Ulrike Guérot

Making Europe simple – simply making Europe

"Simple language" is gaining ground: a simple language for everyone. Why always express things in such a complicated stilted way? The Bible is now available in simple language. Even some radio broadcasters now have programmes in simple language and the association "Inclusion Europe" has created an "easy-to-read logo" as a quality seal for texts in easy language. If language can be simplified, why shouldn't we try the same with Europe? In simple terms, this could read like this:

Europe is the second smallest continent after Australia. In Europe, there are many cities having their own distinct history, such as Dublin or Helsinki in the north and Thessaloniki or Lisbon in the south. In the middle, there is Paris, Stuttgart and Budapest. Europe is home to 500 million people who speak different languages and come from different cultures: some prefer to eat pizza, others prefer herring; there are different customs, many different types of cheese and very different houses. In the north, houses are often made of bricks and in the south they are often made of sandstone. There are different European regions that have their own identity: for example the Bretons, the Bohemians, the Tyroleans, the Bavarians, the Catalans, the Scots and many, many more.

Despite these cultural differences, Europeans share some common goals and values. These values are freedom, the rule of law, human rights and a social market economy. They are called the values of European enlightenment.

In order to realise these values, the Europeans have founded a European Republic. The regions are the bearers of this Republic. There is a Senate, a House of Representatives and a President. The regions each send two senators to the European senate, who discuss the political goals of Europe. There is also a House of Representatives in which citizens are directly represented. This is called a two-chamber system and can be found in almost every country in the world. At the same time, all Europeans elect a president who heads the European Republic and represents it externally. This president then meets with other presidents of the world for example.

Europeans are proud to be the first in the world to have developed a 'post-national' democracy. A 'post-national democracy' is a democracy in which national borders have been overcome and in which every European citizen, wherever he goes, has the same political rights and duties.

In the past, it wasn't that easy. There used to be nation states. Some states were bigger and more important than others and it was always about how to get the most out of your nation. There

was a lot of competition and wrangling. Because there was a national level in addition to the European level and the regional level, you never knew exactly whom to contact about a particular problem.

Nevertheless, for many years they clung to the nation state. All over the world there was mockery of the fact that Europeans always argued about trifles. Much worse, however, was that Europeans could always be concerned and tricked, because they were constantly busy with their national disputes and did not want to cooperate. That harmed the Europeans enormously and ultimately cost them a lot of money, because they did many things twice and three times over.

Today, nationality is no longer important in Europe. That's what the founding fathers of Europe wanted. Jean Monnet once said: "Europe does not mean integrating states, but unifying people". Many people said: "But that's impossible". Everybody wanted Europe, but there was always a "but": *But* the people are not ready for it. *But* the people are too different. **But, but** … But then came a young generation that saw that the differences in Europe are actually not so big. And so they resolutely stood up for a Europe beyond nations, a Europe in which the political is more important than the national. "Cancel the but", these young people said. They just simply wanted to *make* Europe; and to make Europe *simple*.

They wrote down on a sheet of paper how they imagined it: 2025 equality of voting rights, 2035 fiscal equality and 2045 equal access to social rights. Millions of young people in hundreds of European cities demonstrated for these demands and these demonstrations grew into an important political movement. The latter then finally pushed through the European Constitution – a Constitution that Europe has been adhering to ever since. In short, European Democracy was simply made the way national democracies had been made before, based on two principles: the principle of universal political equality for all citizens and the principle of the separation of powers. In fact, this goes for all democracies. Today, it's easy for Europeans: they have a single economic order with a single currency, uniform tax rates and uniform social benefits; they have a common army, a single environmental and energy policy and also a single strategy for dealing with digital data. Europeans are still contentious when it comes to shaping the regions in which they live, in other words, their immediate surroundings and everything that directly affects them. But as soon as it comes to sausages, cucumbers or light bulbs – Europe speaks with one voice; Europeans defend their values with all their might. They are equal, they show solidarity, they are strong. They simply are Europe.

Ulrike Guérot is founder and director of the European Democracy Lab at the European School of Governance in Berlin and since 2016 professor and head of the Department of European Policy and Democracy Research at the Donau University Krems/Austria. Most recently published by her: *Der neue Bürgerkrieg. Das offene Europa und seine Feinde* (The New Civil War. An open Europe and its enemies), published 2017 at the Ullstein Verlag.