

*Freedom, Citizenship, Culture and the changing role of the intellectual class.
A European Perspective*

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Now that the Treaty of Lisbon, effected in December 2009, has come into force, a legal framework has been introduced that has unmistakably changed the relations between the member states and the European Union in favour of a transnational definition of citizenship. The Dutch parliament anticipated this move in 2008 by referring to the EU as a union of member states and citizens.¹ Although this introduced dual citizenship, the instruments for promoting (European) citizenship have not been adapted to this new situation in any of the member states. The question of the role that the intellectual class can play in growing international public space has to be analysed. One can observe that in practically non of the memberstates the issue of European citizenship has inspired the usual political analysts, newspaper correspondents nor radio- and tv-commentator to discover this novelty in the lives of all citizens as something worth to pay attention to.

The success of the common market enables a continual improvement of the working of it and makes it more accessible to all stakeholders, including the European citizens and their informal and formal civic initiatives. Also in this respect the role of the intellectual opinion leaders is undergoing a substantial change.

There is no intellectual community of opinion-makers to be found anymore like the one that was so decisive for the post war social debate. At least until recently, there was an apparent consensus on the ideal of edification that gave the cultural élite the moral authority to do everything that was in the interest of that ideal. So it is hardly surprising that, during the post war reconstruction years, in spite of the considerable and irreconcilable religious and ideological differences between the various ranks, classes and religious or ideological groups, there was virtually unanimous major support for the largest and most important of the political projects: the banishment of war and the striving for peace for all the nations of the Western European continent. Yes, indeed, this was an exclusive western-European informal consensus. How citizens in the former East would have formulated their ideal is not clear, that part of nowadays differences in attitudes towards European borders, migrants a.s.o lies in the divergent developments in East and West, to put it mildly, is quite understandable.

As it was perfectly understandable for the residents of the sunny side of the iron curtain that they wanted to boost their self-awareness and belief in their own strength along with their regained freedom as soon as possible.

‘The Netherlands can have its say again.’ That is how the national pride in my native country could be summed up. Variations on this slogan could be found in every country of the ‘free West’. As a result, the construction of national identity received an enormous boost. Dutch identity for instance, certainly as it was to be propagated abroad, could not consist of anything other than: tolerance, freedom of thought, forbearance and internationalism. So ideal types of Dutch character and national virtues came in handy, all the more so because the very recent history had not given much cause for cheerfulness: it is simply hard to imagine how a people that until 1940 had been primarily interested in themselves and their mercantile activities were suddenly, five years later, to undergo a massive spiritual development that would change each and every one of those citizens into independent-thinking cosmopolitans. By now it is clear that the moral uniqueness and superiority of the Netherlands that was propagated for years by the official government bodies and others was above all a marketing concept.²

It is obvious by now that offering scope for pluriformity, as it has developed, can also have unwelcome side-effects, but I see that as part of the deal. How that is to be dealt with is an almost permanent object of debate among politicians, figures in authority, parents and teachers, social institutions and the public.

The enormous number of solid contributions by readers to the opinion pages of the major European papers concerning individual freedom, sovereignty and identity is ample proof that a more democratic, self propelled intellectual and administrative élite welcomes the opportunity to take an intensive part in the social debate. These “active citizens” do so no longer as representatives of some nomenclature, whether self-appointed or not, but as individuals, as responsible citizens. For some this is not enough and they publish essays, collections of articles or pamphlets, under their own imprint or that of a publisher, which are then discussed in various old and new media. However that may be, all those different insights, opinions and analyses appear on the internet and are commented on there by anyone who wants to do so. Talk programs and discussion evenings follow, often leading to renewed interest, so that the cycle starts anew.

To conclude: the vertical communication that determined the relations in the social debate to a large extent before the arrival of internet has gone. The era of paternalism, including its enlightened form, is over, although it must be mentioned that in some

¹ Parliamentary proceedings *Kamerstukken II 2008-2009*, 31 702, no. 3.

² Austen, S., *De Europese Culturele Ambitie*, SMO, The Hague, December 2004.

of the new member states of the EU frenetic attempts are being made to return to pre-democratic forms of government interference. No matter how threatening this may be for the development of a flourishing civil society, it will presently become clear that this is a rear-guard action. Moral authority no longer belongs as a matter of course to a privileged élite, although it is by no means clear how authority is to be handled nowadays. It seems that generally applicable frameworks can no longer be taken for granted, that citizens themselves want to decide whether to conform to certain insights or forms of behaviour.

This by no means implies that the transfer of knowledge is a thing of the past. On the contrary, if you want, you can find all kinds of things that can adjust insights in the field of society, politics or ideology. A genuine proliferation of courses, study trips, lectures and information networks is the result. The participants are curious and are prepared to pay in order to obtain more insight.

“The idea of culture playing a more prominent role in local, regional, national and European processes than before, does find more and more acceptance.

By implementing the new rules of the game, the EU can no longer be seen as primarily an economic project. Inclusion of citizens’ aspirations in ALL fields of policy changes the paradigm from economic to cultural notions.

When citizens have common cultural aims, even if the cultures themselves are different, the decentralised cross-fertilising of ideas becomes a way for active citizens to develop a common Europe while keeping their own sense of who they are intact. By removing labels, except those individuals choose to express themselves, we remove the need for protection against outsiders who mean us no harm.”

The familiar forms of state such as the nation state, the federal state, the confederation and the political federation were once inventions too as the result of considerations of political power that prevailed at one time. However, in the case of these forms which were once innovative, it is true that, apart from a few exceptions, the population of these states had a negligible say, if they had any at all. That has changed. The decisions on the future of Europe are taken by democratically elected governments that require the approval of their democratically elected parliaments and the approval of the directly elected European parliament.

The likelihood that ‘old’ forms will be chosen is thus so small that it can be discounted. Moreover, there is an important and striking facet to the process of political unification of Europe: it is taking place in complete openness. Every consultation is followed step by step by the media and released for immediate public discussion. Without the free press and the internet, the process of European unification would be considerably frustrated. As a result, more people than ever before in European history

are sharing in thinking about their and our future. There is an enormous reservoir of mental resources and critical knowledge available that finds its way to the politicians and policy organs.

In an era in which innovation has risen to such prominence in every sphere of social life, should the formation of the state suddenly lag behind? The facts point in a different direction. The development that the EU has undergone since the setting up of the European Coal and Steel Community can already easily be compared with the successful social and industrial revolutions. We can state that the Union does not resemble any other existing form of state. It is not a nation state, it is not a federation or a confederation, it is something completely new that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. In the words of Van Rompuy, it is ‘something original, something unique, and should be regarded as the largest area of democracy, freedom, prosperity and social justice in the world’.³ It is a developing political entity that differs not only from familiar forms of the state, but also from familiar international organisations, be they supranational, intergovernmental or multilateral. The unique and specific character of the EU is expressed in the application of the concept of the democratic constitutional state to an international organisation, thereby providing a framework for the extension of the European citizenship that is known to all citizens. The framework of the democratic constitutional state they have been familiar with for a long time, or have been gradually getting to know since the fall of the Wall and joining the EU, now applies to the territory of the Union as a whole and is guaranteed by the Treaty of Lisbon.

As formulated in the Schuman plan (1950)⁴:

So here we have a common framework that improves the functioning of the nation states, the member states of the Union. Without the Union the member states separately would be in a worse position. The Union is a sort of insurance policy, a kind of extra security. The Union does not replace the member states, but strengthens and improves their survival as autonomous states. It is the added value that enables the member states to maintain and reinforce their economic, political and social sovereignty better in the escalating violence of globalisation.

This however does not diminish the search for a national cultural identity.

European unification strengthens the demand for national cultural identity.

Through the process of homogenisation of national policies in practically all domains of daily life, the only policy that remains in the hands of the member state is that of culture, as agreed to by the Treaty of Maastricht.

³ Intervention by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, at the ceremony on the occasion of the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, Lisbon, 1 December 2009.

⁴ Schuman, R., *Ten propositions*, For Europe, Fondation Robert Schuman, Paris, 2010.

In this way the policy on culture offers the member states an excellent opportunity to distinguish themselves from other member states. All over Europe, policy on culture bore the marks of the nation state's need for representation that had been customary ever since the emergence of the nation state as such.

More and more member states came to regard domestic policy on culture as national policy. Culture, after all, was by now becoming the only way in which the member states could profile themselves vis-à-vis.

International cultural cooperation was increasingly confined to forms of national presentation outside the national borders.

It is this tendency that eventually turns against European unification, especially if this is to be understood as a cultural process.

Maastricht witnessed not only the setting up of the European Union, but also the inclusion of the notion of the European citizen in the treaty as stated before.

This calls into question the role of artistic and intellectual activities as the provider of opportunities to identify with the nation and its culture. The fact that the latest austerity measures have been introduced to the national culture budget in many member states without much opposition from their citizens seems to indicate that by now the traditional bond between state, art institutions and public has been considerably diluted. Not only the relation with politics calls for reevaluation, but the relation with civil society calls for serious attention too. All the same, I do not think we should be trying to return to the relations of the 20th century.

a Dutch citizen is at the same time a citizen of the Union, by which the rights and obligations of all the 28 member states of the Union apply in conformity with the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon.

The significance of this European citizenship can hardly be overestimated. Of course, considerable attention must be paid in the respective programs for citizen education in all the member states to the political and intellectual genesis of Europe, if only to contrast the sometimes rather cumbersome and laborious path of the democratic decision-making process with the period before the war when there were no such intergovernmental and supranational democratic processes. An additional factor is that those member states who until 1990 were members of a different Union, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, had no experience at all with parliamentary democracy or had an idealised picture of life in the prosperous states of the West.

The public space in the West, however has undergone enormous changes since the collapse of socialism and the emerging European Union.

The cultural component of European citizenship has to be defined.

Art institutions are by their very nature natural meeting places for gaining depth and orientation with respect to the principles of the value community that forms the basis of a democratic Europe. New alliances are necessary if that potential is to be exploited to the full.

The traditionalists point out that citizenship is an individual matter. After all, it is a question of a personal relation between the citizen and the state, a relation that is anchored in the constitution, which guarantees everyone's equality before the law. According to this view, the state ensures that civil rights in relations between citizens and between citizens and the state are guaranteed by setting up independent institutions that monitor compliance with the constitution.

The protagonists of cultural (student) citizenship consider that collective rights must be recognised, such as for ethnic groups, but also for women, trans-genders, etc.

The influence of the latter concept on government policy in Europe has been and still is substantial. The notion of the multicultural society is grounded in sociological studies that take the group rights mentioned above, based on group identity, as their starting point.

It seems to me that introducing special cases of the notion of citizenship such as 'cultural citizenship' or 'new cultural citizenship' does not further the debate on citizenship. After all, we cannot rule out the possibility that those who devise these terms are arguing for special rights for certain groups of citizens, rights that other citizens will be denied.

Moreover, it might mean that groups that fall under such definitions ought to accept different responsibilities for the public space, the general interest, the functioning of civil society and the democratic constitutional state. This is all apart from the implicit suggestion that group identities, in so far as they exist, must lead to legislation per category, which erodes the principle that all citizens are equal before the law.

By now the question is no longer that of whether citizens are prepared to assume a share of the responsibility for how the public domain is organised, but rather: how can it be organised in such a way that political decision-making processes can be stimulated by it? Is there still a role for national cultural institutions, artists and intellectuals here, and if so, how is it to be understood?

The European Union resolutely breaks with a political practice in which the relations between the European states were determined by geopolitical and power relations and or corporatist structures. In their place, a network of fine-meshed interdependencies is emerging, much too quickly for some, in every sphere of social life. The innovative aspect of this reality is that not only the governments but also the world of industry and commerce and the citizens are increasingly linked with one another in a transnational way, which inevitably and increasingly leads to a complex of shared responsibilities.

In an ever increasing mesh of national, regional and urban interdependencies in Europe, the early medieval citizen seems to be a good starting point for thinking about the meaning of European citizenship. Above that why not suggest that the Cultural Identity of Europe lies in the heritage of its cities. No European city is the same, the balanced relation between tangible and intangible cultural heritage cannot be found outside Europe. I would opt for replacing the EU marketing slogan: Unity in diversity by : “always the same always something different”, or: “always something different, always the same”. The concept of citizen harks back to the Latin *civis*, a member of the *civitas*, another specimen of European cultural heritage.

The main question for all traditional institutions, on national, regional and local level seems to be: How to include the citizenship education component in all their regular activities , a matter of creating more awareness of the education capacity among initiators of civic initiatives, including artistic and cultural activities, all over Europe, especially on local level, in the cities where they are based.

THE EUROPEAN CITY: A COMMON ORIENTATION FOR ITS CITIZENS

It is thus logical for the public space in Europe to be increasingly full of initiatives from (young)European citizens who point to the ‘value community’ that must form the core of every society at local, regional, national or international level.

IT STARTS AT HOME

To begin with at home: in the cities were citizenship found its origin. Supported by the overwhelming citizens initiatives in practically all fields of society; from pop-up restaurants, temporarily alternative spaces. Informal interregional networks, social design modelling pilots, a multitude of start-ups where international cooperation is practised. All these initiatives are having their influence on the renewal of our cities from bottom-up. The daily practise of all these proofs of active citizenship should be seen as part of the process of giving form to entirely new concepts, of communication,

information, cooperation and participation with governments and citizens of 28 democratic member states. This necessitates a continuous process of trial and error and harmonisation. And of course ‘Education Permanente’. This is perhaps the best

definition of the role artists, cultural initiatives and institutions can play. After all, they are attracting millions of citizens that for one reason or another are coming together without being obliged by any government, religious organisation or political party.

The practise of enjoying cultural events is based on individual citizens behaviour, a European value in itself. Let’s share this value.”

The notion that a democracy can be organised, run and further developed without consulting the citizens is still prevalent, especially in the new member states of the Union. In some cases a parliamentary majority is used to curb civil rights ‘democratically’, for example by introducing legislation that limits freedom of expression, freedom of meeting or association, or the pluriformity of the press.

The presence of anti-democratic currents is a part of an Open Society that is constantly developing. However, it is virtually impossible any more to keep movements by individuals and organisations, governments or interest groups who are opposed to the system of law out of the public eye. Individual contraventions of civic rights by state organs are immediately highlighted and, often via internet, presented to the international community of citizens.

Many politicians and institutions have to get used to the idea that honest government has to be accompanied by a maximum of transparency. As a result, trivial argumentation or personal motives can be recognised at a very early stage, abuses can be combatted, and political corruption and conflict of interests become increasingly difficult. The EU can thus be seen to have added a chapter to the Von Clausewitz doctrine that could be called: the EU is the continuation of peace by other means. After all, the EU functions as a platform and supervisory body, so that an opportunity can be given to all 500 million citizens to give expression to the experience of individual liberty within an increasingly clear political and juridical framework. No other continent offers this in such a generous, clear and pioneering way as the territory of the European Union.

Seen in this light, after centuries of armed conflict Europe has achieved a new state of existence for which the word ‘peace’ is inadequate. Certainly, in the early years of European cooperation the avoidance of war was the leading principle. As a result of this, that cooperation was in the first interest focused on the economic front.

While at first it was logical for governments to consult with one another on harmonisation and decision-making, today citizens are demanding a say. The absence of the threat of war in the territory of the EU enabled steady work to continue on strengthening the community values to guarantee the strength and continuity of the Union. Paradoxically enough, it is precisely the Union that has enabled the transition from a community of nation states bound by a treaty to a system of guarantees for democratic values in all of the member states. The Union has made it possible for all

citizens in the EU to voice their approval or disapproval of the further stages of the political development of Europe.

The governments of the member nation states not only increasingly realise that their voting behaviour in the European Council requires the approval of the national parliaments, but they also feel the need to take into account the voting behaviour in the directly elected European parliament. Finally, in so far as the domestic policy of national governments deviates too much from what has been agreed in Brussels or in the Treaty of Lisbon, they will have to fear the corrective measures of the European Commission, the European Court of Justice, or the European Court of Human Rights. Anyone who is properly aware of this will be aware that the democratic content of the EU is not at all in a bad way, especially by comparison with the situation in some of the member states. Anyone, including the heads of state, who accuse the EU of not being democratic enough will thus have to realise that it is not uncommon for those who voice such criticisms to bear some responsibility for the democratic content that is the butt of their criticisms.

Members of the Dutch government and parliament also have no difficulty, no sooner than they have returned from Brussels, in using the national broadcasting channels to contradict or criticise the agreements that have been made there. Of course, this attitude undermines the further inevitable extension of the European Union and above all acceptance of the unification process by the citizens. Realisation that the Union offers additional guarantees, besides citizenship in the nation state for all who have a European residence permit, is not yet given enough emphasis in the national citizenship programmes. All the same, there are great opportunities for giving the experience of European citizenship a new and appealing content. The value of the European dimension will now have to be added to the respective citizenship programs of the member states designed to provide information about the origins of the nation state and the democratic national institutions.

The idea that the Union will, to a greater or lesser extent, replace one's own nation state can be vigorously combatted. After all, they are both complementary. While originally it was enough to convince participants in citizenship education programs of the necessity of the EU by referring to the absence of war, which was indeed the primary objective of the European Coal and Steel Community, the notion of freedom – which was still too closely associated with freedom from occupation and dictatorship – can be given a new content. That will also enable us to put an end to the complaints about the absence of a single European people, a European 'national' anthem, a shared European feeling, a European identity, and so on.⁵ These aspects of belonging are already there, particularly at the level of the nation states and the regions.

⁵ Critchley, S., Interview by Westerduin, M., Volkskrant, Amsterdam, 3 January 2013.

Although these notions are not always based on observable reality and are certainly not the result of democratic decision-making – quite the contrary – these ideas and rituals are desirable and necessary to contribute to the definition of the notion of freedom that is created precisely by the additional guarantees that European citizenship offers the citizen. Freedom in Europe means that every one of the 500 million citizens knows that they are linked with all the other Europeans, that they can develop their own personality as they choose without the interference of any political or social force, that they have freedom of movement in the widest sense of the word within the territory of the Union, and that outside it they can count on the protection of the national and European organs.

This individual freedom for European citizens has its limits, as applies to every activity that forms part of a treaty-based community. Investigating the possibilities that individual freedom within the public space of Europe offers has only just begun. It is to be hoped that the mantra of no war, peace and security can slowly but surely be replaced by a new content for the notion of peace that is now related more than ever to the experience of citizenship in a community that shares European values. Whenever it is a question of giving form to entirely new concepts, especially when the governments and citizens of 28 democratic member states must take part, it will call for a continuous process of trial and error and harmonisation. Perhaps the best comparison is with the procession to Echternach⁶, in which the pilgrims are obliged to take three steps forwards and two steps backwards – a good exercise in European progress.

Cities and universities have something going with each other. Is city life conceivable without an intellectual dimension? I would say hardly at all. In this respect there is no difference between large and small cities. Its area is in any case an unworkable criterion in deciding whether a particular place may adorn itself with the title of city. Of course in theory every borough council is free to take the settlement they run and push it upward in the movement of peoples by extolling its virtues as a city. It is after all no longer a protected title. Whether it has the privileges of a city or not, what does it matter? City and city-dweller appear to be inseparably linked. One might ask what came first, the city or the city-dweller? It was city-dwellers who exacted those privileges for the city. A straightforward act of civil emancipation and self-awareness. Is it strange that the first universities arose in cities and owe their birth to private initiative, to the citizens? It was the enlightened middle classes of Florence who in about

⁶ The hopping procession of Echternach (Luxembourg), inscribed in 2010 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

1450 laid the foundations for numerous societies, associations and foundations elsewhere in Europe, which then brought just as many scientific and artistic initiatives to fruition. The influence of the church and the nobility declined in favour of the middle classes.

So the great interest there currently is for cultural networks is by no means new; now that ideologies are increasingly losing their grip on society, the individual citizen can take the next step in the never ending process of emancipation. If in the late Middle Ages it was the nobility that got it in die neck, in the twilight years of the political power monopolies we are now seeing, it is the national state. This is the structure which, in its most enlightened form, the parliamentary democracy, was, in its turn, until recently considered the peak of civil emancipation. We are living in a time of transformation, on this occasion at the cost of state influence. Some lament this, others applaud it, but this erosion of the power of the state in every field of life can be found all over Europe. We are living at a time when centralised bodies no longer hold monopolies. It is not without reason that it is a very long way off political union: the member states are not about to let the last remnants of sovereignty slip out of their hands just like that. It is at the same time precisely in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg that the increased influence of the citizen is becoming visible. He has joined all sorts of lobbying and pressure groups, movements and networks. He has established the formal and informal non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have unequivocally claimed their share of the political decision making process. This process of siphoning responsibility down to lower ranks was until recently seen as the recipe for including the European citizen into the European machinery. Decentralization however had its limits as we can learn from business. Again the citizen demands more freedoms. The citizen's freedom to claim his or her share of society's decision-making process can lead to complicated situations, in some people's eyes, at least. There is an unmistakable climatic component in this process of emancipation, that of restlessness, discontent, egotism and thirst for knowledge, in short the perfidiousness of the city. It is this climate that has governed the relationship between the city and the state over the centuries. In contrast to the city, in modern history the state has had the monopoly of power. It is the exercise of power by the state that suppresses unrest in the cities, if too many anarchistic features come to light. Is it possible to speak noncommittally of the cultural identity of a city, against the backdrop of these phenomena?

Is, for example, a city more a theatre city than a music city? Of course it's possible. But the question is whether this is sufficient explanation of what is specific to a city, what special things make a city a city. That touch of rebelliousness that, in contrast to any provincial town, is so essential to combat boredom. When is the demanding modern man or woman bored? In any form of monoculture, I would say.

If these is one thing that characterises cities it is their independent power to rid

themselves of phenomena whose aim is to put life on the right track or to impose order, which want to make not only the traffic, but also everyday life, more manageable. In this sense Berlin is finally becoming a city, the fall of the Wall has given Berlin the opportunity to make one city from two provincial towns. The omens do not play us false: more dirt on the streets, higher criminality, more tailbacks and more unchecked commercial activity. In short, we are on the right track. Now for the inhabitants. Shouldn't cities be the places most suited to putting the multiform society into practice? Can we still call it a city when it is ethnically or ideologically cleansed? Cities may turn out to be the only places where it is possible to live together in spite of hate. It is a never ending experiment in coexistence. Constantly summoning up irritation, pleasure, revulsion and love amongst its visitors and inhabitants, the ultimate remedy against boredom. So far so good. There is more, of course: the individual. A product of the city, without the slightest doubt. A special kind of citizen. One that makes his own choices, and whom, in so doing, is not influenced by the appreciation of others. A participant in the process of civilization, in the civil society that we all like to see coming about. When the pressure is raised too high at street level the individual will sooner or later rise up. It is due to the citizens of Budapest and Prague that civil freedoms are a reality throughout Europe. The freedom to express thoughts, to assemble, to lodge protests, and to disagree with a whole lot of things and, most of all, to make that known in word and print.

The fashionable festival practise can degenerate into an instrument that is both inimical to art and archaic: too often it conceals a local narrow-mindedness towards the artists and art lovers whose requests for support or recognition from their local council usually go unheeded. Perhaps the ideal city would be characterised by its capacity to permit every possible form of human activity without the presence of any one of them making another impossible. This demands a constant commitment from all its citizens, who, as it were, consult informally with each other every day in order to discuss and comment on the state of the balance.

To this end, in addition to coffee houses, places of reflection and creation are also essential. Museums large and small, theatres and concert halls, theatre companies major and minor, artists' studios, galleries and street performers are all part of a continuing process of growth and death. Without death no life. Without new developments every equilibrium fossilizes, which leads irreversibly to rigidity, to the loss of life from the city. Perhaps the ideal city would be characterised by its capacity to permit every possible form of human activity without the presence of any one of them making another impossible. This demands a constant commitment from all its citizens, who, as it were, consult informally with each other every day in order to discuss and comment on the state of the balance.“