

EUROPE

Five lessons of history: *Does history teach us anything, something or nothing?*

History is not a science with predicative power, because the actions of societies and individuals are primarily goal-oriented, one-sided, prejudiced and egoistic. The actions are competitive and their outcome difficult to forecast. This is lesson one, when we study history. Lesson two: not everything can happen. There is too much glue in the brains of humans that binds them to their past and to the mistakes of their past.

Lesson three: humans differ deeply, at least culturally, but any child can learn any language, and be educated into any belief whatsoever.

Lesson four: the genes of a human being are the life-line that connects her and him with virtually everything in nature, and with other human beings.

Lesson five: many humans do not like nature, because they are afraid to die. When we deny death, we deny the basic law of life and human history: their incessant, ongoing transformation.

The five lessons teach us about the two poles of our existence: the one of nature and open-mindedness (lesson three and four), and the one of culture and narrow-mindedness (lesson one, two and five). Summarised: Tolstoy's War and Peace.

How to define Europe

We have, of course, a geographical definition of Europe. In such a definition, Turkey would belong to Europe for three percent of its territory. The geographical definition, however, is insufficient, because Europeans never acted according to such a principle, neither in the distant past, nor since they discovered and conquered other continents. The European mind is a Faustian mind, an exploring mind, not easy to understand. If we want to trace the origin of the name *Europe*, we have to turn to Greek history.

The Greek coined the word *Europe* in the 7th century B.C. to refer to the unknown Northern continent of their territory. The oldest meaning of Europe proves to be identical to “unknown territory”. Two thousand and seven hundred years later, we are in a similar position, not knowing where the borders of Europe are. Do Turkey and Russia belong to Europe, or even Israel and the Maghreb? Is the Mediterranean sea with its surrounding cultures an integral part of Europe's religious and political history, and therefore of its future, or do Europeans prefer to turn their back to their own past by constructing an invisible wall right through the middle of the Mediterranean sea, from East to West? The question is important not only because of the thousands of immigrants, trying to cross the sea between Africa, the Middle East and Europe, but also for an understanding of our past, and Europe's orientation to the future. My conclusion is that *the geographical definition of Europe is not the real issue*, because there are no clear geographical borders from a historic and cultural point of view. Europe is a peninsula of the Asian continent, surrounded by seas at its Southern, Western and Northern borders. A more open continent than Europe is hardly imaginable. We will need other criteria to understand Europe's past and future.

Once more a look at Europe's identity

Europe as a geographical unity must be understood as a marriage between land and sea. The borders of Europe were never the coast line: the Mediterranean Sea was a Middle Sea; the Baltic Sea the link between East-, North- and Western-Europe; the Channel and Atlantic Ocean the sea road to the other Continents. As a territory, Europe is the back garden of Asia, with Russia as the intermediary power between the far East and the far West of EURASIA. As a Continent, surrounded by water, it must define itself as a fluid Continent, whose borders are not fixed on beforehand but depend on choices and possibilities. The Mediterranean Sea

could become the New Iron Curtain to which Europe turns its back. But Europe might also look to the Mediterranean Sea with the eyes of the Greek and Romans; the traders and the merchants of Lebanon, Palermo, Barcelona, Marseille, Geneva, Venice and Istanbul. It might remember its colonial policies toward North Africa and the Middle East in the 19th and 20th centuries. The EU could even draw a parallel between the wars on the European Continent throughout its history until the Balkan wars of the 1990's and the wars with the Arab and Turkish neighbours. The EU should reflect upon the fact that if former archenemies as Germany and France have become the protagonists of the EU, we might look with new eyes to our old neighbours that border the European coastlines. If we don't, we deny our history and its potential for change.

Fons Elders

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