

# La Lettre des Entretiens Européens & Eurafricains

Rapprocher - Débattre - Fraterniser



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## Europe, peace and us

### The story behind a commitment

**M**y determination to change the world has always been the driving force behind my commitment! Back in 1970, I joined the French Communist Party because I wanted to build a more fraternal and peaceful world. It wasn't just the common agenda that inspired me, but the fight to free Angela Davis and Mandela, to bring peace to Vietnam and Chile... then, with the *Appel des Cents*<sup>1</sup>(the Appeal of the Hundred), the struggle for di-

sarmament. The war in Serbia, the unscrupulous approach to immigration and the rejection of Europe made me leave the Communists... to join Philippe in creating Confrontations in 1991. I put everything I had into driving discussion and action around European enlargement, bringing eastern Europe back into the fold, building a "common home" with Russia and the wider Europe, and opening up to Turkey, the Maghreb countries and then the world by creating the Entretiens Européens & Eurafricains to renew the relationship between Europe and West Africa. We also supported European, then Eurafrican cinema. Today, we are promoting global cinema through "Open World, Regards Croisés".

I knew that achieving "everlasting peace" – like the promise that we made upon the inimitable creation of the European Community – was not a pipe dream but an ongoing battle. For the world was, and still is, ravaged by war. This is true even in Europe, with the conflicts in Ireland, the Balkans and Chechnya, and on its doorstep in Armenia and Syria... Confrontations has actively condemned the West's cowardice and the weakness of the political union, which prevented the EU from intervening. We organised meeting after meeting to forge a common European destiny and "form a society", develop cooperation and ties with other European countries, and establish an energy union as a basis for solidarity and prosperity<sup>2</sup>, a way of building peace differently, sustainably: we dreamed of reconciling Europeans and creating associated States, and I was convinced that opening Europe up to the world would be a source of opportunity. After the Tour of Europe in 2007 and the Tour of the Balkans in 2011, we engaged in dialogue with the Turks, then with the Ukrainians and the Russians in 2014 when Crimea was annexed<sup>3</sup>. When I look back at the discussions, it is clear that we already knew what was brewing...

### Don't take the West's innocence for granted!

Today, the tragic situation of Ukrainian refugees and migrants is affecting us all deeply. The main difference between that and what happened in the Balkans, Syria or Armenia is that this time, Europeans see the war as a threat to themselves. But what we should be asking ourselves, is what have we done to stop it? In saying that, I am not condoning Putin or Russia for starting a war that in no way provides a solution. But don't take the West's innocence for granted! Since 2014, the conflict in the Donbass between Russian-backed separatists and the Ukrainian armed forces has killed 13,000 people, and the Minsk agreements, which included a ceasefire deal, have been flouted by all amid widespread indifference. The Russians have been able to annex Crimea, the Americans have trained and armed the Ukrainians, and NATO is getting ever closer to Russia's borders.

<sup>1</sup> «L'Appel des 100», born in 1982 at the initiative of the Peace Movement in a world still strongly bipolarized by the Cold War, brought together personalities from the artistic, sports, medical and scientific fields from all walks of life and from several countries of Europe, aware of the threat to peace and the future of humanity posed by the over-armament and proliferation of nuclear weapons. I had the honor of leading the movement in Lorraine.

<sup>2</sup> We proposed an energy solidarity pact that would take into consideration the specific assets and history of each EU Member State. With the Entretiens Européens, we organised a conference in 2015 to increase our energy security, and we invited all the protagonists (including Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey). We also set up international meetings to build a pan-European nuclear industry, develop a low-carbon energy mix, and maintain our leadership in a world undergoing a nuclear renaissance.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. The Crimean crisis: the energy challenges for Europe, Confrontations Europe conference, 25 April 2015.

## The demise of an Empire

While the tragedy in Ukraine is rooted in the history of its complex relationship with Russia<sup>4</sup>, the political upheaval it has triggered cannot be understood without retracing the relationship between Russia and the West<sup>5</sup>, the more recent one of the Second World War, and what happened when the Soviet Union ended. For Putin, this was the “biggest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century”. But, more fundamentally, did it not signify the demise of the third empire as Philippe Herzog suggests<sup>6</sup>, following that of the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish empires which, let’s not forget, caused the First World War? Putin got his war of succession when he bombed Ukraine, but it has wreaked geopolitical havoc. Our leaders must get a handle on this if they are to quell the “hysteria” fuelled by friction between the eastern and western blocs, and prevent systemic reactions.

We have wasted a lot of time. Back in 1990, Gorbachev was already inviting us to build “our common home”. Why, asks Jacques de Larosière, didn’t we grab the opportunity at the time? There is no evidence that the former head of the IMF was anti-American. However, according to him, the great and mighty United States of America, winner of the Cold War, did its utmost to “reduce, ridicule and marginalise Russia... out of vengeance and a desire to assert its superiority<sup>7</sup>”. He added that “in history as in life, you reap what you sow”. But what are we learning from history? When Henri Guaino warned “we are sleepwalking into war”, he reminded us of the humiliation imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles, which resulted in the Second World War. Bearing this in mind, President Macron’s warning that “humiliating Russia won’t bring peace” is commendable.

## There will be no winners

Yet, by excluding the Russians from the G20 and from large international institutions, and by trying to deprive them of their foreign exchange reserves, the USA means to bring the Russian economy to its knees... and humiliate Russia. By urging Europeans to increase their sanctions on Russia, by over-arming Ukraine and inviting all countries to reinforce NATO, they are using us. In a way, this is not hypocritical. We are at war. However, we are fighting remotely through a third party as it were: Ukraine. President Biden and the arms industry may come out winners in the short term, but that certainly won’t be the case for Europeans, any more than for the Russians and Ukrainians. They will be sucked dry, permanently damaged by hatred and tragedy. The world is dividing into blocs again. Africa is turning its back<sup>8</sup>, to the detriment of peace and global fraternity.

## The over-armament of Europe signifies the failure of European reconciliation

And those who think that the European Union will emerge stronger with a joint defence force are wrong<sup>9</sup>. In my view, over-arming the European Member States so that they can better “defend themselves” (against whom?) and “deter the enemy” (which enemy?) is not a good idea. Unlike NATO, which believes the current crisis has restored its original purpose, the Union does not have an operational structure. However, the Atlantic alliance, which is a legacy of the post-war period, cannot do without the United States<sup>10</sup>. Fearing Russia, some countries are even scurrying to sign bilateral defence agreements with the Americans – as Slovakia and Poland have done recently – or with the United Kingdom, or to buy fighter aircraft from them, like Germany. Our interests are not the same, and in fact we have very different views on the subject. The dividing lines are clear: the United States and some eastern European countries, such as Poland, do not want to give up on NATO.

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<sup>4</sup> See the memo by Armen Kagranov, policy officer at ASCPE, on *Les relations russo-ukrainiennes depuis leurs origines* [www.entretiens-europeens.org](http://www.entretiens-europeens.org); and the article by Jacky Fayolle on *L’Ukraine, nation d’Europe* <https://jackyfayolle.net/2022/03/24/ukraine-nation-deurope/#more-2742>.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Oleg Kobtzeff, *Les relations entre les États-Unis et la Russie : retour sur les trois dernières décennies*, Institut d’Études de Géopolitique Appliquée, Paris, 15 February 2022.

<sup>6</sup> The session of the film society “Open World, Regards croisés” at the Russia/Ukraine evening on 14 April 2022. [www.entretiens-europeens.org](http://www.entretiens-europeens.org).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. At the above-mentioned Russia/Ukraine evening on 14 April, Jacques de Larosière condemned Washington’s decision to liquidate Russian banks in European countries in 1993. Then Governor of the Bank of France, he refused to undermine the Banque du Nord, which owned Russian assets.

<sup>8</sup> It is shocking to see Ms Van Layen threaten African countries with cutting off their development aid unless they condemn Russia! A further opportunity to escape European dominance and prepare for the future independently of the major powers of the past. I am appalled to hear the West accuse Russia of starving African people. Africans have been dying of hunger and thirst for decades, while the West for the most part has stood by and watched.

<sup>9</sup> Without going into any detail here, I would just like to point out that the energy union – the purpose of which divides the Member States – will emerge further weakened from this period. The Member States are not championing the same interests. There are those who propose to “take advantage” of the oil and gas crisis to strengthen their energy mix with nuclear power, and those who want to diversify oil and gas supply sources (to the huge benefit of the USA) and, like Germany, recommission coal-fired power stations. It is within this context that I am organising the 20th edition of the *Entretiens Européens* in October 2022, on “The Geopolitics of Nuclear Energy in Europe”.

<sup>10</sup> The protection of the United States does not guarantee peace, and the Americans – who decimated Hiroshima and Nagasaki with a nuclear bomb, dropped napalm on Vietnam, and invaded Iraq but turned their backs on Afghanistan amid a serious political crisis – ought to make amends...



*La danse (the dance), 1910, Henri Matisse*

Because they feel threatened, Finland and Sweden are knocking on its door. France has proposed a security and defence architecture in which the European Union would be more independent, but Germany is undecided.

What will remain of European unity after the war? Are we ready to seriously consider the possibility of Ukraine joining the European Union? Some Europeans regret the accession of Hungary and Poland, allegedly because they do not have the same understanding of law and democracy as we do. Will they accept the Ukrainians, bearing in mind that they have a different culture, a different history, and no democratic traditions... We were unable to integrate the Balkans to stave off the return of nationalism following the break-up of Yugoslavia and the war that afflicted so many people – especially the Bosnians, against whom we shut our doors. Will we be prepared to welcome the Ukrainians or others, such as the Georgians?

### **Don't do anything irrevocable, and find a way back to peace**

To escape the spiral that is pulling us towards “full-blown war”, we must first understand what caused the war and avoid black and white thinking. The hostilities must not jeopardise the trust that will be needed in the future to sign a peace treaty and a regional “Minsk 3” agreement between the European Union, Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus and Turkey to ensure stability and solidarity<sup>11</sup>.

Achieving lasting peace will be a different matter. But it was our dream. Let's keep it alive. Shouldn't we think it is time for a global revival movement for peace and disarmament? And as Philippe Herzog invites us to do in his next essay<sup>12</sup>, “let's use our freedom to build a Federation defined by active non-alignment with the superpower rationale, which would pave the way for a global civilisation.” Let's join forces with civil society, which is less credulous than one might think, and initiate a dialogue and make new proposals for regional cooperation on specific reconstruction and development projects. Shouldn't we think it is time for a global revival movement for peace and disarmament? That is the driving force behind our commitment.

May,26 2022

<sup>11</sup> Isn't it incredible that Turkey has positioned itself as the only mediator between the Russians and the Ukrainians? Erdogan's government has been discredited by the genocidal crimes it has committed in Armenia despite the 1994 Bichkek Protocol, crimes which it is still committing today, again amid widespread indifference

<sup>12</sup> “Les failles de la raison”, to be published by Editions Descartes in September 2022.