

| **The citizen and Europe**

A Christian democratic vision for the EU community

Summary and recommendations

A project of the Centre for European Studies with the support of the Research Institute for the CDA

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ISBN/EAN 978-90-74493-63-5
2008 Centre for European Studies

Design: Mullerdesigns

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This report is an English language extended summary of ‘De burger en Europa. Een christendemocratische visie op de waardengemeenschap EU’.

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Preface

In June 2009 voters in the Netherlands will go to the polls for the European elections. With that in mind, we have published a report about Europe. This report examines the future of the European Union, focusing on the question: what kind of Europe do we want to have? In order to answer this question we must consider the past, present and future. Looking at the past we see Europe's rich cultural heritage and its commitment to strong values. In the present we find a decreasing involvement of citizens in the European Union. When looking to the future we anticipate questions that cannot be answered solely by national states, questions for which common policies are necessary and where ambition must be shown in tackling the challenges. Crucial to this is the concept of the EU as a community of values based on Judeo-Christian and humanistic principles. We believe that by carrying out these ambitions and strengthening citizen involvement it will be possible to bring the EU closer to the citizens.

We would like to express our gratitude to the commission led by Prof. mr. J.W. van de Gronden, for its contribution and dedication. Members of the committee were drs. E.J. van Asselt, Prof. J.J. van Dijk (advisor), Prof. mr. B. Hessel, Drs. J. de Koning, Drs. P.R.H.M. van der Linden (advisor), Drs. M. J. T. Martens (advisor), drs. H.J. Ormel (advisor), dr. J.W. Sap, drs. C.W. van der Waaij, mr. D.C. van Wassenauer and mr. R. Wezenbeek. The report was compiled by the secretary of the work group, mr. N. Naderi.

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1 | Introduction

What kind of Europe do we want to have? In order to answer this question we must consider the past, present and future. When we look at the past we see a rich European tradition and culture, and a Europe that stands for strong values that are still alive today. In the present we see decreasing involvement in Europe. When looking to the future we see questions for which common policies are necessary.

What kind of future is desirable for the European Union from a Christian democratic perspective, and from that same perspective, what are the available means for improving citizen involvement in the European Union? We seek the answer along three lines. First of all we consider the values that Europe represents. We subsequently look at the present-day reality of the EU and examine the ambitions that the EU holds. We conclude with suggestions for how to strengthen the relationship between the EU and its citizens.

2 | The European Union as a community of values

The history of Europe is long and rich. 'Europe' refers to geographical, historical and cultural legacies that have contributed to a European culture. Europe owes much to its Judeo-Christian heritage, to the cultures of ancient Rome and Greece and to humanism. Together these have made Europe a community whose foundation lies in values. Christian democrats have always collectively supported European cooperation. "Unity in diversity" is a basic Christian democratic principle and is now also the motto of the European Union. The common European culture that exists despite the wide spectrum of diversity enhances "*Gemeinsamkeitsglaube*" (the belief in a shared community). It affirms the solidarity and mutual trust within the European Union.

The European Union is distinguishable not only by geographic and cultural features, but also in its fundamental principles, goals and tasks. The underlying political objective of the European Union is to safeguard peace, freedom and prosperity in Europe. Established for the furthering of economic cooperation and integration, it has increasingly developed into a community of values based on the principles of freedom, democracy, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. These derive from, among others, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. The European Union is thus also most certainly a community of values.

The European Union actively spreads these values. Countries may participate in the EU only if they comply with the norms and rules, rights and responsibilities in which these values are expressed. In accordance with the Copenhagen criteria, any European country that respects these rights and meets the responsibilities is in principle eligible to join the EU. Thus the admission requirements ensure that only countries which subscribe to the European values are admitted to the Union. Within the EU, pressure can be exerted upon Member States that violate these values through the suspension of certain rights, including the right to vote in the Council, and through bilateral pressure. Such joint European action may help to move the rest of the world toward recognising the fundamental values and principles of the rule of law as well as respecting them within the internal borders.

3 | **Reality of the EU**

The process of European integration began shortly after World War II. During that period the balance of power within Europe was uncertain and instable; long-lasting peace was considered impossible without the existence of far-reaching economic and political cooperation. The challenges with which the European Union has been confronted since its beginnings have resulted in huge benefits for European citizens: peace, security, freedom, stability, democracy and prosperity. The value of European cooperation is indisputable; this is all the more obvious now that the growing financial uncertainties in the world have also begun to have repercussions in the EU. Without the Economic and Monetary Union, and in particular the euro, the effects of the current credit crisis would, according to some, likely hit Europe much harder.

Dutch Citizens have recognised the reality and the benefits of European cooperation from the beginning. Although we statistically see a large interest in the European Union, it appears that support for the EU has nonetheless weakened. This does not so much concern the idea of 'Europe', but instead has to do with the way in which the integration process is taking place. Originally this process derived its legitimacy from the prosperity, peace and stability it offered. Today it increasingly affects the daily lives of European citizens directly and can therefore no longer be legitimated solely upon the basis of specific policy results. A sustainable policy for the future of the EU requires clear substantive priorities and intentions. It must be clear as to what goals the (Dutch) government aspires, what choices must be made and on which issues it is willing to make concessions. This policy must be discussed in time both politically and socially and then presented to the citizen. The 'problem' of the EU is also the citizen's image of the EU: bureaucratic, wasteful and an excess of regulations. The EU is saddled with this image in part, albeit unjustly so, because it is often held responsible for decisions agreed to by the Member States themselves.

In answer to the concerns of European citizens and in order to increase European cooperation, the Member States signed the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007. The intention behind the treaty is a more democratic and efficient Europe with a stronger foundation in values and a stronger position on the global stage. It gives the European Parliament and the national parliaments a stronger position in the decision-making process regarding European matters. Citizens will have more opportunities for participation through the possibility of citizens' initiative and gain more clarity about the diffusion of competences between the EU and Member States (what should be arranged at European level and what at national level - such as the on services of general interest). The treaty will also have added value to the good governance of the Union. The Treaty of Lisbon clarifies and strengthens the fundamental democratic values and objectives of the EU. These values show European citizens, but also the world, what the EU has to offer. The treaty gives more flexibility to the institutions that 'govern' the Union of 27 Member States. It introduces simplified working and voting procedures and more opportunities for action in areas where the EU faces chal-

lenges. The decision-making process will become more effective and efficient. This treaty will reinforce the role of the EU in the world. To this end, the Union will have a High Representative and become a legal entity, there will be a solidarity clause and a mutual defence commitment and the opportunity for permanent structured cooperation.

Before it can be implemented, the Treaty of Lisbon must be ratified by all Member States. The Netherlands has already ratified it. The goal is to complete this process before January 1st, 2009. However, Ireland has rejected the Treaty of Lisbon in a referendum. For Christian democrats it is of utmost importance that the Treaty of Lisbon be implemented in one form or another.

4 | **Ambitions of the EU**

What is Europe's future? Where is Europe going? The ambitions of Europe are the ambitions of the Netherlands. We cannot realise them alone.

Challenges

The Union has always faced many challenges, and over the years it has been able to formulate an answer to most of them. Nonetheless, past results do not guarantee future success. In order to address the challenges of the future, the EU and the Member States need to focus on the same objectives, each from the basis of his own responsibility. The EU and Member States must work together more effectively *and* involve the citizens in that cooperation. Current and future issues require a better Europe, which sometimes means more, sometimes less and sometimes a different Europe. The European Union must play a leading role in joint actions, and the Member States need to make the necessary efforts toward that end. Recent issues such as the credit crisis, climate change and regional tensions and conflicts indicate the importance of working together on a common European approach. Europeans can meet the challenges of the future only by developing a much larger, broader and, in particular, well-conceived sense of priority about the European Union and its citizens. Effectiveness is a prerequisite for being able to rise to the occasion. Only then can the issues be brought to a solution that contains a promise of future achievements. The Lisbon Treaty aims to realize that effectiveness.

The ambitions discussed in this report relate to border-transcending policy fields in which more European cooperation is necessary. This involves, among others, new economic questions such as those laid down in the Lisbon Strategy, as well as the current safety challenges. In part these challenges arise from the traditional objectives of the EU. Given the basic concepts of justice, solidarity, stewardship and shared responsibility, Christian Democrats foresee grand opportunities for the EU.

Common Foreign Security Policy

The preservation of peace and security, the protection of common values, the development of democracy and respecting human rights and the rule of law are the most important objectives of the Common Foreign Security Policy. The EU must act commonly and unanimously. The importance of such a united front is clearer now than ever. The conflict between Georgia and Russia has once again underscored this need. A European security strategy must include a security concept in which political, economic, social and intercultural efforts also have a place, so as to depolarise and solve conflicts. In a later stage that security concept must form the basis of a European defence policy. For Europe to be able to act with one voice and effectively, the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon is vital.

Innovation and technological progress

Not enough progress has yet been made in the areas of innovation and technological development. The EU should focus, by means of research programmes, on the most important societal issues and invest more – and more efficiently – in research, creativity, innovation and higher education. A space needs to be created for knowledge, with emphasis on education and lifelong learning, and the research efforts must become more focused and effective. The emphasis needs to lie on new challenges. The obstacles to the ‘free movement of knowledge’ must be eliminated and cross-border mobility needs to be further stimulated. The EU should stand up for the realisation of a simple and harmonised regime for Intellectual Property Rights,. Furthermore, a common infrastructure needs to be developed for scientific research, in which national research programmes are judged at the European level.

Climate

Climate is another area in which the EU needs to work together with the Member States to achieve a correct application and adequate enforcement of European environmental law. Economic growth and a healthier environment should be better balanced; an effort must be made to realise the objectives.

Energy

Together with the Member States, the EU should stimulate energy conservation projects and contribute to the security of energy supply. The EU needs to invest in energy infrastructures in order to reduce the European dependence on imported natural gas and oil. It needs to achieve mutually supportive energy relations between Member States while respecting the responsibility of each Member State. Each Member State must remain in control of determining its own energy mix. It should, however, strive to increase the level of renewable energy as much as possible. Biofuels may only be supported if there are clear standards and effective certification, so as to guarantee that they are sustainable and do not conflict with the world’s food security. The opportunities of nuclear power should also be exploited.

Cross-border crime and terrorism

For the control of cross-border crime and terrorism, a clear and stable framework needs to be established for the cooperation between police, the judiciary and customs, and their cooperation needs to be improved. Europol and Eurojust need to be fully deployed and developed further. Law enforcement authorities need to cooperate better and more effectively across borders. Cooperation by means of mutual recognition of judicial decisions in criminal proceedings needs to be intensified. The EU’s external frontiers need to be protected better. To this end, the Lisbon Treaty is highly important.

Asylum and migration

Asylum and migration have a strong international character and affect people directly. With regard to the protection of European borders, a Europe with open internal borders cannot afford that member states differ much in their policies concerning migration and asylum. There must be an integral European migration and refugee policy, one which supplements the Member States' policies. Managing migration flows requires clear norms with respect to refugee and migration policy. Moreover, that policy needs to introduce a harmonized asylum procedure that is limited in duration. In order to combat illegal immigration and ensure a sound migration policy, the EU must work together with third countries and develop a future-oriented prevention policy that can counteract the sources of illegal immigration through economic development projects and other actions. There is a need for a common visa policy that facilitates the more effective control of the entrance into Europe by citizens of third countries. Readmission agreements (for sending back rejected asylum seekers to their countries of origin) between the EU and third countries must be concluded as to ensure rapid and non-bureaucratic repatriation of refused asylum-seekers. Readmission clauses should also be included in commercial and association agreements. The Union's asylum policy is inextricably related to its common migration policy, which must be based on the prevention of illegal immigration.

Modernisation of the welfare state

Besides areas which ask for European answers, there are a lot of challenges which can be tackled by the individual Member States. In the Netherlands we can and want to arrange certain things ourselves. Pensions, housing, social-economic policy, education and health care are all fields in which local, regional or national policy should take precedence. In these areas the national or local governments take the initiative, often together with civil society organizations. The Netherlands has great opportunity in these fields.

Globalisation forces Europe to strengthen its international competition capabilities and to modernise its economy. The EU is confronted from the outside with an intensification of international competition and the internationalisation of the economy. From the inside it is confronted with the influences of the European economic and political integration itself and the gradual but pervasive changes to the demographic structure of the population, such as the aging trend. These developments will have far-reaching consequences for the European economy and its capacity to finance European welfare systems.

Dealing with the consequences of these developments is one of the main challenges to the EU. The ambition is to be well prepared for these issues. In order to meet this challenge, in the first place and especially with regard to the competitiveness of the European economy in the globalising world, the completion of the internal market

is of utmost importance. In the second place, this challenge requires the modernization of our welfare state and the reform of our social system. This modernization subsequently leads to a new issue – one which does not so much concern the European Union in general but more the Netherlands itself.

This important issue for the future is to what extent our collectively financed social systems (pensions, health care, and social security) can be retained in their current forms. The European legislator has limited authority with respect to public services. Nevertheless, in the arrangement of these services, Member States may be confronted with direct or indirect restrictions that follow from the internal market rules and rules regarding state aid. The challenge for the Netherlands is to implement the necessary changes as much as possible in accordance with our national preferences, without undermining the economic and financial stability of the EU or hampering either the internal market or the EU's competitive position.

The implementation of the current health care policy proves that this is possible. In this case, the Netherlands sought out the limits of European law and attempted to fully use the available space for its own implementation of public services. Moreover, the Netherlands should not interpret the European rules in an overly strict manner if that would come at the cost of our own traditional systems. The ambition is now to also achieve this in other areas, such as social housing. The implementation of the social functions of the housing corporations should be in line with the rules regarding competition, free movement and state aid. In the case of housing corporations, a system in which there is a clear separation between commercial and public services appears to be adequate.

The principle of subsidiarity

The question of who should realize what ambition and where is determined in large part by the principle of subsidiarity. The subsidiarity principle regulates the distribution of competences between the European Union and Member States by providing a general guideline for the practical allocation of responsibilities. Christian democracy also applies the term 'shared responsibility'. This principle is relevant to both the vertical relations – the sharing of responsibilities between the local, regional, national and European level – and the horizontal relations between different agencies.

The principle of subsidiarity states that regulation should be developed as closely as possible to the citizens, meaning at the lowest possible level. Aside from the exclusive competences of the EU, it delineates, based on an assessment of economies of scale or cross-border external effects, what the European Union should handle and what should be left to the Member States. It may also mean that the EU and the Member States analyse, through a process of self-reflection, whether certain policy arenas should be returned from the European level to the national level, or the other

way around. In such cases the European Union should determine which parts of the common policy the Member States should take on and in which fields they should confer responsibility to the EU.

In most cases, the distribution of responsibilities has been established in the treaties or arranged through a subsidiarity test. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that European legislative proposals will, in some cases, affect policy areas that fall under the competence of Member States. After all, the principle of subsidiarity is primarily an organizing principle, which always requires political interpretation in concrete cases. It may determine the direction as well as the criteria for the debate but will rarely force unequivocal results and is characterized by strong political dynamics. Therefore, it is a task of the national governments and their parliaments to critically assess the EU's policy proposals and to judge whether they are truly desirable and necessary. To this end, they need to apply the subsidiarity test in a timely fashion. For Christian democrats, a correct implementation of the subsidiarity principle is an important precondition for strengthening the public support for Europe. It allows the Netherlands to keep responsibility as close as possible to the people and in this way effectively make use of the room that the subsidiarity principle leaves for the protection of our own cultural preferences.

5 | **The citizen and Europe**

The European Union has taken upon itself extremely varied tasks that influence the lives of citizens in many areas, including the personal sphere. It was mainly the metamorphosis of the EU that put pressure on the legitimacy of its policy. European cooperation continually needs to be rooted in the trust and support of European citizens. The legitimacy of the EU is inextricably linked to it.

This legitimacy needs to be strengthened, partly through more clarity regarding the distribution of responsibilities, through stronger and more real participation of citizens and through more and better political and societal discourses about the EU. Citizens need to be more closely involved with the EU so that they are more aware of the relevance and reality of European cooperation.

Determining the scope

The Netherlands needs to provide clarity about what the EU is and is not. In other words, the Netherlands needs to take responsibility for its own choices, respond to the concerns of its citizens and strive for a clear demarcation of areas in which the EU may act and areas in which this is not desirable, also in view of citizens' concerns and uncertainties. The principle of subsidiarity may give some clarity in these cases.

But for increased citizen involvement, and with that a stronger legitimization of the European Union, more is necessary than a clear demarcation of responsibilities. Citizens have to consider themselves part of the political community. Moreover, they need to know what the process of the Union is about, what it aims to achieve and how it reaches its objectives.

Participation

The European democracy must strive for the highest level of citizen participation possible; the role of the citizen is indispensable. To reinforce public support and participation, the EU needs to transform its public space – an area in which citizens, whether individually or as a group, can participate in the European decision-making process – into a lively space that is open to all EU citizens.

European citizenship

In this public space, this right to participation has indeed been given to them on the basis of European citizenship, and the Lisbon Treaty reinforces it through the so-called citizen initiative. On the ground of this citizenship, citizens of the Union may not be discriminated against on the grounds of their nationality and they may participate in elections for the European Parliament. They can submit requests to the European Parliament and turn to the European ombudsman with complaints about mismanagement by European institutions or bodies. They can claim the four freedoms and so benefit from the advantages of the internal market. These citizens also enjoy all rights that are laid down in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. The citizenship of the Union is a reality on paper; there is yet a long way to go before

it will also acquire an emotional dimension. It needs to develop, just like Dutch citizenship had to, and so become a reality for the European citizens.

Debate in the European public space

In the European public space, debate is an essential element. In this space the EU must be subjected to societal and political attention: the EU must become politicised. In this politicisation the propagation of viewpoints on the European process, the political attitude, the role of the European and Dutch parliaments and the opportunities that fall to them in the European process – particularly the right to speak by members of parliament – are very important. Politicians and national governments need to be clear about the standpoints that they take. They need to make clear that as representatives of a Member State of the EU, they are a part of the European legislature and therefore co-decision makers in European decision-making processes. In addition, they need to react in a timely and consistent fashion, take responsibility, conduct a clear policy and motivate that policy. National governments need to embrace their responsibilities and not shift them continually onto the EU. If they do this, it cannot be expected that citizens will judge Europe positively. If politicians and government can improve the legitimization of European policy, citizens can develop knowledge, familiarity with and understanding of European issues, as a result of which in the end they will also feel more connected to the EU.

The political parties, too, must devote more attention to the European Union. European integration must become a real component of party organisations. To this end, continuation of the growing cooperation and mutual adjustment between the parliamentary representations in the Netherlands and the European delegations is desirable, for instance through further intensification of formal meeting cycles, informal and formal contacts through international secretaries who function as the link between politicians and party leaders and contacts with like-minded parties in other countries. These contacts need to be stimulated for the benefit of national political integration of European policy and to stimulate the development of a European political domain. Party political think tanks could together take the initiative for European publications, campaigns and debates.

Civil society, media and education

The debate about the EU must not be limited to political leaders and the traditional participants. Citizens, civil society, social partners, national parliaments and political parties must all be involved in the debate.

As the link between government and citizens, the organisations of the civil society can be more involved with European policy and represent societal interests and opinions in the EU. These organisations can participate in discussions with the European parliament or parliamentary delegations in order to sound the voice of the citizens in

the European process. Then it is just as if the citizens themselves participate in that process, as long as 'every voice' is proportionally represented. Through their global connectedness, churches may also provide a valuable contribution.

The debate about the future of Europe is also a debate about the future of the Netherlands and its national position. Media attention for and involvement in the debate are important for the legitimisation of EU policy. Television debates between the most influential political leaders, possibly watched by millions of Dutch citizens, are important in that respect. National party leaders and Dutch Euro-parliamentarians, independent publicists, commentators and intellectuals need to defend their viewpoints regarding the EU in the television, radio and newspaper debates and be open to discussion about other viewpoints.

In concrete terms, the EU and the Dutch government must try together to focus attention on European integration through broadcasts and other media sources. New communication technologies can be of use to the EU and the Dutch government in their own information campaigns. In this way the media can contribute to solidifying the legitimacy of European policy.

Citizen participation can also be furthered through education, beginning in the very early school years. By organising debates and events at universities, schools and other places people can be made more aware of the importance of the EU and be given the chance to discuss it.

Communication

The exchange of information is vital in a healthy democracy whose ability to thrive depends on its citizens being aware of what is happening and being able to fully participate in it. Informing citizens about the history, goals and ambitions of the EU, as well as the fulfilment of standpoints, outlooks and expectations of 'politics', are deciding factors in this.

Informing citizens

In promoting communication with citizens, the role of politics must be to devote more attention to the European Union and to politicise European policy. Political executives and the national and European parliaments and political parties are the key figures in the politicisation process. They must take their roles in this seriously. In the process of politicisation, national politics must provide a convincing explanation of the value of Europe, complete with concrete examples. This includes citizens being better informed about European cooperation; propagating standpoints about the European process; making clear what the EU is about, what it is and what it is not; and acting in a timely and consistent manner and taking responsibility for decisions. Parliament can also be better and more actively involved in the European decision-

making process, among others through utilising Europarliamentarians' right to speak. Dutch political parties, too, must place Europe on their political agendas and make room for it in their parties' organisations.

The same holds for the European Parliament and the European People's Party (EPP). The European Parliament must cooperate more closely with the national parliaments, and the EPP must promote its viewpoints transparently. The delegations to the European Parliament must continue to strengthen their cooperation with the parties in the Dutch parliament so that these delegations remain informed of developments at both the national and European levels. Then, having solid foundations, they can politicise the EU.

Europe can be brought closer to the citizen by means of the political layers closest to them. In view of the closeness of regional and local authorities to the citizens, these authorities are fundamental with regard to the distribution and flow of information. In order to realise this, Europe should set up information campaigns which make clear the importance of Europe and which take the specificity of each region into account.

Civil society, education and media

Due to their dependable and trustworthy status, as well as their ability to reach large segments of the population, civil society organisations are able to inform citizens and communicate with them about developments at the European level.

The educational system can stimulate youth toward a deeper involvement in the EU by presenting more information to students about the reasons for and foundations of the EU and about the current reality concerning our interdependence and the need for the EU, as well as through promoting exchange programmes.

The media, too, has an important task ahead. Reporting about European affairs is and remains limited and fragmented. This needs to change. More attention needs to be given in the media (magazines, newspapers, television, radio, etc.) to the EU, for example in the form of 'Europe 24' – and not by means of a 'Commission TV', for which the only goal is propaganda.

