fact, not differ that much from the International Steel Cartel of 1926, which did not hold for long . . . . A lot of sweeping statements were used to depict the pile of treaties and administrative meetings that had been effected since 1951 as a grand plan that entirely originated from the spirit of reconciliation after 1945. [III.40] (Zamoyski, 2015, p. 147)

Zamoyski (2015) juxtaposes this view on European integration with the humanistic narrative of European shared cultural roots in “Athens, Rome and Jerusalem,” and in the works of “Erasmus, Montaigne and Kant” (p. 149)—thus, the view put forward by Riemen, for example in his interview with Verplancke (2015). Yet Zamoyski (2015) expresses firm criticism of one the most eloquent defenders of the humanistic approach: George Steiner. Steiner’s previously mentioned essay The Idea of Europe from 2015, based on the Nexus lecture in 2003, provides the entry point for Zamoyski’s essay:

The first time I read the essay De idee Europa [The Idea of Europe] by George Steiner, I was very much impressed by his vast erudition and his elegant writing style . . . . However, on rereading, I was struck by the contradictions, the naiveté and the absence of historical facts and, it is difficult for me to write this, the arrogance that it reveals. . . .
If the word “Europe” really stands for anything, then we have to take the good with the bad and accept that the collapse of the Greek civilisation, the fall of Rome, the Thirty Years War, the massacres in the First World War and the Holocaust are as well part of our past as all the cultural highlights. The attempt to identify and isolate a kind of perfect “imaginary Europe,” that subsequently in one way or another can be projected on this continent, is overshooting the mark. [III.41] (Zamoyski, 2015, pp. 144–146)

The point of Zamoyski’s critique is that Steiner’s “humanistic idyll” (Zamoyski, 2015, p. 149) does not do justice to the partly coincidental and economic aspects of the process of European integration, nor sufficiently considers the dark pages of both European thought and history.

The texts reveal that it is precisely this humanistic perspective that dominates the image of Europe constructed by the contributors—a view that is in line with that of the Nexus Institute as discussed in Part II. Instead of a political perspective, and a focus on the European Union as a product of economic development and a need to prevent war, Europe as a cultural construct prevails in De terugkeer van Europa. However, whilst Zamoyski resists the legacy of Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem as a means to understand the current European Union, it is Costa Carras (2015), a member of Europa Nostra, who noted in his contribution:

But I must admit that I currently have reasons to be pessimistic about the state of the European Union, which has so much to offer but now ignores the core values of the European tradition. Rome, Athens and Jerusalem are the cradle of the European cultural tradition, but the EU currently neglects both Athens and Jerusalem—and that is dangerous. [III.42] (p. 267)

Indeed, a reference to these three cities is precisely also how Riemen defined a European cultural identity in the previously mentioned interview with Verplancke (2015). Many essays in De terugkeer van Europa revolve around this formulation of a European spirit. Humanistic ideals and the search for core values—such as defending the importance of Enlightenment (Al-Azmeh, 2015; Leyers, 2015); humanism (Steinsaltz, 2015); cultural heritage and cultural diversity (Carras, 2015; Dertilis, 2015); and Christian values (Janik, 2015)—can all be found in this publication. A focus on the cultural and philosophical roots of Europe is also evidenced by the inclusion of historical essays, which mainly focus on the “European spirit” (Flora, [1946] (2015); Musil, [1922] 2015); humanism (Guéhenno,
Some of the contributors explicitly follow the line of argument set out by Riemen (2015b) in his introduction to the publication: that only by reviving this European spirit, will a counterweight emerge to the bureaucratic, market-based European Union. Plácido Domingo (2015), for example, argued: “I sincerely believe that our shared culture is the essence of being European. Without culture, the European project is a soulless task” [III.43] (p. 136). The Flemish journalist Jan Leyers (2015) used the metaphor of a human relationship to illustrate the European Union. Leyers suggested that if the US were a couple and they were asked how they fell in love with each other, they would tell a story of elopement to pursue a dream. Yet if the European Union were asked the same, it would simply answer that they were not really in love at all, and just wanted to live together to split the costs of rent and electricity (Leyers, 2015). He stated: “The tragedy is that we allowed Europe to be hijacked by the accountants, by the boys and girls of numbers” [III.44] (Leyers, 2015, p. 115).

Whilst *De terugkeer van Europa* shows a tension between two different images of Europe—Europe as a political construct and a cultural ideal—the emphasis is on the latter. This emphasis comes about, not only because of the selected historical texts on the cultural and philosophical roots of Europe, but also due to contributors who specifically argue along the same lines as the Nexus Institute: that a cultural Europe is essential for the continuation of the European Union as a whole. Yet despite this outlook, some essays clearly take a different point of view, emphasising instead Europe’s economic pragmatism and its dark history of war and colonialism. These authors aim to show how the political constellation of the European Union grew not only—or to some, not at all—from noble ideals. This tension is brought to the fore via the differing views on the role of literature and writers in contemporary Europe expressed in the project.

11.2 “The European Emperor Never Had Clothes”: The Role of Writers and Literature

The importance of the writer’s perspective is immediately apparent from the fact that the majority of the historical essays in *De terugkeer van Europa* are by novelists (Hugo, Musil, Zweig, Roth, Spender). With contributions from Colm Tóibín, Adam Zagajewski, Javier Marías, Timothy Garton Ash, Apostolos Doxiadis, and Arnon Grunberg, the assumption is that not only writers and poets from the past, but also those from the present, might offer valuable insights in Europe’s current crises.

The historical essays and speeches, which span the period from 1849 to 1963, set the tone for understanding the specific role that writers and literature might play in reflecting on Europe. Literature
is perceived by many of the great European writers as an expression of both the European spirit and European values.\textsuperscript{65} Riemen (2008) also took up this line of argumentation in his texts, not only about the project, but also concerning the Nexus Institute more generally, believing that the European spirit of humanism and its related core values of truth and beauty are all expressed through literature. Thus, according to Riemen (2008), the European spirit "is \textit{The Magic Mountain} by Thomas Mann" (p. 14). The speech by Stefan Zweig from 1932, entitled "European Thought in Its Historical Development", is exemplary of this line of thought, as it draws an image of European spiritual development evolving from the Roman Empire to the European humanism that emerged during the Renaissance and the first suggestions that Europe should be not just a cultural, but also a political and economic unity, culminating in the transnational literary movements of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century (Zweig, [1932] 2017). In this representation of history, the European Union becomes the materialisation of a European spirit that has existed for centuries. Despite the fact that Zweig admitted that the spirit of unity and integration is not in the hands of writers and philosophers anymore, as the European spirit of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century is technological\textsuperscript{66}, the importance of novelists has been crucial for the expression of a European identity, rooted in Roman culture and humanism. Zweig summarised his ideas in his 1932 essay as follows:

I wish to attempt, by casting a glance at the intellectual development of Europe, to furnish a brief history of this perennial yearning for unity, in feelings, wills, thoughts and lives, which across two millennia has created the magnificent common edifice which we can proudly name European culture. (Zweig, [1932] 2017, p. 88)

In 1946, when Zweig’s dream of European unity and brotherhood had fallen apart, literary critic and essayist Jean Guéhenno ([1946] 2015) called upon writers, poets, and intellectuals to revive the European spirit, reflected in the individual human being as described by Montaigne, Descartes, and Voltaire. In his speech “Station Europa,” he wrote: “Nowadays, there are many writers who only write to entertain other people, but the real heroes of the mind write and think for the salvation of the other, however ‘salvation’ may be defined” [III.45] (Guéhenno, [1946] 2015, p. 217).

\textsuperscript{65} The essays and speeches by Francesco Flora ([1946] 2015), Stephen Spender ([1946] 2015), and Stephan Zweig ([1932] 2015) are based on this idea.

\textsuperscript{66} Zweig’s argument here can be illustrated with a passage from his autobiography (published posthumously in 1944), \textit{The World of Yesterday}: “In Vienna we shouted with joy when Blériot flew over the channel as if he had been our own hero; because of our pride in the successive triumphs of our technics, our science, a European community spirit, a European national consciousness was coming into being. How useless, we said to ourselves, are frontiers when any plane can fly over them with ease, how provincial and artificial are customs-duties, guards and border patrols, how incongruous in the spirit of these times which visibly seeks unity and world brotherhood?” (Zweig, [1944] 1953, p. 196)
The German historian and novelist Philipp Blom (2015) builds on this idea of European values and the role of literature from the perspective of the current challenges faced by the European Union. He argues in his contribution “Europese identiteit in tijden van verandering” [“European Identity in Times of Change”] that migrants have been, and also will be, coming to the European continent; migration is, furthermore, necessary to prevent a Europe that becomes a permanent “home for the elderly” (Blom, 2015, p. 201). However, the challenge will be to convince newcomers of the importance of European values, which he describes as follows:

But will the future Europe be the Europe of Shakespeare and Cervantes, of the Enlightenment and human rights, of freedom of speech and the separation of church and state? That will depend on us, on the old Europeans, and whether we are able to convince the newcomers in our society that these are the values and achievements that turned Europe into the stable and peaceful place where they have sought refuge, that these values have a future and that the future of Europe is only in their hands. [III.46] (Blom, 2015, p. 201)

Compared to the historical essays and speeches in De terugkeer van Europa, the trust in the important role of literature as an expression of values and a means to revive the European spirit is notably diminished in the contributions by contemporary writers. The idea of a European mind or “spirit” is not taken up by the contemporary novelists and poets who contributed to the volume—albeit with the exception of the novelist Colm Tóibín (2015), who took a more postmodern view:

What is fundamental now . . . is the quality of our laughter and the quality of our despair. With despair I mean . . . more like something fundamental in the spirit of the European culture and in our own spirit as Europeans. [III.47] (pp. 77–78)

Tóibín argues that laughing about our superiors, and even laughing about God, is woven into our literature and the spirit of Europeans. Referring to well-known European novels, he explains:

Laughter, mockery and lasting irreverence have always been part and parcel of the European project, as the readers of Shakespeare, Cervantes and Rabelais will know, and as the admirers of De lotgevallen van de brave soldaat Švejk [The Good Soldier Švejk] and De blikken trom [The Tin Drum] are aware of. The European emperor has never had clothes on. Not only writers but
also European citizens in general take it for granted that the mere idea of inflated power, braggart speeches and being driven around in expensive cars has to be considered as ridiculous. [III.48] (Tóibín, 2015, p. 78)

Despite the fact that Riemen (2015a) refers to the role of intellectuals and grand narratives in a manner that is comparable to the arguments in the historical essays, these contemporary novelists seem more reluctant to perceive themselves as having such a task—to revive the European mind and its humanistic values. Tóibín’s sense of tragedy and laughter is the extent to which a “European spirit” expressed in literature might be acceptable to modern-day writers in De terugkeer van Europa.

However, this does not mean that these novelists do not engage with the tradition of great European writers. The Greek poet Apostolos Doxiadis (2015) opens his contribution with an attempt to define “being European” in the motto of the project “Je suis Européen!” He found this unproblematic in the cultural sense of the word:

I fully support her [a European identity] on the cultural level. If the extent to which we are European refers to the tradition that begins with Homer, Virgil, Plato and Augustine, as we like to think, I am all for it. If it is the source where the oeuvres of Sophocles and Seneca . . . Thomas Mann and T.S. Eliot emerge from and return to, then I will say whole-heartedly that I would—if the big boys let me—like to join the club. [III.49] (Doxiades, 2015, p. 299)

However, Doxiades questions this view of European cultural identity as a basis for European politics. Even though he is involved in European cultural ideals and traditions, he is “highly sceptical” (Doxiades, 2015, p. 300) of attempts to engage in a public debate on European politics from the perspective of European culture.

This is indeed one of the pivotal questions that is addressed in multiple contributions to De terugkeer van Europa—both by novelists and academics. Part II demonstrated how Riemen sees both domains—that of European culture and EU politics—as inextricably linked, in the sense that culture will offer a counterweight to the bureaucracy and the market-based thought processes of European politics and provide people with a sense of belonging. Other contributors do perceive an interrelatedness between culture and politics, but focus mainly on the importance of the cultural policies of the European Union as unifying forces that might legitimise the process of integration—
as for example the vice-president of the cultural heritage foundation Europa Nostra contended (Carras, 2015).67

Yet, other authors and academics diverge from the point of view presented by Riemen in his introduction, and urge instead, albeit via different arguments, for a separation of the discussions on the identity of Europe as a cultural entity and the European Union as a political project—Doxiades being one of these critics. Doxiades (2015) contends that European identity—its ideas and values—might best be discussed from a cultural perspective, but that this issue should be differentiated from any political discussion of the European Union—although, since the rise of populism, the focus should be on political discussion. He concludes:

In view of the attacks by the populists in various European countries, I believe we should enter into a new discussion on the future of Europe, from the right angle. And that angle should not be a disastrous search for European identity . . . But just as when we talk about individuals, we should avoid as far as possible discussing the issue of identity and remain as close as possible to politics. [III.50] (Doxiades, 2015, pp. 306–307)

The Polish poet Adam Zagajewski (2015) draws a similar conclusion regarding the current state of the European Union:

It is clear, and it becomes clearer every month to the good listener, that there is no bridge between the lofty ideal images of Europe that we may find in so many books and essays, between the desire for Europe as expressed, for example, by Czesław Miłosz or Jan Patočka, and the sober reality of the European Alltagspolitik [everyday politics]. . . . High-flying rhetoric, however beautiful and inspiring it may occasionally be, cannot be reconciled with the precarious situation of the current nouveaux pauvres [the new poor]—or with the hubris of small ethnic communities. [III.51] (pp. 110–111)

In his contribution, Riemen evoked the memory of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, here also referred to by Zagajewski. However, Zagajewski highlights the downside of such an approach to the current political problems in Europe, namely the loss of a sense of reality—being out of touch with,

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for example, “angry citizens in Athens” (Zagajewski, 2015, p. 111), which is of increasing concern to the European Union. So, as with Doxiades, Zagajewski urges us to focus on discussions about acute political problems, but not from the perspective of cultural identity and the lofty ideals expressed by writers of the past. However, according to Zagajewski, this does not mean that poets and poetry are of no importance in contemporary Europe. He explains how East-European intellectuals have played a significant role in the downfall of the Soviet-Union, both via the emergence of their ideas in the public sphere, and their courage as an example to others (Zagajewski, 2015). It is therefore a shame that contemporary poets do not seem to take up a similar role of importance in the European Union:

> It is a sad paradox that these intellectuals and writers, now they are dealing with a democratic Europe . . . are even more helpless than they already were in the past. Apparently it was easier to fight against the Central Committee than against big, cold figures, dreary patriotic passions and Russian imperialism-second-round. [III.52] (Zagajewski, 2015, p. 113)

He continues by defining the role that poets should therefore take in the European Union, in which he pleads for optimism—albeit with a classical reference:

> What should “we” do? It seems to me that we have to do our work, work that constitutes the core of our activities, and perhaps we should also take part in the political debate, even if at the end of the day we can probably not do much more than sit out on the porch and reread Voltaire’s Candide. This is an optimistic conclusion—that there will still be porches, and books, and us. [III.53] (Zagajewski, 2015, p. 113)

Both writers and poets—Doxiades and Zagajewski—thus express their reservations about discussing political topics from a cultural perspective, even though Zagajewski still perceives a place for poets within public debate. However, it is not only authors that urge for a distinction to be made between a political and a cultural approach to Europe’s issues. The historian Miroslav Hroch (2015) explained the fundamental difference between identifying with, on the one hand, a cultural and humanistic “Bildungstradition,” and with economic agreements and monetary union on the other. Similarly, the historian Zamoyski (2015) criticised the “humanistic idyll” as a means by which to understand the emergence and workings of the European Union. Furthermore, he believes that the emergence of a European identity has to be a bottom-up process, rather than top-down:
The whole project to create European sovereignty and identity by relying on Athens, Jerusalem and Rome, Erasmus, Montaigne and Kant, is ridiculous . . . . Europeans have formed themselves from the stone age onward, without the help of Erasmus, Montaigne and Kant, and that process is accelerating and is becoming more and more complicated as a result of the flow of immigrants from all parts of the world, and by natural human interaction. “Europeanness” can only evolve from the bottom up. [III.54] (Zamoyski, 2015, p. 149)

It is striking to see how these contributions—the warnings from both writers and historians against conflating the realms of humanism and culture one the one hand, and the EU’s political challenges on the other—diverge from the outlook proposed by Riemen (2015a). The writers contributing to this project are hesitant, not only about their role in public debates, but also about using literature to formulate humanistic ideals (Doxiades, 2015; Tóibín, 2015; Zagajewski, 2015). The focus author in this case study, Arnon Grunberg, expresses similar concerns about the hopes invested in literature and writers to address current European crises.

11.3 The Tediousness of Peace and Prosperity: Focus Author Arnon Grunberg
The Dutch author Arnon Grunberg, born in 1971, took part in the roundtable discussion at the symposium “Je suis Européen!,” during which he laid the groundwork for some of the ideas put forward in his later essay in De terugkeer van Europa. The essay is a short, three-page contribution, extremely dense in its line of argument, invoking the tensions previously noted between the domains of culture and politics, whilst also adding a new perspective: that of heroism (Grunberg, 2015a). Both of Grunberg’s contributions to this project reference ideas about Europe that are expressed in other parts of Grunberg’s vast oeuvre—prose, drama, essays, short journalistic texts (the so-called “Footnotes” on the first page of the Dutch newspaper de Volkskrant), blogposts, and performances. These texts have been the object of research in multiple academic publications (e.g. van Dijk, 2010b; Goedegebuure, 2010; Vaessens, 2010). Compared to the previous chapter’s focus on authors such as Van Istendael and Benali, the large corpus of texts by Grunberg thus necessitates a more extensive approach.

To understand his contribution in the light of other texts, it is important to begin with a brief sketch of the development of Grunberg’s authorship. In an interview in 2017, Grunberg was asked
by his interviewer Arjen Fortuin if he had imagined, 20 years ago, being so close to recent political events as a writer. Grunberg responded:

If someone had told me in those days that I would someday defend the EU passionately in a column, I would have laughed out loud at him. I would never have thought that I would ever write political columns. I even would have found it a bit dirty. But it was really a different time. In hindsight, also for me, 9/11 proved to be very important. [III.55] (Fortuin, 2017, n.p.)

This reply summarises how Grunberg’s authorship has evolved since early 2000. The tone of voice in his novels is more serious and less ironic than in previous publications since his debut in 1994.68 A major shift is also seen in the type of publication. Increasingly, Grunberg explores journalistic projects—such as embedded journalism in Afghanistan—via his daily column (“Footnotes”) in de Volkskrant; blogs on his website; and many other works of non-fiction. These projects make him an important participant in public debates on national, European, and global politics (e.g. van Dijk, 2009; Vaessen, 2010). For Grunberg (2009a), these journalistic activities are tied up with his work as a novelist, as he explained in a contribution to a website that promotes cultural understanding through the translation and promotion of contemporary literature. On the website, called Words Without Borders, Grunberg (2009a) states: “There is a myth that journalistic endeavors interfere with the true vocation of a novelist: writing novels. I find that the opposite is true. My journalistic excursions have, if anything, enhanced my work as a novelist” (para. 1).

In contrast to the other focus authors—in particular, Ugrešić and Van Istendael—this reply highlights another important aspect of Grunberg’s work, namely his outspoken defence of the European Union. Despite his disagreement with the austerity measures imposed as a response to the crisis in 2008 and his criticism of EU immigration policies, he argues that the failings of the European Union are mostly caused by national politicians:69

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68 In his collection of early essays of his journeys around the world, Grunberg rond de wereld [Grunberg Around the World] from 2004, Grunberg’s nihilistic stance during his travels was, for example, formulated as follows: “What people do, they do because they long for a better life, but there the problem begins, because I do not believe in much. Not in a house that has to be furnished, not in marriage, not in family, not in friendship, not in a place of which I can say: here I belong” [III.56] (Grunberg, 2004, p. 334). Later, it is precisely his personal sense of belonging or feeling at home Grunberg researched in his 2017 publication Thuis ben je [You Are Home].

69 He discussed these financial perspectives on the European crisis extensively in an interview with economists Ewald Engelen, Bas Jacobs, and Koen Schoors in a series entitled “Arnon Grunberg ontmoet…“ [“Arnon Grunberg Meets…”] (Jacobs, Engelen, & Schoors, 2013). For his criticism on the European Union, see for example his interview in “Buitenhof” in 2014 (Grunberg, 2014c).
Politicians should take their responsibility and go for Europe instead of pretending that the EU is an infectious disease we must learn to live with. They should explain that where the EU fails, it is mainly due to the fact that countries think in the short term and choose for themselves. [III.57] (Grunberg, 2014d, p. 88)

On many occasions, Grunberg explained that he only started feeling “European” when he moved to the United States, where he has lived since 1995. According to a “Footnote” from 2011 in which he draws a parallel with integration exams for immigrants, when Dutch people do not “feel European,” this is something that needs to be worked on:

If the daily consumption of a frikandel [a typically Dutch snack, in the form of a minced-meat hot dog] may be due to socio-economic deprivation, as some believe, then certain opinions are probably also the result of deprivation. Those who do not consider themselves European are simply victims of socio-economic deprivation that has to be removed.

For Dutch immigrants who, according to some Dutch people, are still not Dutch enough, there are civic integration courses. We urgently need civic integration courses, including language courses in English, German and French for Dutch people who are not European enough.

There is no fundamental difference between the Moroccan in Osdorp who does not feel Dutch and the Dutchman in Maassluis who does not feel European. [III.58] (Grunberg, 2011, p. 1)

In this humorous link between integration on both national and European levels, Grunberg makes a serious point concerning the dominance of national identity over transnational identities, such as “being European”—a point which will be expanded upon later.

His increasing involvement in European politics, travels, and his outspoken defence of “Europe” thus make Grunberg an apt contributor to the De terugkeer van Europa.70 However, his frame of reference is at times still very different from the ideals that the Nexus Institute propagates. His search for a way out of the postmodern relativism and nihilism of his early years did not result in the embrace of a form of humanism for Grunberg. From a tirade against humanism in De Mensheid zij

“humanism is as bankrupt as a coal mine in former East Germany” [III.59] (Grunberg, 2001, p. 68), to his more recent essays (e.g. Grunberg, 2016a), Grunberg’s critical attitude towards the grand ideals of humanism is a striking and recurring theme. For Grunberg, the humanistic project has not only failed; it is also a mistake to think that great art even reflects these ideals, as he concluded his contribution to *Nexus* 67, entitled “De school der beschaving” [“The School of Civilisation”] (Grunberg, 2014a). In this contribution, he distanced himself from the hopes invested in education and civilisation, as civilisation is “a feast of short-term hope” (Grunberg, 2014a, p. 57). Continuing, he states that

> those who propagate a civilisation that ignores the very essence of mankind, that is to say, its splendid fallibility—it is its fallibility that has become the focus of our art, hence also the adjective “splendid”—will be cynical or intolerant. [III.60] (Grunberg, 2014a, p. 57)

The most important quality of a teacher should therefore be a sense of irony, which Grunberg (2014a) understands as “the recognition that man is a being that is standing on quicksand” [III.61] (p. 55).

It is important to underline that Grunberg’s rejection of humanism and his defence of irony in his later work goes hand in hand with an increasing interest in morality.71 For example, in his journalistic reports from 2009, collected in a work of essays entitled *Kamermeisjes en soldaten* [Chambermaids and Soldiers], Grunberg explained why he organised writing courses for Dutch soldiers in Afghanistan as follows:

> The large Christian and the large humanist project, which is the Christian project without Jesus, have failed. The other is not the neighbour who we can love as we love ourselves. The other is the enemy with whom we have nothing in common, with whom we share nothing, and certainly not humanity.

> The testimonies of soldiers will be essential to determine what morality may mean following the bankruptcy of the large, utopian projects. [III.62] (Grunberg, 2009b, p. 314)

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71 Vaessens (2009a) points out how Grunberg both criticises irony and at the same time propagates irony and relativism. See also Buelens (2010) on the limits of irony in Grunberg.
This quotation illustrates how Grunberg intends to investigate morality—without a firm basis such as a humanistic framework—whilst encompassing non-fictional elements in his work, such as testimonials by soldiers. This is precisely why Vaessens (2009a, chapter 5) understands Grunberg as a proponent of late postmodernism: Grunberg’s presence in the public sphere and his journalistic research all suggest that he attempts to move beyond postmodern relativism. Taking Grunberg’s 2008 novel *Onze oom* [*Our Uncle*] as an example, Vaessens (2009a) argued: “For him, it is all about the literary incorporation of genuine experiences, about the proximity of realities that cannot be deconstructed in a relativistic way. Literature should again have the aim to deal with the essentials of life” [III.63] (p. 158). Van Dijk (2009) sees *Onze oom* as an example of Grunberg’s recent novels that can be read as a “moral appeal” to his readership, even if that moral character does not lean on a humanistic framework: “However, the novel *Onze oom* shows nowhere an unambiguous humanistic morality—for that it lacks any basis”[III.64] (p. 11). It leads Van Dijk (2010a) to conclude that “mild humanism” is perhaps still too strong a term with which to characterise the work of Grunberg, suggesting instead that “ethical irony” might be a more apt way to summarise his current worldview.

Even though there is thus something at stake in literature for Grunberg (Buelens, 2010), the framework of humanism, shared values, and cultural heritage put forward in the introduction by Riemen does not concur with his approach. Grunberg’s position is more nuanced, complex, and sometimes contradictory. His essay is critical of the entry points taken by *De terugkeer van Europa*, and also takes up issues that were put forward by other writers in the project. Three elements that shed light on Grunberg’s idea of Europe in this essay and his performance during the event “Je suis Européen!” will be discussed below in the context of his oeuvre: the importance of the Second World War; the challenges of present populism and nationalism; and the separation of Europe as both a cultural ideal and a political project. The final section addresses how Grunberg sees the role of writers and literature in discussions on Europe.

Grunberg’s (2015a) central thesis in his essay “Het antiheroïsch project” [“The Anti-heroic Project”] in *De terugkeer van Europa* and the first theme to be discussed here, is that the European Union should be understood as a product of the Second World War, bearing in mind, however, that its effective strategies of compromise and negotiation have now led to a sense of tediousness—even if this tediousness, or lack of heroism, is certainly to be preferred to the heroism of the warring nation states of the past. He explains:
German politics after 1945 was based on a dogma: no experiments. It is precisely this dogma that is also the basis of the EU, also known as “Brussels,” the embodiment of compromise, of long-winded negotiations. No longer total victory, and thus no total defeats. No longer the heroism of war, but the tediousness of prosperity and peace; peace has a tendency to become boring as the memory of war is fading away. [III.65] (Grunberg, 2015a, p. 169)

Thus, according to Grunberg, the roots of the European Union—Germany and the Second World War—are crucial to this notion of “anti-heroism.” The memory of war is a recurring theme in Grunberg’s oeuvre, and his personal history has also been determined by the war: both of his Jewish parents fled Nazi Germany to come to the Netherlands. Indeed, Van Dijk (2010b) points out how, “although Grunberg’s work hardly ever refers directly to the Shoah . . . much of it is can be understood in the light of the effects of the Shoah in the present” [III.66] (p. 104). An instance of what Van Dijk (2010b) calls “re-enactment”—described as being “rather a repetition or staging of the inexplicable violence, than an attempt to cope with it” [III.67] (p. 84)—can be seen in a scene from Grunberg’s 1997 novel Figuranten [Silent Extras], in which the protagonist, aptly called Ewald Krieg, befriends a young man with a striking personality, whose Jewish parents—characterised as “still from the old Europe” (Grunberg, 1997, p. 176)—have to flee the country by train, throwing their luggage overboard. Van Dijk (2010b) suggests this scene recalls the Jews leaving Amsterdam on their way to the camps.

In addition, throughout Grunberg’s oeuvre of non-fictional blogs and essays on Europe, the Second World War is a motive in his analysis. In his “Footnote” column in de Volkskrant after the news that the European Union had won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, he defended the committee’s choice, stating: “Franco-German wars were once of the order of the day. After 1945 a Franco–German war has become unthinkable. Also thanks to the EU. For that reason alone the Nobel Prize is rightly awarded” [III.68] (Grunberg, 2012e, p. 1).72 In 2014, he featured on the political interview programme “Buitenhof,” together with the then president of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, during which he asked Van Rompuy why EU politicians do not emphasise the uniqueness of peace and prosperity more often (Grunberg, 2014c).73 Grunberg expressed his concern regarding the fact that

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72 See also his comments on the euro, for example in a “Footnote” from 2015: “The euro cannot be understood without the unification of Germany. As far as that is concerned, the euro is also a legacy of the events between 1914 and 1945” [III.69] (Grunberg, 2015b, p. 1).

73 Van Rompuy (2012), however, had expressed a view similar to Grunberg’s analysis of the tediousness of European politics during the acceptance speech after the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize: “The Union has perfected the art
some intellectuals and politicians do not wish to refer to the Second World War anymore, as this does not speak to younger generations. Referring to his personal past, Grunberg (2014c) made the point that peace is precarious, and the idea that Europe might never see a war again an illusion.\footnote{In a blogpost from 2016, he makes a similar point: “This is a valid question: what if the EU has already fulfilled its primary function? We may live in a post-EU epoch [sic]. We may, because peace and prosperity can never be taken for granted” (Grunberg, 2016b, para. 4).} This perspective on the European Union led him to praise the “dullness” of the European Union in his essay in De terugkeer van Europa: the anti-heroism of peace and endless negotiations characterise the success of the European Union.\footnote{A “Footnote” from 2012 has a comparable conclusion: “The more boring politics are, the healthier democracy is. Let us start an ode to tediousness” [III.70] (Grunberg, 2012d, p. 1).} The fact that civil servants in Brussels have not felt the urge to construct “European enemies” in order to enhance a post-national, European identity is therefore a sign of their “decency,” Grunberg (2017) noted later in an essay in the Dutch cultural-political magazine Vrij Nederland.

Grunberg feels an increasing urge to repeat these lessons learnt from history, as he argues that ghosts of the 20th century reappear again today. In Vrij Nederland, Grunberg functioned as an “agony aunt” from 2008 until 2016 (a column titled “De Mensendokter” [“The Human Doctor”]). Answering personal and general questions from readers, Grunberg’s replied on a serious note to a woman who asked the question “What is, in your opinion, the European idea in this century?”:

I do not know if there is one single European idea. With this caveat: curious resignation, aware of the fact that the evil is not in the other but must be sought in yourself. As far as I am concerned, pluralism and liberalism are inevitably connected with Europe, with which I do not want to say that they are not connected with Jordan or Mali. And also in this century, the European idea first and foremost can be narrowed down to the rejection of the ghosts of the twentieth century. That more and more people, even intellectuals, writers and opinion makers, are embracing these ghosts, of course in the name of the crusade against some evil, indicates how fragile the European idea is. [III.71] (Grunberg, 2016e, p. 77)

This quotation illustrates well how Grunberg defines the “European idea” as a recognition of the dark or evil side of mankind, and of the self—an attempt that is wholly different from the principles of Riemen, who argued in an interview with Steketee that the tradition of intellectuals and writers is so...
important since they are “moral heroes,” responsible both for the dignity of the mind and the best ideas for mankind (Steketee, 2015, p. 23).

One of the ghosts of the 20th century, mentioned in the quotation above, is nationalism. Grunberg opened his essay in *De terugkeer van Europa* with a reference to Robert Menasse’s essay *Der Europäische Landbote* (2012; translated in 2016 as *Enraged Citizens, European Peace and Democratic Deficits: Or Why the Democracy Given to Us Must Become One We Fight For*), in which Menasse argued that the European project will either move towards the end of the European Union, or the end of nation states. Grunberg (2015a) agrees with this perception and points out how this uncompromising perspective is lost in debates; politicians treat their voters as “patients” who need to be lied to about their condition. According to Grunberg, the end of nation states, which would thus be the outcome of the success of the European Union, would be no great loss. He declared in an interview after being asked “Do you feel Dutch?”: “Partly. I feel European. I am not an American. . . . I am in no way a nationalist. Not even with football” [III.72] (Pek, 2016, n.p.).

Besides the frame of the Second World War, it is the contemporary rise of nationalism, populism, and xenophobia that constitutes the second frame of reference for Grunberg in his discussions on Europe—a case of the past re-emerging in the present. Grunberg (2014b) sees a close tie between xenophobia and the hatred of the European Union, since “hatred of the EU and the euro boils down to hatred of foreigners,” as “it sounds better to be against the EU than against foreigners”

76 Menasse (2016) makes a comparable observation to Grunberg on the idea of the tediousness of Brussels: “In my experience, most people get bored whenever the history of the EU is recounted, even in its most abbreviated form. I, on the other hand, am fond of that particular boredom, and I don’t wish for myself or for anyone else the extremely exciting history that would no doubt result from the break-up of the EU and a relapse into a Europe of competing nations” (p. 4).

77 In a contribution to the previously mentioned website Words Without Borders, Grunberg argued the “absurdity of nationality” as follows:

On July 23 the theater director, playwright and writer George Tabori died. Unfortunately, Mr. Tabori is not widely known outside Germany and Austria. His relative obscurity doesn’t do justice to the quality of his texts. (I cannot judge the quality of Mr. Tabori as a theater director. I have never seen a play directed by him.) The English version of Wikipedia lists Mr. Tabori as a Hungarian. He was born in Hungary, but he has never worked in Hungary, nor has he written anything directly in Hungarian. The German version of Wikipedia states that Mr. Tabori is British. While he did obtain the British nationality in 1941, he never spent much time there. By the same token, one could declare that Mr. Tabori was American. In 1947, he moved to the U.S. where he wrote screenplays for, among others, Alfred Hitchcock.

A Dutch newspaper decided after his death that he was German, although many of his text were originally written in English.

Mr. Tabori’s life is a good example of the absurdity of nationality. He himself said that an author must be a stranger. (Grunberg, 2007b, n.p.)
(para. 6). In the Abel Herzberglezing in 2016, he took an explicit moral stance on the issue of migration:

Let me put it differently and more briefly: a Europe where there is no room for the outsider will ultimately be a Europe where there is no room for people at all. That would mean the world domination of barbarism. [III.73] (Grunberg, 2016f, p. 3)

The increasing role of nationalism, religion, and ethnicity in Europe led to a pessimistic “Footnote” in 2014: “Europe is not only a continent, but also an ideal in terms of emancipation; the hope that man can overcome his religion and ethnicity. We are witnessing the process of dying of that hope” [III.74] (Grunberg, 2014e, p. 1).

In a “Letter to Fellow-Europeans,” read to the audience during the “Europe Endless Express” project in 2016, Grunberg (2016a) explained how Europe “is double-faced: it is both barbarism (within the last century, Nazism and Stalinism) and the answer to barbarism” (n.p.). He added: “bear in mind that the past can easily resurface in the present. This is not a warning. I’m not here to warn you—anybody with eyes and ears can see and hear for themselves—I’m stating a fact” (Grunberg, 2016a, n.p.).

See also, for example: “I have often argued that the idea that the EU is an enemy of the citizen is based on myths and often comes down to camouflaged xenophobia” [III.75] (Grunberg, 2014d, p. 88).

Grunberg does not only address the issue of migration in lectures, but also in fiction (see for example his 2003 novel De asielzoeker [The Asylum Seeker]) and journalism (see his columns from 2015 in the Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad, for example, about a journey back from the Netherlands to Kabul with asylum seeker Qader Shafiq). Another instance of his attempts to open up a debate about migration was his participation in a festival in Utrecht in 2009, during which he organised “Café Kiev,” described on his website as follows: “On Saturday the 12th of September Arnon Grunberg’s Café Kiev took place in Leidsche Rijn, the Netherlands. It was part of the festival Uitfeest Utrecht. Two charming and gorgeous looking single ladies from the Ukraine, Tanushka and Natalushka, accompanied Grunberg during a talkshow about immigration politics and mail-order brides. In the afternoon there was a dating game presented by Sander Voerman for men who were interested in marrying one of the two ladies” (“Leidsche Rijn - Café Kiev,” 2009, n.p.).

See also a “Footnote” from 2013: “For more and more Europeans Europe seems to be once again one big beer garden where foreigners are not allowed” [III.76] (Grunberg, 2013b, p. 1).

This event is comparable to the “Literatur Express,” only less extensive. It comprised a three-day train ride with 600 academics and artists on board to explore Europe in the summer of 2016 (“Europe Endless Express,” 2016). See also the General Introduction to this dissertation.

The reading of this letter was not unproblematic, according to a blogpost by Grunberg (2016c):

On Friday evening I took a taxi from Vienna to Bratislava together with the historian and novelist Philipp Blom. We were supposed to read a letter to our fellow Europeans but we were a bit late. Google maps didn’t function properly, at least not for our taxi driver.

The occasion for these festivities (if that’s the right word) was the beginning of the EU presidency of Slovakia on July 1.

A train filled with about 600 people from the Netherlands was traveling through Europe, partly forum for discussion on the EU, partly disco I assume, and as far as I’m concerned also an attempt at historical reenactment.
Despite the rise of nationalism, Grunberg still defends a sense of cosmopolitanism, even though this is “yet again a term of abuse,” as he points out in an interview (van Velzen, 2014, n.p.). In an argument that calls to mind Geert van Istendael’s analysis, he cited Ian Buruma’s defence of Brussels with its lack of a clear identity in a blogpost from 2016 as follows:

Buruma is right, the capital of Belgium deserves an “In praise of Brussels” and the fact that Belgium despite everything still exists may be a sign that there is hope for the EU.
The masses never liked cosmopolitanism, but it needs to be defended—for exactly the same reasons why Buruma speaks highly about Brussels. (Grunberg, 2016d)

With this frame of reference in mind—Grunberg’s perspective on the European Union as a result of the atrocities of war; the “tediousness,” or anti-heroism of Brussels; and his engagement with current EU policies and politics—his contention in *De terugkeer van Europa* that European culture and politics should be clearly differentiated comes as no surprise. Grunberg (2015a) explained this in his essay as follows:

Precisely because of this anti-heroism it is foolish to turn this European project into a cultural project, because then heroism gets back in again by the back door . . . . Mozart, Goethe, Beethoven, Stendhal or Plato have as much, or more accurately: just as little to do with the EU as with the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Trying to define a common European culture by roundabout methods reveals precisely the same kind of provincialism that European cosmopolitans—those who call themselves cosmopolitan or those who are called cosmopolitan—were hoping to escape. [III.77] (p. 169)

Grunberg thus exemplifies how a number of participants in the Nexus project contest its foundations as formulated by Riemen: a focus on European culture in order to revive European politics. The previous section analysed how writers and poets—Doxiades and Zagajewski—expressed their reservations about discussing urgent political topics from a cultural perspective, which is simply too
far removed from the harsh economic realities of some EU citizens. The historians Hroch and Zamoyski also warned against a “humanistic idyll” as a frame of reference by which to understand the workings of EU politics. Grunberg adds a new perspective to this series of arguments: the unwanted heroism that is projected onto a European Union that aims for a non-heroic stability, consensus, and prosperity. Grunberg (2015a) therefore noted in his contribution to De terugkeer van Europa: “Although Goethe and Beethoven may add lustre to all too dull state banquets, the tragic fate of artists who are canonised too much, those who confuse the European project with a cultural project have tragically misunderstood that project” [III.78] (p. 170). Moreover, Grunberg’s perception of the European idea entails the recognition of evil—both in oneself and in mankind in general—in line with the perceived “ethical irony” in his work (van Dijk, 2010a) in the light of the collapse of humanism and Christianity. He expressed consistently throughout his oeuvre that the European Union is thus not the result of a humanistic tradition, of intellectual ideals and dreams, but rather of “a nightmare” (Grunberg, 2015a, p. 170) in the form of the Second World War, as the epitome of evil.

Grunberg’s strong separation of European culture from EU politics begs the question of why he, as a novelist, engages in European political debates, and participates in projects such as De terugkeer van Europa. Indeed, it is striking how Grunberg never explicitly refers to what literary authors might bring to these discussions and projects. The idea of great European writers even brings about a sense of mockery, as one can see, for example, in a humorous blogpost from 2012 about the Dutch author Cees Nooteboom, who is characteristically described as the most important “European author” in the Netherlands:

Good friend
Cees Nooteboom is not only a great author and a terrific poet, probably the greatest poet since Ariosto (compared to Cees Nooteboom Goethe is a midget and Shakespeare a hunchback) Nooteboom is also a reliable friend, a sensitive thinker, a Don Juan with good manners, one of the most important philosophers of the Netherlands and above all a true European. Without Cees Nooteboom Europe will never be the same. . . .
And here comes my pitch: let’s rename the euro, let’s call the euro as of January 1, 2013 nooteboom.

83 Other examples of European projects are his reading of Lof der Zotheid during the opening of Rotterdam as European Capital of Culture in 2001; his contribution to the earlier mentioned “Europe Endless Express” (2016); and his participation in the 2016 project by the Forum on European Culture, entitled “Re:Creating Europe” (see also the previous chapter on Abdelkader Benali), during which he interviewed the Austrian director Ulrich Seidl.
That’s the least we can do for Cees. (Grunberg, 2012a)

Moreover, Grunberg is quite sceptical of the powers of literature so enthusiastically proclaimed by Riemen on other occasions. In another blogpost from 2012, Grunberg described a conversation he hosted between Riemen and Ian Buruma:

Mr. Riemen defended literature by pointing out that Primo Levi was able to survive Auschwitz thanks to his command of Dante. By reciting Dante he stayed sane. This is a highly selective reading of Primo Levi, but let’s assume that Riemen was right. We need literature in order to survive the camps, to survive totalitarianism.

Perhaps we need something to believe in to survive; that could be God, Dante or Marx. In that case I would also go for Dante.

I would phrase it like this: we need to make sense of the world and sooner or later we discover that we cannot make sense of the world without fiction.

But this doesn’t mean that we need literature.

There are many competing fictions around us (perhaps democracy is another fiction) trying to catch our devotion, trying to turn us into believers.

I chose literature, because literature is the worst form of fiction except all the others that have been tried. (Grunberg, 2012c)

Yet, one can still argue that Grunberg attempts to understand European politics and crises as a writer, and more specifically, as someone who writes about human emotions and mortality. For example, he analysed the European Union from a psychoanalytical perspective, mainly to answer the question why the European Union is currently disliked so much (e.g. Grunberg, 2014c). Grunberg sees a strong connection between literature and psychoanalysis, as both attempt to destroy the illusions that humanity has constructed. Freud’s analysis that the enemies of civilisation are not “the others,” but ourselves, is a crucial insight for Grunberg, together with the idea that all gods are substitutes for the Freudian father-figure (e.g. de Bruin & Grunberg, 2007).

In her analysis of Grunberg’s oeuvre, achieved by zooming in on the ethics of the relations between characters, Van Dijk (2013) therefore

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84 On another occasion, Grunberg equated Europe with the bond he has with his mother. A blogpost from 2012 reads: “On Sunday a Flemish journalist and a friend of mine asked me: ‘So you have a name for your strong bond with your mother, you call it Europe?’ I hesitated for a second and then I answered: ‘Yes, that’s how I would call it’” (Grunberg, 2012b).
argues that Freud is an apt frame of reference with which to understand these relations, especially since this framework is explicitly intertextual in nature. Inter-human relationships, as Van Dijk shows, are characterised by a repetitive process of destruction of the other, and self-destruction of the main character. These ideas resonate in Grunberg’s interview in “Buitenhof” with Herman van Rompuy, in which Grunberg emphasised how in Europe, people have forgotten that living and suffering go hand in hand, and that fear seems to be the only passion that can be evoked on this continent (Grunberg, 2014c). People need a father-figure, Grunberg argued, and the current loathing of the European Union is a form of patricide—of a father that failed to protect. The fact that Grunberg transposes the European Union to the role of a father-figure, means that Van Dijk’s insights on the ethics between characters can be expanded to the more abstract relation between citizens and the European Union. The “basic narrative structure” (van Dijk, 2013, “Conclusie”) of destruction and self-destruction is indeed crucial if we are to understand this relationship: the European Union as an anti-heroic project functions as a constant reminder of Europe’s self-destructive history.

The idea of mortality and suffering plays an important role in Grunberg’s contribution to the Nexus project. During “Je suis Européen!” he initiated a discussion of the question “Would you die for Europe, and if not, what does it mean to have a feeling of being European?” (“Would You Die for Europe?,” 2015). He admitted himself that he would rather die for the US than for Europe, but at the same time, he noted that it is problematic that they were talking about Europe without being willing to die for it (“Would you die for Europe?,” 2015). The element of mortality and sacrifice recurs again in his contribution to De terugkeer van Europa, albeit in a puzzling contradictory sense, compared to the discussion he provoked during the symposium. The “anti-heroism” of the European Union, he argued, is founded on the fact that nation states could not resist the heroism of war, and the belief that war and destruction should be prevented in the future (Grunberg, 2015a, p. 169). Therefore, the European Union should be understood as an attempt to organise the “art of surviving” (“overlevingskunst”) on a European level (Grunberg, 2015a, p. 170). To explain the idea of the art of surviving, Grunberg (2015a) noted:

Those who want to understand the EU better, should read Ecclesiastes: better a living dog than a dead lion. Because of this basic principle the European project evokes misunderstandings and repulsion; it is not founded on a dream but on a nightmare. [III.79] (p. 170)
With this quotation from a biblical text, Grunberg indicates that it is precisely through literature that we gain an understanding of the emotions and psychological workings regarding EU issues. The biblical text in general deals with the transitory nature of our existence (“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity”), and the quotation “better a living dog than a dead lion” more specifically to the lesson that one should accept suffering and misery in life, in the light of the prospect of death. Grunberg’s idea of the art of surviving in the realisation of the finitude of life is thus illustrated by this biblical reference. Grunberg (2015a) concluded his argument in De terugkeer van Europa as follows:

In his book The Denial of Death, Ernst Becker explains that human beings have always, and in various cultures, tried to solve their fundamental inability to accept their own mortality through the construct of heroism. The paradox of the art of surviving on a European level, which is meant to help the European citizen escape from his own nightmares and is therefore necessarily anti-heroic, is that the citizen precisely for this reason is reminded of his own mortality.

You do not have to be an extraordinarily good judge of human nature to understand that the citizen sooner or later will reject everything that reminds him of his own mortality. [III.80] (p. 170)

Thus, according to Grunberg, the European Union—by definition a form of anti-heroism—necessarily recalls the memory of past wars and human fragility. Grunberg envisions that it is precisely this emphasis on mortality, inherent to the European project, that will lead to a rejection of this project. His question “Would you die for Europe?” during the symposium underlined the fact that a transnational or post-national Europe does not evoke such feelings of heroism—simultaneously a noble accomplishment, and a declaration of the finitude of this European project. This conclusion also puts Grunberg’s assessment into perspective: “I am European and I always will be European, but the future of Europe is on the other side of the ocean: in the United States of America” [III.81] (Grunberg, 2014e, p. 1). His perspective on the European Union thus leads to a conclusion in his contribution to De terugkeer van Europa that is radically opposed to Riemen’s starting point. Whereas the latter sees an opportunity for the return of Europe in a revival of European culture, Grunberg argues, firstly, that European culture does not have anything to do with the EU’s political crises; and secondly, that Europe will not return—sooner or later, she will leave for good.
11.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that there is an explicit tension between the goals envisioned by Rob Riemen and the contributions that resulted in the form of the symposium “Je suis Européen!” and *De terugkeer van Europa*. The idea of European culture as an expression of humanistic values that could bring a sense of identity to Europeans today in contrast to the one-sided and failing narrative of economic cooperation, can indeed be found in the many historical essays that have been reprinted in *De terugkeer van Europa*. Members of Europa Nostra—an organisation that aims to protect European heritage—make a similar point on the importance of the tradition of “Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome” (e.g. Carras, 2015). The author Philip Blom suggested that European values, for example those found in literature, and in the tradition of Enlightenment, are worth defending in the light of the many newcomers to the continent. Despite the prevalence of the idea that a cultural Europe is essential if the European Union is to continue as a whole, historians and writers in this volume are also sceptical of the hopes invested in European culture. Further, the poets Doxiades and Zagajewski warned that such a cultural-humanistic framework might lead to the loss of a sense of reality concerning the current political problems within Europe. Therefore, these political crises should not be addressed from an elitist perspective of cultural identity—as the lofty ideals expressed by writers of the past.

Compared to the historical essays and the introduction by Riemen, contemporary writers are thus more reluctant to perceive themselves as important spokespersons in the debate on European issues. Tóibín sees the European spirit, for example, not so much in humanistic values, but in the tradition of making fun of highly valued persons and ideas: the emperor of Europe, he pointed out, “never had clothes.” The postmodern questioning of grand narratives such as “humanism” on the one hand, and the changing role of public intellectuals who are no longer conceptualised in terms of Romantic ideals—the author as “visionary”—but now more in terms of “mediator” (Heynders, 2013; Osborne, 2004) on the other, explain the change in the tone of voice of these contemporary writers. Arnon Grunberg’s oeuvre exemplifies this questioning of grand narratives such as humanism and Christianity—one that does not imply nihilistic relativism, but an increasing need to address moral issues from an attitude that Van Dijk (2010a) characterises as “ethical irony” (p. 73). This chapter argued how Grunberg expressed consistently throughout many texts that the European Union is not a result of a humanistic tradition—of intellectual ideals and dreams—but of the Second World War. In this formulation, the idea of Europe is a recognition of the dark side of mankind, and of oneself. His approach is thus very different from that of Riemen, who argued that the tradition of intellectuals and writers is important because they represent the dignity of mankind. Grunberg’s contribution to
the Nexus project is therefore also an example of the stance taken by other contributors: he refuses to combine a political and a cultural Europe, as the project intended. Via this refusal, he adds another perspective: that it is not only the end of humanism and the threat of losing sight of harsh economic realities, but also the “anti-heroism”—the tediousness of endless negotiations—of the European Union that needs to be considered. Leaning on frameworks and metaphors from psychoanalysis and the Bible, he underlines how the hateful response of citizens to the European Union is more fundamental than just critique of EU policies: it reflects a complex relationship with a transposed father-figure, and an engagement with mortality. Despite the hopeful tone in the introduction by Riemen, this analysis leads Grunberg to the pessimistic conclusion that the European Union seems destined to fail.

The result of the Nexus project is a collection of essays that differ in their analysis of European identity, the current European crises, and in the proposed solutions. This difference in tone is not only the result of the historical essays that appear in De terugkeer van Europa; it also reflects current debates on European cultural and political identity, as discussed in Chapter 2. Yet, one can still argue that the metaphor that this project leans on actually “incorporates” the contributors’ criticism of its intentions. “Je suis Européen!” was staged as a coffee house in order to engage intellectuals in a discussion—an approach predicated upon George Steiner’s idea, referred to in the brochure of the symposium. He argued that “Europe is made up of coffee houses, of cafés. . . . The café is a place for assignation and conspiracy, for intellectual debate and gossip, for the flâneur and the poet or metaphysician at his notebook” (Steiner, 2015, p. 17). In other words: critique and debate are necessarily an element of reflections on Europe, or even of a European identity. A similar approach can be found in the introduction by Riemen (2015b) to De terugkeer van Europa: “And for the sake of the critical dialog contemporary thinkers and poets reflect on the nexus of past, present and future. So Nexus 70 is as a polyphonic song of Orpheus: full of hope, self-knowledge, wisdom and confidence” [III.82] (p. X). With the classical references, emphasising Riemen’s perception of the importance of antiquity for reflections on Europe, the introduction of this volume frames the contributions—despite their wide variations in tone and content, expressing not only hope, but also despair, and sometimes outright refusal of the intentions of this project—as a “polyphony,” or a unity of different voices. The underlying idea is that this volume—precisely because of its many perspectives and contestations—is a reflection of what Europe entails: a lively debate, and a form of unity in diversity.
Conclusion to Part III

This part examined the intentions expressed by the project leaders and compared them to the actual outcomes of their projects via the prose, poetry, and essays produced by the literary writers involved. The overall discourse of the organisers on European identity corresponds to the literary results: the authors in the “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” were mostly engaged in reflecting on Europe as a cultural unity, whilst contributors to “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse” intended to spark a debate on European political policies. The specific contributions of the focus authors showed how Ugrešić critically engaged with the discourse of cultural identity in the “Literatur Express,” and Grunberg—adopting a similar critical stance—questioned the role of culture in the process of European integration. The cultural discourse of unity in diversity was the starting point for Van Istendael, whilst the analysis of his contribution to “The European Constitution in Verse” showed how he reinterprets this discourse as a form of critique on the European political project. Finally, Benali engaged in European policy issues such as migration and extremism during the “Narratives for Europe” project.

A striking result of this analysis is the fact that the participating authors take the opportunity to, critically speaking, “talk back” to the project leaders—both on the level of the image of Europe, and on the idea that literature and writers might have an important role in the process of European identity formation. On the level of the image of Europe, three of the four focus authors are (at times) outspoken critics of the European Union. The analysis of the oeuvres of these selected authors revealed how this critical stance was not simply taken up as an opportunity of the literary projects themselves; rather, the critique of the European Union expressed by Geert van Istendael and Dubravka Ugrešić in their contributions can also be found in their oeuvres. Both authors take up the discourse of “unity in diversity” in order to explain their negative assessment of the workings of the European Union. Van Istendael sees this slogan as a lost cause, since EU policies such as unifying regulations, neo-liberal strategies, and lack of democracy are, in his view, endangering the multilingual, culturally diverse—or “Belgian”—character of Europe. Ugrešić expressed her reservations about this slogan in both her oeuvre and her contribution, as it celebrates the commercialisation of national stereotypes in a market-based cultural policy. These highly critical authors are at the same time participants in EU-sponsored projects: the “Literatur Express” received EU funding, and “The European Constitution in Verse” received a subsidy from the EU cultural programme as part of the larger project “Sharazad – Stories for Life”. These ties to EU institutions apparently did not prevent the authors from continuing their critical assessment of the European Union in their contributions.
The fact that these writers, each with their own doubts about the European Union, are important contributors to these EU-funded projects sheds a different light on the aims of European cultural policy. Cris Shore (2000, p. 221) stated that the creation of a sense of common heritage is a crucial element of cultural policy, as it may enable people to identify more with EU institutions. In the light of the “Literatur Express” and “The European Constitution in Verse,” one can argue that this intended result of EU policy does not correspond with the result of both projects, in which Eurosceptic writers are offered a stage for their criticism of EU institutions. However, EU-funded projects do not only engage in questioning the European Union. Abdelkader Benali, in his contribution to “Narratives for Europe,” expressed deep concerns about its migration policies and the exclusive narrative of Jewish-Christian roots that does not acknowledge the role of Islam in Europe. Whilst Grunberg is one of the most outspoken defenders of the European Union in his many publications, his contribution to De terugkeer van Europa envisages the inevitable finitude of the European Union.

The findings on the importance of writers and literature in the process of European identity formation yield an ambiguous result. Every argument for the importance of literature discerned in the theoretical framework has been addressed by authors via their contributions. These included the importance of literature as a medium that represents shared memory and cultural heritage (humanism in “The Return of Europe”; the Second World War in the “Literatur Express”); literature as a place to mediate between the individual and the abstract or universal level (the contribution by Van Istendael to The European Constitution in Verse); and finally, literature as a place of diversity (the plurality of cultures during the train journey for the “Literatur Express,” and the multilingualism found in the publication that resulted from “The European Constitution in Verse”). In line with the observation above regarding the criticisms expressed by the participating authors, the focus on the role of literature as a place of subversion and contestation is most prominent in their contributions. The projects show how intertextual references to European myths and literary characters provide authors with the opportunity to re-imagine and contest issues such as European identity (“Narratives for Europe”) and borders (“The European Constitution in Verse”). Also, the literary form provides a space for a critical interplay with formal EU documents (“The European Constitution in Verse”). Finally, the tradition of great writers is often referred to—in some cases as a solution to current political crises (“The Return of Europe”; the “Literatur Express”). From this perspective, these texts all contribute to the “literary Europe-discourse” researched by Lützeler (2007a). His conclusion on the most recent literary texts on Europe (for example on the various works by Reinhold Schneider, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and Adolf Muschg) underpins the findings presented in this chapter: they formulate ideas on Europe “that
are not compatible with the ideas put forward by the EU” [III.83] (Lützeler, 2007a, p. 24). Whilst their solutions to perceived problems are not strong, according to Lützeler, their importance lies in their capacity to engage an audience in a conversation about Europe.

However, the analysis in this chapter has shown how, at the same time, these literary texts on Europe contribute to a process of self-reflection on the role of writers regarding issues of transnational identity, and the ways in which culture in general has the means to engage in European politics. The projects thus also create space for hesitance regarding the role of literature and writers in reflections on Europe, and for resistance to political appropriation. This is an important addition to the insights provided by Lützeler. Writers do not only open up a conversation on European identity; the topic advances a discussion on the position of authors and intellectuals in society as well. The analysis of the focus authors has shown how Ugrešić struggles with her position as a writer in the market-based cultural policies of the European Union. She was not the only writer feeling out of place during the “Literatur Express”; other authors also expressed doubt about being “on a mission” to reunite a divided continent (Viragh, Jouet, Konkka). The contributors to “The European Constitution in Verse” were asked to come up with alternatives for Shelley’s famous dictum “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world” (cited in Vermeersch, personal communication, October 31, 2008), which they phrased in less far-reaching and self-assured verses (“recalling, murmuring, echoing”). During the “Narratives for Europe” event, the creative imagination was discussed and doubted as necessary for rethinking current democratic practices. Finally, whilst Riemen of the Nexus Institute contended that culture is necessary if we are to revive the European spirit in order to solve an institutional crisis, Grunberg denied that such hopes should be invested in the world of arts and literature.

One can argue that it is precisely the fact that these cases are cultural projects, resulting from plans made by cultural organisations and offering a stage for multiple writers, that led authors to reflect openly on their position in European society. The major difference between this analysis and other research on the contemporary literary construction and images of European identity is the fact that this other research is mainly focused on either individual authors as important voices in Europe (Heynders, 2009; Lützeler, 2007a), or on single works of fiction (e.g. Hollis, 2000; Vitse, 2011). The majority of the participating authors are not typical great European writers such as Enzensberger, Nooteboom, or Kundera (even though Grunberg and Ugrešić could be added to this list). Despite the fact that especially the focus authors in these chapters have published regularly on Europe and the European Union, in these instances the authors are placed within the framework of a cultural European project with certain intended outcomes instead of individually publishing a letter in a newspaper, or a novel on European issues. Thus, the framework of a cultural project can
be asserted or emphasised (as is the case in “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse”), or critically questioned and contested (as in “The Return of Europe” and the “Literatur Express”), providing an opportunity for writers to make a more general point about the interplay between novelists and European politics and identity.
PART IV. THE EFFECTS OF THE TRANSNATIONAL LITERARY PROJECTS
Introduction

The chapters in Part IV explore the extent to which the projects featured in this research were perceived by the media as valuable contributions to reflections on European identity. All the projects share two common features that allow them to be treated as examples of what Lützeler (2007a) called the “*literarische Europa-Diskurs*” (“literary discourse on Europe”). Firstly, they all intend to say something about the forces that bind Europeans together by engaging their audiences in conversations about Europe: “They address the important European issues of our day, critically examine tendencies, and often invite disagreement through polemic . . . which is to say, they start a conversation” [IV.1] (Lützeler, 2007a, p. 271). Secondly, they want to contribute to these conversations in a specifically literary way, meaning that the literary nature of these transnational projects—in the form of participating writers, or specific poetic language—is perceived by the organisations involved as providing crucial perspectives on debates surrounding European integration. The potential significance of the projects’ outputs as a contribution to these discussions was analysed in the previous chapter. This chapter asks if the projects have been perceived as, firstly, a contribution to a discussion on European identity, and secondly, if their literary nature is acknowledged as a valuable perspective in this debate. The final research question therefore focusses on what the *effects* were of these four projects, approaching the question from two different angles.

Firstly, the *reception* of the projects’ various outputs will be analysed—understood here as the reviews and reports in various media by critics, journalists, and in some cases the participating authors themselves, in which these projects are described and evaluated. This aspect of the effects was researched by collecting accounts of the projects (mostly published during or shortly after the event), as well as reviews of the texts that resulted from the projects themselves. These reviews and accounts were sourced online, and via LexisNexis, DBNL, and Literom for written media such as (literary) magazines and newspapers. The language of publication and location of the projects narrowed this search down to Dutch, English, and German media sources. The corpus of texts in various media was analysed by specifically focussing on the European dimension in the reviews and accounts in order to decide whether (and to what extent) these projects are indeed perceived as more than “simply” cultural events and literary artefacts, but also as attempts by which to understand European identity.

The second angle from which the effects of these projects are researched, consists of analysing the “*impact* on the public domain” (Heynders, 2009, p. 10, emphasis added). Impact is, however, by its very nature difficult to establish—so far, little has been published on how impact should be studied or defined (see also Chapter 3). This research proposes a possible new approach
to analysing and assessing the societal impact of such projects. This analysis will assess, in broad terms, the repercussions of these initiatives in four fields: European politics; academia; literature; and social media. This approach is thus much broader than a simple analysis of the reception of these projects: it highlights what these performances and texts actually do in a societal context. This angle also differs from a more quantitative “effect study,” which might, for example, measure the effect of sponsored cultural events on the visibility and image of the sponsor.85 The following four chapters each discuss one of the projects from these two dimensions: the immediate reception and the broader impact of these initiatives.

85 E.g. Manfred Schwaiger’s (2001) research on the effect of sponsorship of the “Literatur Express.”
12. A Media Event and Its Fictional Re-workings: the “Literatur Express”

The project entitled the “Literatur Express” consisted of two events. Firstly, there was a six-week train journey, which ran between June 4 and July 16, 2000. During the journey, some participants published their experiences in newspaper articles and blogs. Additionally, many articles about this literary journey and the local festivities involved were published by journalists in magazines and newspapers all over Europe (e.g. Adolf, 2000; Keller, 2000; McCormack, 2000). Secondly, there was the anthology Europaexpress: Ein literarisches Reisebuch [Europe Express: A Literary Travel Book], which was published in 2001 and presented on October 5 at the Stiftung Brandenburger Tor in Berlin during an evening entitled “Europa erzählen” [“Narrating Europe”] (“Newsletter Stiftung Brandenburger Tor,” 2001, “Torgespräche”). This work contains the essays, prose, and poetry produced by the participating authors. In comparison to the many accounts in different media about the journey that preceded this publication, it is striking that the number of articles devoted to the anthology itself is very limited: in fact, it was hardly noticed by literary critics in Germany. However, one can also argue that, although the intended outcome of the train journey through Europe—the anthology—might have gone unnoticed, other publications by participating authors after their journey—the “unintended outcomes,” as it were—received more attention in the press (e.g. Gerits, 2003; Rüdenauer, 2016). Both Kamiel Vanhole and Lasha Bugadze published novels based on their experiences during the train journey, respectively in 2002 and 2009.86

This chapter is therefore divided into two sections, based on the differences between “reception” and “impact” as outlined in the introduction to this Part IV. The first part engages with the reception of the train journey in the media by both participants and journalists, and the reception of Europaexpress. The second part analyses the broader impact of this project by

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86 The poet Jacques Jouet (2002) also published a work of poetry he wrote during the “Literatur Express” by asking the participants three words from their native language, which he used to construct poems according to a fixed form. He described the result, Poèmes avec partenaires [Poems as Teamwork] from 2002, on the website of his publisher as follows: “Ces poèmes sont avec « partenaires » pour avoir été composés en sollicitant des écrivains vivants. Que chacun me donne trois mots de sa langue (le plus souvent pas française) et je me charge de composer une redonde, poème à forme fixe de 15 vers en trois strophes avec répétition réglée de chacun de ces trois mots, cinq fois. Le poème est en français, mais il accueille des mots d’ailleurs, de langues voisines, de langues lointaines, du turc au finnois, de l’espagnol à l’albanais, du roumain au letton... Le voyage dit « Train Littérature Europe 2000 » qui a voyagé quelques cent écrivains selon une ligne Lisbonne, Madrid, Bordeaux, Paris, Lille, Bruxelles, Dortmund, Hanovre, Malbork, Kaliningrad, Vilnius, Riga, Tallinn, Saint-Petersbourg, Moscou, Minsk, Varsovie et Berlin, fut le cadre heureux de cette entreprise.” [“These poems are the result of ‘teamwork’ for they have been composed by making an appeal to living writers. That each of them would give me three words of their mother tongue (most often not French) and that I would take it upon me to compose a redonde, a fixed-form poem of 15 lines in three stanzas with a regular repetition of each of these three words, five times. The poem is in French, but it includes words from elsewhere, from neighbouring languages, from distant languages, from Turkish to Finnish, from Spanish to Albanian, from Romanian to Latvian... The train journey, called ‘Literature Express Europe 2000,’ which transported one hundred writers along Lisbon, Madrid, Bordeaux, Paris, Lille, Brussels, Dortmund, Hannover, Malbork, Kaliningrad, Vilnius, Riga, Tallinn, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Minsk, Warsaw and Berlin, was the happy frame of this project.”] (Jouet, 2002, “Poèmes avec partenaires”) As these poems are not so much reflections on the journey, and therefore difficult to compare with both novels, this title has been left out in this analysis.
concentrating on the fictional re-workings of the “Literatur Express” by two participants, and the reception of their novels. This chapter will argue that reviewers and participants alike perceive a certain “mismatch” between the literary outputs on the one hand, and the intended European outputs of this project on the other: the focus is on the business and spectacle that literature has become, rather than on European identity.

12.1 Reception of the “Literatur Express”

The organisation behind the train journey, eurobylon e.V. (part of the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin), published an extensive international media review of the articles, interviews, and essays produced on, and regarding, the event (eurobylon e.V., 2000). The review is preceded by a short introduction, which states: “Regarding media coverage, the Literature Express Europa 2000 was very successful. 1281 articles were published in 28 countries (number of copies: 153 million). 10 TV- and 45 radio-stations covered the events in 137 programmes” (eurobylon e.V., 2000, “Introduction”). The authors also posted short blogs on the website www.Literatur Express.org during the journey. This website is, however, no longer online, and the radio and television programmes are no longer easily available. Written articles consist mostly of general journalistic reports on the project, some specifically on the individual festivities that were organised in cities along the route (e.g. “Großer Bahnhof in Berlin,” 2000). Some articles feature interviews with participants, whilst others are with Thomas Wohlfahrt—the organiser of the event (e.g. NR, 1999). The participants themselves were also involved in portraying the event in different media (e.g. Duijnhoven, 2000; Meester, 2000f; Vanhole, 2000b). The corpus of articles for this analysis thus consists of reviews by journalists as well as reflections on the project during the journey by the writers involved. The focus of this part of the analysis will be on three participants whose reports were published during the journey in Dutch-language media: Kamiel Vanhole wrote six reports in De Standaard der Letteren (the weekly literary supplement of the Flemish newspaper De Standaard); Mariet Meester published seven reports in the Dutch newspaper de Volkskrant; and Serge van Duijnhoven posted blogs, which formed the basis for an article in the Dutch weekly newsmagazine De Groene Amsterdammer.

Whilst some of the articles in the international press focus on the mundane aspects of the tour, others adopt a more serious tone, addressing issues of literature and European identity that are relevant in the context of the project. The headline of The Independent’s article—“Drunk writers arrive in Moscow; Bernadine Evaristo joined 104 fellow European writers on a six-week cultural journey through 11 countries. No wonder her brain went awol...” (Evaristo, 2000, p. 51)—is rather telling in this regard, as is that of Mariet Meester (2000a), who opens her first report with the line: “Travel by train through Europe for a period of six weeks in the company of hundred writers from forty-three countries: it is bound to end in an orgy of booze and sex, as I may believe the warnings the experts gave me at my departure to Lisbon” [IV.2] (p. 27).
reception from both perspectives, by asking to what extent these articles engage with questions of European (cultural or political) identity, and in what ways the literary approach to this issue is perceived as offering an appropriate and valuable contribution. The analysis will show how the networking opportunities afforded to the writers and the involvement of literary institutions themselves were perceived positively in the media (even if the participants nuance this perception from the perspective of gender and nationality). Two reoccurring points of critique are encountered in the media reception of the event: the combination of literature and politics that underpinned the event, and the perceived media spectacle that the event became.

12.1.1 Networking Opportunities

The articles addressing the idea of European identity in the light of the project underline the importance of building a European network of writers and gaining an understanding of fellow Europeans. Ingo Arend (2000)—a cultural journalist and essayist for the visual arts, literature, and cultural policy, and editor of the German weekly newspaper Der Freitag—perceived at least a symbolic success in the project:

When authors like Dubravka Ugresic, who was born in Kutina, Croatia, in 1949, are nominated as authors for Germany, it means that this kind of symbolic politics has succeeded in creating a different definition of national identity than the one we have had up to now. And the fact that Stevan Tontic was named by the oppositional Serbian PEN as the Yugoslavian representative and was able to work well together with the other authors on the trip who had lived under the reign of Tito—this gives us hope for a different future in the Balkans. [IV.3] (Arend, 2000, para. 1)

The value of the opportunity to engage with other European authors was also noted by Meester (2000b), who stated: “This journey gives us the opportunity to come into contact with colleagues whose life stories differ completely from ours” [IV.4] (p. 29). However, this image—of writers happily engaging with each other despite tensions between their nationalities—is simultaneously problematised by Meester (2000d), who cites a moment in the journey when Albanians join Serbians in a train compartment, upon which the Serbians abruptly leave. It was also noted in the press that the East-West divide, extensively described in Europaexpress (see also Chapter 8), limited the idea of mutual understanding. The journalist Claudia Keller (2000), for example, observed that

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88 Although Meester does not specify who “ours” might be, the context suggests that it might refer to West-European authors.
mutual understanding still has its limits: the Ukrainian author Jurij Andruchowytsch noticed that the authors’ approaches to the European “wine region” (from Portugal to Luxembourg) and the Central European “beer zone” were much friendlier than in the vast stretches of the Eastern “vodka region.” [IV.5] (para. 2)

International political struggles also became increasingly important as the train moved east. Meester (2000e) referred to an initiative by the Ukrainian delegation to sign a petition in protest against Putin’s war in Chechnya. Van Duijnhoven (2000) described the response of the Russian delegation as follows:

The open letter to Putin led to a substantial dispute between the Russian and Ukrainian writers on the train. The Russians, who were not consulted in the letter, felt passed over and started on their own a counter-offensive by distributing books with gruesome snuff-photos of Russian men who were beheaded with butcher knives by Chechens. [IV.6] (para. 20)

Besides the international political tensions that slowly gained prominence on the train, two other recurring problems are addressed that prevented—at least in the eyes of some journalists and participants (e.g. Arend, 2000)—the possibility of a more profound knowledge and understanding of each other and the countries that were visited. Firstly, there were insurmountable language problems. Both Van Duijnhoven (2000) and Vanhole (2000b) expressed the problems they experienced with this multilingual project. Van Duijnhoven (2000) longed for a lingua franca in order to attain the “cultural reconciliation” envisioned by the organisers:

Due to the fact that there is no English, French or German translation I am no longer able to gather anything from the debate. I leave slightly disgruntled and disappointed. During this trip experience has taught me that there really is a need for a lingua franca, because otherwise communication falters and the cultural fraternity about which such solemn speeches were delivered, will be nothing more than a hollow phrase. The medieval people who used Latin were perhaps not that crazy. [IV.7] (para. 4)

Vanhole (2000b) described how he misunderstood a poem recited by his colleague Anne Haverty on the train; his first contribution to De Standaard der Letteren refers to this poem as a work about
ants that died. He later found out that the poem was actually about aunts instead of ants, and much to his bewilderment, Haverty then threatened to sue him for libel, as he reported in his second article: “Yes, we are sailing on the river of Babylon. One letter is enough to set people against each other” [IV.8] (Vanhole, 2000b, para. 8).

Secondly, the fast pace of this journey was deemed problematic. Exchanges and tours were only shallow encounters, and the observations were similarly superficial. Arend (2000) noted in his article about the internet blogposts by the authors on Literatur Express.org:

The messages conveyed about the old continent were themselves as superficial as the impressions gained by this rolling literary bivouac. As the Hungarian author Lázló Garadczi wrote in his entry on the Express’ blog on 9 June: “Short time, much programme, quick impressions, lack of loves or family.” [IV.9] (para. 3)

Vanhole (2000d) underlined in a similar observation that the speed of travel brings about an uncomfortable sense of superficiality: “I feel that the speed with which we travel entails a kind of indifference, and an uneasy feeling of superficiality. That is reinforced by the deceitful, protected existence that we lead, as of diplomats” [IV.10] (para. 6).

Thus, despite the positive observation by journalist Arend (2000) that the “Literatur Express” gained symbolic success by overcoming national tensions and thereby establishing a European network of authors, the participating writers themselves nuanced this idea by pointing out the increasing political tensions, language problems, and the fast pace of the programme, all of which prevented true European intercultural understanding.

It is, however, not only the question of Europe and European identity that is addressed in these articles; the majority of the accounts in the media of the journey concern its literary aspects. The positive aspects of the event are formulated in terms of the emergence of an international network of writers and institutions, and the importance of translations in Europe—topics firmly placed on the agenda by the “Literatur Express,” according to both participants and journalists. For example, the Irish novelist Mike McCormack (2000) reported how, regarding the importance of networking in The Irish Times,

[those train journeys were the most valuable part of the project. Few of them clocked in shorter than six hours—long enough to walk through the train and make friends, long enough to settle down and read translations of Icelandic novels and Macedonian poetry. This was where the real networking was done, the place where the whole Literatur Express
project put down its deepest roots. Books and manuscripts were swopped. Publishers, foreign residencies and bursaries were openly speculated on. This was where we got to know each other. (p. 8)

However, Meester (2000f) noticed how networking during the journey seemed more to the advantage of men than women, who were very much outnumbered—only 23 women participated, whilst there were 80 men (Meester, 2000a). She wrote about how the women held a meeting in Warschau to discuss the journey from a gender perspective:

In turn we told something about ourselves and our work. We were surprised by each other’s strength. It was decided to keep in touch via telephone, fax and e-mail, and, if possible, to pass each other assignments. An Austrian woman came up with the idea to compile an anthology of stories and poems written by the female participants on the literature express. Someone else noted that, according to her, the men had comparatively more lectures than the women. And how many men had actually asked if they could read the translation of our texts? Even my Dutch-speaking colleagues showed no interest at all in mine, whereas I did in theirs. Despite all the amiability there was certainly a “velvet war,” as the French philosopher Pascal Bruckner tends to call the competition between artists. I have experienced several times that male participants on the train journey deliberately kept important persons away from me. [IV.11] (Meester, 2000f, p. 20)

The international literary network that was envisioned by the organisers took shape in the form of the website lyrikline.org, which had already been created by the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin in 1999 (Döbler, 2000; “Großer Bahnhof in Berlin,” 2000). The network was also manifested in the group of European literary institutions that were involved in co-organising the journey. The website Lyrikline.org is now an “international website for experiencing the diversity of contemporary poetry. Here you can listen to the melodies, sounds, and rhythms of international poetry, recited by the authors themselves, and read the poems both in their original languages and various

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89 In 2003, Thomas Wohlfahrt contributed to a volume on Europe in current literature with an essay about the “Literatur Express.” He summarised the results of the project as follows:

The result: a network of structures throughout Europe which make literature accessible and have worked excellently since their inception . . . ; the international online poetry platform lyrikline.org, on which you can hear poets read their works in their original languages as well as read translations of these works, was declared a UNESCO project in 2002. . . .

The German-language edition, Europaeexpress – Ein literarisches Reisebuch, was published in 2001 by Eichborn-Berlin. The anthology provides the basic materials for how the European authors we are discussing here perceive Europe. [IV.12] (Wohlfahrt, 2003, p. 100)
translations” (Lyrikline, n.d., “About”). Whilst the train journey might have given the website a boost with the translations that were produced of poems for *Europaexpress*, the website is currently not explicitly related to the “Literatur Express.” Even though the participating poets can be found there, it does not offer a place for the novelists who were part of the journey, such as Dubravka Ugrešić.90

Within the context of these networks, it is striking that all three Dutch-speaking authors have commented on the absence of interest from the Netherlands and Belgium in this project—not only during the preparatory phase, but also during the journey itself, as Meester (2000d) observed:

Not that I need it, but I cannot help but notice that during the whole trip Serge van Duijnghoven and I have not seen a Dutch diplomat yet. It is completely different for the other participants of the literary express; sometimes they are immediately on arrival at the station welcomed by their ambassador or cultural attaché. Special meetings to promote their books are organised by their respective embassies. Apparently Dutch literature is not taken seriously in diplomatic circles. Or is it our fault, has it to do with the fact that Dutch writers are too busy with building a personality cult around themselves? [IV.13] (p. 20)

Vanhole (2000c) experienced a similar lack of interest:

The lack of interest on the part of the Belgian government is striking. Whereas other writers may rejoice in the presence of some ambassador when they give a lecture, the Belgian delegates abroad show complete indifference. Not that I look forward to such official greetings, but it would be a sign of courtesy or of real interest. [IV. 14] (para. 8)

In an interview with Steven Adolf in the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, Van Duijnghoven attempted to explain the lack of interest from the Dutch literary institutions by referring to Dutch cultural interest as more transatlantic than European:

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90 According to Wohlfahrt, the webpage that was originally tied to this project, Literaturexpress.org, was meant as the main platform upon which to publish (translated) texts by the participating authors to expand their readership (NR, 1999), and also contained blogs on the online diary during the journey. This website is, however, no longer online—perhaps due to the fact that the result did not live up to expectations: one of the critics called the website “disappointing” (MM, 2000), whilst another judged the observations in the online diary to be “superficial” (Arend, 2000), as mentioned above.
The Netherlands was not in the continental timetable. And as a result of this, the Literair Productiefonds [Dutch literary organisation] had not been approached for a stop-over in Amsterdam, according to the organisers. Serge van Duijnoven: “It also has to do with the Netherlands itself. The Productiefonds thinks it is just a megalomaniac project. The fine words of welcome that were spoken here in Madrid, you will never hear in the Netherlands. The Netherlands has a European outlook when it comes to politics, but culturally the focus is more transatlantic.” [IV.15] (Adolf, 2000, p. 24)

Thus, one can argue that the positive effects perceived in the media of the networking opportunities for writers and the involvement of literary institutions needs to be nuanced from the perspectives of both gender and nationality. Women felt less facilitated to expand their network, and Dutch-speaking writers experienced fewer opportunities to engage with cultural institutions and embassies abroad.

12.1.2 The Business of Literature

Alongside positive evaluations of the possibilities to expand European cultural networks from a literary perspective, criticism can be found in articles that discuss the project. This critique boils down to two fundamental points: the awkward combination of literature and politics that underpinned the event, and the perceived media spectacle that the event became.

Firstly, Meester (2000a), amongst others, noted that the political character of the itinerary was frequently debated. For example, a colleague from Belgrade had hoped to escape the topic of war in his own country, only to find himself in numerous roundtable talks during the “Literatur Express” about the Balkan Wars (Meester, 2000a). Vanhole (2000c) expressed relief in his third report as follows: “Finally, in the evening on the Marché de la Poésie it is about literature itself again and not about our political headaches” [IV.16] (para. 6). Meester (2000c) saw how the programme of this journey did not always correspond with the attitude of the participating authors:

Over the past few weeks I have made enquiries here and there about the theme of everyone’s work. The most common answer was: I write about outsidership, I am an individualist. And now all those individuals did obediently all that was on the programme of the Russians. [IV.17] (p. 25)

The main point of contention regarding the interrelatedness of political and literary domains can be found in the final statement that was produced during the journey and read out on the last day
in Berlin to representatives of the European Commission. This joint declaration, as already discussed in Chapter 8 regarding the contribution of Ugrešić, was not agreed upon by all of the writers. Meester (2000f) described the discussion that the draft of the text sparked as follows:

A committee of four members had written a final statement which was addressed to the European Parliament and the Council of Europe. We had all received a copy. In official language the text dealt with unity through diversity, the need to protect smaller languages, the importance of supporting translation projects. The text was a draft, a proposal. The opponents were of the opinion that it had no literary value or originality at all. I considered it indeed a pity to end the trip, which in itself was already a statement, with such worn-out phrases. Bowing to politicians by using their language was a degradation of the work of art that we had created together. [IV.18] (p. 20)

Despite the many arguments against the statement, a final version was presented as a joint effort—much to the dismay of some authors, as Van Duijnhoven (2000) noted. Vanhole (2000e) was one of the authors who felt betrayed, as he reported in De Standaard der Letteren:

The worst is that many of us felt that they got screwed. Just before Konrad took the floor a more or less revised version of the resolution was proposed, but only in English, so that it could not be read by all writers, let alone supported. In addition, already in the very first sentence the belief in European unification is pronounced. I am not the only author who does not feel like contributing to the process of European unification. Unification is good for bankers and managers, but we, writers, are there to cultivate the nuances and differences. [IV.19] (para. 8)

The journalist Arend (2000) discussed this statement in his account of the journey and has a similar point of critique as Ugrešić and Meester, namely that this statement reflected formal EU discourse too much, its vague terminology preventing it from achieving any lasting or profound impact:

The phrase “unity in diversity” and the flat rejection of globalisation contained in the controversial statement which the authors read aloud on Bebelplatz in Berlin at the end of the trip is strongly reminiscent of the official phrasing that the writers were, in fact, supposed to be critically examining and which, according to György Konrad, they should avoid if they want to be taken seriously. We all agree that more money should be spent on
European translations. But we would have liked to know what they mean by the ominous term “geo-poetics,” which the authors intend to place side by side on equal footing with the geopolitics of European governments. [IV.20] (para. 4)

Despite the contested statement, Wohlfahrt defended this outcome in his essay of 2003, in which he reflected on the project. Whilst he admitted that the petition concerning cultural politics only came about after heated discussions, he maintained that the importance of translations remains crucial as a means by which to provide insight into the different histories, cultural experiences, and political realities of Europe—especially to overcome the East-West divide (Wohlfahrt, 2003). This insight is clearly lacking, also amongst writers, as the “Literatur Express” showed:

Without claiming representativeness, it can be said that European writers know very little about the extremely diverse ways of living in Europe... We certainly cannot expect to see the grand intellectual concept of a politically unified Europe, and the extremely diverse viewpoints of the authors themselves reflect the generally identifiable, aimless structure of a Europe without a true intellectual self-image. [IV.21] (Wohlfahrt, 2003, pp. 106–107)

This perceived problematic relationship between European politics and the project was taken up again in 2016, when the German journalist and previous editor of the newspaper Die Welt, Thomas Schmid, published a book entitled Europa ist tot, es lebe Europa! Eine Weltmacht muss sich neu erfinden [Europe is Dead, Long Live Europe! A World Power Has to Reinvent Itself], in which the “Literatur Express” is mentioned as an example of a project with unjustified political ambitions. In the chapter “Zuerst die Kultur” [“Culture First”], he argued that many writers’ conferences on Europe, with participants such as Cees Nooteboom and Robert Menasse, have the same resigned tone of complaint, as authors generally contend that Europe is too pragmatic, too economic, neither sufficiently value-driven, nor sufficiently aesthetic (Schmid, 2016). Schmid’s main point in the chapter was to claim that it is fortunate that the process of European unification did not start with culture and a discussion about shared values, but rather started on an economic basis. However, he argued, literary writers display a puzzling conceit towards European politics and a prime example of this is to be found in the “Literatur Express”:

But many authors remain and continue to be insulted that no one asked them, that no one included them. And they are unwilling or unable to dispatch with the tone of annoyed condescension towards politics. One especially marvellous example of this broadly
orchestrated attempt to portray authors as the “true” Europeans was an event that was organised in Berlin by the Literaturwerkstatt. As part of the Literature Express Europe 2000, they put around 100 authors from 43 countries on a train that travelled from Lisbon to Moscow and then through Warsaw and Berlin on the way back. Although it garnered a great deal of attention in the media, the whole undertaking had as little impact on literature as it did on Europe. [IV.22] (Schmid, 2016, pp. 201–202)

Schmid’s opposition towards the “Literatur Express” is grounded in a more fundamental objection towards the role of writers in the process of European unification—in this sense he differs from the other authors and journalists featured in this chapter, who do not question this role, but rather problematise the result in the form of a joint statement. However, it remains interesting to note how, 16 years after, the “Literatur Express” is characterised as a case of literary hubris with very limited results—both on a political and a literary level—despite the considerable media attention it attracted at the time.

Whilst Schmid does not elaborate further upon his observations of this project, it was precisely the media attention to which he referred that was problematic for other journalists. The second point of critique of the “Literatur Express”—in a literary context—is concerned with the character of the spectacle that this event created. The scale of the project and the marketing around it brought Arend (2000) to argue that

[The] Literature Express is the perfect example of overblown event culture. Handshakes all around, surrounded by the flash of cameras. Nobel Prize winners, presidents and children’s choirs greeting them at every railway station and city hall.

Of course it is a bit difficult when the media describes it as a “pan-European media event with a long-lasting impact” including a target group matrix for sponsors, image transfer and potential for synergy. [IV.23] (para. 2–3)

Despite accepting the media character of this event, Arend is not convinced of the quality of the output during the journey. Both the blogs and the final statement do not lead to an “aesthetic impulse”: “the journey did not result in any aesthetic impulses, in any actual controversy surrounding contemporary European literature” (Arend, 2000, para. 5). Thus, he saw this project overall as a grand tour in self-promotion in the field of European cultural policy and lacking any interesting content: “And the network will be that much more exemplary if it can prove that it is not only a platform for cultural-political self-promotion, but that this massive spectacle can also
generate some spectacular results—writing rather than simply travelling” [IV.24] (Arend, 2000, para. 8). Katharina Döbler (2000), who travelled part of the journey as a reporter for Die Zeit, deployed the same frame of reference by juxtaposing the intimate process of reading a book about a person from another county as a way to gain mutual understanding in Europe, with the spectacle of this large media event—albeit one that might not lead to the anticipated sense of shared heritage:

They say that literature is a means of international understanding. And that is certainly the case when it refers to reading books: the intimate nature of your own mind and your easy chair sharing in the experience and perception of a foreign, possibly even exotic person. But, of course, this does not constitute an event. And since international understanding is a political issue, it requires a spectacle. Hence the transportation of thoughts using language as a vehicle has been turned into the physical transport of poets in an actual vehicle. . . . From an external perspective, the Literature Express is an attempt at representation whose success is dependent on the amount of media coverage it generates. Otherwise, Europe as viewed from a moving train is a story that no one wants to hear. [IV.25] (Döbler, 2000, para. 1)

Yet the scale of the event in the media does not reflect its impact on European politics, nor the quality of its literary output. Arend (2000) concluded from this observation that the project should therefore not be seen as an important literary contribution to reflections on European identity, but as an event that reveals more about the future of the literature business:

More than the question of European identity, the Literature Express leaves us with the question of the future of literary promotion and of literature’s public persona. Despite the advertising savvy of the new generation of young, pop lit and club writers, we cannot seem to dispense with the cliché of the lonesome poet who sits in wood-panelled literary houses weaving his complex tapestry of words. And yet, when a literary project attracts this kind of media attention for multiple weeks on end and draws a crowd of 80,000 to the closing celebrations at the Friedrichstraße railway station and Bebelplatz in Berlin, where, in 1933, the National Socialists staged a book burning, it takes on entirely new dimensions. [IV.26] (para. 4)

Arend’s contention that this venture is more about the future of literature is similar to the conclusion that Döbler drew in the previously mentioned quotation: a project that created a great
occasion for the literature business, yet without providing any profound insights into the question of European identity.

12.1.3 Reception of Europaexpress: Ein literarisches Reisebuch

Compared to the media attention the train journey generated in different European countries, the resulting 730-page anthology *Europaexpress: Ein literarisches Reisebuch* received only three reviews (Gohlis, 2001; “Neue Reisebücher,” 2002; Tewinkel, 2001) in the German media when it was published in 2001. The Literaturwerkstatt originally envisioned an output on a far larger scale: a translation of each text in every language of the 58 represented in the anthology, to be presented at the Frankfurter Buchmesse in 2001 (Literaturwerkstatt, 1999). The feasibility of this aim was already put into question in some media accounts of the journey (Langston, 2000; Sonck, 2000). In the end, only a German edition was published.

The most extensive review of the anthology appeared in *Die Zeit* and via the website of the author Tobias Gohlis (2001), who often writes about travel literature. The title of this article, “Einhundertdreimal ich” [“One Hundred and Three Times Me”] already reveals its main point of critique: this publication hardly provides eloquent insights into Europe, but consists more of references to the writers as a group themselves:

Anyone who travels in a group primarily experiences that group. This results in a few interesting observations about your colleagues, a romantic dalliance or two, and a lot of spinning your own wheels: the Literature Express as a moving self-reference. Pickpocketing suddenly becomes an act of burglary.

Many articles, written a half-year after the event, find it hard to shake off the thrill of travel and are stuck in the rhythm of stop and go: “The train stops. Everyone gets off.” 19 times, every three days. It is amazing how difficult it is to describe the unknown. The writers are at a loss for words. Instead: stammering and phrases. [IV.27] (Gohlis, 2001, “Leider kein Narrenschiff”)

Whereas Gohlis perceived the contributions as repetitive, Christiane Tewinkel (2001, p. 22), in her review for the newspaper *Taz*, saw no overlap in the contributions, which she called “a rich compendium.” Drawing a direct comparison with the wealth of European cultural diversity, she argued:
Even though it is clear that the East made a stronger impression than the West, even though the illustrious figures from the trip appear here and there in different sketches . . . it is all the more interesting that the project remains as varied as Europe itself. A book that dozens of translators have contributed to, in which the travelling authors write about one another, about languages and ethnicities, about the water in Minsk, the house in Warsaw where Chopin was born, or the minibus that was blocked in by other cars in Madrid—a book of this kind is something truly unique. [IV.28] (Tewinkel, 2001, p. 22)

Finally, the newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine* published a short, positive review in 2002 that refers to the project and concluded:

> And now, a full year after they have returned, the accounts of the authors' journeys and cultural exchanges have been published as a book. As poems; one-act plays; narratives; observations; novellas; light-hearted tales of happiness; difficult, wordy descriptions of painful experiences; love stories; memorials; bedtime stories. And all of the texts as a whole form a lovely travelogue. Written on the road. To be read on the road. In Europe, on the train, or anywhere else. [IV.29] (“Neue Reisebücher,” 2002, p. 2)

The reason that this anthology received so little attention in the press might have something to do with the fact that it turned out to be, according to Gohlis (2001), as voluminous as the timetables at a German railway company. Whilst another factor might be grounded in the intentions behind this project—namely, to provide lesser-known authors with a broader audience through the various translations. The large number of relatively unknown authors therefore possibly resulted in a lack of media attention.\(^{91}\)

The original aim to provide editions in other languages was not fulfilled because of a lack of funding, which was to be gathered from a later spin-off project. In 2002, Luc Pire from Tournesol Conseils S.A., together with eurobylon e.V. and two literary organisations—one from Spain and one from Lithuania—took the initiative to publish the other translations of the texts from the anthology on the website babelexpress.org. A subsidy of €114,517,50 from the EU Culture Programme 2000 was awarded that same year to support this website and provide for translations (“Culture 2000-exercise 2002,” n.d.). The report from the EU Culture Programme announcing this funding described this spin-off project as follows:

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\(^{91}\) Another factor might be that the anthology appeared one month after 9/11 and hence the media paid more attention to these events.
**Description:** Babelexpress is a multilingual library of contemporary European texts available on the internet for free. It offers some hundred texts about Europe, written by 103 authors from all over the continent, in 58 languages and translated into Spanish, German and Russian. There will be forums for readers to give their reaction to the texts.

**Objectives:** To give writers the opportunity to speak about Europe; to offer the public texts via the internet, and published in lesser represented languages; to favour the meeting of writers and readers. (“Culture 2000-exercise 2002,” n.d., “Babelexpress’’)

The multilingual website Babelexpress.org is no longer online, but via the internet archive it can be gathered that the site provided contributions from the anthology in Russian, Spanish, and in the authors’ original languages. Some background information is provided about the origins of this project and its relation to the “Literatur Express”:

The Literature Express project mobilized a lot of energy in order to convince all the countries where the train stopped to organize literary events. But once the train stopped in Berlin, its final destination, it was not easy to find funds for the translation. Russia, Germany and Spain managed to finance the translation of all the texts in their language. But no one was willing to publish the texts in their original versions. Electronic publishing solved the problem. (“Babelexpress.org (via Internet Archive),” n.d.)

Despite the fact that the websites Literaturexpress.org and Babelexpress.org are now offline, this large project also generated outcomes that were not planned by the organisers, in the form of the two previously mentioned novels, both with a fictional reconstruction of this journey as their topic. Importantly, both of these subsequent novels are still available to consult. In 2016, the “Literatur Express” was therefore mentioned again in German media, as the novel *Der Literatur Express* was published, translated from the Georgian original, written by one of the participants, Lasha Bugadze (see section 12.2). By then, reviewers were referring to the project on which the novel was based in highly critical terms. Ulrich Rüdenauer (2016) summarised its meagre results in the German newspaper *Der Tagespiegel* as follows:

In the end, we were not sure if it was a massive celebration of Europe or rather a booze cruise for a bunch of poets who were happy to have survived the whole thing more or less in one piece. After all, authors tend to eschew social interaction. And the fact that this kind
of a field trip can also serve a social purpose, but not necessarily inspire notorious loners
to produce artistic masterpieces, was made clear by the publication of the Europaexpress
anthology. It contained rather mundane attempts at summarising the foreignness and
overwhelming nature of the trip—but there were few aesthetic revelations or new insights
into the countries visited or the acquaintances encountered on the journey. [IV.30] (p. 28)

Katharina Döbler (2016), who reported on the original journey in 2000 for *Die Zeit* (see section
12.1.1), also reviewed Bugadze’s novel, and concluded on the output of the “Literatur Express”:

> Afterwards they were released to their home countries, and yet accompanied by the
> expectation that there would be a lot of books written about the big trip they had all just
taken.
> That was not the case: 16 years later, there are no readable traces of the mega project except
> for a novel titled *Der Literatur Express*, which was published in Tbilisi in 2009 and purports
to describe the experiences of a Georgian passenger. [IV.31] (p. 40)

In the light of Bugadze’s novel, Rüdenauer (2016) noted that the project upon which it was based
had not so much revealed European unity, but more its many different borders and boundaries:

> In the summer of 2000, 100 authors from 43 European countries spent six weeks on a train
> travelling across the continent . . . . In the following year, an anthology was published with
> writing from all of the passengers—that was all we heard about it.
> Even back then, more than anything, this highly publicised, pan-European travel project
> served to make boundaries tangible—physical, mental, geographical and cultural. That is
> also what Georgian novelist and playwright Lasha Bugadze describes. [IV.32] (p. 28)

It should be noted that the above observations on the long-term effects of this project only
consider the written output in the form of the anthology. However, this chapter has argued that
effects were also intended in less visible areas, namely in the creation of a network of institutions,
writers, publishers, and translators, and the call in general for the European Union to keep
providing financial support for translations.

12.2 **Impact: The Fictional Reworkings of the “Literatur Express”**
The “Literatur Express” was also a creative inspiration to at least two participants who turned their experiences on the “Literatur Express” into fiction: Kamiel Vanhole (O heer, waar zijn uw zijstraten? [O Lord, Where Are Your Alleys?], 2002) and Lasha Bugadze (The Literature Express, 2013). This section discusses the impact of the project in the light of these fictional re-workings.

The contribution by the Flemish author Kamiel Vanhole to the anthology Europaexpress: Ein literarisches Reisebuch largely overlaps with the second chapter of his novel O Heer, waar zijn uw zijstraten?, which appeared in 2002. The basis for this novel is thus grounded in his experiences during the “Literatur Express.” The protagonist is René Razifa from Madagascar, who arrived in Europe as an undocumented migrant, with no luggage except “know[ing] the first article of the Declaration des Droits l’Homme et du Citoyen by heart: Les hommes naissant et demeurent libres et égaux en droits. Copyright the French people, 1789” [IV.33] (Vanhole, 2002, p. 15). Soon after his arrival, René meets a Turkish woman, Amber, who invites him to join her secretly on her train journey around Europe, organised by the German Tobias Ambach, with the intention to “unify again this hopelessly disintegrated continent. We are the stitching. Together we are going to prove that Europe is a reality” [IV.34] (Vanhole, 2002, p. 30). The invitees are not writers, but people from all over Europe, from different social classes and professions—from plumbers to lawyers. As René ends up being discovered by the organisation, he argues for the importance of his presence during the journey in a plea to Ambach to let him stay:

The whole idea of this trip, I thought, is that all participants should start thinking about the unity and the variety of the European continent. Well, I did. And I came to the conclusion that I might play a very specific role with my presence in the group. As a matter of fact, I have a question for the group. And that question is very simple: is Europe a closed institution or not? Should Europe be permeable? [IV.35] (Vanhole, 2002, p. 69)

René is allowed to remain, but he finds himself being set up in a complex conspiracy by Amber, who wants him to commit murder during one of their stops in Hannover at Expo 2000.

Despite the fact that this novel contains a mysterious plot around a murder, many nonfictional elements of the real “Literatur Express” can also be discerned: the cities that are visited; the scene in the European Parliament; the idealistic and somewhat overbearing ambitions behind the journey to unify the continent; and the speech from a Nobel Prize winner at the start (José Saramago had sent off the participants in the “Literatur Express” in Lisbon). A crucial scene in the novel is based on an event that Vanhole observed from his hotel: four men physically abusing another person on the street in Brussels, which he referred to in his third report for De Standaard
Vanhole transposed this scene to his novel by depicting how René was beaten up by British hooligans in Brussels, during which he contemplates where to find alleys, hence the title of this novel—*O Lord, Where Are Your Alleys?*. Throughout the novel, René reflects on Europe, the event that he became part of, and its intended outcomes; reflections that can also be read as thoughts on the “Literatur Express,” especially considering the many references to the nonfictional train journey. The idealism and optimism towards Europe that the organiser, Tobias Ambach, aims to purvey during his speeches and the many discussions, leads René to think: “It all sounded so goody-goody, that it first made me sick and then suspicious” (Vanhole, 2002, p. 83). Amber has reservations about this journey as well, as she sighs: “It is all so silly . . . . I don’t know, those conversations, everything. Each has its say but, everyone thinks that all those cheerful thoughts will lead to something meaningful…” [IV.36] (Vanhole, 2002, p. 88). René concludes in a lecture he was asked to give to compensate for his illegal presence:

> Some people will ask me: and what do you think of Europe now? . . . Well, so many days later, I actually still don’t know what to think of Europe: my impressions are still so fresh and confusing that I cannot draw anything from them. By the way, I hope it will stay that way, I am not so fond of essences. [IV.37] (Vanhole, 2002, p. 145)

With the hesitance about the grand ambitions of the journey, the unwillingness to reduce Europe to a certain essence, and the critical addressing of the issue of migration, Vanhole clearly created a novel that is more than a mysterious crime story. Reflections on Europe sit at the core of his work, and this is also noted by the many critics and academics who have reviewed it (Borré, 2002; Gerits, 2003; Missinne, 2011; Overstijns, 2002). All of them do so in the light of Vanhole’s participation in the “Literatur Express” two years earlier. In the Flemish newspaper *De Morgen*, for example, the critic Jos Borré (2002) noted:

> In his new novel *O Heer, waar zijn uw zijstraten?* [O Lord, Where Are Your Alleys?] he [Vanhole] puts people from some 40 countries, not writers, on a train for a comparable expedition, but the reporter puts strongly into perspective the euphoria which they are supposed to show . . . . The train is an allegorical journey through the Fortress Europe, and with his pure, sometimes even naïve view on the cultural achievements of the Old World René investigates them mercilessly and exposes the hypocrisy and the contradictions. [IV.38] (para. 3)
The disillusionment with the European continent is repeatedly noted by the critics. Jeroen Overstijns (2002) is surprised by the “tormented fighting spirit” of Vanhole to address European issues: “social criticism, for example, on the anonymous power of multinationals, and, above all, Europe’s desperation with regard to refugees, migrants and integration looms largely in *O Heer, waar zijn uw zijstraten?*” [IV.39] (Overstijns, 2002, “Vechtlust”). Joris Gerits (2003) underlines the intertextual references in the novel as techniques by which to reflect on Europe:

> And for that reflection he provides between the lines the necessary material: idealistic positions are critically examined, Ortega y Gasset is cited and his vision of the Europeans united by an ambitious project, but also, Cioran, although not mentioned, is cited. He was of the opinion that the future of Europe belongs to the immigrants and that irrevocably the day will come that the western world will be governed by its immigrants. [IV.40] (p. 459)

According to Lut Missinne (2011), the choice for an outsider, in the role of undocumented migrant, is an import perspective by which to emphasise the discrepancy between European ideals and reality:

> As non-European, René is presented as the only person without a past. However, he loses his pure innocence and he is confronted with the deceit, the moral decay and the pain of Europe. The tour, intended to symbolise the unification threatens to end in a total fragmentation. [IV.41] (pp. 57–58)

Contrary to the reviews and accounts of the “Literatur Express,” one can thus observe how Vanhole’s novel—despite clearly mocking the ideals behind the project—is seen, as Gerits (2003) argued, as an appeal to readers to reflect on both Europe and issues such as identity and migration. The focus here is firmly on Europe, and not on the insights that, in the eyes of reviewers, the “Literatur Express” provided into the workings of modern authorship and cultural policies.

More than Vanhole, the Georgian author Lasha Bugadze—who was incidentally the youngest participant on the train journey (Wohlfahrt, 2003)—weaved nonfictional elements into his novel *The Literature Express*, which revolves around a secret love affair that develops between the protagonist, Zaza, and the wife of one of the fellow travellers, called Helena, on board the train. Bugadze published this novel in 2009; it was translated into English in 2013, and into German in 2016. It was long-listed for the International Dublin Literary Award in 2014.
As there is no text by Bugadze in the anthology *Europaexpress*, this novel might perhaps be seen as his belated contribution. The Literature Express in this novel is also a train journey around Europe with writers on board—with most of the chapters referring to the cities that were part of the original train journey’s itinerary. In an interview, Bugadze emphasised the many real elements of the journey in the novel—despite the fact that it cannot be perceived as autobiographical (Haemmerli, 2016). The main intervention into the nonfictional account of the events is that he transposed the journey to 2008, right in the middle of the Russian-Georgian conflict, which he addresses in the novel as well (Bugadze, 2013). Besides this temporal change, there are many recognisable elements in this novel that refer to the nonfictional “Literatur Express” of 2000: the self-doubt of participants about their literary standing (“Who considered me a bona fide writer. . . ?” [Bugadze, 2013, p. 10]); the ongoing linguistic misunderstandings (“Whatever the reasons, I found myself in literary Babylon.” [p. 46]); and the East-West divide (“There was no sign of the ‘western camp’ in the museum.” [p. 45]).

Whereas Vanhole’s novel reveals a disillusionment and anger about European political issues, Bugadze’s work is much more light-hearted and satirical, trying to convey the problems of Europe by focussing on the communication difficulties of the travellers during the journey. As Rüdenauer (2016) observed in *Der Tagesspiegel*:

> What is blatantly obvious today in the political discussions and European crises can also be observed in this intellectual microcosm: we simply do not understand one another. We tend to gravitate towards others from our home country, the other participants are eyed warily and, for the sake of convenience, taken into consideration together with all of the usual national stereotypes.92 [IV.42] (p. 28)

Carsten von Hueck (2016) sees how the reference to the Russian–Georgian war in 2008 also puts the efforts of the “Literatur Express” in a different light: “one single Europe clearly proved to be a farce” [IV.43] (von Hueck, 2016, “Lasha Bugadze zeigt gemeinsames Europa als Farce”).

However, the main point that this novel wants to drive home is a satirical perspective on the business of literature, and the cover text of *The Literature Express* introduces the story as follows: “A bevy of mediocre writers are invited to a seminar aboard a specially chartered train, and this

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92 According to Katharina Döbler (2016), the role of national stereotypes that Rüdenauer mentions constitute a flaw in this novel. She concluded her review by stating that Bugadze leans too much on cultural clichés in his depiction of the different characters (Döbler, 2016). In another review, the overall presence of national stereotypes is problematised as well: “The text is lively, amusing and pleasantly self-deprecating, but also a bit arbitrary. When the passengers come into the project with all of their stereotypes and preconceived notions, and the people prefer to be around others from their home countries, or at least the proven East-West split is maintained, then it is entertaining but little else” [IV.44] (Pöhlmann, 2016, p. 14).
novel tracks their progress across Europe: bitter, bickering, and self-absorbed” (Bugadze, 2013). Often, the protagonist takes the opportunity to simultaneously ridicule his fellow travellers and himself by noticing how “right there, before my eyes, an enormous heap of pulp-fiction was created. Literary surrogate in huge amounts—texts not worth a penny!” (Bugadze, 2013, p. 38). Towards the end of the journey, Zaza realises:

The train presented a collection of equal abilities. Equally talented and equally incapable. . . Similar originality. Similar lack of luck in literature. Yes, it was the train of the luckless. The Germans had gathered one hundred unlucky writers and drove us to the ultimate goal: eventually we all had to proclaim: “I’m not a writer!” . . . Even the name *Literature Express* was a joke—we were ridiculed! And that’s why we were taken from city to city as if we were a sideshow… Of course we were pathetic! (Bugadze, 2013, pp. 202–203)

The tone of voice in this novel is comparable to some of the contributions in the anthology, for example the short story by the Catalan author Xavier Moret (2001), in which the protagonist suspects that the participants as lesser-known authors are secretly being transported by train to Siberia to prevent them from publishing ever again. The finale of this novel consists of a competition between the authors, and the prize winner would have his or her story published in the important German literary magazine *Simplicissimus* (the name of a genuine German satirical magazine that was published until 1967, see http://www.simplicissimus.info/index.php?id=9). The participants, and especially those from Eastern Europe, are eager to find ways to get published, and Zaza also searches for ways to “push me into European literature” (Bugadze, 2013, p. 210). However, he finds himself too tangled up in his romantic affair to produce a story for the competition, much to the dismay of the organisers, who insist that everyone on the train should submit a text (Bugadze, 2013, p. 212).

Whilst the critic Christiane Pöhlmann (2016) appreciates how this novel depicts “the publishing industry as a kleptocratic organisation” [IV.45] (p. 14), Rüdenauer (2016) describes how Zaza’s insight into the project and his colleagues reveals a moment of truth in this narrative:

Clichés themselves often contain hidden truths. This at least true of Zaza’s realisation that one should never take this writers’ circus too seriously, and that those who feel they constantly have to be writing and producing themselves, whether out of vanity or existential necessity, seldom make good listeners. [IV.46] (p. 28)
Both novels discussed in this section focus on two different aspects of the project and the anthology. Bugadze’s *The Literature Express* emphasises one aspect of the project: the workings of the literary business and modern-day authorship—albeit in a satirical manner. Many years after the “Literatur Express,” Bugadze’s work constructs an image of a media-driven event, with mediocre writers on board a train, holding on to their prejudices about other nationalities, and only present with one goal: furthering their own careers. Yet whilst ridiculing this journey and the business that surrounded it, Bugadze actually succeeded in “pushing himself into European literature,” with translations in English and German, and international recognition in the form of being long-listed for an award. With regard to the second aspect of the project, whereas the anthology failed to reveal deeper insights into issues of European identity—according to the reviewers—it is especially Vanhole’s *O Heer, waar zijn uw zijstraten?* that led critics to reflect upon Europe and a range of political issues, since the novel is read as an invitation to contemplate such topics. The differences between these fictional re-workings and the anthology itself are striking and notably, both novels received more media attention than the book *Europaexpress* itself.

12.3 Conclusion

The “Literatur Express” yielded contradictory effects if we consider its literary contribution to reflections on European identity. Whereas the journey and its products—most notably the anthology, *Europaexpress*—were intended to act as explorations of a divided continent, to go in search of that which binds Europeans together, and to establish an international network of writers, translators, and publishers, its critics are quick to frame the project as a problematically political, megalomaniacal media event. The attention it garnered hardly addressed the European issues that it originally aimed to put on the agenda, and instead the focus is firmly on the business and spectacle that literature has become—an aspect of the project that was magnified in the novel *The Literature Express* of 2009, in which the author, Lasha Bugadze, offered a satirical, fictional version of the project featuring a range of self-absorbed, mediocre writers.

A striking aspect of the reception of this project is how both reviewers and participants alike perceive a certain “mismatch” between the literary aspects and the intended European dimension of the project. Its final statement, firstly, fails to impress either group, as the text reflected contemporary EU discourse instead of utilising more “literary” language (Arend, 2000; Meester, 2000f). Furthermore, the personal enjoyment of a book as a means by which to encounter a European character is deemed more profound than the media spectacle this project engendered (Arend, 2000; Döbler, 2000). Finally, the literary author is generally perceived merely as a “sociophobe” (Rüdenauer, 2016)—a person who does not perform well in groups and that writes
on individualism and being an outsider (Meester, 2000c). Thus, when it comes to the perceived value of the project and its stated aims, one can argue that its reception reveals how these images of the author and literary works are precisely the problem. The way in which writers and literature are constructed in the media (again, both by critics and by the authors themselves) stands in opposition to the wider agenda of the organisation behind the project: writers are individualists who specialise in literary language, and who produce novels that are best enjoyed alone by their readers. Travelling in a group to produce a statement for the European Union in a media spectacle does not concur with this particular image of literature. Thus, answering the research questions that asked if this project was indeed perceived as, firstly, a contribution to the wider discussion about European identity, and secondly, if the project’s literary nature was acknowledged as a valuable perspective in the debate, one can argue that neither can be considered true in the case of the “Literatur Express.” The project’s reception did not address European issues, and its literary credentials are problematised in the light of its stated ambitions as well.

However, the project did at least yield a fruitful combination of literature and reflection on European identity and policies, according to some of its reviewers. The novel *O Heer, waar zijn uw zijstraten?* led critics to contemplate what binds Europeans, as well as issues of immigration. It is precisely the literary nature of Kamiel Vanhole’s novel that engendered these thoughts: the “allegorical journey through Fortress Europe” (Borré, 2002) is interwoven with intertextual references to the European project (Gerits, 2003), and the choice for an undocumented migrant offers a valuable perspective on “being European” (Missinne, 2011). One can thus conclude that the project’s unplanned outputs—its wider “impact” as described in the introduction to this part—met the expectations of the organisation better than the official output in the shape of the anthology.
Part III of this dissertation argued that the intentions formulated by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) in their project “Narratives for Europe,” which ran between 2009 and 2012, are clearly reflected in the project’s outputs. These outputs consisted of three elements: a website, Narratives for Europe (www.narratives.eu), with contributions from academics, activists, writers, and artists; the publication *Remappings: The Making of European Narratives*, published in 2012, which was largely based on this website; and a closing event, “Imagining Europe,” which was held over a four-day period, October 4–7, 2012 (partly funded with a subsidy from the EU Culture Programme 2007). The programme of “Imagining Europe” included a keynote speech by the Indian author Amitav Ghosh; a debate on the reinvention of democratic practices with, amongst others, Peter Vermersch; the world premiere of a theatre play by the Belarus Free Theatre entitled “Trash Cuisine”; musical performances; a film screening; and a live cinema performance entitled “European Souvenirs” by an artistic collective, showing fragments of film from European archives (as part of the project “Remapping Europe—A Remix Project”; see https://www.docnextnetwork.org/remappingeurope/).

The texts, performances, and website engaged in formulating an idea of Europe that corresponded with the image constructed by the ECF: specifically, a Europe that finds its overarching narrative, not so much in a shared cultural past, but rather in contemporary political challenges, such as the issues surrounding migration and Europe’s alliances with neighbouring countries. Two elements in the image of Europe were underlined in the resulting texts and events: the need for alternative political practices (new forms of democracy), and narrative practices (of migration). Literature was perceived by the organisers as providing an opportunity to (re)formulate these different narratives beyond their existing institutional scripts. Participants took up this challenge by reflecting on the importance of the creative imagination in democratic practices and the tradition of great writers in order to reflect on issues of migration and extremism (Benali, 2012; “Imagining Europe, Reclaiming Public Space,” 2012).

However, this approach also revealed a tension within the project. On the one hand, the tradition of great European writers was perceived by Van Reybrouck (2017a) as a form of elitism that is unable to resolve current European issues. This perception was echoed by the ECF, emphasising the importance of a bottom-up approach and of involving audiences to avoid an elitist...
approach. On the other hand, some participants explicitly relied on this image—of the great European writer—to argue their importance for reflections on European identity (Benali, 2012; van Nimwegen, 2012). This included the ECF itself, who framed the project with references to Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht (ECF, n.d.-c).

This chapter addresses two perspectives: the reception of the festival “Imagining Europe” in mainstream media; and the larger effect of the project as a whole, including the academic representations of the activities and the inspiration this initiative provided to the European Commission to initiate their project “A New Narrative for Europe.” This chapter will argue that the project “Narratives for Europe” succeeded in providing a platform for cultural actors to assess EU policies critically and, paradoxically at the same time, exemplified the close interaction between the institutional levels of the European Commission and grassroots cultural organisations.

13.1 Reception of “Narratives for Europe”

Of the three main events (the website, the book, and the festival) that made up the project, it was the festival that garnered the most attention in various media—especialy the performance by the Belarus Free Theatre and the opening lecture by Amitav Ghosh. This section focusses on both of these elements of the festival.

The media attention for “Imagining Europe” relied mostly on the fact that the Belarus Free Theatre was invited to stage their performance “Trash Cuisine.” The individual stories of the members of this theatre company—most of them in exile and all victims of “Europe’s last dictatorship” (van den Berg, 2012, “Kunst en media”)—received considerable attention in national and international media: interviews with the members appeared in de Volkskrant (Veraart, 2012), Het Parool (van den Berg, 2012), and Vrij Nederland (van den Broek & Cohen, 2012). In Germany, an online review and newspaper article appeared in Welt Online and Die Welt (Petz, 2012a, 2012b). The interviews give an impression of life in Belarus, where it is “Stalin-time all over again,” as one of the members explained, with executions, random arrests, and house searches by the Belarussian secret service (Veraart, 2012, p. 8). The interview in the news magazine Vrij Nederland goes further than simply discussing their personal experiences of living in Belarus. Here, the theatre makers explain the political message in their play, stating:

Trash cuisine is like the earlier shows a raw, physical performance on the subject of the death penalty. “I see our work not as political, but the political situation pushes us in the direction of a subject,” according to [theatre producer] Kaliada. “Each year, 40 people are
executed in Belarus and it frequently happens that their family is only informed after the execution.” [IV.47] (van den Broek & Cohen, 2012, p. 64)

Despite the fact that neither the ECF, nor the festival are discussed in detail in these articles, one can see how the ideas of Europe and European identity both play a role: the Belarus Free Theatre takes the opportunity to criticise Europe for ignoring these grave violations of human rights. The interview in *Vrij Nederland* continues:

The theatre makers whose projects are promoted by international colleagues such as Tom Stoppard, Kevin Spacey and Jude Law and who were supported by sympathiser Vaclav Havel, feel left in the lurch by Europe. The Netherlands is, according to them, after Russia the largest trading partner of the state-owned companies of dictator Lukashenko, “in the former Soviet Republic a free market is still an illusion,” but it seems that the Netherlands is just like the rest of Europe unwilling to impose a trade embargo. “Belarus belongs in terms of history and mentality to Europe, it seemed that we rather than, for example, Poland would get the opportunity to join the European Union. But instead we have been governed for already eighteen years by a totally paranoid dictator who supplies weapons to Iran and Syria and who openly states that he admires Adolf Hitler,” according to Nicolai [Khalezin, director] and Natalia [Kaliada, producer]. “And Europe, where we supposedly belong, does not mind and even makes money out of it.” [IV.48] (van den Broek & Cohen, 2012, p. 64)

Referring to their shared sense of European identity, these participants reveal how disillusionment with Europe and the European Union also permeates the ways in which the ECF’s search for European narratives is constructed in the media: it is perceived neither as “pro-European” nor as EU institutional rhetoric. Critique and dissent are part and parcel of the emergence of the new narratives that the ECF aimed to facilitate.

Furthermore, one recurring theme in the intentions and outcome of “Narratives for Europe” also plays a crucial role in media reports on “Trash Cuisine”: that of classical literature, as the title of the contribution on the website Welt Online already reveals—“Gegen die Diktatur; Lear tanzt mitten im weißrussischen Horror” [“Against the Dictatorship; Lear Dances in the Middle of the Belarusian Horror”] (Petz, 2012a). Producer Kaliada explained how Shakespeare was the main source of inspiration for this play on the subject of executions and the death penalty:
Shakespeare is our partner in all of this. As the only one in his time, he wrote about all possible ways of murder. With his themes he was in the centre of society. We use some parts of his text, but not that much. Precisely because you must not quite revert to the classics, but take your own time and society as a subject for your plays, makes him our hero. [IV. 49] (Veraart, 2012, p. 8)

Cooperating with Amnesty International, the Belarus Free Theatre travelled the world to explore their theme, and the association with Shakespeare proved to be fruitful, as Kaliada explained in another interview:

During the research for their production the makers visited death cells in prisons in Thailand, Malaysia and the USA and they spoke with child soldiers in Uganda and with Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda. In addition, they use texts by Shakespeare about murders and executions. “We are not a theatre company that stages a complete Shakespeare play. We use his texts to emphasise that man has not changed. We spoke with a Belarusian ex-prison officer who maintained that he had not killed people—he was only in charge of a group of executioners. It becomes clear that his texts form a perfect match with those of Lady Macbeth.” [IV.50] (van den Berg, 2012, “Kunst en media”)

It is precisely this combination of (classical) literature and political statements that the ECF aimed to bring into the spotlight with “Narratives for Europe,” and as demonstrated in Part III, the focus author Abdelkader Benali referred to classical literature in similar ways—as a means to reflect critically on the European Union’s migration policies.

Besides the premiere of “Trash Cuisine,” the opening lecture by Amitav Ghosh also featured prominently in Dutch media. On the last day of the event, the Indian author was invited to the political interview programme “Buitenhof” to share his views on Europe (Ghosh, 2012). The interview was explicitly focused on the European Union’s political challenges and on questions of identity. It began, however, with a question about Ghosh’s birth place: “[D]oes Europe mean anything to an average Indian?” (Ghosh, 2012). Ghosh replied politely that the ways in which Europe is able to draw in more people by expanding its borders can be an example for India, and its struggles with border issues and different ethnic groups. However, Ghosh deplored the fact that the European Union began with economics, instead of with bonds between people: EU leaders still put the markets above people, he argued, and they talk “corporate talk.” The focus of the interview then shifted to issues of identity, and the possibility of having multiple identities—one
that Ghosh defends. The interviewer asked Ghosh to talk about the various ways that exist to “create” an identity, in the sense of “inventing a tradition,” as phrased by Hobsbawm (1983). Ghosh (2012) replied that even outside of Europe, Europeans have a European identity—it is already there. According to Ghosh, the main threat to a sense of European identity is the current rise of right-wing parties, and the fostering of national identities that accompanies it. Left-wing parties should, therefore, find an equally strong voice with which to speak of solidarity (Ghosh, 2012).

Read in the framework of this project, the most interesting aspect of this interview is not so much what was said, but rather what was not said. During the 20-minute interview, the Indian author was not asked about what he, specifically as a writer, could add to reflections on Europe; he was only addressed as being an Indian intellectual, and what that could mean for his views on Europe. Neither were the capabilities of literature and storytelling for the emergence of a European identity debated, even though the question on the invention of tradition might have been understood as an attempt to reflect on the role of literary imagination. The fact that these issues did not come up in the conversation might have something to do with the fact that “Buitenhof” is a political programme, and not a cultural show. On the website of “Buitenhof”, the item with Ghosh was indeed introduced as an interview on the more political aspects of Europe:

Amitav Ghosh is one of the best known contemporary authors from India. The colonial history of Europe and its influence on Asia is one of the central themes in his work. Invited by the European Cultural Foundation, he is in the Netherlands for a few days and this Sunday he will feature exclusively in Buitenhof. How does this leading Indian intellectual look at the crisis in Europe? And what can and must be the role of the old continent in a globalising world? [IV.51] (https://www.vpro.nl/speel~VPWON_1165558~amitav-ghosh-louise-fresco-marianne-thieme-buitenhof~.html)

However, Geert van Istendael—one of the participants in “The European Constitution in Verse”—was asked a few years earlier on the same political programme “Buitenhof” why this poetic intervention was necessary—especially since poetry is perceived by some as complex and inaccessible (van Istendael, 2008). This question referred to the text, rather than to the fact that Van Istendael was there as a poet. The fact that Ghosh was not asked about his expertise as a writer reveals how this interview taps into the tradition of great European writers and intellectuals who debate European issues and provide their point of view with a certain authority that is not questioned, notwithstanding of course that in this case, the great writer in question is not European.
The fact that an interview with a writer during a political television programme on current EU crises goes unquestioned in the sense that her or his authority is not addressed with regard to these issues, shows how this tradition is still highly influential in the perception of authorship.

In a special edition of De Groene Amsterdammer, there are more instances that claim the importance of culture and literature to formulating an “idea of Europe,” or to imagining European identity (Polak, 2012; du Saar, 2012). This edition, which was published as a supplement to the weekly news magazine shortly before the festival “Imagining Europe,” consists of contributions by journalists from De Groene Amsterdammer themselves, along with pieces by publicists with a connection to the ECF (Monica Sassatelli’s contribution to the book Remappings by the ECF was reprinted in this issue). The issue, entitled “Een ander Europa / Imagining Europe,” is introduced as follows:

That “the old continent” is going through a challenging period, is an understatement. The crisis, the rise of new world powers, demographic developments: they raise many questions. What does it mean to be European in the year 2012? What does a united Europe bring us? How does the rest of the world look at us? Has Europe also to contend with a cultural crisis? What does the future look like? The one and only solution is not offered by Imagining Europe. However, it offers an exploration of these questions—and possible answers—by a diverse group of established and up-and-coming artists, thinkers and cultural creators. [IV.52] (“Imagining Europe / Een ander Europa - in performance, film, en debat,” 2012, p. 3)

Even though the Dutch part of the title, “Een ander Europa” [“Another Europe”], suggests that the contributions are all gathered around shared critiques of current EU policies, this is not the case. Rather, the common ground in these articles is the underlining of the abilities of culture to reflect on current political challenges and to offer new ideas for Europe.

The first instance of the importance of literature for Europe is provided by Ghosh, who argued in an interview with Mars van Grunsven in the special edition that, despite the fact that he is a great believer in the European project, he perceived a fault with the European Union: it is a “failure of imagination” (van Grunsven, 2012, p. 5). This lack of imagination prevents the emergence of a shared narrative, as Ghosh explained:

“What is missing is a story of unity. There are hundreds of nationalist stories about French or German identity, which often have their origins in military events. But there is no way
to represent European identity.” Therefore, Ghosh thinks that the work of the ECF, which so far has been unknown to the general public, is important. “Yes, culture takes time, but you can also influence culture. Culture can be sponsored. Dutch culture is shaped and reinforced by the Rijksmuseum, which is funded by the state. Currently, you will find anywhere in Europe cultural institutes that are sponsored by nation states, but no pan-European institution.” [IV.53] (van Grunsven, 2012, p. 5)

The importance of culture to Europe is summarised by the film director John Akomfrah, who states in an interview with Nouska du Saar:

Much of my work is about different representations of Europe . . . . The idea of Europe will only succeed, if people believe in it. It is not only, which is now the case, the responsibility of politicians. Artists are important as well: not only to entertain but also to increase cultural knowledge.94 [IV.54] (du Saar, 2012, p. 15)

Other contributions also exemplify how Europe might be understood through the lens of a cultural product: Nina Polak (2012) argued that a “re-mixing” approach of the performance “European Souvenirs” during the “Imagining Europe” festival, consisting of images from European visual archives, offers an appropriate representation of the complexity of European identity. Whilst Erdal Balci (2012) compared the position of women in Europe and Turkey through an analysis of Lisbeth Salander, a character from the novels by Stieg Larsson. Finally, Farid Tabarki (2012), one of the moderators during the festival and active on the website Narratives for Europe as well, concluded:

It is of vital importance that we keep in touch on a European scale with these new ideas and solutions. So does the conference Imagining Europe, just like, for example, the initiative A Soul for Europe which connects the development of the political union to a more important role for art and culture, with the aim to render Europe a “soul.”95 [IV.55] (p. 16)

With these examples in mind, one can argue that the reception of the festival is congruent with the stated intentions and agenda of the organisation: it firmly established cultural actors and products

94 An example of this approach is Akomfrah’s film Nine Muses (2010) “on the post-war mass migration from Africa to England. Akomfrah combined archive material of Africans migrating to England with poetic quotes from Homer’s Odyssey and pictures from a lonely figure in a winter landscape” [IV.56] (du Saar, 2012, p. 15)
95 Farid Tabarki is a member of the strategy group for this initiative, which “connects and mobilizes citizens and democratic institutions across Europe, fostering a sense of responsibility for the future of Europe and democracy through culture” (“A Soul for Europe,” n.d., n.p)
as possessing valuable perspectives in debates on European issues—via the interview on the “Buitenhof” programme with Ghosh, and by the special edition of De Groene Amsterdammer examining the festival. The image of Europe and the role of literature as formulated by the ECF is clearly recognisable in these media. Culture here is not based on the expression of shared values or European histories. From the outset, the ECF’s approach was geared towards the future of the European Union, and the importance of culture thus lies in possessing the imagination to reflect upon that political future, and to open up discussion about current issues, such as migration, borders, and neighbouring countries. However, these cultural actors still confess to gaining inspiration from literary icons of the past: Akomfrah used excerpts from Homer’s Odyssey in his movie on migration in the 20th century, and the play that premiered during the festival by the Belarus Free Theatre leaned on quotations from Shakespeare, drawing a parallel with the political situation in their native country.

From the annual report filed by the ECF, it can be ascertained that the organisation is not only satisfied with the ways in which this festival was construed in the mainstream media, but also with the audience numbers it reached (ECF, 2013). The 2012 report reads:

Proving that there is no such thing as “the” European debate, discussions at the event touched on a range of issues: Europe’s role in climate change and how it relates to arts, culture and society; the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria; new forms of democracy initiated from the bottom up; the political situation in Belarus; the collective and personal imagery of immigration.

More than 1,000 visitors attended the Imagining Europe event in person and around 15,000 visitors were reached through online activities and social media. . . .

The event received unprecedented press coverage for ECF, with a total of 58 articles/interviews appearing in the press and media (2 television, 10 print, 10 radio, 36 online) in Dutch, English, Spanish, Swedish and Russian.

Prior to the ECF’s Imagining Europe event, ECF and De Groene Amsterdammer (Dutch weekly magazine) published a supplement called Een ander Europa/Imagining Europe, which was distributed to 22,000 people.96 (ECF, 2013, “Imagining Europe”)

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96 The use of Facebook and Twitter, “to broaden and connect with our audiences” (ECF, 2013, “Imagining Europe”), gained prominence after the project “Narratives for Europe,” and shows how the ECF attempts to incorporate different voices and narratives by engaging the public.
Despite the extended press coverage, the media analysis conducted by the ECF reveals how, “though the attention for Belarus Free Theatre was high, the focus was generally on the group and the situation in Belarus. At best, ECF and Imagining were not highlighted but merely mentioned and quite often, neither was mentioned” (ECF, 2013, “Media analysis”). Moreover, little attention was paid to the appearance of the publication Remappings. Compared to the festival, this publication—more than 500 copies of the book sent out (ECF, 2013), and the launch event held on December 6, 2012—was barely noticed by the mainstream media. Despite this lack of attention, this section has argued that the ECF did succeed in bringing its agenda to the fore, highlighting the importance of current cultural products to critical reflections on EU issues.97

13.2 Impact of “Narratives for Europe”

Whilst the reception of Remappings in mainstream media was very limited, its impact in academic publications is more substantial, since this work is perceived as an academic source of information on the idea of narratives in Europe (Bouza García, 2013); a successful case study of cultural networks (Innocenti, 2014); and an example of the interrelatedness of both top-down and bottom-up initiatives in the European Union (Sassatelli, 2009). This project thus stands at the crossroads of different fields of interest—mainly in European studies—and as such it is represented in differing and sometimes contradictory ways. This section gives an overview of these perceptions and attempts to reconcile these contradictory views by focussing on the interrelatedness of this project with EU political bodies and institutional rhetoric.

Firstly, the project “Narratives for Europe” is perceived as tapping into the recently evolved “narrative turn” in European studies. This turn is described by European studies scholar Luis Bouza García (2013) in an article for an academic journal on the European Union as follows:

The EU is often said too distant for the general public because of its slow decision making, its distance from national affairs and its lack of personalisation. This has been addressed recently in intellectual debates through the notion that the EU lacks a suggestive narrative, understood as an inability to select, articulate and communicate EU policies via a convincing public discourse on its positive effect on the lives of Europeans. This “narrative turn” encompasses previous reflections on the EU democratic deficit, identity issues and the lack of a European public sphere. (p. 49)

97 Indeed, the event “Imagining Europe” is described by the ECF in the 2012 report as “a perfect illustration of our work” (ECF, 2013, “Imagining Europe”).
He continues:

In this sense it is obvious that the narrative turn is about the way in which EU institutions and political actors choose different elements of European integration to build an argument about it in order to derive a message. In this sense narratives can have diverse aims and goals, either to justify or to criticise European integration. But in both cases the basis of any narrative is a selective usage of events and a particular form of establishing links between them. (Bouza García, 2013, p. 52)

In analysing this narrative turn (e.g. Eder, 2011; Scalise, 2015; Trenz, 2016), the publication Remappings: The Making of European Narratives is seen as an expression in this tradition of academic thinking regarding European identity. As indicated in Chapter 6, the close links between academia and the ECF indeed provided the starting point of this project, and scholars continued to have an important voice in its end result; the publication Remappings, with contributions by European studies scholars Monica Sassatelli, Wolfram Kaiser, and Paul Scheffer. It is not only in European studies that “Narratives for Europe” features as a point of reference; literary studies scholar Astrid van Weyenberg (2016) took “Narratives for Europe” as a starting point from which to analyse the narrative components in the House of European History. From this narrative perspective, she questioned her object of research from the perspective of storytelling: “if ‘Europe’ can be read as a narrative, who are its addressed readers? If ‘Europe’ is written, who are its authors? If ‘Europe’ is a story, how exactly is this story written?” (van Weyenberg, 2016, p. 167).

The second perception of this project in academic publications is as a successful case study of cultural networks. This perception is illustrated perfectly in the volume Migrating Heritage: Experiences of Cultural Networks and Cultural Dialogue in Europe (Innocenti, 2014)—a result of the research project “European Museums in an Age of Migrations,” funded by the European Commission. Working from the idea that we are currently witnessing a shift from heritage as part of national identity to heritage as a continuous process of recreating and adapting, coined “migrating heritage” (Innocenti, 2014, p. 3), this volume addresses how cultural institutes might respond to this scenario. One of the case studies is the ECF, more specifically the project “Remapping Europe—A Remix,” which was presented during the festival “Imagining Europe” with the film screening “European Souvenirs” (Watson & Paulissen, 2014). In the introduction to Migrating Heritage, the ECF is described as an organisation that is “in a unique position in being able

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98 The House of European History is a museum in Brussels, instigated by the European Parliament and dedicated to “strengthen your knowledge of Europe’s common history and shared memories, reflect on the present, and visualize the future” (“House of European History,” 2016, “Mission & vision”).
to work across Europe and its neighbours and to sponsor risk-taking and experimental projects” (Innocenti, 2014, p. 11). The then director of the ECF, Katherine Watson, and Vivian Paulissen, manager at the ECF, contributed to the volume and summarised the result of this project as follows: “‘Remapping Europe’ is seeking a new generation of digital storytellers . . . . The existing narrative of a single new image, photograph, recording, sound, or story is ‘de-constructed’ from the individual perspective of the participant” (Watson & Paulissen, 2014, p. 36).

The publication *Migrating Heritage* reveals how the ECF is not only linked to the academic world, but that close ties also exist between the ECF and large EU institutions. “Remapping Europe” received funding from the Culture Programme, and simultaneously functioned as an example of good practice in the research project “European Museums in an Age of Migrations—also funded by the European Commission (Innocenti, 2014, p. 1). This interrelatedness has been observed as well for the project “Narratives for Europe,” and this observation thus entails the third perception of this project in academic publications. From this perspective, the project is construed as an example of the close links between the ECF and EU institutions, but in contradictory ways: On the one hand, the project is viewed as a successful example of a bottom-up approach to the creation of a cultural perspective on Europe—one in which the European Commission failed in their own, top-down attempts to instigate such a cultural initiative. On the other hand, the ECF is construed as a grassroots organisation that leans heavily on the institutional discourse of “unity in diversity.” Both images of the project—that of a bottom-up initiative and at the same time a replication of institutional rhetoric—need to be nuanced, as will be argued below.

After the ECF had completed their “Narratives for Europe” project, the European Commission launched “A New Narrative for Europe”—a project that ran in 2013 and 2014, during which the Commission appointed a “Cultural Committee” of artists, intellectuals and scholars, and charged them with delivering a “New Narrative” text. This committee produced the publication *The Mind and Body of Europe: A New Narrative* and a summary of this publication in the form of a “declaration” (Battista & Setari, 2014). Bouza García (2017b) observes a similarity between both initiatives:

One of the purposes of the European Commission’s new narrative for Europe is to bring

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99 Kaiser (2011) also briefly refers to this project as an example of new narrative strategies for museums: “The current process of transnationalising narratives in history museums and exhibitions forms part of a larger search for new narratives—narratives that chime more with our contemporary experience of the nation-state as bounded and limited in its capacity to act purposefully with a view to providing its citizens with internal and external security and welfare. To some extent, this search for new narratives extends beyond museums to other cultural forums. Thus, the European Cultural Foundation has started a programme, Narratives for Europe, for example” (pp. 396–397).

100 This initiative has been relaunched with a focus on young people in 2016 (https://europa.eu/youth/new_narrative_for_europe_en).
artists and intellectuals from the field of culture to elaborate a story of what Europe is beyond its institutions and laws, and how the EU encompasses these cultural aspirations. From the field of civil society, a similar but pre-dating project was launched by the European Cultural Foundation. (p. 345)

Wolfram Kaiser (2017), himself a contributor to the publication Remappings, goes a step further and contends that one of the MEPs who initiated the project “A New Narrative for Europe” may have been broadly aware of the project on European “narratives” run by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) in Amsterdam during 2010–2012, however. In this project the ECF had organized a variety of events with artists from across Europe . . . .

The Commission definitely followed this project, and most likely took its cue from there. Although the Commission never formally consulted with the ECF over its project, it invited ECF representatives and several of the ECF authors to the “New Narrative” launch in Brussels in April 2013. The Commission appropriated the “narrative” terminology, but it never collaborated with the ECF during the implementation of its own “New Narrative” project.101 (pp. 217–218)

Despite the similarities between both projects, Kaiser sees an important difference between the approaches of the ECF and the European Commission. He juxtaposes this institutional project with the ECF as follows: “Whereas the ECF project had a primarily cultural focus and bottom-up orientation, the Commission’s approach was top-down and geared towards culture as a support mechanism for European integration and the EU” (Kaiser, 2017, p. 218). The Commission’s top-down approach led him to conclude critically that, “in the prevailing political climate of aggressively populist radical Left and nationalist right-wing discourses about national and European elites, top-down attempts at shaping European identity and legitimizing the EU can perhaps only be shambolic and ineffective” (Kaiser, 2017, p. 228).

The bottom-up approach from the ECF is thus, according to Kaiser (2017), precisely what differentiates this project from the top-down institutional version. Yet, one can argue that the ECF struggled with the possibility of staging an elitist approach to the issues of European identity and politics as well. Chapter 9 analysed how the reference to great European writers in this project caused alarm for David van Reybrouck (2017a), who warned against embracing a perspective of

101 De Boodt (2015) suggests that the inspiration for the Commission might also go back to an earlier project by the ECF, entitled “Europe as a Cultural Project,” which ran from 2002 until 2004 (pp. 73–78).
dead European male writers that is estranged from the everyday realities of Europe. Additionally, the project’s conceptual framework—the basic idea of “narratives”—had been fleshed out mainly by academics in reflection groups, as described in Chapter 6, tapping into the “narrative turn” in European studies (ECF, 2010b). In the light of the foregoing, one might ask if Kaiser’s characterisation of “Narratives for Europe” as “bottom-up” still holds.

Indeed, Sassatelli (2009) argued that the ECF exemplifies how the difference between top-down and bottom-up approaches does not do justice to the complexities of the interrelatedness of institutes and grassroots organisations on a European level:

These so-called grassroots initiatives rely on such European institutional support, function as incubators for the solutions and approaches designed at the “central level,” and are then monitored according to standard procedures. In a way this jeopardizes the distinction between top-down programmes of co-operation and bottom-up initiatives, contributing to a subtle but substantial reconfiguration of the field. (p. 68)

So, while the idea of a “bottom-up” approach needs to be nuanced, the ECF in general has simultaneously been observed as an example of a “grassroots organisation” that leans heavily on an institutional approach—the “ECF uses language that often replicates the now dominant ‘unity in diversity’ rhetoric” (Snelders, 2011, p. 18). Sassatelli (2009) explained the interrelatedness of grassroots organisations with the ECF and EU institutes as follows:

Because of their origin, these [grassroots organisations] end up having rhetorics and working methods that are very close to those of the European organizations . . . . One of the oldest and most significant cases in this respect is the European Cultural Foundation, which is illustrative of how entangled “institutional” and “private” (or non-governmental) initiatives are in this arena . . . . As well as its own programmes . . . it often carries out projects commissioned or supported by the EU, and it notably managed the well-known student exchange programme Erasmus at the time of its inception. (pp. 68–70)

Whilst the interrelatedness between EU institutes and the ECF that Sassatelli observed here is undeniably present in the project “Narratives for Europe,” it has been argued in Chapter 7 that this cultural organisation does not simply replicate an institutional discourse, as Snelders (2011) and Sassatelli (2009) suggest. The analysis of the documents produced by the ECF on this project
revealed how there are numerous occasions when resistance is expressed to the “official” or institutional top-down narrative; the rhetoric of “unity in diversity” is not a prevailing one.

Hence, neither academic representation of the interrelatedness of the ECF’s project and EU institutions line up with the analysis provided in this research. Firstly, juxtaposing the Commission’s initiative and “Narratives for Europe” as two poles of bottom-up and top-down approaches to issues of identity does not take into account the “elitism” inherent to the ECF’s project via its academic framework and references to great European writers. Secondly, the merging of institutional discourse with the stories that the ECF aimed to construct leaves aside the sustained critique of the institutional narrative contained both in Remappings and other documents issued by the organisation.

What remains then, is the finding that there are indeed close ties between EU institutions and the ECF, and that the main difference between the ECF’s “Narratives for Europe” and the Commission’s “A New Narrative for Europe” is the possibility for criticism. As Bouza García (2017b) argues, “the alternative of the Barroso Commission seems to be to try to build a new all-encompassing narrative to reduce dissensus” (p. 55). Kaiser (2017) agrees with this assessment and points out that it is precisely the participation of citizens that “Narratives for Europe” enabled—in the form of an open festival and a range of online opinions that reflect the plurality of European narratives. The Cultural Committee appointed by the European Commission was instead involved in a “process [that] at times became almost surreal in ignoring critical debates about the EU outside of the Brussels bubble and when a single person ended up drafting the text in what was very much an ad hoc manner” (Kaiser, 2017, p. 217). Kurt de Boodt (2015), who also analysed the Commission’s project, summarised the intentions behind “A New Narrative for Europe” in a similar way:

The point of the exercise was to present a positive narrative of values worth striving for, a narrative of rich cultural heritage and of a revitalized “meaning” . . . . What mattered most of all was mobilizing the pro-European voices which, for a variety of reasons, remained silent. (p. 80)

This, however, is not the case at the ECF: Chapters 7 and 9 argued how Eurosceptic voices, explicitly critiquing EU policies, have a prominent place in this project.

13.3 Conclusion
The reception of the festival “Imagining Europe” in mainstream media showed how the ECF attained their goals of providing a platform upon which contemporary writers and artists could critically reflect on European issues. Even though the cultural actors concerned expressed their admiration for, and inspiration by, past literary icons, the media representation of this initiative is in line with what the ECF set out to do: not to search for a shared cultural heritage in Europe’s past, but to create a platform of debate and counter-narratives, focused on the future of the European Union.

Whilst its reception is congruent with these intentions, the general impact of the publication *Remappings* and the project as a whole show how this initiative is also constructed as an academic achievement following the “narrative turn” in European studies, and as a good example of a cultural institute’s response to changing notions of identity and heritage in Europe. Furthermore, academic publications stated that the project of the ECF provided a blueprint for a new approach to reflections on identity, and the Commission translated this grassroots initiative into “A New Narrative for Europe.” The “institutional copy” of this project thus revealed how the difference between top-down and bottom-up approaches is not as clear-cut as it might seem: this project illustrates the complex interrelatedness between EU institutions and the ECF.

“The European Constitution in Verse” relied on several different media events for its promotion: the initial launch of the project in 2008, during which other European poets were invited to participate; the presentation of the resulting poem in 2009; the publication of an adapted Dutch version, *Neem bijvoorbeeld graniet*, in 2011; and a tour of Europe with the participating poets, which took place between 2009 and 2012 (Stavanger Cultural Centre, n.d.-b, n.d.-c, n.d.-d). The cultural organisation Passa Porta, based in Brussels, provided practical and organisational support for the Brussels Poetry Collective and kept track of the activities to provide sponsors with an account of the output—in this case the EU Cultural programme, which subsidised the international project “Shahrazad—Stories for Life”, of which “The European Constitution in Verse” is a sub-project (Stavanger Cultural Centre, n.d.-a). In their report, they contended that “the impact has been overwhelming. ‘The European Constitution in Verse’ was ‘officially’ presented at the Passa Porta Festival on 27th March 2009. But this was not a one shot event. It clearly has a longer life” (Stavanger Cultural Centre, n.d.-b, p. 8). These media-moments and output are described in more detail below and a brief overview of the activities can be found in Appendix 3, based on the reports from Passa Porta (Passa Porta, 2009; Stavanger Cultural Centre, n.d.-a).

The launch of the project took place on January 31—Poetry Day—in 2008 at the European Parliament. The Brussels Poetry Collective—consisting at the time of the Brussels-Galician Xavier Queipo; Manza, a Belgian of Moroccan origin; the French-speaking Laurence Vielle; and the Dutch-speaking poets Geert van Istendael and David van Reybrouck—read out a joint statement and a preamble to introduce the idea of a poetic constitution to members of the European Parliament and journalists (Passa Porta, 2009). The former prime minister of Belgium—and one of the main forces behind the political European Constitution—Jean-Luc Dehaene, was interviewed beforehand and a video of the interview was projected during the presentation (Passa Porta, 2009). According to a report from Passa Porta, Dehaene’s response to this idea was “[v]ery good! A serious matter as the European Constitution belongs to the citizens. I applaud that poets will take the lead!” (Passa Porta, 2009, “The European Constitution in Verse: The Launching”). The Belgian television channel VRT took an interest in the idea and invited Van Istendael and Van Reybrouck to appear on Phara—a Belgian talk show (van Istendael & van Reybrouck, 2008). During the show, the interview with Jean-Luc Dehaene was also broadcast, during which he called upon poets to participate in this project, so that the European citizen would realise that the constitution can also be lyrical and inspiring (van Istendael & van Reybrouck, 2008). The Dutch political interview programme “Buitenhof” also invited Geert van Istendael (2008) to explain the initiative and called for poets to participate (see Chapter 10).
In 2009, the result of this Europe-wide poetic project was presented at the Flagey Centre, a cultural venue in Brussels (Passa Porta, 2009). Passa Porta reported: “marketing wise the timing for this project was just perfect. A couple of months after the no-vote of Ireland and a couple of months before the European elections in June 2009” (Passa Porta, 2009, “The European Constitution in Verse”). Before an audience of 650 people, the Brussels Poetry Collective, a number of leading poets such as Antonio Gamoneda (Spain), Franzobel (Austria), Gerrit Komrij (Netherlands), and Mircea Dinescu (Romania), and the 70-strong PolyFolies choir, presented the text that was made available in three versions: Dutch (350 copies), French (500 copies), and English (300 copies). The poets read out a selection of their articles, and the choir sang a “European hymn” with the word “bread” in different languages set to Beethoven’s ninth symphony (see Chapter 10; Passa Porta, 2009). *The European Constitution in Verse* was nominated for the Europe Book Prize in 2009 (Stavanger Cultural Centre, n.d.-b).102 In 2011, a Dutch edition of the text was published by the Dutch publisher De Bezige Bij under the title *Neem bijvoorbeeld graniet* (van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2011).

The project also led to a tour of various European cities between 2009 and 2012 (with visits, amongst others, to Brussels, Leuven, Prague, and Yerevan; Stavanger Cultural Centre, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). On the tour, contributors read excerpts from their texts at poetry festivals and in cultural venues such as libraries and theatres. Some events were more focussed on political discussions. For example, after their performance at the Berlin poetry festival, the poets also participated in the colloquium “The Mediterranean and Europe—The Other History of Europe,” which revolved around issues of migration and refugees (Stavanger Cultural Centre, n.d.-b, p. 14). Meanwhile, at the library in Leuven, the poets were joined by a member of the EU Parliament (Stavanger Cultural Centre, n.d.-c).

Clearly, the project has, as Passa Porta suggested in their report, enjoyed “a longer life” (Stavanger Cultural Centre, n.d.-b, p. 8). The question here is whether these events led to an opening up of discussions about Europe, as the organisers intended, or if the project is mainly seen as an interesting literary experiment. The following section will address this question by looking at the reception of the project, analysing the arguments that are provided to describe and evaluate the presentations and the resulting poem. The broader impact is explored by asking to what extent the project indeed succeeded in sparking a debate between citizens on European issues. This chapter will argue that, despite the fact that the poem engages readers in a highly critical understanding of European policies—as argued in Part III—this poem has not so much been the starting point of a

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102 The winning book turned out to be *L’Europe pour les nuls* [*Europe for Dummies*] from 2007, by Sylvie Goulard.
public debate, but more one of institutional incorporation; civil servants and EU institutions have embraced this project in different ways as an expression of their ongoing efforts to underline the importance of involving citizens.

14.1  Reception of “The European Constitution in Verse”

Although *The European Constitution in Verse* is a work of poetry, its reception in different media was more inspired by the abandoned Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe that preceded it, than by the poetic or aesthetic aspects of the text itself. The launch of the project on Dutch television during the weekly political programme “Buitenhof” set the tone for the reception of the resulting poem—Van Istendael (2008) argued that the foundation for this project lay in the failed referendum of 2004. The interviewer confronted the audience with the text of the official Treaty by reading excerpts from this very dense and complicated document. Juxtaposing the official preamble with Van Istendael’s poetic preamble, the point was clear: a poetic version might at least reach an audience to spark some interest in a European Constitution, and in issues such as democracy and sovereignty (van Istendael, 2008). The publicist Maxim Februari (2008), who published columns on a wide range of topics in the opinion pages of the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* until 2010, applauded the initiative, contending that the Dutch Constitution should have a poetic version as well. He suggested that *The European Constitution in Verse* displays a more profound insight than the formal document:

> There are currently two versions of the European Constitution in circulation. A legal version and a poetic one. It will depend on your state of mind and your sensitivity which of the two versions you are willing to take seriously.
> One version, as I believe, is called, “Treaty amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community” . . . 
> The second version sounds different: “Solemn Declaration of the European Constitution in Verse.” At this moment only the prologue has been written . . .
> I am inclined to consider the author of the latter, the poet Geert van Istendael, as more serious than the authors of the first text. He definitely understands better what is at stake for Europe. [IV.57] (Februari, 2008, p. 3)

*The European Constitution in Verse* (in three different languages) was reviewed on two international websites: VoxEurop, which focusses on European news; and cafèbabel, a European website with articles ranging from politics to culture and lifestyle (Canovas, 2009; Danciu, 2009). In the Dutch
media, the poem was discussed by three reviewers: the journalist Gijs Moes reviewed the edition published in 2009 in the “Europe” section in the national newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* (Moes, 2009); the journalist and writer Bert Wagendorp (2009) discussed this version in a column in the national news section in the national newspaper *de Volkskrant*; and the journalist Eric Kok published a review of *Neem bijvoorbeeld graniet* that was reprinted in the culture section of various local newspapers (e.g. Kok, 2012). Finally, the German newspaper *Die Zeit* featured *The European Constitution in Verse* in the cultural section of the print version as well as in a separate, online piece (Hung, 2009a, 2009b). Compared to the average number of reviews a work of poetry might receive in the (international) press, one can conclude that *The European Constitution in Verse* received considerable attention.

This overview of publications on “The European Constitution in Verse” already reveals an important aspect of the reception of this project, namely that the reviews are not all published in the cultural sections of papers. This is an important aspect of the reception, as the organisers specifically aimed for a broad readership, not only lovers of poetry, and the foregoing shows that they clearly succeeded in reaching a larger audience. Articles in the press show how this work is not only discussed as a work of art, but even more as a contribution to reflections on a unified Europe, paving the way for a more general debate on European issues.

Despite the fact that some of the reviews of this project were not published in the cultural sections of newspapers, nor by professional poetry critics, the resulting poem was applauded precisely because of its literary character—the articles all express appreciation for its poetic intervention regarding Europe. The poem was appreciated, firstly because of the polyphony of voices that are recognisable in the text, whilst the poem still “reads as a whole . . . . It is a polyphonic choir that sings of unity and diversity, of freedom and peace, of sorrow and pain, in short of life” [IV.58] (Kok, 2012, para. 3). In *Die Zeit*, this polyphony was seen as a positive feature as well, as it mirrors one of Europe’s appealing characteristics:

> The original version is a polyphonic jumble or—to put it bluntly—a cacophony. In the meantime, even though there are translations into English, Dutch and French, the hodgepodge of different languages, styles and topics is at the same time what makes it most appealing: both the art project and Europe itself. [IV.59] (Hung, 2009a, para. 4)

Secondly, in similar ways to the response to the launch of the project, comparisons with the formal document that inspired *The European Constitution in Verse* show it in a favourable light. The work is embraced by commentators and critics alike as a successful attempt to bridge the gap between
European politics and ordinary citizens—a gap that was revealed in the “no” vote to the original Constitution in the referendum of 2004. The European news website VoxEurop framed the lyrical constitution as follows: “Whilst the ratification of the European Constitution has bogged down in the quicksand of certain Member States’ rejection, these poets have joined ranks to form an avant-garde, spearheading ‘the solution’ to European unification” (Danciu, 2009, para. 2). The European website cafébabel concluded along similar lines that the poets “illustrate the ideal citizen and form a cultural appeal for a closer and more citizen-friendly Europe” (Canovas, 2009, n.p.). The Dutch journalist Bert Wagendorp (2009) exemplified this response by arguing that this poem shows how imagination is problematically lacking in the European Union:

The Constitution in Verse is written in a completely different language to that of the Treaty of Lisbon. You only have to browse five minutes through the latter to know what is wrong with Europe: fallen into the hands of bloody bores, hair-splitters and other unimaginative trash . . . .

What if Mr. Frans Timmermans, State Secretary for European Affairs, would decide that The European Constitution in Verse is to be delivered door-to-door? Maybe then we could open our minds again to imagination and the European dream. Good for the art of poetry too.

Give Europe back to the people, is the message of the poets. Europe is ours; if that becomes clear again, we might love it again. [IV.60] (p. 3)

The difficult language used by the European Union in formal documents such as the Lisbon Treaty and the original Constitution is also juxtaposed with the poetic constitution by the German journalist Jochen Hung (2009a). In an online article for Die Zeit, he states: “Language also plays a role in Euroscepticism and the EU’s poor image. The convoluted language of the Eurocrats is less than inspiring, and in the worst cases inspires mistrust”[IV.61] (Hung, 2009a, para. 6). Hung (2009a) argued that the poetic version emerged just in time to engage its readers in the upcoming European elections. Yet, in a further piece for the print version of Die Zeit, entitled “Ode and die Kleinigkeiten” [Ode to Small Things], Hung (2009b) added a third aspect to his discussion of The European Constitution in Verse. Hung (2009b) suggests that, despite the fact that these poets are not representative of the average citizen in their willingness to participate in this multilingual European project (the poets are, in this respect “Avantgarde”; Hung, 2009a, para. 4), the poem provides an important means by which to understand the failure of the original attempt to formulate a constitution—according to Hung (2009b), a result of the fear European citizens possess.
Expanding upon this point, Hung (2009b) quotes from an interview with the Austrian poet Franzobel, who sees how the cultural approach is important in a European context, but warns that the fear citizens harbour about losing their jobs to workers from other member states should not be underestimated. However, it is not only the prospect of losing an economic position that makes citizens afraid; *The European Constitution in Verse* shows how fear is also reflected in more simple issues of daily life, as Hung (2009b) concluded that

in their version, the poets also give a voice the everyday, the insignificant things that generally do not make it to the political arena. . . . The French poet Jacques Darras complains about the anonymity and ahistorical nature of euro notes. . . . Europe’s political constitution failed because of the citizens’ fear of disregard of precisely these minor details. *The European Constitution in Verse* shows that Europeans’ fear of losing that which makes us exceptional is what unites us. [IV.62] (p. 49)

Clearly, these critics discuss *The European Constitution in Verse* from the perspective of the original document and the current problems that the European Union faces, and it is important to observe how the literary aspect of this poem—its polyphony, appealing language, and the possibility of revealing emotions such as fear in the process of integration—are put to the fore to argue the importance of the poetic perspective. Despite the fact that only some of the reviewers are poetry critics, the poetic aspects of the project are deemed to be crucial in all of their articles.

This reception also shows that the poem is not evaluated specifically as a work of poetry, which would entail a focus on specific characteristics that might be aesthetically pleasing, a critical review of the metaphors, or an assessment of the originality of the images—as one might expect from a poetry critic. Rather, the poems’ reception indicates that critics have read this work in the broader societal context of European political issues. As discussed previously, the reviews were indeed published, not only in the culture sections of local and national newspapers, but also by a broader group of journalists and publicists. This aspect of its reception comes even more to the fore in comparison to the reception of Van Istendael’s (2010) work of poetry *Sociale zekerheid en andere gedichten* [*Social Security and Other Poems*], which contains the poem “De Europese grondwet in verzen”—the extended version of the preamble of *The European Constitution in Verse*. However, Van Istendael’s collection of poems was only reviewed by literary critics in the cultural sections of magazines and websites devoted to literature reviews, for example by Piet Gerbrandy (2011) in *De Groene Amsterdammer*; Wil Fraikin (2010b, 2010a) for the websites Meander Magazine and Poëzie Leestafel; and Paul Demets (2010) in *De Morgen*. All of the above-named critics were impressed,
not only with Van Istendael’s stylistic quality and lyricism, but also with his commitment to societal issues. However, the more politically engaged poems, such as “De Europese grondwet in verzen,” are not viewed so favourably, as these are, according to Gerbrandy (2011), not the best of the collection. Wil Fraikin (2010a)—an artist, poet, and occasional publicist on poetry—is most explicit in his rejection of Van Istendael’s political work, to whom he refers as “a hack writer”—a poet whose works are “assigned by the Brussels Poetry Collective” (Fraikin, 2010a, n.p.). He also observed how these programmatic poems are not as aesthetically impressive as Van Istendael’s other work:

After this [the preceding section “Things” in *Sociale zekerheid en andere gedichten*] there is a section of long poems titled “Of the European Constitution in Verse.” In the section “Things” it was suggested that the poet represented the operation of these objects, however, in these commissioned poems which seem to be somewhat formulaic, the poet, to my view, overplays his hand: long-windedly the poet keeps hammering at the necessity of poetry. . . . It is a pity that the poet frequently makes use of enumeration to compose a verse. In this way the long poems tend to be farfetched and predictable. As a language lover the anecdotal short poem is his forte: the long poems become boring and in the end drift “away.” [IV.63] (Fraikin, 2010b, para. 7)

Comparing the reception of Van Istendael’s contribution “De Europese grondwet in verzen” in *Sociale zekerheid en andere gedichten* with the final edited volume, *The European Constitution in Verse*, reveals how the receptions of the two works differ: whereas Van Istendael’s collection of poems is reviewed in aesthetic terms as poetry, *The European Constitution in Verse* is discussed in the context of the Lisbon Treaty, and the problems facing the European Union. Thus, in the eyes of its reviewers, the latter succeeded in bringing the importance of a poetic approach—understood here as the opposite of the formal and dense prose of EU documents—to the fore.

14.2 **Impact: The Reception by EU Institutions**

Whilst the poetic perspective on European issues is thus appreciated by reviewers, one can ask if the project achieved its broader intended outcome. Specifically, did the organisers succeed in sparking a debate amongst committed citizens? The project plan stated that “this is an initiative that places the debate on the foundations of Europe squarely where it belongs: in the public sphere of free and involved citizens” (Passa Porta, 2008, p. 1). Europe does not only need elections, but also a public arena of debate and stories to contribute to political identity formation, and as
discussed in Part II, this was precisely what the organisers of “The European Constitution in Verse” aimed to contribute to. Therefore, this section focusses on the effects of this project, which can be divided into the intended impact of a debate between citizens, and an unintended (or perhaps unexpected) impact—namely, the recognition of this poetic constitution by EU civil servants.

In addressing this issue, the perspective of the participants themselves is considered first. Some of the poets indeed reflected on the project’s societal impact, and in general shared an idea in the media of the importance of poetry for politics in Europe. In 2010, Peter Vermeersch gave a TED Talk on “The European Constitution in Verse”, asking himself: is literature important to politics? He answered affirmatively, speaking “as a poet and a political scientist”. According to Vermeersch, the poetic constitution is an example of what literature can do for politics: a poem about “this imagined community called Europe,” able to express dreams and doubts and reclaim Europe. The project gave him the insight that the story of Europe “has been told by writers and poets for ages and it is important to continue this tradition” (TEDGlobal, 2010). The website of cafébabel also cites the optimistic views of the participants on the societal impact of poetry:

These authors share the belief that poetry can play an important role in society and beyond. It’s about re-energising European democracy. “What poetry can bring is imagination, imagination well and truly,” says Peter Vermeersch. “The European union must listen to poets and authors more, who are ambassadors of society,” says Romani co-author Hedina Tahirovic Sijercic, a former journalist in eighties Serbia before she immigrated to Canada and then Germany. “Politicians must read more of the work of poets and writers, who are truly ambassadors of the people.” “If poetry can’t change everything in a depoliticised world, it can at least allow us to bring back important political subjects which are at the heart of public debate,” adds José Ovejero, from Spain. (Canovas, 2009, n.p.)

However, a Romanian poet quoted on the website of VoxEurop is less confident about the capabilities of poets to influence politics:

As to the potential social impact of the European Constitution in Verse, in the context of the ongoing discussions about European “unification” through poetry, Mircea Dinescu is rather sceptical: “. . . The poets have long since ceased to be the voice of the people. Before, poetry was a weapon, at least in the Communist realm. The fear of words, of allusions,
struck home. Now, under capitalism, the poet is nothing but a buffoon, let’s face it.”
(Danciu, 2009, para. 5)

One can argue that the scepticism of the Romanian poet on the societal impact of the project might be appropriate here: despite the fact that these critics and journalists all emphasise the need to engage citizens more in the European political project, their reviews do not pick up on the points of critique that *The European Constitution in Verse* addresses. Chapter 10 has argued that this poem certainly contains several lyrical attacks and explosive assessments of the European project. The poem, it was contended in this chapter, critiques EU policies such as unifying regulations, neoliberal strategies, and a lack of democracy, with intertextual references that are used to draw parallels with political discussions on borders and migration. This critical tone of voice is to some extent recognised in different reviews, for example on the website VoxEurop, which described the work as a “text reflecting European thought as well as, in symbolic terms, the problems facing the European Union” (Danciu, 2009, para. 4). However, in some cases, these specific issues are not fully addressed in the articles, but only briefly touched upon—for example on the website cafébabel, which states that besides “crazy pieces” there are also more “serious articles on immigration or democracy” to be found in *The European Constitution in Verse* (Canovas, 2009, n.p.).

Thus, the potential meaning of the poem, filled as it is with doubts and questions concerning the European project, is not fully realised in the different readings in the media. However, this is almost certainly related to the genre: reviews tend to be short articles in newspapers, thus preventing any thorough discussion of the work. Indeed, it is only in an academic publication by Heynders (2016) that the political dimension of the poem comes to light. She discusses

> 52 voices from all angles of Europe contributing together to one poem in order to critique “Fortress Europe” from within . . . . The idea, indeed, is that the European constitution draws on an ongoing dialogue, and constantly needs input from the people, with new perspectives expressed in different words and phrases. (Heynders, 2016, pp. 122–123)

One can thus conclude that the many possible openings for a public discussion on European policies that the poem aimed to create, were not taken up by the various reviewers.

Perhaps the debate that was intended to engage the European public took place not so much in the newspapers and other media, but more during the European tour, on which fragments were read aloud by the poets. The Passa Porta reports indeed show how the poets participated in a colloquium in Berlin on migration and the refugee question and how, after a performance in
Brussels, “some of them [members of the audience] started a discussion with the poets concerning Europe’s future” (Stavanger Cultural Centre, n.d.-c, p. 7).

Although the attempt to reach out to, and engage EU citizens in, a bid to open up a wider debate about Europe is difficult to observe from the reception of *The European Constitution in Verse*, one can argue that the project certainly did manage to attract the attention of EU politicians and civil servants. Besides the fact that it was financed by the EU Culture Programme as a sub-project of the “Shahrazad” initiative, the close link between EU politics and the project was already apparent right from the beginning. This link is, for example, evident at the event launch in the European Parliament with Jean-Luc Dehaene—a firm supporter of the initiative and a former MEP, who was a member of a think-tank involved in the preparation of the original European Constitution (Passa Porta, 2009). Close ties also existed between the Brussels Poetry Collective and another EU institution: Xavier Queipo, a pseudonym of Francisco Xavier Vázquez Álvarez, was a scientific researcher at the European Commission’s Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries at that time.

Furthermore, during Belgium’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union (July 1 to December 31, 2010), the work of artists from Belgium was on display “in strategic locations where the Presidency will be in action over the course of a half-year,” aiming to

not only . . . highlight the artistic aspect: the symbolism is also important. The themes of the works selected run parallel with the major themes that the Belgian Presidency wants to address: technology, design & fashion, as well as poverty and austerity. Other European topics such as multiculturalism, identity, migration and national borders are also symbolically represented. (“Presidency Proudly Presents the Art of Belgium,” 2010, n.p.)

Two verses from *The European Constitution in Verse* were selected to be on display—one as a neon text and one as a light box—on the walls of two buildings: “Europe is my house, your house, a right, your right” by the poet Manza (article 13) was displayed in the 61–63 Rue de la Loi, which houses the Permanent Representation of Belgium to the European Union, and “Order emerges again and again from the magma of chaos” by Xavier Queipo (article 3) was exhibited in the Justus Lipsius building. A brochure on the art presentations explains the choice of artwork in the following way:
Excerpts from *The European Constitution in Verse* have thus become quite literally institutionalised—as part of EU buildings in Brussels. Members of the European Parliament were also involved in the project: the Passa Porta reports mention how MEP Said El Khadraoui joined the presentation in Leuven on January 27, 2011 (Stavanger Cultural Centre, n.d.-c, p. 6). A direct result of the project in the European Parliament can also be observed in an interview with MEP Marianne Thyssen who, on a Belgian radio programme, discussed her five favourite books, *The European Constitution in Verse* being one of them (Thyssen, 2011). Thyssen especially appreciated the piece by Van Istendael in the preamble, listing individuals by name and profession as pars pro toto for their respective member states. She argued that this is “the European population that it is all about” (Thyssen, 2011). In another example, in 2012 the MEP Graham Watson (then president of the ALDE party) mentioned *The European Constitution in Verse* after the State of the Union speech by the President of the Commission José Manuel Barroso (“Debates of the European Parliament,” 2012). He replied to Barroso in the following way:

You challenge artists and intellectuals to make their voice heard. You may be aware that 50 poets came together and published the European constitution in verse just three years ago. It depicts European citizens full of ideals but let down by their leaders. It is not just a federation of nation states that is needed, it is a federation of citizens, and we need leaders who understand that. (“Debates of the European Parliament,” 2012, p. 32)

Finally, in early 2018, *The European Constitution in Verse* has been incorporated into the House of European History as part of the permanent exhibition on the 5th floor dedicated to “Milestones in European Integration” in an area entitled “Dealing with Diversity,” which is interpreted here in the context of migration and multilingualism in Europe (Grau Segú, personal communication, November 28, 2017). This area consists of a large bookcase, filled with dictionaries and guides for translation. The bookcase also contains TV screens; one showing interviews with bi-cultural Europeans, and another presenting the audience with the full text of *The European Constitution in Verse*, with screens that contain several numbered articles from the poetic constitution, each in different languages, thus visualising the plurality of multilingualism, in a unifying document—a constitution. The House of European History in Brussels was initiated (and is currently also
funded) by the European Parliament (“House of European History,” 2016). However, plans for
the project proved to be controversial, and after many years of debate it finally opened in 2017.
Quoting from a report by a committee on the House, Rigney (2014) describes the initiative as
follows:

In December 2008, the European Parliament voted to establish under its aegis a
“European House of History,” and commissioned a committee of experts to develop it.
The stated purpose of this Museum, currently under construction in Brussels at a
controversial cost of some 50 million euro and due to open at the end of 2015, is to ensure
that a “shared view on the past, present and future of Europe can emerge” by creating “a
place where a memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly
cultivated” . . . . Whereas the 2008 outline is more top-down in its presentation (it seeks to
“convey” and “make clear” a message), the recent prospectus insists that the museum is to
be a place for debate, exchange, and the expression of multiple perspectives . . . . Although
the recent prospectus is much more “bottom-up” in its discourse and is written more in
the spirit of participatory culture than the original parliamentary decision, they share the
same underlying commitment to celebrating the European project as an antidote to war
and as part of a search for a better life. (pp. 339–340)

Even though the impact on the public sphere—in the form of debates between citizens—is
difficult to assess, “The European Constitution in Verse” has succeeded in acquiring a degree of
political influence. Yet this also implies that the project’s critical narrative has been adopted by the
politicians. With the organisers stated goal to “challenge institutional narratives,” this institutional
incorporation might be deemed problematic. Even though The European Constitution in Verse
garnered attention at the highest political levels, its message—which is very critical of certain
policies and contains “quite a lot of Euroscepticism,” as Van Istendael explained in an interview
(Moes, 2009, p. 9)—is translated and summarised in the context of EU institutions as an
understanding of the rather vague “importance of involving citizens,” albeit without further
specifying how to actually turn this ideal into a political reality. The project might therefore give
EU politicians a rather facile instrument with which to express their involvement with ordinary
citizens.

14.3 Conclusion
The reception of the “The European Constitution in Verse” shows how this literary initiative succeeded in reaching an audience that went far beyond simply lovers of poetry. The resulting poem even met with acclaim in the form of a nomination for the European Book Prize in 2009. The project has been extremely successful at drawing attention to the fact that the poem was meant as the starting point of a wider debate on the European Union and the failings of the initial plans for a European Constitution. Critics and columnists all take this framework into account in their positive reviews of *The European Constitution in Verse*. Additionally, audiences have also been involved via a European tour, offering readings and discussion with the participating poets. Whilst the literary outcome in the form of the poem has not been discussed in terms of an aesthetic accomplishment (the reviews differ greatly from the work of poetry *Sociale zekerheid en andere gedichten* by Van Istendael, which contains large fragments of the poetic constitution), the poem is reviewed by critics who clearly appreciate its poetic language and capabilities to engage readers on a more emotional level.

Moving now from its immediate reception to the wider impact of the project, this chapter showed how MEPs applauded the initiative, and referred to the poem during a parliamentary debate on the State of the Union speech by Barosso. Meanwhile, verses were displayed on the walls of EU institutions during the Belgian Presidency and then permanently in the House of European History. Yet, Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch themselves aimed to engage in politics via citizens, not via institutions (see Chapters 6 and 7). Rigney (2014) provides a possible explanation for the embrace of such cultural initiatives by EU institutions, arguing that

...creative writing and film-making travel more easily than historiography and documentaries do because they invite voluntary participation in a story and offer aesthetic and emotional rewards. In contrast, top-down memory narratives offered by institutions (even those that, like the House of European History, promise to appeal to all of the senses) arguably lack the lure and transformative power of the arts and their capacity to mobilize individuals through imagination and affect. (p. 353)

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103 However, when the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), likely inspired by *The European Constitution in Verse*, wanted the EU’s human rights charter recast as an 80-minute-long epic poem, accompanied by music, dance, and multi-media elements not everybody was pleased (Philips, 2010a). As the website EUobserver reported in 2010: “Justice commissioner Viviane Reding has killed off plans to recast the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as an 80-minute-long epic poem. Concerned about what she viewed as a frivolous waste of time and money, Ms Reding, who is also responsible for fundamental rights and citizenship, has written a tersely worded letter seen by EUobserver to the director of the Fundamental Rights Agency, Morten Kjoerum, lambasting the plans ... “This initiative does not provide the added value that is expected from the agency and is not in line with its mandate,” she continued, demanding to know how much time and money had been spent on the poetry plans” (Philips, 2010b, para. 1-2).
The incorporation of verses from *The European Constitution in Verse* might therefore, via the House of European History, be an attempt to reach citizens on a less abstract level. By absorbing the arts, EU institutions have fruitfully merged a top-down memory narrative with a more affective narrative provided by the lyricists, whilst simultaneously appropriating these critical poetic voices into a general narrative on the importance of involving citizens.
15. A Vote for Thomas Mann or Oswald Spengler? “The Return of Europe”

“The Return of Europe” encompassed two elements: the symposium “Je suis Européen!” on June 6, 2015 in the “Delamar” theatre, a large cultural venue in Amsterdam; and the publication *De terugkeer van Europa*—a special edition of the Nexus journal produced to celebrate 25 years of the Nexus Institute. The first copy of this edition was presented to Jaap Goedegebuure, former Professor of Modern Dutch Literature, at the well-known bookshop Athenaeum in Amsterdam on November 26 of the same year (“Presentatie Nexus 70,” 2015). With these events, the Nexus Institute succeeded in attracting the attention of a large audience, and mainstream media (newspapers and radio programmes) invited the organiser of this project and founder of the Nexus Institute Rob Riemen to discuss current issues in the European Union. Riemen approached such political topics according to his agenda as defined by him in the introduction to *The Return of Europe*, namely, from a humanist perspective, based on the idea that shared traditions and common values are the key to understanding Europe (e.g. Verplancke, 2015).

Before turning to the reception of these initiatives, it is important to note that Rob Riemen is a controversial public figure in Dutch society, and the response to his publications and performances is often highly critical across various media. His pamphlet on the Dutch right-wing political organisation the PVV, for example, entitled *De eeuwige terugkeer van het fascisme* [*The Eternal Return of Fascism*] (Riemen, 2010), met with fierce opposition from leading publicists and critics (e.g. Ellian, 2010; Heumakers, 2010; van het Reve, 2010). The Nexus Institute itself has met with the same, often hostile attitude. Publicist Joost de Vries (2011) described these reviews as “unusually vicious, personal attacks,” causing him to wonder: “It is supposed to be the Dutch haven for the international intellectual elite. But why is the Nexus Institute in Tilburg so severely criticised by the vanguard?” [IV.64] (para. 1). In his 2011 article, De Vries tentatively suggested two possible answers. Firstly, the argumentation in the pamphlet on fascism is indeed quite fragile—a list of quotations from 19th and 20th-century intellectuals does not provide sufficient evidence on the comparison between fascism and the PVV (de Vries, 2011). Secondly—and more important to the analysis of the workings of *De terugkeer van Europa* here—Riemen and the Nexus Institute might represent a certain “snobbishness” that Dutch intellectuals find difficult to accept:

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104 In 2018, an English edition of Riemen’s introduction to *De terugkeer van Europa* was published, together with Riemen’s essay “The Eternal Return of Fascism,” under the title *To Fight Against This Age: On Fascism and Humanism* (Riemen, 2018).
105 A critical review of this English edition also appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, in which it is argued that Riemen’s interpretation of current populist movements as “fascist” reveals a “serious failure of understanding” the nature of politics (Linker, 2018, para. 12). This review deals mostly with Riemen’s essay on fascism and not with “The Return of Europa.”
In an essay on the book Adel van de geest [Nobility of Spirit] in De Groene Amsterdammer, Rob Hartmans pointed out something else: “therefore I cannot be completely cleared of a certain elitism, but at the same time I break out in an itchy rash looking at an interview with George Steiner or when the programme for the next Nexus conference is in front of me. Certain kinds of intellectuals fill me with disgust, and I usually heap them together as being snobs.” Finally Hartmans judged Adel van de geest positively but only after, in his own words, putting aside “strong prejudices.”  

Furthermore, the Nexus Institute is barely noticed in academic publications: the organisation has not been the focus of academic research before, nor have their publications been analysed in any academic journals. Yet despite the hostile reception that Riemen’s publications receive, the perceived elitism of the Nexus Institute, and the obvious academic disinterest, the popularity of its events is unmistakable, as De Vries (2011) argued:

In fact, when it comes to the reception of his [Riemen’s] books, he might as well shrug his shoulders. Because whichever way you look at it: the books are successful, are sold by tens of thousands and are abroad showered with praise. [IV.66] (para. 3)

These general remarks on the role of Riemen and the Nexus Institute resonate in the reception and workings of the publication De terugkeer van Europa and “Je suis Européen!”: the reviews and interviews often address points of critique, but Riemen succeeds in sparking debate beyond the pages of newspapers and political magazines by embedding both the publication and the event in recent political points of contention. This chapter argues that despite the explicit cultural approach to Europe, the workings of this project lie more in the field of the European Union and (even more so) national politics. The first section discusses the reception of the De terugkeer van Europa, highlighting three main areas of critique: Eurocentrism; elitism; and the representation of the relation between European culture and politics. The second section focusses on the broader impact of the event and the publication, arguing that, despite its critique from an elitist point of view, Riemen did succeed in reaching a large audience in the media—albeit without succeeding in establishing a meaningful relation between the world of literature and the current political crises.

106 Rob Riemen responded to the criticism as follows in this article: “I knew: this should always be independent, this should never be pigeon-holed, this should be international by definition, this should be something that breathes and radiates the spirit of European humanism and will be un-Dutch—and then you also know that it is unlikely that you make many friends here, or receive support” [IV.67] (Riemen as cited in de Vries, 2011, para. 3).
15.1 Reception of “The Return of Europe”

The symposium “Je suis Européen!” in June 2015, and the publication of De terugkeer van Europa in November of the same year, have been presented, both by the organisation and the media, in the context of the current European political crises. Indeed, the English version of the invitation to the symposium reads:

As the current European Union is, in fact, nothing more but a political and economic bureaucracy, it is not surprising that many people derive their identity, again, from resurgent nationalism and fascism. What kind of policy should the European Union embrace to reverse this anti-European spirit? (Riemen, personal communication, n.d.)

Resurgent nationalism, as mentioned in the invitation, is not the only political context in which the Nexus symposium functioned: in reports on the event, the various challenges that the European Union faces provided further context. The cultural news website 8weekly referred to a fragile sense of unity felt after the violent attack on Charlie Hebdo:

In the title of the symposium organised by the Nexus Institute in June last year, reverberated current events. After the offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo were attacked on 7 January, whereby a number of people were killed, millions of Europeans marched through the streets, chanting, “Je suis Charlie.” All of a sudden Europe seemed to be united. [IV.68] (van Amelsvoort, 2016, para. 2–3)

The journalist Jan van Benthem (2015)—a commentator on foreign affairs—discussed the symposium in the opinion pages of the national newspaper Nederlands Dagblad by summarising the different contributions of the participants around the topics of the European Union’s perceived democratic deficit, institutional bureaucracy, and the looming “Brexit” referendum in the UK. This last issue could also be seen as an excellent opportunity to rethink the European Union, as Van Benthem quoted the contribution of Philipp Blom to the roundtable talks during the symposium:

And again Blom’s diagnosis is the right one: too long, Europe has suffered from a “scepticism deficiency.” The critical questions now being raised have been neglected for too long. Therefore, necessary adjustments were not implemented, up to the point where we are today and a country like Great Britain, with an age long democratic tradition, in all
seriousness is going to hold a referendum on the question whether it still wants to remain in the Union.

But at the same time the British rebellion is a unique opportunity to screen the EU once again, to fight the obesity of institutes that have been growing too fast and to get back to a Union that is again attractive for the people who live in it. [IV.69] (van Benthem, 2015, “Opinie”)

Another Dutch national newspaper, *de Volkskrant*, chose the perspective of the Greek financial crisis to report on the symposium in its opinion pages—this time by highlighting the contribution to the plenary debate by Apostolos Doxiadis (Korteweg, 2015). The journalist Ariejan Korteweg (2015), political editor for this newspaper, commented on the financial negotiations with Greece in the light of the Nexus symposium, arguing:

Here, the kind of Europe that is on other occasions so anxious to appeal to its shared Christian-Jewish-humanist roots, is far away. Gone are the shared ideals of the Enlightenment, gone is the zone of peace that had to be protected at all costs, the economic unity that should lead to political integration. Not even a beginning of identification with the Greeks in their remote European corner; they just have to pay for all their squandering. According to the Turkish scholar Erdemir Aykan—also at the Nexus symposium—the culture of coffee houses where you meet to discuss problems, so typical of Europe, is nowhere in sight. Europe has a shared history, of struggle, of alliances, of influence, of which a joint perspective could be the result. The European Union is based on that vision, with the euro group as the most far-reaching expression of mutual trust. None of it plays a role. Calculate, and, if the sums are not right, push off. This has led to the catastrophic negotiations of the last few months . . .

If Greece will be given up, it will mean that this powerful economic zone is not capable of putting back on the rails a small country with less than 11 million inhabitants. Although this will not be the end of Europe as an economic unity, it certainly means the collapse of the European ideals and a considerable restriction of its ambitions. An argument that should weigh heavily these days. [IV.70] (Korteweg, 2015, “Bloeden voor al dat potverteren”)

254
The general sense of pessimism—some might even say alarmism—led Jelte Wiersma (2015), the EU correspondent for the newsmagazine Elsevier, to conclude that the overall tone of the symposium was one of humorous cynicism regarding the European Union:

What does this coffee house conversation with intellectuals, with almost only senior and high educated participants in the room, teach us? Whoever criticises the European Union scores points. Count Adam Zamoyski (66), a famous British historian, for example, is loudly applauded, stating: “The European Union is just like the Soviet Union.” Writer Arnon Grunberg (44), who lives in New York, goes even further. Europe itself has finished. “I asked a Syrian refugee why he had not gone to America. His answer: ‘I couldn’t find traffickers to take me there.’” He also scores points. [IV.71] (Wiersma, 2015, para. 3–4)

It is striking to observe how the pessimistic and cynical ways in which journalists have reported on Europe do not consider the optimism at stake in the project. Indeed, Riemen (2015a) asserts that culture and a renewed interest in humanistic values might provide an answer to these challenges. The importance of literature, music, or the arts in general, does not come to the fore in these reviews. This is possibly a result of the articles being written for the opinion section of the newspapers concerned by political and foreign affairs correspondents, rather than cultural editors. The focus of these articles is first and foremost on what ails Europe, and not on the cultural cure that is proposed.

Whereas the symposium is perceived as merely a contribution to reflections from a political perspective, the reception of the special edition of the Nexus journal, De terugkeer van Europa, leans much more towards the cultural aspects of the project. The cultural news website 8weekly presented the project as a series of political events, but also underlined the importance of the arts: the reviewer praised the eloquent defence of European literature and culture in the publication and concluded, in line with the view proposed by Riemen, that culture is an answer to the European crisis of identity:

The answer, as many contributions to this volume suggest, has to be found in a shared culture, a shared history. The fact that the EU does not make the heart beat faster, makes sense: although since the 1980s efforts have been made to stimulate a European identity, it is in essence an economic and political project. [IV.72] (van Amelsvoort, 2016, “Bestaat de Europese ziel?”)
It is, however, not clear from this review how culture might be able to achieve such a goal: the interrelatedness of politics and culture is not discussed further.

This review exemplifies how the reception of *De terugkeer van Europa* highlights the humanistic values and Europe as a cultural unity. The compilation of essays is appreciated for its insightful perspectives on European integration and its focus on culture; however, critics also point to some of the difficulties they have with Riemen’s argumentation. Their critique is presented below, summarised under three topics: the reproach of Eurocentrism; elitism; and the unfair representation of the link between European politics and literature.

As argued in Part II, which looked at the intentions of the organisation, Riemen’s position could be labelled “Eurocentric” by virtue of the ways in which he argues how the intellectual tradition of “European humanism” is opposed to the apparent barbarism of peoples and places that are not influenced by this humanistic tradition. The opposition between the universal European tradition of humanism—“civilisation,” in Riemen’s terms—on the one hand, and the only alternative, namely “barbarism,” on the other, has led reviewers to criticise Riemen for failing to see how barbarism is part and parcel of the European tradition. The well-known Dutch literary critic Carel Peeters (2015) took this stance in his review of *De terugkeer van Europa* in *Vrij Nederland*:

The most convincing Europeans who contributed to *De terugkeer van Europa* are those who evoke some protest. Those who look at Europe as the continent where over the centuries both the highest and the lowest level of civilisation was realised. For them it is difficult to call to mind one vision of Europe. Authors, such as Plácido Domingo, the opera singer and chairman of the heritage organisation Europa Nostra, are ironing out history by claiming that they are “proud to be European.” Conversely, his right hand, the vice-president of Europa Nostra, Costa Carras, is aware of the fact that you cannot think unequivocally about Europe: “we Europeans are responsible for many good things,” he writes, “but also for many evil things. This evil is part of our heritage.” [IV.73] (Peeters, 2015, para. 7)

Peeters’s review shows how Riemen’s problematic juxtaposition of barbarism and “European humanism” is sometimes contradicted in *De terugkeer van Europa*. The “polyphony of voices” that comprise this edition does indeed offer counter-voices to the main line of argument outlined in the introduction by Riemen himself. As Part III showed, the contributors to *De terugkeer van Europa* often voiced their reservations towards the idea of literature being an expression of humanistic ideals and the conflation of the realms of culture and politics (Doxiades, 2015; Grunberg, 2015;
Tóibín, 2015; Zagajewski, 2015), thereby diverging from the starting point offered by Riemen. Peeters quoted from another contribution by the British historian of Polish descent Adam Zamoyski to illustrate his point that the most interesting essays are the ones that challenge the optimistic narrative of European humanistic values (Zamoyski, 2015). Zamoyski states: “We are the product of ‘barbaric’ forces as well as of the legacy of Athens and Jerusalem” [IV.74] (as cited in Peeters, 2015, para. 8).

Besides the reproach of Eurocentrism, commentators also perceive this special edition of the Nexus journal as “elitist” in its defence of values such as beauty, justice, and truth. Professor of Fundamental Theology at the Belgian University, KU Leuven, Stephan van Erp (2016) provided an example of this type of reasoning from a theological perspective in his discussion of De terugkeer van Europa. Summarising Riemen’s main line of argument in an essay on Europe, he concluded:

Riemen articulates a thought model of a cultural and intellectual elite that occurs in many varieties and that is not always as overt or explicitly “elitist”—in the strict sense of the word—as is the case with him. Also, for example, in churches, journalism and at universities similar sounds can be heard. The ideological essence of the ideas of these elites is a sharp distinction between mind and practice, or between culture and reality. With regard to a vision of Europe’s future it is often suggested that the reality of the present crisis could be averted by returning to Europe’s cultural roots. . . .

Wherever the European roots may be found, the values derived from the spirit that sprang from these roots, are nothing more than abstractions: truth, goodness and beauty that may shape the human being into the civilised being who, for example, was honoured in the Viennese salons. [IV.75] (van Erp, 2016, para. 7–8)

Van Erp argued that the “romantic idealism” professed by the “pseudo-intellectual” Riemen is no longer an answer to current challenges in Europe in the field of environment, migration, and financial crises. Abstract meta-concepts such as liberty and equality have become empty terms, only used by different parties to substantiate their own political preferences (van Erp, 2016).

A similar approach to the conceptual apparatus in De terugkeer van Europa can be seen in a highly critical review in De Correspondent, a recently established Dutch newspaper targeting a younger audience. The journalist Tomas Vanheste (2016) noted: “Soul! Spirit! Truth! Justice! These are big words, but Riemen does not interpret them” [IV.76] (“Probleem 1”). Vanheste thus signals the

107 The Belgian publicist Luc Devoldere (2014) described a very similar response to the language in Nexus journal: “Culture! Soul! Spirit! Love! Beauty! These are catch-all concepts: you can put so much in them that they will eventually mean everything and therefore nothing” [IV.78] (p. 229).
same problem as Van Erp, namely the apparent meaninglessness of these concepts in a contemporary context, although delving a little deeper into the reasons behind this problematic terminology. He argued that, ironically, Riemen himself refers to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, albeit without accepting the repercussions of this philosophical worldview:

The message that Nietzsche through Zarathoestra delivers, is, in the words of Riemen: “God is dead; there is no truth; there is no morality; there is no good and evil.” How to go on after Nietzsche’s demolition work? As if nothing has happened, Riemen keeps on using high-sounding language such as “truth” and “justice.” As if Nietzsche’s work was merely a warning and as if the philosopher with the hammer did not lay bare a fundamental problem which philosophers are still struggling with: how can we determine what is “true” and “right” if God is dead, if there is no absolute foundation for our judgements?108 [IV.77] (Vanheste, 2016, “Probleem 1”)

In contrast, the philosopher Erno Eskens (n.d.), in a review in the digital philosophical magazine iFilosofie, defended Riemen’s reference to core values of the European project in such metaphysical terms. However, he expressed doubt as to whether the attitude of elitism and alarmism that Riemen expresses in this volume is helpful in reflecting on European issues:

The way he wants to protect the core values of Europe also has something heroic. And what is more, he writes beautifully about these values. I also share his view that philosophy—the search for what is true, good and beautiful—is the essence of the European project . . . . But I do not think that we cultivate the soul by denouncing the supposedly simple-minded others. Let a thousand shades of grey flourish and again another colourful intellectual will come to the fore to help us further. And that is exactly what Europe with all its rules has organised for us; that we all have a free rein to try in our own way not to be simple-minded. For this we may be grateful to Europe. [IV.80] (Eskens, n.d., “De gecultiveerde ziel”)

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108 In the interview in Knack magazine, Riemen showed that he is well aware of the fact that such words have lost meaning in contemporary society (Verplancke, 2015). He defends his apparent “elitism” by explaining that the meaning of this concept is problematically narrowed down compared to the original sense of the word. On the question “Many people find the spiritual values that you defend elitist. How is that?,” his reply is: “Because we live in a vain culture in which the meaning of words is lost. The word elitist is narrowed down to inaccessible, belonging to a small group, exclusive. As long as it is about the entertainment elite or sport elite, we see no problem at all: we all want a selfie with those people. But when it comes to culture, you are suddenly elitist. Nevertheless, the original meaning of that word is ‘the best.’ And that best is timeless. That is why we can still read the Plato’s dialogues, and listen to Bach’s music” [IV.79] (Verplancke, 2015, p. 89).
Eskens’s (n.d.) observation on the regulations that underpin Europe is set in his review in a larger context, which addressed a third and final point of critique on De terugkeer van Europa that is made in other reviews as well: the representation of European politics. Eskens argued that it is precisely the tradition of humanism, defended by Riemen, that created a society in which freedom of expression and public debate are crucial, and to organise this debate, one needs formalities and regulations. The formalism of the European Union creates the possibility for a lively debate by guaranteeing rights, liberties, and welfare (Eskens, n.d.). Referring to Grunberg’s essay in De terugkeer van Europa, he explained:

We should not expect of Europe that it is going to be philosophical. It is a formal project. The European Union is, as Arnon Grunberg in the same Nexus asserts, “an anti-heroic project” . . . . Those who in addition to formal values are also looking for substantive values (an active cultivation of the soul), should not rely on Europe or “politics.” Every democracy has to be distant and formal in order to enable pluralism. Get used to it. [IV.81] (Eskens, n.d., “Een lege huls”)

Also relying on the essay by Arnon Grunberg, Vanheste (2016) made a similar point in his review in De Correspondent, juxtaposing Riemen’s ideas with the more mundane, non-heroic approach defended by Grunberg:

This may all be true, the most annoying thing about Riemen’s argument is that it reveals contempt for politics. Without any embarrassment, without having gained any in-depth knowledge, he dismisses both the entire European Parliament and the entire European Commission.

By doing so, the self-appointed intellectual Riemen, fiercely opposed to the populism of Wilders cum suis, is guilty of what Pieter van Os has so beautifully coined as “parlor populism”: the tendency of the upper class to dismiss politics as a dirty and filthy job for intellectual light weights.

Nevertheless, his own journal could have been a source of inspiration for a different way of thinking. See Arnon Grunberg’s nice, small essay, for example. [IV.82] (Vanheste, 2016, “Probleem 4”)

With these three general points of critique—Eurocentrism, elitism, and the representation of European politics—in the reception of De terugkeer van Europa, the content of the reviews has been
analysed, but not their style. From this perspective, one can see how Vanheste’s (2016) assessment of *De terugkeer van Europa* exemplifies the rather forceful “ad hominem” rhetoric—referring to Riemen as a “self-proclaimed intellectual,” which is comparable to Van Erp’s (2016) reproach of Riemen as a “pseudo-intellectual”—which De Vries (2011) observed in his portrait of Riemen. Vanheste (2016) concluded his review by stating that Riemen is “[n]ot only facile, but also dangerous. With his philippics he fosters the aversion to politics, which is essentially the attempt to pacify the struggle of all against all and to create step by step a better society” [IV.83] (Vanheste, 2016, “Probleem 4”). This tone of voice might be construed as symptomatic of a more general negative attitude towards publications by Riemen—at least in the minds (and opinions) of critics.

*De terugkeer van Europa* is, however, not a monograph by Riemen alone. Rather, it is a compilation of historical texts and recent essays. It is striking to observe that reviewers who give a more thorough analysis of this special edition of the *Nexus* journal limit themselves mostly to the introduction by Riemen—and only refer to other essays in this volume to substantiate their critique of Riemen, as in the reviews by Eskens (n.d.) and Vanheste (2016), both using Grunberg to make their point.¹⁰⁹ Peeters (2015) also preferred the authors who offered a view on the darker side of Europe (Costa Carras, Philipp Blom, and Adam Zamoyski), instead of merely celebrating the legacies of humanism, to argue that barbarism should necessarily be seen as an element of European history. However, Eskens (n.d.) did conclude his review on a positive note, saying that this volume of the *Nexus* journal contains many essays that are worth reading, which is in line with the positive evaluation in *NRC Handelsblad*: “a collection of often very erudite articles, crammed with thoughts and formulations worthy of consideration” [IV.84] (de Vos, 2016, p. 12).

15.2 Impact of “The Return of Europe”

Regarding the wider impact of the Nexus project, one event featured prominently, namely, the national debate on EU policies in the form of the Dutch Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement referendum on April 6, 2016. The Dutch political interview programme “Buitenhof” featured a debate between Rob Riemen and Thierry Baudet, the leader of the Dutch national conservative political party Forum voor Democratie [Forum for Democracy], to discuss the referendum (Baudet & Riemen, 2016). Where the reception of the Nexus symposium addressed political European issues and reviewers of *De terugkeer van Europa* focussed on the importance of culture, this interview can be seen as Riemen’s attempt to tie both perspectives of culture and politics together—which was not an overall success. This section will address Riemen’s role in this debate.

¹⁰⁹ See Anouk Zuurmond (2016) for a review of *De terugkeer van Europa*, in which I discuss some of the other essays.
March 6, 2016 was exactly one month before the polls would open for the Dutch referendum to decide on closer relations between the European Union and Ukraine—a move proposed by the European Union. The referendum was perceived as an attempt to give the public a voice on the European Union in general: an opportunity, not so much to speak out on this specific deal, but on the process of integration. With a turnout of 32%, it resulted in a rejection of the Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement (“Dutch referendum voters,” 2016). When the “Buitenhof” debate was organised, however, the outcome was unknown. Thierry Baudet was invited to explain why he would vote “no” in the referendum. Baudet was one of the initiators of the referendum, and has been a prominent Eurosceptic voice in the public sphere (e.g. Baudet, 2012), whilst Riemen—an avid defender of European culture in the media—was invited to explain his “yes” vote (Baudet & Riemen, 2016).

Riemen took the opportunity to show the audience a copy of De terugkeer van Europa, which was placed on the table during the discussion in order to open the debate with the proposition that Baudet “does not know this woman”—Europa, the personification of Europe on the cover of the book (Baudet & Riemen, 2016). Baudet rejected the ideals of European humanism and values, and (according to Riemen) instead propagated the ideology of nationalism. What followed was a debate that is difficult to follow, let alone summarise, as the discussion moved through antisemitism and Hitler, Thomas Mann, Wagner, and fascism. Whilst the interviewer attempted to bring the men back to the topic at hand—the upcoming referendum—the Association Agreement and Ukraine were only touched upon briefly. Riemen explained his position with a reference to De terugkeer van Europa as follows: “In this book, we exercise a fundamental critique of the European Union. But: if the EU disintegrates, we are left with nothing. We lose spiritual values and unity” (Baudet & Riemen, 2016). Baudet’s response was simple—that Riemen failed to differentiate between EU politics and European culture. Whilst Baudet positioned himself as a fan of European culture and the writers whom Riemen mentioned, he disagreed with the process of European political integration and criticised the perceived democratic deficit. Instead, Baudet stated, he would prefer to see a return to the sovereignty of the nation state (Baudet & Riemen, 2016).

The programme provided Riemen with a platform from which to proclaim and advertise De terugkeer van Europa to a large audience. The response in the media was overwhelming, but predominantly negative. In the words of a commentator on the news website Joop, “Twitter exploded”:
What should have been a cutting edge debate on the Ukraine referendum, degenerated into a bizarre discussion that no viewer was able to follow. Even host Paul Witteman seemed to be at a loss.

Thierry Baudet and Rob Riemen were guests. Baudet will vote against the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, Riemen for. However, it was hardly possible to gather from their arguments why they were for or against the Association Agreement. It soon degenerated into a meaningless duel of name dropping . . . . On Twitter both the guests and the host were sharply criticised . . . . It was impossible to make sense of the content, and the question whether you should vote for or against the treaty with Ukraine remained for many viewers unanswered. Perhaps this tweet sums it up most accurately: “Buitenhof summarised: Baudet is the best argument to vote for and Riemen is the best argument for voting against.” [IV.85] (“Baudet bij Buitenhof,” 2016, para. 1–3)

Other highly popular websites, such as the anti-establishment blog Geenstijl (“Geenstijl TVTip,” 2016) and online forums (e.g. “Klaagbaak,” 2016), reported with a sense of amusement on the debate. Columns appeared in more mainstream media as well, such as in De Groene Amsterdammer:

Riemen sat on a meters high moral throne and tried in an ostentatious way to frame his opponent as eccentric. The usual rudeness of the our-kind-of-people brigade.

However, a lot of what Riemen put forward, appealed to me as a modern man. That what he praised Europe for was the same reason why I consider Europe as the best humanity currently has to offer. Our only hope. [IV.86] (Terstall, 2016, para. 1–2)

Publicist Max van Weezel (2016) ended his column in Vrij Nederland with the following question: “I have to confess that a month before the referendum I am still completely at a loss. Shall I vote for Thomas Mann or rather for Oswald Spengler on 6 April?” [IV.87] (para. 8).

The reactions to this televised debate reveal how it proved almost impossible for Riemen to establish a connection in the media between European cultural heritage and humanistic values on the one hand, and contemporary political issues in the European Union on the other. In other words: the attempted link between Thomas Mann and an association agreement with Ukraine was perceived as either non-existent or, at best, highly confusing.

15.3 Conclusion
The reception of the symposium and the publication of *De terugkeer van Europa* reveals firstly, how there is in a more general sense a disconnect between the cultural approach to Europe and the political criticism of the European Union—a connection that Nexus attempted to establish. Whereas the symposium was reviewed by political commentators from the perspective of, for example, the economic crisis, the cultural critics who discussed the publication *De terugkeer van Europa* focussed on the framework of values and the humanistic tradition, as defended by Riemen in the introduction. Despite the fact that some of those critics appreciated the essay collection, the overall reception of the project “The Return of Europe” met with a critique that addressed a perceived Eurocentrism, elitism, and a distorted account of the relation between politics and culture. These negative responses might be part of a more general dismissive attitude in Dutch media towards the Nexus Institute and Rob Riemen. However, as the analysis in Part II showed, the texts by Riemen are indeed vulnerable to the charge of Eurocentrism, and the need to differentiate between European culture and EU politics has also been pointed out by some of the contributors to *De terugkeer van Europa*. The performance of Riemen on “Buitenhof”, during which he attempted to connect the world of literature and acute problems in the European Union whilst referring to *De terugkeer van Europa*, did not provide an answer to his critics—the effect was that it only confirmed, in the eyes of commentators, the impossibility of connecting culture and politics.

In this respect, this project failed to gain appreciation for its specific literary perspective on European issues: either the cultural aspect is not put on the agenda, or it is simply problematised and seen as an unnecessary complication to gaining an understanding of European politics. However, all the cases in this research were intended to engage audiences in a discussion about European identity—and no other project has succeeded in stirring up such a debate and engaging such a large crowd as the project by the Nexus Institute. With a sell-out theatre show, plenty of media attention, and a storm on Twitter as well as on other forums and blogs, the Nexus Institute did manage to gather people in their “café Europe”—and to provoke discussion well outside of the intellectual circle of that “café” as well.
Conclusion to Part IV

Combining the perspectives of the critical reception of these four projects and of their broader impact—the public use of these texts in different fields—these chapters in Part IV explored whether these projects have achieved their aim of furthering our understanding of European identity from a literary point of view. Each case was researched to ascertain if the projects have indeed been perceived as, firstly, a contribution to a discussion about European identity; and secondly, if their literary nature is acknowledged as adding a valuable perspective to the debate. To approach these research questions, the effects of the projects were divided into two elements: the immediate reception of the intended output of the projects; and the wider (and to a certain extent less intended) impacts of the projects on society—what these texts actually did. As there are few studies on how to analyse this larger societal impact, this research proposed to map the repercussions of these initiatives in four fields: that of European politics, academia, literature, and (social) media.

As for the immediate reception of these projects—ranging from critics reviewing these publications in cultural magazines to political commentators discussing the output in the opinion section of newspapers—one can see how “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse” have been most successful in establishing appreciation for their literary contribution to discussions on European identity. “The Constitution in Verse” is praised for its appealing use of language, and its poetic character is often juxtaposed favourably with the original EU document. Its polyphony is seen as reflecting European diversity, and the capacity of the poem to address the more emotional aspects of European integration is appreciated. Similarly, “Narratives for Europe” achieved its goal of showing the public how literary writers, the contemporary arts, and their more classic predecessors, can actually contribute to analyses of European democracy, issues of migration, and interactions with neighbouring countries. Indeed, both projects were also analysed in this research as based upon an idea of European identity that is political, rather than cultural. Their aim had been to engage citizens in a critical, public debate on EU policies and the future of the Union. However, one can assert that the intended search in these projects for “counter-narratives” and the desire to encourage citizen involvement are less visible: even though there was substantial media attention, the projects did not trigger wider public debate.

Less successful in bringing a literary perspective on Europe to the fore according to the different media were the “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe.” The reception of the “Literatur Express” revealed how critics often (negatively) focused on the future of the business of literature—with this large-scale project as a media spectacle—and the perceived pretentious claims about culture and politics. In a comparable manner, political reflections by Riemen on the
European Union were not accepted by reviewers, who claimed, for example, that the project presented a distorted image of the workings of the European Union. The public performance by Riemens in the programme “Buitenhof” exemplified, according to critics, why literary icons of the past cannot provide clarity in contemporary political debates. It is striking to see how these two projects—analysed here as having an image of Europe as a cultural unity instead of a political unity at its basis—were both less successful in presenting an image in the media of the importance of literature to debates on Europe. The valued link between the world of literature and that of European identity has not been recognised by these critics. Perhaps precisely because these projects adhere to European identity in terms of shared values, history, and culture, this translation to the world of EU politics is not accepted.

With these results in mind, this research adds to the observations made by Lützeler (2007a) on literature and writers who contribute to a public discourse on Europe, to the effect that such interventions are not always accepted by the media. The “works that are published as contributions to the literary discourse on Europe” [IV.88] (Lützeler, 2007a, p. 17) are in some cases not received as literary input in the debate on Europe, because other players in the debate—journalists, critics, citizens—might question or even deny writers or literature a voice in European political issues. The potential of these projects to offer valuable literary perspectives on European identity—as analysed in Part III—have thus not all been realised.

The wider societal impact of these literary projects on Europe reveals a range of different fields that have been involved in the workings of these initiatives. The fields of literature, academia, and media were, to begin with, all influenced by the projects—albeit not all with the same intensity. The “Literatur Express” proved to have a long-lasting impact in the world of literature: two novels were devoted to the project, one coming a full nine years afterwards. It has been argued that the novel O Heer, waar zijn uw zijstraten? (Vanhole, 2002) was more successful in generating reflections on European identity from a literary perspective than the project itself. “Narratives for Europe” is perceived as an example of the “narrative turn” in European studies and therefore also as an academic point of reference. In the field of social media, it has been observed that the Nexus Institute was most successful in sparking public debate and engaging ordinary citizens in discussions on EU policies—goals that “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse” had also set as intended outcomes. Drawing the attention of many bloggers and Twitter users to the attempt to combine the literary past with the European political present, Riemens generated a large response in mainstream media and especially social media, even though his performance was repeatedly criticised.
What these projects have in common concerning their societal impacts is that each organisation intended to influence European politics, but the ways in which they actually managed to reach EU institutions differs greatly. The Nexus Institute, despite inviting a former EU Commissioner, chose to oppose and criticise the world of EU politics, with outspoken statements from Riemen on Brussels and EU politicians. Less outspoken was the “Literatur Express,” yet this organisation did attempt to share with the European Union concerns about cultural policies and opportunities for translations in a much-debated “final statement”. Even though “Narratives for Europe” was not directed specifically at EU institutions, according to some scholars their initiative provided the inspiration for the EU Commission to instigate the project “A New Narrative for Europe.” Finally, despite searching for a non-institutional approach, “The European Constitution in Verse” was embraced by MEPs and incorporated in the House of European History. The range of political impacts—from opposition or a statement to institutional inspiration and finally, institutional incorporation—provides a more precise framework by which to analyse, not only the role of writers in debates about European issues—as Heynders (2009) suggests—but also to assess their specific (intended and unintended) influence on EU politics and institutions.

What the analysis of the effects of these projects finally shows is how the strict dichotomy between “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches in European studies on cultural politics, as for example established by Shore (2000), does not hold in these cases. The institutional and political interaction with these literary projects—in the form of funding; the participation of EU Commissioners; the wider impact of the European Commission taking a format as a blueprint; or the institutional incorporation of the results of these projects—is consistent with the findings of Sassatelli (2009), who argued that the field of cultural programmes is being reconfigured, as the lines between grassroots organisations and top-down initiatives have become increasingly blurred.
16. General Conclusions

The starting point of this research was the observation that in publications addressing literary reflections on Europe, little attention has been paid to emerging European cultural networks, the role of EU subsidies, or literary organisations engaging European writers in a range of transnational initiatives aimed at contemplating the challenges that the European Union currently faces. To further our understanding of this changing European literary field, this dissertation made use of four recent transnational literary projects: the “Literatur Express” (Literaturwerkstatt Berlin, 2000); “The European Constitution in Verse” (Passa Porta and the Brussels Poetry Collective, 2008–2011); “Narratives for Europe” (European Cultural Foundation, 2009–2012); and “The Return of Europe” (The Nexus Institute, 2015). The literary contributions to the debate on Europe—the “literarische Europa-Diskurs,” to use Lützeler’s (2007a) term—made by these projects were analysed. As discussed in Part I, all are texts by literary authors and either utilise “direct” forms of writing, such as essays and pamphlets, or “indirect” forms, such as poetry or fiction. All the texts intended to contribute to a wider understanding of European identity. The selected projects were analysed via an examination of three aspects: the intentions of the cultural organisations behind them; the cultural artefacts resulting from them; and the reception of these projects.

The choice of transnational literary projects allowed for an interdisciplinary research approach that combined insights from three fields of research—also discussed in Part I of this dissertation—namely European identity; the role of writers and literary works in the construction of (trans-)national identities; and EU cultural policies. Firstly, European identity was conceptualised as not possessing a stable core or essence, but rather as constructed, contested, and reconstructed within various social and discursive practices. Drawing upon multiple studies in the field of European identity, two fundamental dimensions were discerned: European cultural identity—referring to a sense of shared heritage, values, and plurality, tied to the discourse of “unity in diversity”—and European political identity, which indicates a shared set of political ideas. The latter type of political self-understanding is reflected in the discourse of the “Europe of citizens,” consisting of elements such as elections, the European Parliament, and the importance of a public sphere. Both dimensions were clearly distinct, since a sense of shared values and a common heritage—a cultural identity—does not necessarily lead to a legitimate political European Union.

The second field of research was addressed by asking to what extent models of national identity formation in the 19th century—specifically, the role of literary works in this process, such as
Anderson’s “imagined community” (1991)—apply on a European level. To approach this methodological question, four major differences were discerned between national and European identity formation and the function that literature might have within them. The first difference was observed in the field of memory, which is much more contested on a European level than on a national level: instead of merely retelling triumphant narratives of national history, traumatic, conflictual memory might be negotiated in literary works on European history. The second difference was the lack of a shared language, and compared to the analysis of Anderson’s imagined national community, the European Union—unlike nation states—does not have the tendency to arouse feelings of deep attachment in its citizens. The relation between politics and literature has also changed, delineating the third difference with national identity formation in the 19th century. This third difference concerns the instrumentalisation of literature to substantiate a national identity—as in the search for a “foundational epic”—albeit one that is difficult to translate to the current European project, as literature has become more independent from the field of politics. A final example of the differences between national and transnational identity formation is the plurality of the European continent: compared to national self-images, the European self-image is necessarily more diverse. Mapping the most important differences between the processes of national and European identity formation, the chapters in Part I argued that the concepts derived from theories on literature and the emergence of a nation can indeed be transferred to a European level, although only if the dangers of “methodological nationalism” are carefully considered by taking into account the distinctiveness of the process of European identity formation.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework in Part I yielded insights into different EU cultural policy strategies. Some are more focussed on stimulating a sense of shared values and history (cultural identity), whilst others address EU citizenship and attempt to further a European public sphere (political identity). Whereas cultural and political identity were at first distinguished, the research showed how EU cultural programmes might also function as strategies by which to legitimise the European Union as a political entity. Furthermore, drawing on the research by Sassatelli (2009), it has been argued that EU identity discourses are not simply top-down strategies. Processes of European identity formation are instead an interplay between institutional rhetoric and civil society, consisting of recipients who actively transform and translate these discourses.

These three different fields of research—European identity, literature in (trans-)national identity formation, and EU cultural policies—thus provided the theoretical framework via which the featured transnational literary projects could be analysed. The four projects were conceived as
contributions to an imagined European community, in which the specificities of literature in the process of transnational identity formation are taken into account: literature can represent contested memory; bridge an emotional divide; provide critical opposition; and reflect diversity. Furthermore, these literary projects were considered as instances in which both political and cultural identity discourses are instrumentalised—interpreted, transformed, and contested—in the practice of cultural organisations, literary writers, and their audiences.

The first research question (addressed in Part II) dealt with the reconstruction of the expectations that cultural organisations have when they launch projects that reflect on shared European identity. This was done by asking two sub-questions. Firstly, how is European identity presented in the paratexts related to the selected case studies? Secondly, why have the organisers invited authors of literary works to reflect on these issues? This analysis of the ways in which cultural and political identity discourses were instrumentalised resulted in a categorisation in which the paratexts linked to the “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” were found to reproduce the discourse of cultural identity in their interpretations of unity in diversity, whilst “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse” aimed instead to contribute to European political identity formation by reproducing the discourse of citizens. The discourses in which these cultural organisations participate were found to be related to the argumentative strategies—linked to the specificities discerned in the theoretical framework of the role of literature in European identity formation—they employed in order to legitimise their literary contributions. The “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” aimed to contribute to European cultural identity formation, as literary texts might reflect on European diversity and represent historical unity; they encouraged authors to formulate and envisage a shared heritage, or a set of cultural values. Meanwhile, “The European Constitution in Verse” and “Narratives for Europe” were expected to become part of the process of European political identity formation, as organisers relied on the critical and non-institutional narratives that literature might bring to the European public sphere. Writers were thus invited to open up public debate on EU policies.

The second research question (addressed in Part III) confronted the intentions expressed by project leaders with regard to the outcomes of their projects in the form of prose, poetry, and essays. This was achieved by asking exactly how these contributions relate to the expectations of the organisers. The research showed that the literary texts do indeed correspond to the general image of Europe that had been put forward by the project leaders. For example, the authors in the “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” were largely engaged in reflecting on Europe as a cultural unity,
whilst contributors to “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse” intended to spark a debate on European political policies. As such, these literary artefacts all contribute to imagining a European community either by representing a shared past or by engaging in political discussions. However, these literary texts not only contribute towards an imagined European community; resistance to political appropriation was also perceived in these texts. The additional focus on one specific author for each of these cases revealed how they took the opportunity to “talk back” critically to the organisers of the projects. On the issue of European identity, Geert van Istendael, Dubravka Ugrešić, and Abdelkader Benali are all outspoken critics of the European Union. The chapters in Part III argued that their critical stance is part of a recurring and sustained critique of the European Union in their oeuvres. These literary projects have thus provided a platform for structurally sceptical voices as well—including projects that have received EU funding. This finding is supported by Nele Bemong, Mirjam Truwant, and Pieter Vermeulen (2008), who argued in their introduction to Re-thinking Europe: Literature and (Trans)National Identity,

While the study of literature in the last two decades has convincingly demonstrated how literature aids the construction of cultural identities, it has at the same time not forgotten that literature is also often (and perhaps even constitutively) subversive of such attempts to enlist it in the service of an articulation of a distinct identity. (p. 14)

Furthermore, the research in Part III revealed that these literary texts also contribute to a process of self-reflection on the wider role writers play regarding both issues of transnational identity and the ways in which culture in general has the means to address European political issues. Hence, the projects created a space for hesitance towards the role of literature and writers in such reflections. Arnon Grunberg (2015a), for example, took the opportunity to challenge the idea put forward by the Nexus Institute that culture is necessary to revive the European spirit to solve an institutional crisis, by arguing that the heroic world of the arts and literature is not in any way related to the fundamentally anti-heroic project that is the European Union.

Combining the perspectives of the critical reception of these projects and of their larger impact—as the public use of these texts in different fields—Part IV asked what the actual effects of these transnational literary projects have been. The research found that regarding their immediate reception, “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse” have been the most successful in garnering appreciation for their artistic contribution to discussions on European identity,
with reviewers applauding the literary attempt to bridge the gap between Brussels (in its institutional sense) and European citizens. Whilst both of these projects aimed to contribute to European political identity formation, projects that were developed around an idea of cultural Europe met with more scepticism from reviewers. The reception of the “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” revealed how critics struggled with claims of the link between culture and politics, and with the ways in which the workings of the European Union were represented. The wider impact of these projects was difficult to assess, not least because so little has been published on how this impact should be studied or defined. Still, it is important to map what the actual contributions of these projects have been to reflections on European identity. A possible approach to analysing this societal impact was proposed in this dissertation, namely to assess, in broad terms, the repercussions of these initiatives in four fields: that of European politics; academia; literature; and (social) media. The field of European politics was a domain upon which all of the projects had an impact, either via openly criticising EU politics (“The Return of Europe”); by reading out a statement (the “Literatur Express”); by providing a blueprint for a project by the EU Commission (“Narratives for Europe”); and even institutional incorporation (“The European Constitution in Verse”). These findings correspond with the observation that the lines between top-down and bottom-up initiatives in the field of culture have become increasingly blurred (Sassatelli, 2009). As Rita Felski (2012) contended in her introduction to an issue of the journal *New Literary History*, entitled *A New Europe?*: “European cultural policy is not just a top-down imposition of centralized norms, but involves complex negotiations amongst multiple actors that leaves room for distinctive and local visions of Europeanness to be articulated” (p. xi).

However, a complication to overcoming the opposition between top-down and bottom-up initiatives in formulating ideas on what binds Europeans, is what role oppositional voices and counter-narratives might still possess. For example, as argued in Parts III and IV, “The European Constitution in Verse” is deeply critical of EU policies, yet at the same time highly successful in attracting the attention of MEPs and civil servants. Thus, the display of its poetic articles in the House of European History (a project initiated and funded by the European Parliament) might be perceived as an attempt to absorb these critical poetic voices into a coherent narrative of European progress, as Van Weyenberg (2016) characterises this museum.

An important insight that research into these case studies provided is the fact that the tradition of the great European writer—one briefly discussed in the General Introduction—still functions as a point of reference in these transnational literary projects. Appealing to names such as Thomas Mann and Milan Kundera, organisations also attempted to claim a position for current literary writers in
contemporary debates on Europe and European identity. Additionally, authors align themselves with their canonical colleagues, either by aiming to continue the tradition, or by trying to break with their iconic predecessors. Heynders (2016) explains how indeed the position of current public intellectuals has evolved during recent years. Interaction with audiences and strategies of celebrity behaviour have altered the image of the traditional public intellectual (Heynders, 2016). The importance of the literary text has also changed drastically. Since the 1960s, literature has become devalued in the public eye, as Vaessens (2016) explained in his work on Grunberg: “Grunberg works in a world that ascribes more authority to the writer of nonfiction than to a novelist” (p. 196). Despite the declining impact of literature, the participants in these projects do not hesitate to fulfil a more traditional role of a public intellectual—to proclaim a “controversial, committed, and sometimes compromised stance from a sideline position” (Heynders, 2016, p. 3). Whilst Benali (2011a, 2011b) stresses the benefits of migration and the Islamic roots of Europe, Grunberg (2016d) defends cosmopolitanism (now unfashionable again). Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch (van Reybrouck, 2017a; van Reybrouck & Vermeersch, 2009b) critique European elitism, and Ugrešić (2007b) exposes the financial and political aspects of European cultural projects. Yet their positions cannot simply be reduced to “pro” or “anti-EU” stances, as their roles in these discussions reflect ongoing multifaceted debates on Europe and the European Union in society as a whole, with both defenders of the idea of Europe who are sceptical of certain policies of the European Union, and defenders of the European Union who also plead for an urgent rethinking of democratic practices.

As observed in the General Introduction, the majority of research on contemporary literary reflections on European identity is focused on individual and in the main canonical authors as important voices in Europe. Thus, the typical great European writer is not only repeatedly referred to in these projects, but also in various research on the role of intellectuals in European identity formation (Giesen, 1999; Kaelble, 2001; Lacroix & Nicolaïdis, 2010). However, analysing these literary projects as a whole, instead of such individual case studies, leads to the conclusion that the participating authors can be perceived as “new European writers.” This dissertation proposes that these new European writers, compared to earlier visionaries who proposed a united Europe, function in the reality of the European Union, alongside established institutions that are part of a European civil society, such as European cultural organisations, and EU subsidies. A closer look at the “focus authors” in this analysis reveals how many authors participated in more than one project, which shows how they function in a network of writers who travel around Europe to engage with their audiences via (EU funded) projects and festivals. Van Reybrouck and Vermeersch did not only organise “The European Constitution in
Verse”; they also participated in “Narratives for Europe.” Grunberg and Benali both participated in other European cultural projects, namely “citybooks” (a EU sponsored project by the Flemish-Dutch cultural organisation deBuren) and “Re:Creating Europe” in 2016, organised by the Forum on European Culture and financed, among others, by the European Cultural Foundation. Both authors also featured in the 2017 television series “Made in Europe” (“Made in Europe,” 2017). Ugrešić participated in a symposium that resulted in the anthology Writing Europe: What is European about the Literatures of Europe? (Keller & Rakusa, 2004), whilst Geert van Istendael was assigned by Brussels 2000—the organisation that prepared for the city to be a European Capital of Culture—to write the poem “Taalmachine,” which he recited during the opening ceremony (van Istendael, 2001). Furthermore, Brussels 2000 was the same organisation that arranged the programme for the Brussels stop of the “Literatur Express”.

Kraume (2010) painted a picture of writers in the 19th and 20th centuries as paving the way for European unification and furthering a European federation. We have thus seen that these contemporary writers critically reflect on the realities of the existing European Union, although they are certainly not all unanimously in favour of increasing integration. As Vanhole (2000c) argued in his final report during the “Literatur Express”, “unification is good for bankers and managers, but we, writers, are there to cultivate the nuances and differences” [IV.19] (para. 7). Despite their sometimes outspoken Euroscepticism, these authors at the same time accept being part of these networks, and negotiate their critique within the framework and expectations of the organising bodies concerned. These cases show how their commitment to critically address the European Union is combined with the more mundane—economic and practical—commitments of an authorship that is inherently tied to transnational networks of subsidised projects. How the texts and performances by these new European authors precisely relate to those of the classic “great European writers,” how these networks might be mapped, and to what extent European civil society interacts with these literary writings; all these questions demand further research. From a theoretical point of view, this dissertation has proposed a reading of these texts within a framework of European cultural policies, the agenda of cultural organisations, the oeuvre of authors, and the effects in the fields of European politics, academia, literature, and media—in which these texts might be re-used, reinterpreted, or even appropriated.

In her introduction to the volume A New Europe?, Felski (2012) observed that
there is a certain irony in the fact that “culture” is now being widely invoked as a solution to the divisions within Europe—on the grounds that economic and political ties between nations are not sufficient—while scholars of culture are all too rarely heard in debates around Europe.

(p. vi)

This research has shown how the interaction between EU politics, civil society, cultural networks, and individual authors is an ongoing process—a process that should be studied using theoretical insights from studies on European identity and cultural policies, and frameworks from literary studies. As such, this research traverses the dichotomy that is sometimes created in studies on Europe and literature. Where Literature for Europe? (D’haen, 2009), for example, is explicitly interested in “literature as a possible policy instrument for Europe” (p. 7), and The Novel and Europe (Hammond, 2016) steers away from such an “instrumentalist” approach by studying literature from a perspective that has “no connection to EU integrationism” (p. 4), this dissertation proposes that we take into account the oscillating interaction between EU politics, cultural networks, and literary texts.
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Appendix 1. List of Quotes in German and Dutch

Part I

1. ontologische Tiefenstruktur
2. Das Partikulare universell and das Universelle im Sinne von “Glokalisierung” partikular erscheinen zu lassen, das ist gerade der Dichtung möglich.
3. die Literatur ist immer auch das Medium der Möglichkeiten und der Alternativen, und zwar umso mehr, als sie sich keineswegs nur literarischer oder im weiteren Sinne kultureller Zugänge zu Europa bedient, sondern eben immer wieder auch politische und Wirtschaftliche Diskussionen aufgreift, um sie mit literarischen Mitteln weiterzuschreiben.
4. Beide, die Literatur and Europa haben gemeinsam, dass sich ihre Einheit gerade aus der Vielzahl der unterschiedlichsten Zugänge und Annäherungen heraus realisiert. Auch Heinrich Mann beschreibt deshalb sowohl die Literatur als auch Europa als eine Bewegung, die immer neu vollzogen werden muss und die dennoch niemals zu einem Abschluss kommt.
5. kulturelle Vielfalt
7. Wenn sich vom 1.6.2000 bis 17.7.2000 etwa 100 Autorinnen und Autoren aus ganz Europa auf eine Lese- und Arbeitsreise durch den Kontinent begeben haben werden, um sich und Europa zu er-fahren;
Wenn zur Frankfurter Buchmesse 2001 alle mitreisenden Autorinnen und Autoren ihre Sichtungen auf Europa ein einem “Kursbuch Europa” versammelt haben werden, das etwa gleichzeitig in möglichst vielen europäischen Sprachen erschienen sein wird;
Wenn über 1000 deutsche und 1001 anderssprachige, insgesamt also 2001 Gedichte im Internet als “lyrikline” zu hören und in Übersetzungen zu lesen sein werden.
8. Toen we dit emailadres kregen, zo’n twaalf jaar geleden, had het nog niet zo’n rare bijklank. Dat zegt iets over de verandering van de tijd en het klimaat waarin wij ons werk doen.

Part II

2. De Noord – Zuid Express kwam er in 1896 en heeft een heel bewogen geschiedenis achter de rug . . . het transport van de joden, de soldaten die Belgie [sic] binnenvielen, Russische aristocraten op de vlucht voor de Oktoberrevolutie, het IJzeren Gordijn [sic].


6. Ik heb geen enkel probleem met het verdedigen van een aantal fundamentele waarden die ook het Europese humanisme schragen. Democratie, de algemene geldigheid van de wet,
individuele vrijheid, vorming en mensenrechten zijn universele waarden. Ze leiden tot wereldburgerschap. Er is maar één alternatief voor beschaving, en dat is de barbarij. Daarom doe ik een oproep aan alle weldenkende mensen: verenig u, want het is allang geen vijf voor twaalf meer.

7. Laten we alsjeblieft die geestelijke waarden die juist in Europa vanaf de klassieke oudheid via het christendom en het humanisme tot ontwikkeling zijn gekomen, niet veronachtzamen. Pas als we die waarden op ons continent delen, zullen mensen zich als Europees burger kunnen identificeren en kunnen we de huidige verdeeldheid achter ons laten.

8. De EU is slechts een economische en politiek unie. Dat is te weinig om een gemeenschap van burgers te creëren . . . . Om een hechte samenleving te vormen heb je cultuur nodig en een identiteit die de nationaliteit overstijgt.


10. We hebben in 2004 nota bene op verzoek van de regering conferenties gehouden over Europa, resulterend in een aantal aanbevelingen. Typerend is: ik heb er sinds die tijd niet één politicus over gehoord. Nooit. Zijn politici op zoek naar een Europese visie met idealen? Daar ligt ze! Waarom zwijgen jullie erover?

11. Autoren entdecken Europa konkret in ihrem Schreiben.

12. Die Literatur benutzt, plündert, bearbeitet, verändert und bewahrt diese historische Gedächtnisse.


15. Met een bende van meer dan vijftig anarchisten krijg je dan heel verschillende stijlen. Toch is het een eenheid geworden, waarin je de ongelooflijke diversiteit van Europa ziet.

16. Alles is geschreven met passie voor Europa, maar niet noodzakelijkerwijs voor Europese instellingen. Er zit behoorlijk wat eurosceptis in.

17. Het is politiek in een andere zin: het maakt Europa resoluut opnieuw een bron van artistieke inspiratie, creativiteit en culturele samenwerking buiten de instellingen om. . . . De Europese Grondwet in Verzen is meer een verhaal dan een oplossing, meer een wandeling dan een wegwijzer. Maar we zwijgen niet.

18. Het minste dat we kunnen doen is een gesprek op gang brengen over de betekenis van de idee Europa. Het ware Europa is altijd, lees Milan Kundera, het Europa van de cultuur. In de woorden van Thomas Mann: het zijn de grote humane ideeën, het is de adel van de geest, het is een Bildungsideal. Dit Europa kan niet bestaan zonder kosmopolitisme en in Goethes prachtige definitie: een oefening in respect, respect voor het goddelijke, de aarde, onze medemensen en onze eigen waardigheid.

19. Dankzij zijn werk maakte ik kennis met de Europese geest en als men in die tijd mij had gevraagd wat Europa is, dan had ik geantwoord: De Toverberg van Thomas Mann. Dat acht ik overigens nog steeds een valide antwoord . . . . Het Europees humanisme waar Mann zijn leven aan zou wijden, is geen filologie en heeft evenmin met wetenschappelijke geleerdheid te maken. Het is primair de tegenhanger van elke vorm van fanatisme. Het is een levenshouding.

20. Het hele idee dat er solidariteit kan bestaan tussen 500 miljoen mensen, dat zij hun identiteit kunnen ontenen aan enkel economische belangen en politieke waarden—en de EU als “politiek project” is de facto niet meer dan de optelsom van deze belangen en waarden—is een dwaasheid die het gevolg is van het feit dat Europa vergeten is. Europa is de prinses, ontvoerd door Zeus vermomd als stier. Ze spoelde als drenkeling aan op Kreta en werd aldaar de inspirerende geest van een groots, humanistisch beschavingsideaal, bedacht en bezongen door denkers en dichters, verwezenlijkt door dappere daadkrachtigen die een wereld van waarheid en rechtvaardigheid bevochten op de tirannie van macht, rijkdom en domheid.

21. Zij wisten zich verantwoordelijk voor de waardigheid van de menselijke geest, de wereld van ideeën, het beste dat het menselijk bestaan kent.
22. Opdat de nu nog jonge generatie een zielloze, geestdodende Economische Unie weer zal doordringen van de Europese geest, is voor Nexus 70 een tiental klassieke toespraken verzameld (waaronder die van Victor Hugo, Stephen Spender en Robert Schuman!) die als de draad van Ariadne ons allen uit een doodse Unie kunnen leiden.

Part III

1. Diese autoren verstanden, daß es in Europa eine ontologische Tiefenstruktur, ein kulturelles Sediment, eine Traditionsbasis gibt, woran in Krisenzeiten erinnert werden kann . . . . Europa hat im Lauf der Jahrhunderte nicht nur die Konstruction diverser nationaler “imagined communities” (Benedict Anderson) erlebt, sondern auch einen Diskurs hervorgebracht, der das Gemeinsame an die Einheit des Kontinents im Auge behielt . . . . Aber nicht nur an Autoren, die sich direkt an einer Diskussion über die Identität und die Einheit Europas beteiligt haben, soll hier erinnert werden, sondern auch an jene Schriftsteller, die mit ihren Dichtungen allgemein die europäische Kultur als eine überrationale profiliiert.

2. Das unterstreicht erneut die Tatsache, daß die Ideale Europas gemeinsame, ihre Kulturen aber verschieden sind. Europa ist ein Gemeinschaft unterschiedlicher Kulturen.

3. sondern stärken im Grunde das Gefühl, daß Europa ein Einheit ist.

4. Gespenst der Globalisierung

5. ein einheitskultur

6. Alle reden vom Europa der Kulturen, der Einheit in der Vielfalt. Bis zum Überdrüß ist es zitiert. Aber was ist das, dieser Kontinent, zehn Jahre nach dem Fall sämtlicher Mauern?

7. Wir beide wissen im tiefsten Inneren, daß die Vergangenheit Fragen an uns richt.


9. unsichtbaren Barrieren

10. Geistverwandtschaft der Autorinnen und Autoren


12. Im Lauf der eineinhalb Monate der Reise im Literaturexpress zahlte mir nicht ein einziger Westler ein Getränk; als ich dabei war, zahlten “gemeinsame Rechnungen” ausschließlich wir Balkaner, die übrigen natürlich jeder für sich.

14. eine neue Vorstellung von Europa

15. Größenwahn / Selbsttäuschung

16. Aber was die von Dir erwähnte Mission betrifft, so glaube ich, daß Schriftsteller schlechte Missionare sind, dem Himmel sei Dank!


18. zu Hause, im geistigen Haus Europas


gewaardeerd. Wij neutraliseren. Dat opiniestuk van mij neutraliseert. Zodra iets neutraal is, gaan mensen weer denken.

22. Mijn ervaring is dat migratie mensen de kans geeft om zich vrijelijk te ontwikkelen en dat het uiteindelijk de samenleving zelf verrijkt en sterker maakt.

23. Uiteindelijk lag de kern van elke cultuur, civilisatie in zijn waardigheid. En waardigheid die andere mensen ontnomen werd, was de erosie van die civilisatie . . . . En hij beseft dat . . . . Europa het nieuwe huis was geworden van velen en dat hij alles op alles moest zetten om voor die mensen het huis Europa zo in te richten dat zij die de oversteek waagden zich beschut voelden.


25. Dat begint al bij de preambule [van De Europese Grondwet in Verzen] die een bewust contrast vormt met de omstreden preambule van het ontwerp Europese grondwet. Dit is het moment waarop, in een echte grondwet, het volk zich constitueert: Wij, volk van Europa. De officiële versie uit 2003 laat dat echter achterwege. De voorzitter en vice-voorzitters van de Europese Raad dienen een tekst in die bij consensus is aangenomen door de leden van de Europese Conventie, waaraan zij hun erkentelijkheid betuigen “omdat zij namens de burgers en de staten van Europa deze grondwet hebben opgesteld.” Er is dus, meteen al bij het begin, geen sprake van een Europees volk dat zich manifesteert, er is een verslag van een procedure die is uitgevoerd namens de burgers en de staten die daarbij dus van elkaar onderscheiden en conceptueel gescheiden worden opgevoerd (wat achteraf profetisch mag heten). Er is al meteen geen eenheid. Wie de Europese grondwet leest, hoort niet de sprekende stem van het volk. Het is dus een raadsel wie er aan het woord is.

26. Dit land dat al honderdzeventig jaar lang koppig een onmogelijke vrede bewaart, dat al honderdzeventig jaar lang zijn onoplosbare problemen toch oplost, dat al honderdzeventig
jaar lang kiest voor vrede en democratie en niet voor burgeroorlog . . . dat België is niet
alleen de miniatuur van Europa . . . dat België is ook een lichtend voorbeeld voor het
veelvormige Europa.

27. Spreek, Brussel, spreek, / je hebt zoveel monden, / in niet een woont de waarheid alleen
28. Wie één taal eist, verjaagt / zichzelf, wil witte huizen in Amerika, / verraadt Europa’s zwarte
   algebra
29. Europa zou zijn belangrijkste karaktertrek verliezen, dit wil zeggen zijn verscheidenheid,
as de grote talen, de grote culturen, de grote staten zich zouden laten gelden ten koste van
de kleine . . . . We overdriven nauwelijks wanneer we stellen dat Europa Belgisch zal zijn
   of niets.
30. Ik ben teleurgesteld in dit hoogmoedige Europa. Als je Engels als werktaal overneemt, wat
   nu aan het gebeuren is, dan neem je een heel ideologisch model over. De Angelsaksische
   hardvochtigheid botst met het sociaal-democratisch model en het botst met de Europese
   solidariteit.
31. collectieve zinsverbijstering
32. Gaarden met pere- en appelbomen, hoog en diep, overhuifden de omwalde hoeves met
   hun machtige poorten. En toen kwam Europa of liever, de eurocratie.
   Sinds haar ontstaan heeft de eurocratie slechts één doel: alles wat mooi is aan Europa, alles
   waar de Europese burgers aardigheid in hebben, moet kapot . . . .
   Oudewets, onrendabel en bijgevolg tot verdwijnen gedoemd waren plots de rinse
   reinetten, de knalrode sterappeltjes, de bescheiden schapekoppen, de keulemannetjes, de
   Brabantse bellefleuren.
33. Wij allen samen, zij die ons lief zijn, zij die ons haten
34. Ik denk dat men meegaat in een technocratische stroming, die trouwens een constructiefout
   is uit het begin: te weinig democratie. Europa moet het hebben van het krachtenspel tussen
   wat men dan noemt de volkswil, die in parlementen wordt uitgesproken, en ideeën die van
   bovenaf komen. Ik denk dat de volkswil nu straal genegeerd wordt.
35. De Europese Unie mag voor mijn part vandaag nog uit elkaar spatten, die kan het niet laten
   systematisch alles te vernietigen wat mij in Europa lief is . . . . Weg met de Europese Unie,
   leve Europa.
36. Ik lees de Europese gedachten in een half dozijn talen, in boeken die eeuwen ouder zijn
   dan de op torenende dogma’s tronende Europese Economische Gedachte.
37. In zijn schriele lijfje zit meer Europa dan in de voltallige Europese Commissie. Het ware
   Europa komt uit een boerendorp aan de poorten van de Balkan. Het spreekt zes talen,
toegankelijke en moeilijke, klassieke en hedendaagse. Het ware Europa is nog geen vijftien jaar oud, dit wil zeggen, het heeft de toekomst.

38. Maar dan moeten wij, Europeanen, de moed hebben om de wereld te verkondigen: de georganiseerde solidariteit is een glansstuk van de Europese beschaving. Zoals de negende van Beethoven.

39. Het is nog maar zeventig jaar geleden dat er een einde kwam aan de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Al die eeuwen daarvoor deden onze landen niets anders dan elkaar te lijf gaan, die continue slachtpartijen vormen een treurig deel van onze identiteit. Vreemd genoeg lijken de jongere generaties geen besef te hebben van deze traditie en zien ze niet wat een ongelooflijke stap vooruit het is dat daaraan een halt is toegeroepen . . . . Je vraagt je af waarom men geen weet meer heeft van deze verworvenheid en hoe het komt dat er zo veel partijen in te veel landen zijn die het liefst de Unie willen slopen en terug willen naar het misdadige nationalisme.

40. Toch startte en verliep de totstandkoming van wat wij nu “Europa” noemen op een aarzelende, toevallige manier die nogal in tegenspraak is met de grootse visies die wij daar momenteel over koesteren. De Europese Gemeenschap voor Kolen en Staal van 1951 was niet meer dan wat het heette te zijn en verschilde in wezen niet veel van het Internationaal Staal Kartel van 1926, dat maar kort standhield . . . . Er werden een boel hoogdravende frases gebezigd om de berg aan verdragen en administratieve bijeenkomsten die sinds 1951 waren gesloten af te schilderen als een groots plan dat geheel in de geest van verzoening na 1945 was ontstaan.

41. De eerste keer dat ik het essay De idee Europa van George Steiner las, was ik erg onder de indruk van zijn enorme eruditie en zijn elegante schrijfstijl. . . . Bij herlezing werd ik echter getroffen door de tegenstrijdigheden, de naïviteit en het ontbreken van historische feiten en, het valt me zwaar dit te schrijven, de arrogantie die eruit spreekt. . . . Als het woord “Europa” echt ergens voor staat, dan moeten we het goede met het kwade nemen en aanvaarden dat de ondergang van de Griekse beschaving, de val van Rome, de Dertigjarige Oorlog, de slachtingen in de Eerste Wereldoorlog en de Holocaust net zo goed deel uitmaken van ons verleden als alle culturele hoogtepunten. De poging om een soort volmaakt “denkbeeldig Europa” te identificeren en isoleren, dat vervolgens op de een of andere manier op dit continent kan worden geprojecteerd, schiet zijn doel voorbij.

42. Maar ik moet toegeven dat ik momenteel somber word van de toestand van de Europese Unie, die zo veel heeft maar nu de kernwaarden van de Europese traditie negeert. Rome,
Athene en Jeruzalem zijn de bakermat van de Europese culturele traditie, maar de EU verwaarloost momenteel zowel Athene als Jeruzalem—en dat is gevaarlijk.

43. Ik geloof oprecht dat onze gedeelde cultuur het essentiële element is van het Europeaan-zijn. Zonder cultuur is het Europese project een zielloze opdracht.

44. Het drama is dat we Europa hebben laten kapen door de boekhouders, door de jongens en meisjes van de cijfers.

45. Tegenwoordig zijn er talloze schrijvers die alleen nog maar schrijven om anderen te vermaken, maar de echte helden van de geest schrijven en denken voor het heil van de ander, hoe men dat “heil” ook zou willen definiëren.

46. Maar zal het toekomstige Europa het Europa zijn van Shakespeare en Cervantes, van de Verlichting en de mensenrechten, van de vrije meningsuiting en de scheiding van kerk en staat? Dat zal van ons afhangen, van de oude Europeanen, en van de vraag of we de nieuwkomers in onze maatschappij ervan kunnen overtuigen dat dit de waarden en prestaties zijn die van Europa de stabiele en vreedzame plek hebben gemaakt waarheen ze hun toevlucht hebben gezocht, dat die waarden een toekomst hebben en dat de toekomst van Europa alleen in hun handen ligt.

47. Wat nu essentieel is . . . is de hoedanigheid van onze lach en de hoedanigheid van onze wanhoop. Met wanhoop bedoel ik . . . meer iets essentieels in de geest van de Europese cultuur en in onze eigen geest als Europeanen.

48. Gelach, spotternij en blijvende oneerbiedigheid hebben altijd centraal gestaan bij de Europese onderneming, zoals de lezers van Shakespeare, Cervantes en Rabelais weten, en zoals ook de bewonderaars van *De lotgevallen van de brave soldaat Švejk* en *De blikken trom* zich bewust zijn. De Europese keizer heeft nooit kleren aan gehad. Het is niet alleen voor schrijvers, maar ook voor Europese burgers in het algemeen vanzelfsprekend te oordelen dat alleen al het idee van opgeblazen macht, dikdoenerige toespraken en rondgereden worden in dure auto’s welbeschouwd belachelijk is.

49. Op cultureel niveau onderschrijf ik haar volledig. Als de mate waarin we Europees zijn verwijst naar de traditie die aanvangt met Homerus, Vergilius, Plato en Augustinus, zoals wij graag denken, dan ben ik daar helemaal voor. Als het de bron is waar de oeuvres van Sophocles en Seneca . . . Thomas Mann en T.S. Eliot uit zijn voortgekomen en naar terugkeren, dan zeg ik volmondig dat ik—als de grote jongens dat goed vinden—graag lid van die club ben.

50. Gezien de aanvallen door de populisten in allerlei Europese landen, denk ik dat wij een nieuwe discussie moeten aangaan over de toekomst van Europa, vanuit de juiste
invalshoek. En die invalshoek moet niet een heilloze zoektocht naar de Europese identiteit zijn . . . . Maar net als wanneer we het over individuen hebben, moeten we in de discussie de kwestie identiteit zoveel mogelijk mijden en zo dicht mogelijk bij de politiek blijven.

51. Het is duidelijk, en het wordt elke maand duidelijker voor de goede verstaander, dat er geen brug bestaat tussen de hooggestemde ideaalbeelden van Europa die we in zo vele boeken en essays vinden, tussen het verlangen naar Europa zoals verwoord in bijvoorbeeld Czesław Miłosz of Jan Patočka en de sobere realiteit van de Europese Alltagspolitik. . . . Hooggestemde retoriek, hoe mooi en inspirerend soms ook, valt niet te rijmen met de hachelijke situatie van de huidige nouveaux pauvres—or met de hybris van kleine etnische gemeenschappen.

52. Het is een droeve paradox dat nu deze intellectueLEN en schrijvers te maken hebben met een democratisch Europa . . . nog hulpelozer zijn dan ze in vroeger tijden al waren. Blijkbaar was het makkelijker tegen het Centraal Comité te strijden dan tegen grote, kille cijfers, naargeestige nationalistische passies en Russische imperialisme-tweede-ronde.

53. Wat moeten “wij” doen? Volgens mij moeten we ons werk doen, het werk dat de spil van onze activiteiten vormt, en misschien moeten we ook deelnemen aan het politieke debat, ook al kunnen we aan het eind van de dag waarschijnlijk niet veel meer dan op de veranda gaan zitten en Voltaire’s Candide herlezen. Dat is een optimistische conclusie—dat er nog veranda’s zullen bestaan, en boeken, en wijzelf.

54. De hele onderneming om Europese soevereiniteit en identiteit te creëren door zich te beroepen op Athene, Jeruzalem en Rome, Erasmus, Montaigne en Kant, is lachwekkend . . . Europeanen hebben zichzelf vanaf de steentijd gevormd, zonder de hulp van Erasmus, Montaigne en Kant, en dat proces verloopt steeds sneller en wordt steeds gecompliceerder als gevolg van de stroom immigranten vanuit alle delen van de wereld, en door natuurlijke menselijke interactie. “Europeesheid” kan alleen van onderaf ontstaan.

55. Als iemand me toen had gezegd dat ik nog eens hartstochtelijk de EU zou verdedigen in een column dan had ik hem heel hard uitgelachen. Politieke columns had ik nooit van mezelf verwacht. Dat had ik zelfs een beetje vies gevonden. Maar het was echt een andere tijd. Achteraf was, ook voor mij, 11 september heel belangrijk.

56. Wat mensen doen, doen ze uit verlangen naar een beter leven, maar daar begint het probleem, want ik geloof in weinig. Niet in een huis dat ingericht moet worden, niet in een huwelijk, niet in familie, niet in vriendschap, niet in een plek waarover je kunt zeggen: hier hoor ik.
57. Politici zouden hun verantwoordelijkheid moeten nemen en voor Europa moeten gaan staan in plaats van te doen alsof de EU een besmettelijke ziekte is waarmee we moeten leren leven. Ze zouden moeten uitleggen dat daar waar de EU faalt dat vooral komt omdat landen op de korte termijn denken en voor zichzelf kiezen.
58. Als het dagelijks eten van een frikadel een gevolg kan zijn van sociaal-economische achterstand, zoals sommigen denken, dan kunnen bepaalde opinies eveneens het gevolg zijn van een achterstand. Wie zich niet Europees voelt, heeft gewoon een sociaal-economische achterstand die moet worden weggewerkt.
Voor allochtone Nederlanders die volgens sommige Nederlanders nog niet Nederlands genoeg zijn, bestaan er inburgeringscursussen. Er zouden dringend inburgeringscursussen moeten komen voor Nederlanders die niet Europees genoeg zijn, inclusief taalcursussen Engels, Duits en Frans.
Er is namelijk geen principieel verschil tussen de Marokkaan in Osdorp die zich geen Nederlander voelt en de Nederlander in Maassluis die zich geen Europeaan voelt.
59. humanisme zo failliet is als een steenkolenmijn in voormalig Oost-Duitsland
60. een festijn van kortstondige hoop / Zij die een beschaving propageren die het wezen van de mens ontkent, dat wil zeggen zijn schitterende feilbaarheid—het is zijn feilbaarheid waarop onze kunst zich is gaan concentreren, ook vandaar het adjectief “schitterende”—zullen cynisch worden of onverdraagzaam.
61. De erkenning dat de mens een wezen is dat op drijfzand staat.
62. Het grote christelijke en het grote humanistische project, dat het christelijke project zonder Jezus is, zijn mislukt. De ander is niet de buurman van wie we kunnen houden als van onszelf. De ander is de vijand met wie wij niets gemeen hebben, met wie wij niets delen, en zeker geen menselijkheid.
De getuigenissen van militairen zullen onontbeerlijk zijn om vast te stellen wat moraal nog kan zijn na het failliet van de grote, utopische projecten.
63. Het is hem om de literaire verwerking van waarachtige ervaringen te doen, om de nabijheid van realiteiten die zich niet relativistisch laten weg deconstrueren. Literatuur moet weer over de essenties van het leven willen gaan.
64. moreel appel / Toch heeft de roman nergens een eenduidige humanistische moraal—daartoe ontbreekt iedere grond.
65. De basis van de Duitse politiek na 1945 berustte op een dogma: geen experimenten. Precies dit dogma is ook de basis van de EU, ook wel genaamd “Brussel,” het vleesgeworden symbool van compromis, van de langdradige onderhandeling. Geen totale overwinning
meer, en dus ook geen totale nederlagen. Niet meer de heroïek van de oorlog, maar de saaiheid van welvaart en vrede; vrede heeft de neiging saai te worden als de herinnering aan oorlog vervagt.

66. . . . Grunbergs werk weliswaar zelden direct over de Shoah gaat, maar dat we veel ervan wel kunnen begrijpen in het licht van de effecten van de Shoah in het heden.

67. . . . een herhaling of enscenering van het onverklaarbare geweld, dan een poging tot verwerking ervan.

68. Frans-Duitse oorlogen waren ooit aan de orde van de dag. Na 1945 is een Frans-Duitse oorlog ondenkbaar geworden. Mede dankzij de EU. Alleen daarom al is de Nobelprijs op zijn plaats.

69. De euro kan niet begrepen worden zonder de eenwording van Duitsland. Wat dat betreft, is ook de euro een erfenis van de gebeurtenissen tussen 1914 en 1945.

70. Hoe saaier de politiek, hoe gezonder de democratie. Laten wij een loflied op de saaiheid aanheffen.

71. Wat is voor u de Europese gedachte in deze eeuw? Ik weet niet of er één Europese gedachte is. Met dit voorbehoud: nieuwsgierige gelatenheid, het besef dat het kwaad niet in de ander maar in jezelf moet worden gezocht. Pluralisme en liberalisme zijn wat mij betreft onvermijdelijk met Europa verbonden waarmee ik niet wil zeggen dat ze niet verbonden zouden zijn met Jordanië of Mali. En ook in deze eeuw komt de Europese gedachte eerst en vooral neer op het verwerpen van de spoken van de twintigste eeuw. Dat steeds meer mensen deze spoken omarmen, ook intellectuelen, schrijvers en opiniemakers, uiteraard in naam van de strijd tegen een of ander kwaad, geeft aan hoe fragiel de Europese gedachte is.


73. Ik kan het anders en korter zeggen: een Europa waar geen plaats is voor de vreemdeling zal uiteindelijk een Europa zijn waar geen plaats is voor mensen. Dát zou de werelddominantie van het barbarendom betekenen.

74. Europa is niet alleen een continent, maar ook emancipatorisch ideaal; de hoop dat de mens zijn religie en etniciteit kan ontstijgen.

75. Vaak heb ik betoogd dat de gedachte dat de EU een vijand is van de burger op mythes berust en vaak op gecamouфleerde vreemdelingenaat neerkomt.
76. Voor steeds meer Europeanen lijkt Europa weer één grote biertent te worden waar vreemdelingen ongewenst zijn.

77. Juist vanwege deze antiheroïek is het dwaas om van dat Europese project een cultureel project te maken, omdat de heroïek dan via de achterdeur toch weer binnensluipt . . . . Mozart, Goethe, Beethoven, Stendhal of Plato hebben net zo veel, of beter gezegd: net zo weinig, met de EU te maken als met het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden. Om door middel van omwegen toch een gemeenschappelijke Europese cultuur te willen definiëren getuigt van hetzelfde provincialisme waaraan Europese kosmopolieten—zij die zichzelf zo noemen of zij die voor kosmopoliet worden uitgescholden—nu juist hoopten te ontkomen.

78. Goethe en Beethoven mogen dan als ornamenten fungeren bij al te saaie staatsbanketten, het tragische lot van kunstenaars die al te zeer zijn gecanoniseerd, wie het Europese project verwart met een cultureel project heeft dat project op tragische wijze misverstaan.

79. Wie de EU beter wil begrijpen zou Prediker moeten lezen: beter een levende hond dan een dode leeuw. Dát basisprincipe zorgt ervoor dat het Europese project misverstanden en weezin oproept; geen droom ligt eraan ten grondslag, maar een nachtmerrie.

80. In zijn boek *The Denial of Death* legt Ernst Becker uit dat de mens zijn fundamentele onvermogen om zijn eigen sterfelijkheid te accepteren altijd al, en in diverse culturen, heeft geprobeerd op te lossen door middel van de constructie van heldendom. Het is een paradox dat de op Europees niveau georganiseerde levenskunst, die de Europese burger moet helpen aan zijn eigen nachtmerries te ontkomen en die daarom noodzakelijkerwijs antiheroïsch is, precies om die reden de burger herinnert aan zijn eigen sterfelijkheid. Je hoeft niet over buitengewoon veel mensenkennis te beschikken om te begrijpen dat de burger alles wat hem herinnert aan zijn eigen sterfelijkheid vroeg of laat zal afwijzen.

81. Ik ben Europeaan en zal Europeaan blijven, maar de toekomst van Europa ligt aan de andere kant van de oceaan: in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika.

82. En omwille van de kritische dialoog reflecteren eigentijdse denkers en dichters op de nexus tussen verleden, heden en toekomst. Zo is *Nexus* 70 als een polyfoon gezang van Orpheus: vol van hoop, zelfinzicht, wijsheid en vertrouwen.

83. die mit dem EU-Vorstellungen nicht kompatibel sind

**Part IV**

1. Sie greifen wichtigen Europa-themen unserer Zeit auf, problematisieren Tendenzen, und reizen häufig durch Polemiek . . . zum Widerspruch, bringen also ein Gespräch in Gang.
2. Met honderd schrijvers uit drieëvenveertig landen zes weken lang per trein door Europa reizen: dat loopt onherroepelijk uit op een orgie van drank en seks, als ik de waarschuwingen moet geloven die ik van experts meekreeg bij mijn vertrek naar Lissabon.

3. Wenn AutorInnen wie die 1949 im kroatischen Kutina geborene Dubravka Ugresic als Autorin für Deutschland nominiert wurde, gelang dieser Art Symbolpolitik eine andere Definition der nationalen Identitäten als bislang. Und dass Stevan Tontic vom oppositionellen serbischen Pen als jugoslawischer Vertreter vorgeschlagen werden konnte, und an Bord mit den anderen Autoren aus dem ehemaligen Tito-Reich gut zusammenarbeiten konnte, lässt für eine andere Zukunft auf dem Balkan hoffen.

4. Deze reis geeft ons de kans met collega’s in contact te komen die een volkomen ander levensverhaal hebben dan wijzelf.


6. De open brief aan Poetin leidde tot fikse ruzie tussen de Russische en de Oekraïense schrijvers op de trein. De Russen, die niet over de brief werden geconsulteerd, voelden zich gepasseerd en begonnen op eigen houtje een tegenoffensief door boeken rond te delen waarin gruwelijke snuff-foto’s te zien waren van Russische mannen die door Tsjetsjenen werden onthoofd met slagersmessen.

7. Wegens het uitblijven van enige Engelse, Franse of Duitse vertaling lukt het me niet om verder nog iets van het debat mee te pikken. Ik vertrek lichtjes verontwaardigd en teleurgesteld. De ervaring leert me dat er gedurende deze reis toch echt behoefte is aan een lingua franca, omdat anders de communicatie stokt en de culturele verbroedering waarover zulke plechtige toespraken gehouden worden, niet meer dan een holle frase blijft. De middeleeuwers die zich van het Latijn bedienden waren allicht zo gek nog niet.

8. Yes, we varen op de rivier van Babylon. Eén letter is genoeg om de mensen tegen elkaar in het harnas te jagen.

9. So flüchtig die Eindrücke dieses rollenden literarischen Biwaks, so flüchtig waren nämlich auch die Erkenntnisse, die es über den alten Kontinent beförderte. “Short time, much programme, quick impressions, lack of loves or family. And always the dilemma: write or live?” schrieb der ungarische Autor László Garadczi am 9. Juni ins Internet-Tagebuch des Expresses.
10. Ik voel wel dat de snelheid waarmee we reizen een soort onverschilligheid met zich meebrengt, en een onbehagelijk gevoel van oppervlakkigheid. Dat wordt nog eens versterkt door het bedrijvige, beschermd bestaan dat we leiden, als van diplomaten.

11. Om beurten vertelden we iets over onszelf en ons werk. We waren verrast door elkaars kracht. Besloten werd om in contact te blijven via telefoon, fax en email, en elkaar zo mogelijk opdrachten toe te spelen. Een Oostenrijkse kwam op het idee een bloemlezing samen te stellen met verhalen en gedichten van de deelnemers aan de literatuurtrein. Iemand anders merkte op dat volgens haar de mannen relatief vaker lezingen moesten houden dan de vrouwen. En hoeveel mannen hadden eigenlijk gevraagd of ze de vertaling van onze tekst mochten lezen? Zelfs mijn Nederlandssprekende collega’s hadden geen enkele belangstelling voor de mijne getoond, en ik wel voor de hunne. Ondanks alle beminnelijkheid was er zeker sprake van een “fluweel oorlog,” zoals de Franse filosoof Pascal Bruckner de concurrentiestrijd tussen kunstenaars onderling pleegt te noemen. Ik heb diverse keren meegemaakt dat mannelijke deelnemers aan de treinreis bewust belangrijke personen bij mij weghielden.


13. Niet dat ik er nou behoefte aan heb, maar het begint wel op te vallen dat Serge van Duijn hoven en ik de hele reis lang nog geen Nederlandse diplomaat hebben gezien. Voor de andere deelnemers aan de literatuurtrein is dat heel anders; zij worden soms al op het station verwelkomd door hun ambassadeur of cultureel attache. Rondom hun boeken zijn door hun respectievelijke ambassades speciale bijeenkomsten georganiseerd. Kennelijk wordt de Nederlandse literatuur in diplomatieke kringen niet serieus genomen. Of zijn we er zelf schuldig aan, heeft het ermee te maken dat Nederlandse schrijvers vaak vooral bezig zijn met het ontwikkelen van een cultus rond zichzelf?

14. Het gebrek aan belangstelling van de Belgische overheid is overigens opvallend. Waar andere schrijvers zich in de aanwezigheid van een of andere ambassadeur mogen verheugen als ze een lezing geven, blijken de Belgische gelastigden in het buitenland volstrekt
onverschillig. Niet dat ik halsreikend uitzie naar zulke officiële begroetingen, maar het zou toch een teken zijn, van hoffelijkheid of van reële interesse.

15. Nederland zat niet in de continentale dienstregeling. En als gevolg daarvan werd het literaire productiefonds ook niet benaderd voor een tussenstop in Amsterdam, aldus de organisatoren. Serge van Duijn hoven: “Dat heeft ook met Nederland zelf te maken. Het productiefonds vindt het maar een megalomaan project. De grote woorden die hier in Madrid als welkom werden uitgesproken, zal je in Nederland nooit horen. Nederland is politiek wel Europees ingesteld, maar cultureel meer transatlantisch.”

16. ‘s Avonds op de Marché de la Poésie gaat het eindelijk weer eens om de literatuur zelf en niet om onze politieke kopzorgen.

17. De afgelopen weken had ik zo links en rechts geïnformeerd naar de thematiek van ieders werk. Het meest gehoorde antwoord was: ik schrijf over het buitenstaanderschap, ik ben een individualist. En nu voerden al die individualisten braaf alles uit dat op het programma van de Russen stond.

18. Een comité van vier mensen had een slotverklaring opgesteld die was bedoeld voor het Europese Parlement en de Raad van Europa. Allemaal hadden we een kopie ontvangen. In ambiëristelijke taal repte de tekst van eenheid door diversiteit, de noodzaak om kleinere talen te beschermen, het belang van ondersteuning van vertaalprojecten. De tekst was een schets, een voorstel. De tegenstanders vonden dat hij geen enkele literaire waarde of originaliteit bevatte. Ik bedacht dat het inderdaad jammer was om met zulke afgekloven woorden een reis af te ronden die op zichzelf al een statement was. Buigen voor politici door hun taal te gebruiken was een degradatie van het kunstwerk dat we met ons allen hadden gemaakt.

19. Het ergste is dat velen onder ons zich zelf genaaid voelen. Vlak voor Konrad het woord nam, is een min of meer herwerkte versie van de resolutie voorgesteld, maar alleen in het Engels, zodat ze niet eens door alle schrijvers gelezen kon worden, laat staan ondersteund. Bovendien wordt al in de allereerste zin in de Europese eenmaking gelooft. Ik ben niet de enige schrijver die geen zin heeft om tot de Europese eenmaking bij te dragen. Eenmaking is goed voor bankiers en bedrijfsleiders, maar wij schrijvers zijn er om de nuances en de verschillen te cultiveren.

20. Die Formel von der “Einheit in Vielfalt” und die pauschale Absage an die Globalisierung, die die Autoren schließlich in einer umstrittenen Erklärung zum Abschluss ihrer Reise auf dem Berliner Bebelplatz verlasen, erinnerte aber doch sehr an die offiziösen Phrasen, die Schriftsteller eigentlich hinterfragen sollten und vor denen sie sich, so György Konrad, in Acht nehmen sollten, wenn sie ernstgenommen werden wollen. Dass mehr Geld für
europäische Übersetzungen ausgegeben werden muss, geht klar. Doch was die ominösen “Geo-poetics” sein sollen, die die Autoren gleichberechtigt den Geo-politics der Regierungen an die Seite stellen wollen, hätten wir sehr gerne gewusst.


Zwar fällt es bei dem Marketingdeutsch vom “paneuropäischen Medienereignis mit nachhaltiger Wirkung” samt Zielgruppenmatrix für Sponsoren, Imagetransfer und Synergieeffekten etwas schwer.


Der Literaturexpress, von außen gesehen, ist ein Repräsentationsunternehmen, dessen Erfolg sich am Medienecho misst. Im Übrigen ist Europa, vom Zug aus gesehen, eine Geschichte, die keiner dem andern glauben will.


27. Wer in Gemeinschaft unterwegs ist, erlebt hauptsächlich Gemeinschaft. Das hat manch schöne Kollegenbeobachtung, die eine oder andere Liebelei und viel Rotation um die eigene Achse erbracht: Der Literaturexpress als rollende Selbstreferenzialität. Da war ein Handtaschendiebstahl schon ein Einbruch.


33. Het Eerste Artikel van de Declaration des Droits l'Homme et du Citoyen, dat ken ik uit m’n hoofd: Les hommes naissant et demeurent libres et égaux en droits. Copyright het Franse volk, 1789.

34. . . . dat hopeloos verknipte continent weer eenmaken. Wij zijn stiksels. We gaan samen bewijzen dat Europa een realiteit is.

35. Het is toch de bedoeling van deze hele reis, dacht ik, dat alle deelnemers over de eenheid en de veelvormigheid van het Europese continent zouden gaan nadenken. Welnu, ik heb dat dus ook gedaan. En ik ben daarbij tot de conclusie gekomen dat mijn aanwezigheid in de groep wel ’s een heel specifieke rol zou kunnen vervullen. In feite vorm ik een vraag aan de groep. En die vraag luidt heel eenvoudig: is Europa een gesloten instelling of niet? Dient Europa poreus te zijn?
36. Het klinkt zo braaf allemaal dat ik er eerst onwel en dan wantrouwig van word. . . . Het is zo dwaas allemaal. . . . Weet ik veel, die gesprekken, alles. Ieder doet zijn zegje maar, iedereen denkt dat uit al die vrolijke bedenkingen iets zinnigs zal opschieter...


38. In zijn nieuwe roman *O Heer, waar zijn uw zijstraten?* zet hij mensen uit een veertigtal landen, geen schrijvers, op een trein voor een vergelijkbare onderneming, maar de verslaggever relativeert sterk de euforie waarvan zij geacht worden blijk te geven. . . . De trein maakt een allegorische reis door het Fort Europa, en met zijn ongerepte, soms zelfs naïeve blik op de culturele verworvenheden van de Oude Wereld licht René ze genadeloos door en legt hij de hypocrisie en de contradicties bloot.

39. getormenteerde strijdlust / De maatschappijkritiek op bijvoorbeeld de anonieme macht van multinationale bedrijven, en vooral de radeloosheid van Europa over vluchtingen, migranten en integratie, is in *O Heer, waar zijn uw zijstraten?* meer dan aanwezig.

40. En voor die reflectie levert hij tussendoor de nodige stof: idealistische standpunten worden kritisch doorgelicht, Ortega y Gasset wordt aangehaald en diens visie op de verbondenheid van de Europeanen door een groots project, maar ook Cioran wordt, hoewel niet met name, geciteerd. Hij was van oordeel dat de toekomst van Europa toebehoort aan de immigranten en dat onherroepelijk de dag komt dat het Westen geregeerd zal worden door zijn gastarbeiders.

41. René wordt voorgesteld als de enige persoon zonder verleden, want niet-Europeaan. Zijn grote onschuld verliest hij echter en hij wordt geconfronteerd met het bedrog, het morele verval en de pijn van Europa. De reis, die de eenmaking moet symboliseren dreigt te eindigen in een totale versplintering.

42. Was man heute in den politischen Diskursen und europäischen Krisen überdeutlich erkennen kann, lässt sich hier im intellektuellen Mikrokosmos beobachten: Man versteht einander einfach nicht. Die Landsleute bleiben meist unter sich, die anderen Teilnehmer werden argwöhnisch beäugt und der Einfachheit halber mit allen Nationalstereotypen bedacht, die so im Umlauf sind.

43. ein gemeinsames Europa entpuppte sich deutlich als Farce

44. Sein Text ist durchaus flott zu lesen, amüsant und angenehm selbstironisch. Allerdings auch ein wenig beliebig. Wenn die Reisenden ihre Stereotype und Vorurteile im Gepäck haben
und man als Nation am liebsten unter sich bleibt oder zumindest die erprobte Ost-West-
Trennung beibehält, ist das kurzweilig, mehr aber auch nicht.

der Literaturbetrieb eher wie eine kleptokratische Organisation

Aber auch im Klischee liegen ja oft Wahrheiten verborgen. Zumindest aber die Erkenntnis
Zazas, dass man diesen Schriftstellerzirkus auf keinen Fall allzu ernst nehmen sollte und
dass gerade jene, die aus Eitelkeit oder existenzieller Notwendigkeit immerfort schreiben
und sich produzieren müssen, noch lange keine guten Zuhörer sind.

Trash cuisine is net als de eerdere voorstellingen een rauwe, fysieke performance met als
onderwerp de doodstraf. “Ik zie ons werk niet als politiek, maar de politieke situatie duwt
ons wel in de richting van een onderwerp,” zegt Koliada. “In Wit-Rusland worden jaarlijks
veertig mensen geëxecuteerd en vaak wordt de familie daarvan pas achteraf op de hoogte
gesteld.”

De theatermakers, die publicitaire hulp krijgen van internationale collega’s als Tom
Stoppard, Kevin Spacey en Jude Law en die werden gesteund door geestverwant Vaclav
Havel, voelen zich in de steek gelaten door Europa. Nederland is volgens hen na Rusland
de grootste handelspartner van de staatsbedrijven van dictator Loekasjenko “in de
voormalige Sovjetrepubliek is een vrije markt nog steeds een illusie” maar lijkt net als de
rest van Europa niet bereid tot een handelsembargo. “Wit-Rusland hoort qua geschiedenis
en mentaliteit bij Europa, wij leken eerder dan bijvoorbeeld Polen kans te maken om bij de
Europese Unie te komen. Maar in plaats daarvan worden we al achttien jaar lang geleid
door een volstrekt paranoïde dictator die wapens levert aan Iran en Syrië en die openlijk
zegt dat hij Adolf Hitler bewondert,” zeggen Nicolai en Natalia. “En Europa, waar we
zogenaamd bij horen, staat dat toe en verdient er zelfs geld aan.”

Shakespeare is onze partner in dit geheel. Als enige in zijn tijd schreef hij over alle mogelijke
manieren van moord. Met zijn thema’s stond hij midden in de samenleving. We gebruiken
zijn tekst deels, maar ook weer niet helemaal. Juist het feit dat je niet helemaal teruggrijpt
op de klassieken, maar je eigen tijd en maatschappij als onderwerp van je stukken neemt,
daar in is hij onze held.

Tijdens de research voor de voorstelling bezochten de makers dodencellen in
gevangenissen in Thailand, Maleisië en de VS en spraken ze met kindsoldaten in Oeganda
en Hutu’s en Tutsi’s in Rwanda. Daarnaast gebruiken ze teksten van Shakespeare over
moorden en executies. “Wij zijn geen theatergroep die een stuk van Shakespeare helemaal
opvoert. We gebruiken zijn teksten om te onderstrepen dat de mens niet veranderd is. We
spraken een Wit-Russische ex-gevangenismedewerker die volhield dat hij geen mensen had
gedood—hij gaf slechts leiding aan een groep beulen. Zijn teksten blijken naadloos overeen te komen met die van Lady Macbeth.

51. Amitav Ghosh is een van de bekendste hedendaagse auteurs uit India. De koloniale geschiedenis van Europa en haar invloed op Azië, is een van de centrale thema’s in zijn werk. Op uitnodiging van de European Cultural Foundation is hij enkele dagen in Nederland en is hij zondag exclusief te gast in Buitenhof. Hoe kijkt deze vooraanstaande Indiase intellectueel aan tegen de crisis in Europa? En wat moet en kan de rol van het oude continent in de globaliserende wereld zijn?


53. Europa is een “falen van de verbeelding.” “Wat ontbreekt is een verhaal van eenheid. Er bestaan honderden nationalistische verhalen over de Franse of de Duitse identiteit, die vaak hun oorsprong hebben in militaire gebeurtenissen. Maar er is geen manier om de Europese identiteit te verbeelden.” Daarom denkt Ghosh dat het werk van de bij het grote publiek onbekende ECF belangrijk is. “Ja, cultuur kost tijd, maar je kunt cultuur ook beïnvloeden. Cultuur kun je sponsoren. De Nederlandse cultuur is gevormd en wordt versterkt door het Rijksmuseum, dat door de staat wordt gefinancierd. Momenteel vind je overal in Europa culturele instituten die door natiestaten gesponsord worden, maar geen pan-Europese instelling.”


55. Het is van groot belang dat we Europa-breed over deze nieuwe ideeën en oplossingen blijven communiceren. De conferentie Imagining Europe doet dat, net als bijvoorbeeld het initiatief A Soul for Europe dat de ontwikkeling van de politieke unie verbindt aan een sterkere rol voor kunst en cultuur, met als doel om Europa een “ziel” te geven.
56. … over de naoorlogse massamigratie vanuit Afrika naar Engeland. Akomfrah combineerde archiefmateriaal van migrerende Afrikanen naar Engeland met poëtische citaten uit Homerus’ Odyssee en beelden van een eenzame figuur in een winters landschap.


De ene versie heet, geloof ik, “Verdrag tot wijziging van het Verdrag betreffende de Europese Unie en het Verdrag tot oprichting van de Europese Gemeenschap”. …

De tweede versie klinkt anders: die heet “Plechtige Verklaring van de Europese Grondwet in Verzen.” Voorlopig is alleen de proloog voltooid …

Ik ben geneigd te denken dat de schrijver van deze laatste tekst, de dichter Geert van Istendael, een ernstiger mens is dan de schrijvers van de eerste tekst. In ieder geval heeft hij beter door wat in Europa allemaal op het spel staat.

58. [De tekst] leest als één geheel … Het is een veelstemmig koor geworden dat zingt van eenheid en verscheidenheid, van vrijheid en vrede, van verdriet en pijn, kortom van leven.


60. De grondwet in verzen, dat is een heel andere taal dan die van het Verdrag van Lissabon. Daarin hoef je maar vijf minuten te bladeren om te weten wat er mis is met Europa: in handen gevallen van droogkloten, muggenzifters en ander fantasieoos geteisem …

Als staatssecretaris voor Europa Timmermans de Europese grondwet in verzen nu eens huis aan huis zou laten bezorgen? Misschien brengt dat de droom en de verbeelding weer een beetje terug in onze hoofden. Goed voor de dichtkunst ook.

Geef het volk Europa terug, is de boodschap van de dichters. Europa is van ons; wordt dat weer duidelijk dan zullen we wellicht weer van haar gaan houden.

61. An der großen Europaskepsis und am schlechten EU-Image ist auch die Sprache schuld. Das verschwurbelte Idiom der Eurokraten wirkt nicht gerade erhebend, im schlimmsten Falle macht es sogar misstrauisch.

62. Und auch das Alltägliche, Unbedeutende, das in der großen Politik meist unter den Tisch fällt, kommt in der Verfassung der Dichter zur Sprache … Der Franzose Jacques Darras beschwert sich dagegen über die Gesichts- und Geschichtslosigkeit der Euro-Scheine … Die politische Verfassung Europas ist an der Angst der Bürger vor der Missachtung gerade
dieser Kleinigkeiten gescheitert. Die gedichtete Verfassung zeigt, dass es die Angst vor dem Verlust des Besonderen ist, die die Europäer eint.

63. Hierna komt er een afdeling lange gedichten “Van de Europese Grondwet in verzen.” Was er in de Dingen-afdeling de suggestie dat de dichter de werking van deze voorwerpen vertegenwoordigde, in deze wat programmatische gedichten in opdracht verspeelt de dichter m.i. zijn hand: breedsprakig blijft de dichter hameren op de noodzaak van poëzie. . . . Jammer dat de dichter in deze gedichten vaak opsommingen gebruikt om een tekst te dichten. In de lange gedichten sluip er gezochtheid en voorspelbaarheid in. Als taaldier is hij sterk in het anekdotisch korte gedicht: de lange gedichten worden saai en lopen op het eind “weg.”

64. Zeldzaam hard en vol op de man. . . . Het is de Nederlandse ankerplaats van de internationale intellectuele elite. Maar waarom ligt het Nexus Instituut in Tilburg dan toch zo slecht bij de voorhoede?

65. Iets anders stipte Rob Hartmans aan in *De Groene Amsterdammer* in een essay over *Adel van de geest*. “Van een zeker elitarisme val ik dus niet vrij te pleiten, maar tegelijkertijd krijg ik jeukende uitslag als ik een tv-interview met George Steiner zie of het programma van de volgende Nexus-conferentie op de deurmat ploft. Er is een slag intellectuelen dat mij weerzin inboezemt, en dat ik doorgaans afdoe met de term snobisme.” Uiteindelijk kwam Hartmans tot een positief oordeel over *Adel van de geest*, maar pas nadat hij, in zijn eigen woorden, “stevige vooroordelen” had overwonnen.

66. Eigenlijk kan hij er zijn schouders over ophalen, over de ontvangst van zijn boeken. Want hoe je het ook wendt of keert: de boeken zijn succesvol, verkopen bij tienduizenden en worden in het buitenland met lof overladen.

67. Ik wist: dit moet altijd onafhankelijk zijn, dit moet nooit in een hokje kunnen worden gestopt, dit moet per definitie internationaal zijn, dit moet iets zijn dat de geest van het Europees humanisme ademt en uitstraalt en on-Nederlands zal zijn—en dan weet je ook dat je hier weinig vrienden maakt of op steun hoeft te rekenen.

68. In de titel van het symposium dat het Nexus Instituut in juni vorig jaar organiserde klonk de actualiteit door. Nadat het hoofdkantoor van satirisch tijdschrift Charlie Hebdo op 7 januari bestormd was, waarbij meerdere doden vielen, gingen miljoenen Europeanen de straat op, “Je suis Charlie” scanderend. Ineens leek Europa eensgezind.

69. De juiste diagnose komt weer van Blom: Europa heeft te lang geleden aan een “scepticismetekort.” Te lang is verzuimd, de kritische vragen te stellen die nu wel aan de orde zijn. Noodzakelijke correcties bleven daardoor uit, tot op het punt waar we nu zijn en
een land als Groot-Brittannië, met een eeuwenlange democratische traditie, in alle ernst een referendum gaat houden over de vraag of het nog wel bij de Unie wil blijven. Maar tegelijk biedt de Britse dwarshoed een unieke kans om de EU opnieuw tegen het licht te houden, de obesitas van te ver uitgedijde instituten te bestrijden en een unie terug te krijgen die weer aantrekkelijk is voor de mensen die erin wonden.

70. Het Europa dat zich bij andere gelegenheden zo graag beroept op zijn gedeelde christelijk-joods-humanistische wortels, is hier ver weg. Verdwenen zijn de gedeelde idealen van de Verlichting, verdwenen de zone van vrede die koste wat kost beschermd moet worden, de economische eenheid die tot politieke integratie moet leiden. Geen begin van identificatie met de Grieken in hun Europese uithoek; die moeten maar eens bloeden voor al dat potverteren. De volgens de Turkse wetenschapper Aykan Erdemir—ook bij Nexus—voor Europa zo typerende cultuur van koffiehuizen, waar je samenkomen om de problemen te bespreken, is nergens te bekennen. Europa is een gedeelde geschiedenis, van strijd, van bondgenootschappen, van beïnvloeding. Daaraan kan een gezamenlijk toekomstperspectief worden ontleend. Op die visie is de Europese Unie gebaseerd, met de eurogroep als meest vergaand blijk van wederzijds vertrouwen. Niets daarvan speelt een rol. Calculeren, en, klopt de som niet, afduwen. Dat heeft geleid tot de catastrofale onderhandelingen van de afgelopen maanden . . . . Als Griekenland wordt losgelaten, wil dat zeggen dat deze machtige economische zone niet in staat is een landje met amper elf miljoen inwoners op de rails te krijgen. Dat betekent dat het einde van Europa als economisch verbond, maar wel het failliet van de Europese idealen en een grote inperking van de ambities. Een argument dat deze dagen zwaar moet wegen.


72. Het antwoord, suggereren vele bijdragen in deze bundel, ligt eerder in een gedeelde cultuur, een gedeelde geschiedenis. Dat de EU de harten niet sneller laat kloppen, is logisch: hoewel sinds de jaren tachtig wordt geprobeerd een Europese identiteit te stimuleren, gaat het hier in de kern om een economisch en politiek project.

74. Wij zijn evengoed het product van “barbare” krachten als van de nalatenschap van Athene en Jeruzalem.

75. Riemen verwoordt hier een denkmodel van een culturele en intellectuele elite die in vele varianten voorkomt en die niet altijd even manifest of nadrukkelijk “elitair”—in de strikte zin van dat woord—is, zoals dat bij hem het geval is. Ook bijvoorbeeld in de kerken, de journalistiek en aan de universiteiten kunnen soortgelijke geluiden worden gehoord. De ideologische kern van het gedachtegoed van deze elites is een scherp onderscheid tussen geest en praktijk, of tussen cultuur en werkelijkheid. Voor een visie op de toekomst van Europa leidt dit vaak tot de suggestie dat de werkelijkheid van de huidige crisis bezworen zou kunnen worden door terug te keren naar Europa’s culturele wortels. . . . Waar de Europese wortels ook gevonden worden, de waarden die aan de eraan ontspringende geest worden ontleend, zijn niet veel meer dan abstracties: waarheid, goedheid en schoonheid die de mens kunnen vormen tot het beschaafde wezen dat bijvoorbeeld in de Weense salons hoog werd gehouden.


77. De boodschap die Nietzsche bij monde van Zarathoestra brengt is, in de woorden van Riemen: “God is dood; er bestaat geen waarheid; er is geen moraal; er is geen goed en kwaad.” Hoe nu verder na het sloopwerk van Nietzsche? Alsof er niets gebeurd is, blijft Riemen schermen met de woorden “waarheid” en “rechtvaardigheid.” Alsof Nietzsches werk louter een waarschuwing was en de filosoof met de hamer geen fundamenteel probleem blootlegde waarmee filosofen nog steeds worstelen: hoe kunnen we bepalen wat “waar” en “juist” is als God dood is, als er geen absoluut fundament is voor onze oordelen?

79. Veel mensen vinden de geestelijke waarden die u verdedigt elitair. Hoe komt dat? Omdat we in een lege cultuur leven waarin de betekenis van woorden verloren is gegaan. Het woord elitair is verengd tot ontoegankelijk, behorend tot een kleine groep, exclusief. Zolang het over de amusementselite of de sportelite gaat, zien we geen enkel probleem: met die mensen willen we allemaal een selfie. Maar als het om cultuur gaat, ben je opeens elitair. De oude betekenis van dat woord is nochtans “het beste.” En dat beste is tijdloos. Vandaar dat we vandaag de dialogen van Plato nog kunnen lezen, en de muziek van Bach nog kunnen beluisteren.

80. De manier waarop hij de kernwaarden van Europa wil beschermen, heeft ook wel iets heroïsch. Hij doet daar bovendien op een prachtige wijze verslag van. Ook deel ik zijn mening dat filosofie—het zoeken naar het ware, goede en schone—de essentie is van het Europese project . . . . Maar ik denk niet dat we de ziel cultiveren, door af te geven op de vermeend domme anderen. Laat duizend tinten grijs bloeien en er staat weer een kleurrijke intellectueel op die ons verder helpt. En dat is nu juist wat Europa met al haar regels voor ons heeft georganiseerd; dat we allemaal de ruimte krijgen om te proberen om op onze eigen wijze niet dom te zijn. Daar mogen we Europa dankbaar voor zijn.

81. Van Europa mogen we niet verwachten dat ze zelf filosofisch gaat worden. Het blijft een formele project. De Europese Unie is nu eenmaal, zoals Arnon Grunberg in dezelfde Nexus zegt, “een anti-heroïsch project” . . . . Wie naast formele waarden ook inhoudelijke waarden (een actieve cultivering van de ziel) zoekt, moet niet bij Europa of “de politiek” zijn. Alle democratie is afstandelijk en formee, juist omdat ze pluriformiteit mogelijk wil maken. Wen er maar aan.

82. Dat mag allemaal zo zijn, wat het betoog van Riemen zo ergerlijk maakt, is de minachting die er uit spreekt voor de politiek. Zonder enige gêne, zonder er zich maar een moment in verdiept te hebben, schrijft hij het hele Europees Parlement en de voltallige Europese Commissie af. Zo bezondigt de zelfbenoemde intellectueel Riemen, die zich toch fel verzet tegen het populisme van Wilders cum suis, zich aan wat Pieter van Os zo mooi “salonpopulisme” heeft gemunt: de in betere kringen opgang doende gewoonte de politiek weg te zetten als een vuil en vanzlig bedrijf voor intellectuele lichtgewichten.

En dat terwijl hij in zijn eigen boek toch inspiratie voor een andere zienswijze had kunnen vinden. In een mooi, klein essay van Arnon Grunberg bijvoorbeeld.
83. Niet alleen gemakkelijk, maar ook gevaarlijk. Want met zijn tirades voedt hij de afkeer van de politiek, die in wezen de poging is de strijd van allen tegen allen te pacificeren en stapje voor stapje een betere samenleving te stichten.

84. . . . een verzameling vaak zeer erudiete stukken, boordevol behartenswaardige gedachten en formuleringen.

85. Wat een “debat op het scherpst van de snede” moest worden over het Oekraïne referendum, ontaardde in een bizarre discussie die geen kijker nog kon volgen. Zelfs presentator Paul Witteman leek de draad kwijt te raken tijdens het gesprek.

Te gast waren Thierry Baudet en Rob Riemen. Baudet gaat straks tegen het associatieverdrag met Oekraïne stemmen, Riemen voor. Maar hun argumenten waarom waren amper uit het gesprek te destilleren. Het ontaardde al snel in een niet te volgen duel namedropping . . . . Op Twitter regende het kritiek op de sprekers aan tafel en de manier waarop ze werden geïnterviewd . . . . Inhoudelijk was er geen touw aan vast te knopen en de vraag of je nu voor of tegen het verdrag met Oekraïne moest stemmen bleef voor velen onbeantwoord. Misschien wat deze tweet nog het beste samen: “Buitenhof samengevat: Baudet is het beste argument om vóór te stemmen en Riemen is het beste argument om tegen te stemmen.”

86. Riemen zat op een metershoge morele kruk en poogde opzichtig zijn tegenstander als excentriekeling weg te zetten. De gebruikelijke ongemanierdheid van de ons-soort-mensenbrigade.

Maar toch. Heel veel wat Riemen aandroeg sprak mij als modern mens aan. Dat wat hij roemde aan Europa was datgene waarom ook ik Europa als het beste zie wat de mensheid nu te bieden heeft. Het enig hoopgevende.

87. Een maand voor het referendum verkeer ik in opperste staat van verwarring, moet ik bekennen. Zal ik op 6 april mijn stem uitbrengen op Thomas Mann of toch op Oswald Spengler?

88. Werke, die als Beiträge zum Europa-Diskurs publiziert wurden.
### Appendix 2. Itinerary: the “Literatur Express”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 4</td>
<td>Lisbon</td>
<td>(opening festivities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 5</td>
<td>Lisbon</td>
<td>Welcome of the authors; lectures, meetings, city-walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 6</td>
<td>Lisbon – Madrid</td>
<td>“Spanish- universal language”: a European mosaic; a Babel-tour of poetry; Madrid – bridge between Europe and Latin America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 7</td>
<td>Bordeaux</td>
<td>“Love of wine – passion for books”; meetings, debates, reception in the wine-regions, literary cabaret at the train station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 8</td>
<td>Bordeaux – Paris</td>
<td>“Literature and utopia” (Bibliothèque de France); “European intellectuals face Austria” (Centre George Pompidou); “The night of the Literatur Express Europa 2000” (Marché de la Poesie); “Oriental letters and occidental desires” (Institut du Monde d’Arabe); “Travel-compagnions” (Maison des écrivains); “Which Europe do you speak?” (Maison de la Poésie); débats, meetings, lectures, festivities, performance at the train station.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 9</td>
<td>LILLE – Lille – Brussels</td>
<td>“Lille – North – South passage of cultures”. Lectures, debates, meetings in libraries and cultural centers; performance at the Théâtre du Nord; literary walk to the Villa Mont-Noir and Marguerite Yourcenar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 10</td>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>Meeting in the European Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 11</td>
<td>Dortmund – Hanover / Expo 2000</td>
<td>“Crossing border in literature”: public lectures and discussions organized by libraries and the Auslandgesellschaft; public lectures in schools and libraries; visit to the Ruhr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 12</td>
<td>Hanover / Expo 2000</td>
<td>“European literatures are invited to the world”; literary festival in town center; poetical tournaments; “Writers’ Walk of Fame”; discussion: “Literature in the age of internet”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 13</td>
<td>Malbork</td>
<td>Return to history: the Middle Ages in Malbork</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| June 25 | Kaliningrad | Poetical rally at the Cathedral; literary rally at the museum K. Donelaitis; discussion at the university: “Literary developments and Europe: myths and realities”; opening of the exposition “The Russian novel at the end of the century” |
| June 26 | Kaliningrad – Vilnius |
| June 27 | Vilnius | “Paganism and modernity”; festivities at the train station; performance at the castle Trakai; literary street-festival |
| June 28 | Vilnius – Riga |
| June 29 | Riga | “Riga 800 – Europe 2000”: ideas in Riga and Pedvale; literary festival in streets named after poets |
| June 30 | Riga - Tallinn |
| July 1 | Tallinn | “Scandinavian literatures in Europe”; “The year of the Estonian book”; open-air cultural performance |
| July 2 | Tallinn – St. Petersburg |
| July 3 | St. Petersburg | “Saint-Petersburg: a bridge towards Europe” |
| July 4 | St. Petersburg - Moscow |
| July 5 | Moscow | Official celebrations of the turn of the millennium |
| July 6 | Moscow - Minsk |
| July 7 | Minsk | “Across borders and centuries” – performances in Minsk and Wjasinka |
| July 9 | Minsk – Brest – Warsaw |
| July 10 | Warsaw | “Everything is poetry”, performance at the castle; symposium “Translating poetry”; “Profession: poet, vocation: poet?”; exposition “Book-illustrations”; performance at the train station “Zone of silence”, the theatre of dreams in the old city |
| July 12 | Warsaw - Berlin |
| July 13 | Berlin | “Berlin – a transit in Europe”; book-festival at the Bebelplatz; “Poetry of the world – World-poetry”, open-air night of poetry at the Potsdamer Platz; performances for children and adults; conference “Europe and the Balkans”; performances and lectures in libraries and literary institutes; translators-congress. |
| July 14 | July 15 | July 16 |
Appendix 3. Overview of Activities on “The European Constitution in Verse”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number of attendeds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>27 March 2009, Flagey Centre, Brussels, Belgium</td>
<td>The Brussels collective, a number of leading poets such as Antonio Gamoneda (Spain), Franzobel (Austria), Gerrit Komrij (Netherlands) and Mircea Dinescu (Romania) and the 70-strong PolyFolies choir presented the result in the Flagey Centre, an important cultural venue. On this evening the complete text of the European Constitution in Verse was presented in three publications: in Dutch (350 copies), French (500 copies) and English (300 copies).</td>
<td>650 attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomination European Book Prize Award</td>
<td>9 December 2009, Brussels, Belgium</td>
<td>The European Constitution in Verse was nominated for the Europe Book Prize. The prize was awarded on 9 December 2009 at the European Parliament, presided by Jacques Delors. The event continued in Théâtre Varia.</td>
<td>320 attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication Neem bijvoorbeeld graniet</td>
<td>10 October 2011</td>
<td>Publication of Dutch edition of this poem with a new title by publisher De Bezige Bij</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performances</td>
<td>15 May 2009 Prague, Czech Republic</td>
<td>In Berlin the Brussels Poetry Collective was represented by Geert van Istendael. He was</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 June 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>65 attendees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Event Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akademie der Kunste, Berlin, Germany</td>
<td>flanked by the German poet Ulf Stolterfoht and the Austrian writer Franzobel. They read their own verses but also a number of poems written by other poets. In the line of this presentation the poets participated as well in the colloquium ‘The Mediterranean and Europe – the other history of Europe’. The central topics of this colloquium were migration and the refugee question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 October, 2010, Centre Wallonie Bruxelles, Paris, France</td>
<td>In the Belgian Centre Wallonnie Bruxelles in Paris Geert van Istendael was flanked by the French poets Tahar Beekri and Jacques Darras. The actress Généviève Damas read a number of articles written by other poets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 October, 2010, Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg, Brussels, Belgium</td>
<td>In the KVS (Royal Flemish Theatre) the Brussels Poetry Collective that artistically initiated the project (with David Van Reybrouck, Xavier Queipo, Peter Vermeersch, Geert van Istendael, Frank De Cris, Manza) was flanked by the Syrian-Swedish poet Faraj Bayrakdar, the Dutch-Frisian Tsjèbbe Hettinga and the Danish Louise Rosengreen. They read their own verses but also a number of poems (= articles) written by other poets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 January 2011, City Library, Leuven, Belgium</td>
<td>The project was presented in the City Library of Leuven by the poets Geert van Istendael, Manza and Peter Vermeersch, the Belgian television coryphaeus Phara de Aguirre, the Belgian sculptor Koenraad Tinel and Saïd El Khadraoui, member of the EU Parliament. They read the poetic articles in French, English, Spanish, Dutch and German.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 January 2011</td>
<td>On 28th January 2011 the project was presented in a St-Gillis theatre by the poets Frank De Crits, Manza, David Van Reybrouck, Xavier Queipo and Peter Vermeersch. They read the poetic articles in French, English, Spanish, Dutch and German. The audience showed great interest in the initiative. Afterwards, some of them started a discussion with the poets concerning Europe’s future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 October 2011</td>
<td>On 20th October 2011 the project was presented in Yerevan by the Flemish poet Geert van Istendael, the Dutch poet Serge van Duijnhoven and Armenian poets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 October 2012</td>
<td>On 24th October 2012 the project was presented in Yerevan by the Flemish poets Geert van Istendael, David Van Reybrouck and Peter Vermeersch and the Armenian poets Husik Ara and Nshan Abasyan. They read the poetic articles in Dutch, French, Spanish, English and Armenian. This event was presented as one of highlights of ‘Literary Ark 2012’, the international literary festival of the Yerevan Book Capital program.</td>
</tr>
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Summary

Shared Stories and Creative Dissonances. Transnational Literary Projects and European Identity

The starting point for this research was the observation that in publications addressing literary reflections on Europe, little attention has been paid to emerging European cultural networks, the role of EU subsidies, or literary organisations engaging European writers in a range of transnational initiatives aimed at contemplating the challenges that the European Union currently faces. Whereas the great European writers of the past, such as Milan Kundera and Günter Grass, in the 1970s and 1980s created their own cultural platform by organising conferences and writing open letters, a new European literary space is now slowly emerging, for example, in the shape of European literary awards, cultural organisations, a European infrastructure of cultural subsidies, and anthologies. Furthermore, a united Europe is no longer simply the dream of intellectuals, but is in many ways now a reality. Interventions by literary authors in European politics and reflections on European identity are therefore becoming increasingly institutionalised as cultural organisations, funded by EU subsidies, aim to engage writers and audiences in debates on the realities of the European Union. In other words, a European literary civil society is emerging, as part of a larger European network of interest groups and institutions that engage with, question, or oppose EU policies.

Despite these changes within the European literary field and the institutionalisation of these interventions in the form of (subsidised) transnational cultural projects, a significant proportion of current research into contemporary literary reflections on European identity is focused either on individual authors as important voices in Europe, or on single works of fiction. This dissertation aims to explain the role of these new initiatives by presenting four recent, transnational literary projects as case studies: the “Literatur Express Europa 2000” (organised by the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin, 2000); “The European Constitution in Verse” (by Passa Porta and the Brussels Poetry Collective, 2008–2011); “Narratives for Europe” (initiated by the European Cultural Foundation, 2009–2012); and “The Return of Europe” (by the Nexus Institute, 2015). These cases were selected because they were all instigated by cultural organisations (some of them subsidised by the European Union)—the projects having an explicitly literary character, in addition to a specifically European dimension. Furthermore, the projects are “transnational” in nature, as they all lean on intercultural dialogues with writers from the different European countries taking part in the various initiatives. The four projects can also be deemed “literary,” not only because writers took part, but also because the organisers all argue the importance of a literary perspective on European issues in texts.
such as interviews and applications for funding. Even though some of the organisers might not refer to their initiatives as “projects,” the word is deployed here to underline the fact that these initiatives entail not only the written word, but also festivals, media performances, and websites.

**Part I: Theoretical Framework**

By selecting literary projects about Europe as case studies, rather than individual authors or texts, this research allows for an interdisciplinary approach that combines the fields of European studies and literary studies. Insights gleaned from research on EU cultural policies directly concerned with processes of European identity formation are examined in the light of perspectives on the importance of literature and writers to the creation of (trans-)national identities. This theoretical framework is presented in Part I of this dissertation, in which two different views on European identity are discerned—namely, European political identity and European cultural identity. Both views are connected with two different discourses: the discourse of the “Europe of Citizens,” linked to European political identity; and the discourse of “unity in diversity,” which is related to European cultural identity. Finally, European cultural policies—interpreted as institutionalised approaches to identity formation—are examined, and it is argued that discourses of European cultural and political identity do not only emerge bottom-up, but are also constructed top-down.

A central question in Part I is the extent to which frameworks of national identity formation—specifically the role that literary works play in the process—apply in a European context. Mapping the most important differences between the role of literature in processes of both national and European identity formation, these chapters argue that the concepts that emerge from theories on literature and nation building can indeed be applied to the European model, albeit with an awareness of the dangers of engendering “methodological nationalism” (Sassatelli, 2009). This awareness requires that the distinctiveness of the process of European identity formation needs to be considered in any analysis of literary texts—a distinctiveness that is reflected in the ways in which literature might provide a valuable perspective on European identity formation. In this sense literature can represent contested memory, bridge emotional distance, provide critical opposition, and reflect diversity. With these specificities in mind, the literary projects considered are conceived as contributions to a European imagined community, and as instances that instrumentalise both political and cultural identity discourses via their interpretation, transformation, and contestation within in the activities of cultural organisations, EU cultural policies, literary writers, and their audiences. The four projects were analysed through an examination of three fundamental aspects: the expectations held by the cultural organisations
regarding their initiatives; the cultural artefacts resulting from the projects; and the effects of the projects in the public sphere.

Part II: Expectations
Firstly, documents such as invitations, interviews, announcements, and applications for funding were analysed in order to reveal the intentions behind the projects. These documents were either publicly available online or obtained by accessing the archives of the cultural organisations and project leaders. The research questions guiding the analysis of these documents are twofold: How is European identity presented in these texts? Why were literary approaches deemed to be a valuable contribution to reflections on Europe? The results of these research questions are presented in Part II of this dissertation. The findings in these chapters suggest that cultural organisations currently function as agents that instrumentalise different discourses on European identity. On the one hand, in general terms, the paratexts on the “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” reproduced the discourse of cultural identity via their interpretations of “unity in diversity.” On the other hand, “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse” aimed to contribute to European political identity formation and to further the discourse of a “Europe of Citizens.”

Furthermore, the chapters in Part II argue that the types of discourse in which these cultural organisations participate is related to argumentative strategies aimed at legitimising a literary contribution to European identity formation, and further, that both elements reveal the expectations held by the organisers. The “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” are expected to contribute to European cultural identity formation since, in this context, literary texts are considered to reflect European diversity and represent historical unity. “The European Constitution in Verse” and “Narratives for Europe” are expected to become part of European political identity formation, as the organisers of these projects rely on the critical and non-institutional narratives that literature might bring to the European public sphere. Recurring elements in the paratexts—the myth of the abduction of Europa and references to the great European writers as key examples—show how these contemporary projects are constructed as part of a tradition that is re-interpreted and re-evaluated differently by each of the organisers.

Part III: Comparison of Expectations and Results
The same points of interest—the image of Europe and the role of literature—structured the second dimension of this research: a close reading of the cultural artefacts that resulted from these projects. Part III juxtaposes the intentions expressed by project leaders with the outcomes of their projects
in the form of prose, poetry, and essays by literary writers, aiming to answer the question of how these texts relate to each other on these specific points within each project. It was argued that overall, the various discourses of the organisers regarding issues of European identity correspond to their specific literary results: the authors in the “Literatur Express” and “The Return of Europe” were mostly concerned with projecting Europe as a cultural unity, whilst the contributors to “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse” intended to spark a wider debate on European political policies. The contributions of the individual focus authors showed how Dubravka Ugrešić critically engaged with the discourse of cultural identity in the “Literatur Express,” whilst Arnon Grunberg—adopting a similarly critical stance—questioned the role of culture in processes of European integration. The cultural discourse of “unity in diversity” was also the starting point for Geert van Istendael; however, the analysis of his contribution to “The European Constitution in Verse” showed how he reinterprets this discourse as a form of critique on the European political project. Finally, Abdelkader Benali engaged with European policy issues such as migration and extremism during the “Narratives for Europe” project.

A striking result of this analysis is the fact that the participating authors took the opportunity to “talk back” critically to the project leaders—both on the level of the image of Europe, and on the idea that literature and writers might have an important role to play within processes of European identity formation. Regarding the overall image of Europe, the focus authors are (at times) outspoken critics of the European Union. The analysis of the oeuvres of these selected authors revealed how this critical stance was not simply a result of the opportunity presented by the literary projects. For example, the critique of the European Union expressed by Van Istendael and Ugrešić in their contributions can also be found in their oeuvres. The EU-funded projects they participated in thus provided a platform for these Eurosceptic writers to voice their concerns.

The findings on the importance of writers and literature to processes of European identity formation yield an ambiguous result. Every argument for the importance of literature discerned in the theoretical framework is addressed by the authors via their contributions. However, the analysis in these chapters has shown how, simultaneously, these literary texts contribute to a process of self-reflection on the role of writers, not only regarding issues of transnational identity, but also the ways in which culture in general has the means to engage in European politics. The analysis of the focus authors revealed how Ugrešić struggles with her position as a writer in the market-based cultural policies of the European Union. Additionally, she was not the only writer feeling “out of place” during the “Literatur Express”: other authors also expressed doubt about being “on a mission” to reunite a divided continent. The contributors to “The European Constitution in Verse”
were asked to come up with alternatives for Shelley’s famous dictum—“Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world”—which they phrased in less far-reaching and self-assured verses (“recalling,” “murmuring,” or “echoing”). During the “Narratives for Europe” event, the creative imagination was discussed and ultimately doubted as being necessary for rethinking current democratic practices. Finally, whilst Rob Riemen from the Nexus Institute contended that culture is necessary if we are to revive the European spirit in order to solve an institutional crisis, Grunberg denied that such hopes should be invested in the world of art and literature in “The Return of Europe.” One can argue that it is precisely the fact that these cases are cultural projects, resulting from plans made by cultural organisations and offering a stage for multiple writers, that led authors to reflect openly on their position in European society. These projects created space for hesitance regarding the role of literature and writers in reflections on Europe, and for resistance to political appropriation. Thus, the framework of a cultural project can either be asserted or emphasised (as is the case in “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse”), or critically questioned and contested (as in “The Return of Europe” and the “Literatur Express”), yet both perspectives provide an opportunity for writers to make a more general point about the interplay between novelists on the one hand, and European politics and identity on the other.

**Part IV: Effects**

Finally, a reception analysis was performed in Part IV for each project, focusing on the effects of these initiatives by asking if these projects have indeed been perceived as, firstly, contributions to discussions about European identity; and secondly, if their literary nature was acknowledged as a valuable perspective in the wider debate. To approach these research questions, the effects of the projects were divided into two elements: the immediate reception of their intended outputs; and the wider (and to a certain extent less intended) impact of the projects on society—what these texts actually did. Importantly, as there are few existing studies on how to analyse this larger societal impact, this research proposed to map the repercussions of these initiatives in four fields: those of European politics, academia, literature, and (social) media.

As for the immediate reception of the projects—ranging from critics reviewing publications in cultural magazines to political commentators discussing the output in the opinion sections of newspapers—one can see how “Narratives for Europe” and “The European Constitution in Verse” are the most successful in establishing appreciation for their literary contribution to discussions on European identity. “The European Constitution in Verse” is praised for its appealing use of language, and its poetic character is often juxtaposed favourably with the original
EU Treaty. Similarly, “Narratives for Europe” achieved its goal of showing the public how literary writers, the contemporary arts, and their more classic predecessors can indeed contribute to analyses of European democracy, issues of migration, and interactions with neighbouring countries. Less successful in bringing a literary perspective on Europe to the fore according to the different media were the “Literatur Express Europa 2000” and “The Return of Europe.” The reception of the “Literatur Express” revealed how critics often (negatively) focused on the future of the business of literature—including the “Literatur Express” as a prime example of a media spectacle—and the perceived pretentious claims about culture and politics. In a comparable manner, political reflections by Riemen in the light of “The Return of Europe” on the European Union were not accepted by some reviewers, who claimed, for example, that the project presented a distorted image of the workings of the European Union. Hence it can be seen that the valued link between the world of literature and that of European identity has not been recognised by these critics. Perhaps it is precisely because these projects adhere to European identity in terms of shared values, history, and culture that this translation to the world of EU politics is not accepted.

The analysis of the wider societal impact of these literary projects reveals a range of different fields that have been involved in the workings of these initiatives. Whilst the fields of literature, academia, and media were all influenced by the projects, not all were affected to the same degree. However, what these projects do have in common is that each organisation set out to influence European politics—even if the ways in which they actually managed to reach EU institutions differs greatly. The Nexus Institute, despite inviting a former EU Commissioner to their symposium, chose to oppose and criticise the world of EU politics, with outspoken statements from Riemen on both “Brussels” in the institutional sense, and EU civil servants. Although the “Literatur Express” was less outspoken, this organisation did attempt to share with the European Union its concerns about cultural policies and opportunities for translations in a much-debated “final statement.” Even though “Narratives for Europe” was not directed specifically at EU institutions, some scholars believe that the initiative provided the inspiration for the EU Commission to instigate the project “A New Narrative for Europe.” Finally, despite searching for a non-institutional approach, “The European Constitution in Verse” was embraced by MEPs and subsequently incorporated in the House of European History in Brussels. This range of political impacts—from opposition, to institutional inspiration, and finally, institutional incorporation—provides a more precise framework by which to analyse both the role of writers in debates about European issues, and to assess their specific (intended and unintended) influences on EU politics and institutions.
What the analysis of the effects of these projects ultimately reveals, is how the strict dichotomy between “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches to European studies on cultural politics does not hold in these cases. The institutional and political interaction with these literary projects—in the form of funding; the participation of EU politicians; the wider impact of the Commission taking a format as a blueprint; or the institutional incorporation of the results of these projects—is consistent with the findings of Sassatelli (2009), who argues that the field of cultural programmes is being reconfigured, as the boundaries between grassroots organisations and top-down initiatives become increasingly blurred.

Conclusion
An important insight that research into these case studies has provided is the fact that the tradition of the great European writer—as discussed in the General Introduction—still functions as a point of reference for these transnational literary projects. Appealing to names such as Thomas Mann and Milan Kundera, organisations attempted to claim a position for current literary writers in contemporary debates on Europe and European identity. Additionally, authors aligned themselves with their canonical colleagues, either by aiming to continue their tradition, or by trying to break with their iconic predecessors.

Analysing these literary projects as a whole, rather than as individual case studies, also leads to the conclusion that the participating authors can be perceived as “new European writers.” This dissertation proposes that these new European writers, compared to earlier visionaries who formulated ideas of a united Europe, function in the reality of the European Union, alongside established institutions that are part of a European civil society, such as European cultural organisations and EU subsidies. A closer look at the focus authors in this analysis reveals how many authors participated in more than one project, demonstrating how they function in a network of writers who travel around Europe to engage with their audiences via (often EU-funded) projects and festivals. These case studies show how their commitment to address the European Union critically is combined with the more mundane—economic and practical—commitments of an authorship that is inherently tied to transnational networks of subsidised projects. In the General Conclusions, it is therefore argued that the interaction between EU politics, civil society, cultural networks, and individual authors is an ongoing process—a process that should be studied using theoretical insights from studies on European identity and cultural policies, and frameworks from literary studies.
Samenvatting

Gedeelde verhalen en creatieve dissonanten. Transnationale literaire projecten en de Europese identiteit

Het startpunt voor dit onderzoek was de observatie dat er in publicaties met betrekking tot literaire reflecties over Europa slechts weinig aandacht is voor de concrete Europese literaire praktijk—in de vorm van Europese culturele netwerken, de rol van EU-subsidies, of literaire organisaties die Europese schrijvers vragen om deel te nemen aan diverse transnationale initiatieven bedoeld om na te denken over actuele vraagstukken in de Europese Unie. Terwijl grote Europese schrijvers als Milan Kundera en Günter Grass in de jaren zeventig en tachtig zelf een podium moesten creëren om Europese (politieke) thema’s aan te kaarten, bijvoorbeeld door het organiseren van conferenties en het schrijven van open brieven, is er nu een Europese literaire ruimte ontstaan, dankzij Europese literaire prijzen, culturele organisaties en een Europese infrastructuur van subsidies. Bovendien is een verenigd Europa nu niet meer de droom van intellectuelen en schrijvers, maar in veel opzichten een realiteit. “Interventies” van literaire schrijvers in de Europese politiek en reflecties van auteurs over de Europese identiteit zijn daarom in toenemende mate geïnstitutionaliseerd, aangezien culturele organisaties, veelal gefinancierd door EU-subsidieprogramma’s, schrijvers tegenwoordig in de gelegenheid stellen om aan het debat over de Europese Unie deel te nemen. Er ontstaat, met andere woorden, een Europees maatschappelijk middenveld. Dit middenveld is de bakermat voor culturele initiatieven die onderdeel zijn van een breder Europees netwerk van instituties en belangenorganisaties die bezig zijn met en zich kritisch verhouden tot EU-beleid.

op principes van mobiliteit en interculturele dialoog met schrijvers uit verschillende Europese landen. De projecten zijn bovendien ‘literair’: niet alleen omdat schrijvers deelnamen, maar ook omdat de organisatoren in interviews en projectplannen hebben beargumenteerd dat juist het literaire perspectief op Europese thema’s van bijzonder belang is. Hoewel sommige organisatoren hun initiatieven, tot slot, wellicht niet als ‘project’ zullen zien, is dit concept hier ingezet om te onderstrepen dat deze initiatieven niet alleen teksten, maar ook festivals, mediaoptredens en websites omvatten.

Deel I: Theoretisch kader

Door dergelijke literaire projecten als casussen te selecteren—in plaats van individuele auteurs of specifieke romans—maakt dit onderzoek een interdisciplinaire benadering mogelijk, waarbij de onderzoeksgebieden van Europese studies en letterkunde worden gecombineerd. Inzichten uit onderzoek naar EU-cultuurbeleid gericht op het proces van Europese identiteitsvorming zijn in verband gebracht met perspectieven op de rol van schrijvers en literatuur in het ontstaan van (trans-)nationale identiteiten. Dit theoretisch kader is gepresenteerd in deel I van dit proefschrift, waarin twee verschillende visies op een Europese identiteit worden gepresenteerd—een Europese culturele en een politieke identiteit—en beide visies worden verbonden met verschillende identiteitsdiscoursen: het discours van het “Europa van de Burgers” is gelinkt aan de Europese politieke identiteit en het discours van “eenheid in diversiteit” is gerelateerd aan Europese culturele identiteit. Europees cultuurbeleid als een institutioneel proces van identiteitsvorming is hier ook onderzocht, waarbij inzichtelijk is gemaakt dat de discoursen van Europese culturele en politieke identiteit niet alleen “bottom-up”, maar ook “top-down” geconstrueerd worden als onderdeel van EU-beleid.

Een terugkerend thema in deel I is de vraag in hoeverre conceptuele kaders met betrekking tot nationale identiteitsvorming en de rol van literatuur hierin vertaald kunnen worden naar Europees niveau. De hoofdstukken in dit deel beargumenteren dat de concepten die centraal staan in theorieën rond nationale identiteitsvorming en literatuur terdege toegepast kunnen worden op Europees niveau, mits de gevaren van “methodologisch nationalisme” vermeden worden: in de analyse van literaire teksten in het licht van Europese identiteitsvorming moet er rekening gehouden worden met de specificiteit van dit proces (ten opzichte van nationale identiteitsvorming). Die specificiteit is gereflecteerd in de verschillende manieren waarop het belang van literatuur voor Europese identiteitsvorming is beargumenteerd in diverse academische publicaties: literatuur is bij uitstek in staat om een betwist verleden te representeren, kan een
emotionele afstand overbruggen, kan kritische oppositie bieden en diversiteit verbeelden. Met deze specifieke aspecten in het achterhoofd, kunnen de literaire projecten in dit onderzoek opgevat worden als bijdragen aan een Europese “ingebeelde gemeenschap” (“imagined community”) en als gevallen waarin Europese culturele en politieke identiteitsdiscoursen geïnstrumentaliseerd (geïnterpreteerd, getransformeerd, bekritiseerd) worden in de praktijk van culturele organisaties, EU-cultuurbeleid, literaire auteurs en hun publiek. De analyse van de geselecteerde projecten richt zich op drie fundamentele aspecten: de verwachtingen van de culturele organisaties die de projecten hebben geïnitieerd (deel II), de culturele artefacten die resulteerden uit de projecten (deel III) en het effect van deze projecten in de publieke sfeer (deel IV).

Deel II: Verwachtingen


In deze hoofdstukken wordt verder aangetoond dat het type identiteitsdiscours waar de culturele organisaties in participeren, samenhangt met de argumentatieve strategieën die een literaire bijdrage aan Europese identiteitsvorming legitimeren. Het type discours en de bijbehorende strategieën geven een beeld van de verwachtingen die deze organisaties hadden van hun projecten. De “Literatur Express” en “De terugkeer van Europa” werden verwacht bij te dragen aan Europese culturele identiteitsvorming, aangezien literaire teksten werden opgevat als verbeelning van Europese diversiteit en representaties van historische eenheid. “De Europese Grondwet in Verzen” en “Narratives for Europe” werden verwacht bij te dragen aan Europese
politieke identiteitsvorming, aangezien de organisatoren uitgaan van het vermogen van literatuur en schrijvers om kritische en niet-institutionele narratieven vorm te geven. Terugkerende elementen in de parateksten, met de mythe van de ontvoering van Europa en de verwijzingen naar grote Europese schrijvers als belangrijkste voorbeelden, tonen aan hoe deze casussen worden geconstrueerd als onderdeel van een traditie die door de verschillende organisatoren telkens op verschillende manieren wordt geïnterpreteerd en geëvalueerd.

Deel III. Een vergelijking tussen verwachtingen en resultaat

Dezelfde aandachtspunten—het beeld van Europa en de rol van literatuur—hebben ook de tweede dimensie van dit onderzoek gestructureerd: een close reading van de culturele artefacten die het resultaat waren van deze initiatieven. In deel III zijn de verwachtingen van de organisatoren vergeleken met de uitkomsten van projecten, in de vorm van proza, poëzie en essays door literaire auteurs, waarbij de vraag wordt beantwoord hoe de verwachtingen en uitkomsten met betrekking tot deze aandachtspunten zich tot elkaar verhouden in ieder project. In deze hoofdstukken wordt aangetoond dat over het algemeen het discours van de organisatoren over Europese identiteit correspondeert met de literaire resultaten: de schrijvers van de “Literatur Express” en “De terugkeer van Europa” reflecteerden vooral op Europa als culturele eenheid, terwijl de deelnemers aan “Narratives for Europe” en “De Europese Grondwet in Verzen” probeerden het debat over Europees politiek beleid aan te wakkeren. Een analyse van de bijdragen van een aantal focus auteurs bood verdiepende inzichten. Zo werd duidelijk dat Dubravka Ugrešić zich kritisch verhield tot het discours van culturele identiteit in de “Literatur Express”. Arnon Grunberg bevroeg vanuit eenzelfde kritische houding de rol van cultuur in het proces Europese identiteitsvorming. Ook voor Geert van Istendael was het culturele discours van eenheid in diversiteit het startpunt, maar de analyse van zijn bijdrage aan “De Europese Grondwet in Verzen” toont aan hoe hij dit discours interpreteert als een vorm van kritiek op Europa als politiek project. Abdelkader Benali verhield zich, tot slot, ook tot Europese beleidsvraagstukken als migratie en extremisme in het “Narratives for Europe” project.

Een opvallend resultaat van de analyse van de focus auteurs is het feit dat de deelnemende schrijvers de gelegenheid namen om kritisch “terug te spreken” naar de organisatoren—zowel met betrekking tot het beeld van Europa als het idee dat literatuur en schrijvers een belangrijke rol zouden hebben in het proces van Europese identiteitsvorming. Op het niveau van het beeld van Europa zijn de focus auteurs soms uitgesproken kritisch over de Europese Unie. De analyse van hun oeuvres laat zien dat dit niet een opportunistisch standpunt is, dat ingenomen werd ter
gelegenheid van deze projecten. De kritiek op de Europese Unie is eerder een consistent onderdeel van de oeuvres van met name Ugrešić en Van Istendael. De door de Europese Unie gesubsidieerde projecten waar zij onderdeel van uitmaakten, boden dus een platform voor deze Eurosceptische auteurs om hun structurele zorgen te uiten over de EU.

De bevindingen met betrekking tot het belang van schrijvers en literatuur in het proces van Europese identiteitsvorming leverden een ambigu beeld op. Alle argumenten voor het belang van literatuur die onderscheiden zijn in het theoretisch kader zijn ook ingezet door de auteurs in hun bijdrages. De analyse in deze hoofdstukken laat echter zien dat sommige literaire teksten over Europa ook een weergave zijn van een proces van zelfreflectie over de rol van schrijvers in transnationale identiteitsvorming en de manieren waarop cultuur in het algemeen een bijdrage zou kunnen leveren aan de Europese politiek. De analyse van de focusauteurs toont aan hoe Ugrešić worstelt met haar positie als schrijver in het marktgerichte cultuurbeleid van de Europese Unie. Ze was niet de enige auteur die zich niet op haar plek voelde tijdens de “Literatur Express”; andere schrijvers uitten ook hun twijfels over het idee om onderdeel te zijn van een “missie” om een verdeeld continent te verenigen. De deelnemers aan “De Europese Grondwet in Verzen” werden verzocht om alternatieve formuleringen te vinden voor Shelley’s bekende uitspraak “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world” (“Dichters zijn die niet erkende wetgevers van de wereld”), waarvoor zij meer bescheiden varianten aanleverden (dichters als “dwaallichten”, die “prevelen” en “echo’s” zijn). Tijdens het “Narratives for Europe”-evenement werd bediscussieerd één betwijfeld of de creatieve verbeeldingskracht noodzakelijk is voor het opnieuw overdenken van democratische praktijken. Terwijl de organisator van het Nexus symposium, Rob Riemen, had beweerd dat cultuur noodzakelijk is om de Europese geest aan te wakkeren en een institutionele crisis op te lossen, ontkende Grunberg, tot slot, dat men een dergelijke hoop moet vestigen op de wereld van de kunst en literatuur.

Juist het feit dat deze casussen projecten zijn, die het resultaat vormen van plannen geformuleerd door culturele organisaties, kan een reden geweest zijn voor de auteurs om openlijk te refleteren op hun positie in de samenleving: deze projecten creëerder ruimte voor twijfel over de rol van schrijvers en literatuur in reflecties over Europa en voor een verzet tegen mogelijke politieke toe-eigening. Het kader van deze culturele projecten kan dus door de auteurs bevestigd of benadrukt worden (zoals het geval is in “Narratives for Europe” en “De Europese Grondwet in Verzen”), of kritisch bevraagd of betwist worden (zoals in “De terugkeer van Europa” en de “Literatur Express”), waardoor er een gelegenheid gecreëerd wordt voor schrijvers om een algemener punt te maken over de wisselwerking tussen auteurs en Europese politiek en identiteit.
Deel IV: Effecten

Tot slot is een receptieanalyse voor ieder project uitgevoerd in deel IV van dit proefschrift, waarbij de focus lag op de effecten van deze initiatieven in de vorm van twee vragen: ten eerste of deze projecten inderdaad werden beschouwd als een bijdrage aan het debat over Europa en de Europese identiteit, en ten tweede of het literaire karakter erkend is als waardevol perspectief in dit debat. De onderzoeksvragen zijn benaderd door om te beginnen het begrip ‘effect’ onder te verdelen in twee elementen: de directe receptie van de geplande uitkomsten van deze projecten enerzijds en de bredere (en in zekere zin minder bedoelde) impact van deze initiatieven anderzijds—wat deze teksten nu precies hebben gedaan in de samenleving. Er zijn weinig studies waaruit blijkt hoe een dergelijke impact op de samenleving het beste onderzocht kan worden, dus in dit proefschrift wordt een voorstel gedaan om de repercussies van deze initiatieven in vier domeinen in kaart te brengen: dat van de Europese politiek, de academische wereld, literatuur en (sociale) media.

In de directe receptie van deze projecten—variërend van critici die de publicaties bespreken in culturele tijdschriften tot politiek commentatoren die de uitkomsten op de opiniepagina’s van kranten bediscussiëren—wordt duidelijk dat “Narratives for Europe” en “De Europese Grondwet in Verzen” de meeste waardering krijgen voor de literaire bijdrage aan discussies over Europa en de Europese identiteit. Het aantrekkelijke taalgebruik van “De Europese Grondwet in Verzen” wordt geprezen en het poëtische karakter van de tekst wordt positief besproken, vooral in het licht van het moeilijk toegankelijke proza van het oorspronkelijke EU-verdrag dat de inspiratie was voor dit project. Ook “Narratives for Europe” heeft bereikt dat duidelijk werd voor het publiek op welke manieren huidige schrijvers en hun klassieke literaire voorbeelden kunnen bijdragen aan een analyse van de Europese democratie, migratievraagstukken en interactie met omringende landen. Minder succesvol in het benadrukken van het belang van een literair perspectief in de verschillende media waren blijkbaar de “Literatur Express” en “De terugkeer van Europa”. Uit het receptieonderzoek van de “Literatur Express” bleek dat critici zich naar aanleiding van dit project regelmatig op een negatieve manier uitlieten over de toekomst van het literatuurbedrijf—waarbij ze vooral de omvang en het mediaspektakel van dit initiatief belichtten—en de in hun ogen pretentieuze claims over cultuur en politiek. Op een vergelijkbare manier werden de politieke reflecties van Riemen in “De terugkeer van Europa” niet geaccepteerd door sommige critici, die bijvoorbeeld benadrukten dat er in dit project een verkeerd beeld werd gecreëerd van de Europese politiek. In deze besprekingen werd het beoogde verband tussen de literatuur en Europese vraagstukken niet herkend—en wellicht werd juist de vertaalslag naar de Europese politiek van deze projecten niet geaccepteerd,
omdat beide projecten expliciet gericht zijn op een Europese identiteit in termen van gedeelde waarden, geschiedenis en cultuur.

De bredere maatschappelijke impact van deze literaire projecten over Europa laat zien hoe de verschillende domeinen van de literatuur, de academische wereld en de (sociale) media beïnvloed zijn—hoewel dat niet voor elk project in even sterke mate gold. Waarin alle projecten wel overeenkomen is een beoogde impact op het Europese politieke domein; de manier waarop de projecten daadwerkelijk de Europese instituties hebben bereikt, verschilt echter per casus. Het Nexus Instituut koos voor een oppositionele houding ten aanzien van de Europese politiek, ondanks het feit dat er tijdens het symposium een voormalig Eurocommissaris aanwezig was. Riemen was uitgesproken kritisch in de pers over Brussel en EU-politici. Minder uitgesproken waren de projectleiders van de “Literatur Express”, maar ook zij probeerden hun zorgen over cultuurbeleid en de financiering van vertalingen kenbaar te maken, middels een omstreden gezamenlijk “statement” geadresseerd aan EU-politici. Hoewel “Narratives for Europe” niet specifiek gericht was op EU-instituties, beargumenteerden sommige academici dat dit project de inspiratie was voor een omvangrijk initiatief van de Europese Commissie, getiteld “A New Narrative for Europe”. Tot slot: ondanks het feit dat “De Europese Grondwet in Verzen” juist gezocht heeft naar een niet-institutionele benadering van Europese vraagstukken, werd dit project omarmd door leden van het Europees parlement en opgenomen in het Huis van Europa in Brussel. Deze reeks van verschillende vormen van impact—van oppositie, naar een statement, institutionele inspiratie en uiteindelijk institutionele incorporatie—biedt een kader om niet alleen de rol van schrijvers in debatten over Europa te analyseren, maar ook om de invloed op de Europese politiek van deze projecten concreter te beschrijven.

Wat de analyse van de effecten van deze projecten, tot slot, ook laat zien is hoe de strikte dichotomie tussen een “top-down” en “bottom-up” benadering van cultuurbeleid in Europese studies niet houdbaar is in deze casussen. De institutionele en politieke interactie met deze literaire projecten—in de vorm van subsidies, deelname van een Eurocommissaris, het bieden van een format voor de Europese Commissie en de institutionele incorporatie van de uitkomsten van projecten—correspondeert met de bevindingen van Sassatelli (2009), die beargumenteerde dat de grenzen tussen zogenaamde “grassroots” culturele organisaties en top-down ontwikkelde initiatieven in toenemende mate vervagen.

**Conclusie**
Een belangrijk inzicht dat het onderzoek naar deze casussen heeft opgeleverd, is het feit dat de traditie van de grote Europese schrijver—een traditie die ook kort in de inleiding van dit proefschrift is beschreven—nog steeds functioneert als referentiepunt in deze transnationale literaire projecten. Door bekende namen als Thomas Mann en Milan Kundera aan te halen, probeerden deze organisaties ook een positie voor huidige schrijvers te bewerkstelligen in actuele debatten over Europa en de Europese identiteit. Ook de auteurs plaatsten zichzelf in deze traditie, ofwel om deze te continueren, ofwel om juist te breken met hun iconische voorgangers.

Uit de analyse van deze literaire projecten (in plaats van individuele casussen) kan echter ook geconcludeerd worden dat de deelnemende auteurs beschouwd kunnen worden als een nieuw type Europese schrijvers. In dit proefschrift wordt beschreven hoe deze nieuwe Europese schrijvers, in vergelijking met voorgaande auteurs die visioenen over een verenigd Europa formuleerden, functioneren in de realiteit van de Europese Unie, met instituten die onderdeel zijn van een Europees maatschappelijk middenveld, zoals culturele instellingen en Europese subsidies. De analyse van het werk van de focusauteurs toont aan hoe deze schrijvers deelnamen aan meerdere Europese literaire projecten, waardoor duidelijk werd hoe zij onderdeel zijn geworden van een netwerk van schrijvers die door Europa reizen via (EU-gesubsidieerde) festivals en projecten. Deze casussen laten daarmee zien hoe deze auteurs een middenweg zoeken tussen hun kritische houding naar de Europese Unie en hun meer praktische en economische belangen om als auteur onderdeel te zijn van een transnationaal netwerk van gesubsidieerde projecten. In de conclusie van de proefschrift wordt daarom beargumenteerd dat de interactie tussen de Europese politiek, het maatschappelijk middenveld, culturele netwerken en individuele auteurs een continu proces is—en een proces dat het beste bestudeerd kan worden met de inzet van theoretische kaders uit zowel Europese studies als de letterkunde.
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Dit onderzoeksproject is mogelijk gemaakt door een samenwerking tussen de Universiteit van Amsterdam en de Hogeschool Utrecht. Om te beginnen wil ik daarom de collega’s van de Hogeschool Utrecht bedanken die dit traject mede mogelijk hebben gemaakt. Rene Karman en Caroline Korpershoek: dank voor jullie vertrouwen! Jaap van Voorst: dank voor je steun, ook voor de conferentie ‘Teacher in Europe’, die nu voor studenten aan tweedegraads lerarenopleidingen in Nederland en daarbuiten een succes is.

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Curriculum Vitae

Anouk Zuurmond holds an MA in Dutch literature and an MA in Philosophy from the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and works as a teacher educator at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht (HU). In 2014, she started her PhD research project as the result of a collaboration between the HU and the UvA. She has published on European dimensions in teaching literature and co-organises the yearly student conference ‘Teacher in Europe’. As a member of the Research Group Normative Professionalisation at the HU, she has published on Hannah Arendt’s philosophy and its value for educational discussions. She is currently involved in a NRO funded project on critical thinking and citizenship in vocational education.