






The U.S. in Europe and Europeans in the U.S.

(On the occasion of the MLK tribute dinner February 9, 2025)

This text was drafted for the MLK tribute dinner on February 9, 2025, organized by Overseas American Remember (OAR).

The text discusses the common ties between Europe and the U.S., and the Netherlands in particular, and focuses on both differences and similarities in historical and cultural events, and some of the politics.

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*"The world is one great battlefield,
With forces all arrayed;
If in my heart I do not yield,
I'll overcome some day."*

This is the first stanza from the song **"We Shall Overcome"**, an anthem of the **American Civil Rights Movement** of the 1950s and 1960s.

Both the inspiration of the song and Dr. King's, Jr. (MLK) idea of volunteering and improving communities have not lost their relevance and are still used today in social justice movements around the world.



Countries develop through empowerment of the civil society and the authority of the government. In these times we see that states and their rulers claim a place in the world, causing shifts in the balance of power. It marks an era in which the old days are over and in which we ourselves will have to respond to the coming changes, at least if we do not want to be secondary.

Wonder, discovery and progress are part of the construct of civilization and of the conditions for peaceful coexistence. Both the U.S. and Europe are aware of the fragility of the construct and are resisting aggressive regimes by taking responsibility to protect and making efforts to keep environments safe.

In **Europa**, "A Distant Mirror", as the title of a book by Barbara Tuchman reads, people were not only at each other's throats; science, trade and the achievements of the Enlightenment, such as tolerance, freedom and equality, led to a foundation for peaceful coexistence. And after WWII,



the idea took hold that European integration was the only way to deal with the far-reaching nationalism that had plagued the continent until then.

450 Years ago, the **Netherlands** had to deal with open rebellion against Spanish rule, leading to a struggle and to independence, sealed on 26 July 1581 with **'The Act of Abjuration'**. The document is considered as the Declaration of Independence.

The 1st decade of the 17th century was dynamic: the Golden Age began and the Dutch East India Company was founded. This company hired Henry Hudson, leading to the establishment of the province of New Netherlands, with New Amsterdam as the name of the settlement, protected by a wall built on what now is Wall Street. In about the same period, the **Pilgrim Fathers** arrived and a truce was agreed with Spain.

In 1620, the Pilgrims, aware of the meaning of the text of the Declaration, set sail for America. It is widely accepted that the spirit of text inspired the Declaration of Independence of the United States of 1776.



Four years after the '**First Salute**' (November 16, 2026, 250 years ago), John Adams, descendant of Pilgrims and the 2nd President of the United States, went to the Netherlands for support and recognition of American independence, sometimes called "the Marshall Plan in reverse".

But to be fair, Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers, complained about the limited assistance the Netherlands had given the United States during the American Revolution, saying "**Holland is a nation of shopkeepers**".

During 1782, the Dutch Republic formally recognized the independence and in that same year John Adams, as America's first ambassador to the Netherlands, signed the Treaty of Amity and Commerce.

Much later, between 1820 and 1900, hundred of thousands Dutch emigrated to the U.S., and tens of thousands more joined them after World War II. Many of them left from the Wilhelminakade in Rotterdam to Ellis Island and made history. At both locations there is an **Emigrants Museum**.

Yet we can ask ourselves whether it was easier to approach each other 250 years ago. Especially because it is known that former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger once joked, "**there is no telephone number to call to speak to Europe**" and Madeleine Albright is said to have quipped once that "**to understand how the European Union works, you have to be either a genius – or French**".

Anyway, Netherlands - United States relations is considered one of the strongest and longest in contemporary history and the mission of the **U.S. Embassy in the Netherlands** is clear, albeit that the interpretation can differ. Whereas the recently resigned ambassador stood out with her strong emphasis on embracing cultural and public diplomacy, the newly appointed ambassador has a business background.

As for the United States, the "**American Dream**" and, according to the former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, "**the indispensable nation**", the first landing by English settlers, the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers and French colonisation may be called a genesis.

Further development was dynamic: civil war, as well as wars leading to independence, involving other European powers, encounters with people from Europe like Lafayette, Solzhenitsyn with his commencement address "**A World Split Apart**" at Harvard University June 8, 1978, and **Thomas Mann**, who lived in Princeton before moving to L.A. in 1941.

And also the achievements of the Enlightenment, events like race riots and human rights activism, the first attack on home soil, Joe Biden's analysis in 2011 that "**the Fractured GOP is the problem**", the storming of the Capitol, and the invention and revolution of advanced technologies and innovations have contributed to the country's development.



Here too, people were at each other's throats and sought peaceful coexistence, but unlike Europe, big dreams, institutionalization of power and authority, and the belief in obvious ("manifest") and certain ("destiny") became a reality, making the country (and the world) stronger.

In this context, names of people and important events come to mind, all of whom emphasize the importance of freedom and who conceived and realized great plans through cooperation:

George Washington (a), Abraham Lincoln (b), Tsar Nicholas II and Andrew Carnegie because of the “Temple of Peace” in The Hague, President Wilson's Fourteen Points, President Truman’s the Economic Recovery Act of 1948, known as the Marshall Plan, and several leading politicians who worked for the reunification of Germany.

And on cultural and academic front, the Fulbright Program, universities and think tanks, many other ties that emerged from people's empowerment such as that of “Overseas Americans Remember”.

In these times of revolutionary changes, now it's Trump's turn, bringing many uncertainties and decisive solutions.

On September 30, 2015, Donald Trump asked for and received blessing, but whether 1) the "American idea", 2) the mottos “*In God we Trust*” and “*Out of many, one*”, and 3) the statues "the Contemplation of Justice" and "the Authority of Law" on either side of the steps to the



Supreme Court will continue to be respected in their current meaning or whether the meaning will be emphasized or diminished because of **Project 2025**, also known as the 2025 Presidential Transition Project, remains to be seen.

The political initiative, published in April 2022, certainly aims to promote conservative and right-wing policies to reshape the federal government and consolidate executive power.

Trump’s foreign policy vision is dynamic and remarkable, partly reminiscent of the era of continental expansion and interventionism. This vision also dramatically forces Europe to find a position.

On the other hand, the idea of creating the 'Russia-Ukraine peace plan', which focuses on freezing the current conflict to stop the war, is a good example of an attempt for a constructive approach to build peace.

John Adams writes in a letter dated May 12, 1780 from Paris to his wife Abigail:

"I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy in order to give their children a right to study the humanities."

244 Years later, Trump made his first trip overseas since winning last month's presidential election. This was seen as offering Macron an early opportunity to play the role of mediator between Europe and the U.S. Trump said while in Paris for the reopening of the Notre Dame:

"It certainly seems like the world is going a little crazy right now. And we'll be talking about that".

On January 20, at noon EST, Donald J. Trump, who began with a *trifecta* of Republican control in Washington, was sworn in as president for the second time. Prior to Senate confirmation, Trump nominated candidates for top positions, many of which had already been approved through so-called recess appointments.

More than two months ago, the Minister of Finance, Scott Bessent has launched policy objectives: **1.** real economic growth + 3%, **2.** reduce the budget deficit to -3% and **3.** the US must produce 3 million barrels more oil per day. It will be interesting to see how this is translated into policy, just like with the tax plans.



And speaking of policy objectives, I remember a conclusion of 15 years earlier, when Former Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan saw the light and said:

"I made a mistake in presuming that the self-interests of organisations, specifically banks and others, were such that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and their equity in the firms".

EU leaders have recently indicated that they are willing to work with the Trump administration, but also that they are on guard against moves, like trade tariffs and territorial claims.

The future is open, but there is another serious disagreement: there are American billionaires who have set themselves the task of reforming Europe as they see it. Without reflection by European leaders, this could lead to the erosion of the democratic rule of law in Europe.

In 2008, Bill Clinton told to me: "I love your country" and as the nearly fifty thousand Americans in the Netherlands know, we share a philosophy of life that we still experience to this day. Let us continue to treasure this philosophy, despite unpredictability's. Eventually, we had to deal with hotter fires.

FINALLY

Between 2008 and 2018 I travelled to the U.S. 20 times, attended ideas festivals, toured the White House and the Pentagon, visited Arlington, the Capitol, statue of Liberty, 9/11 Memorial, many renowned museums, the Port of San Francisco, and took part in an international forum in the UN-building on how to mobilize private finance towards funding the SDGs.



And it is environments like at the Atlantic, the Aspen Institute and Vanity Fair that provide energy, to where the human spirit can flourish, and reason, ideas and knowledge are valued and exchanged.

These are tremendous opportunities to explore, see and speak to great spirits of the Earth, and to learn the art of living well together in all its diversity.

I would not have wanted my experiences any other way and like to conclude by saying that the US and Europe never completely abandon each other, are intertwined.

(a) George Washington (founding father of the United States) wrote:

Why are we today so concerned about social justice and economic inequality? Is it not because those who live in poverty today still have lives more likely to be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short?" Is not the quality of life a moral good to be sought and appreciated? And therefore, from an equity perspective, we show concern for the quality of every life.

This appreciation of living with plenty, with opportunities to earn and to learn, with good health, with the manifold advantages of modernity, was especially voiced by Presidents Washington and Lincoln in their proclamations asking Americans to set aside a day in the month of November to give thanks and not take their lives for granted or as an indulgence in undeserved privilege.

(b) Abraham Lincoln (respected for his leadership) wrote:

"The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and even soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God..."

"Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore.

Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battlefield and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom. No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people."

LINKS

- **American Civil Rights Movement:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?si=M2E36ztjnQa8H841&t=4&v=WPuBGcng6Tw&feature=youtu.be>
- **European Council:** <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/>
- **The Act of Abjuration:** <https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/history-and-heritage/additional-resources/dutch-treats/the-act-of-abjuration>
- **Pilgrim Fathers:** <https://www.pilgrimhall.org> and <https://www.tclf.org/landscapes/pilgrim-memorial-state-park>
- **First Salute:** <https://www.statiagovernment.com/about-st.-eustatius/first-salute>
- **Emigrants Museum:** <https://fenix.nl/en/what-is-fenix/> and <https://www.statueofliberty.org/ellis-island/national-immigration-museum/>
- **Netherlands – United States relations:** <https://nl.usembassy.gov/u-s-embassy-the-hague/>
- **A World Split Apart:** <https://www.solzhenitsyncenter.org/a-world-split-apart>
- **Thomas Mann:** https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691201641/the-mind-in-exile?srsItd=AfmBOoqn5Xs5EG_qNS3ebH2IN2hz1yTKXxk8-NAAjjLX8TkshbbP6_qv
- **The story of 9/11:** <https://www.911memorial.org>
- **Supreme Court:** <https://www.supremecourt.gov>
- **Project 2025:** <https://www.project2025.org>
- **The White House:** <https://www.whitehouse.gov>

BIOGRAPHY:

Erik van der Kooij is director Feeling EUROPE FNDN. He lives and studied in the Netherlands and worked for decades in various professions and branches at financial institutions, mainly in the operational control sector.

Crumbling moral values and norms, led Erik in 2004 to look for a counterpoint to get ideas, resulting in a network to contribute to better societies.

Qualifications

Knowledge and understanding of various departments of learning, science and art was acquired through various formal and informal trainings, as well as through experiences in Brussels (policies and meetings) - the US: DC (The Atlantic), NY (UN), SF (titans of technology, politics, business, and media), and the Aspen Institute - Krakow - St. Petersburg University (on tensions between tribalism and humanism) - Rome - Athens (helping Greece Rebuild) - Wittenberg (on capitalism) - Berlin (Check Point Charlie) - Budapest - Oxford (history of art) - The Hague - and in Salzburg (an international conference on the role and future of Europe).

Occasionally, positions are disseminated and sometimes there is media attention (The Hague newspaper, a daily Dutch newspaper, National Geographic with a contribution to The Race Card project of Michele Norris) and the Corporate Leaders Group (University of Cambridge), requesting to sign the Business Letter on the RepowerEU Plan.

Career

- 45 Years several professions and business at financial institutions;
- and from 2007 onwards, working on the European way of life and the role of the European Union.

Professional memberships

Memberships are maintained with centres in the field of the humanities, European policies, and social and formal sciences.

Feeling EUROPE FNDN focuses on European values and affairs with the aim of improving living conditions as a human condition. The foundation is an outgrowth from the conferences 'Europe: A Beautiful Idea?' (5th) and 'The Sound of Europe'

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