two

the invention of peace

and the pursuit of prosperity

In Flanders fields the poppies still blow, between the crosses, row on row. Amid the flowering meadows around the small Flanders town of Ypres, there are more than 170 military cemeteries, an archipelago of perfectly manicured green lawns lined with row on row of crosses and memorial stones recording why soldiers from at least twenty different countries fought and died in the world wars there:

_Morts pour la France_
For King and Country
_Gestorven voor het vaderland_
_Deutschland muss leben_

For the merchants of Ypres, an ancient market center, the cemeteries are now the main source of income. The Belgian town has built a bustling economy around memories of war. This is fitting, because the broad valleys and long, steep hills of Flanders—stretching across northern France and southern Belgium from Dunkirk, on the Atlantic Coast, to Waterloo, some fifty miles inland—have served Europeans as battlefields for two thousand years. In all that time, the basic war plan has not changed: one army sets up on a high ridge, the other takes the opposite ridge, and the valley between them becomes a blood-drenched no-man’s-land.

Readers old enough to have gone to school when students still had to memorize the opening lines of Julius Caesar’s *Gallic Wars* will remember that Caesar himself went to war in Flanders. “Gallia est omnes divisa in partes tres,” Caesar began; “quorum unam incolunt Belgae” (“All Gaul is divided into three parts; one of those regions is inhabited by the Belgians”). The rest of Caesar’s great war journal has little to say about the fighting in Flanders—not surprisingly, because it was one part of Gaul that he never managed to conquer. The “Belgae,” arrayed on the northern ridge, rained so much damage upon the Roman legions in the wide valleys below that mighty Caesar was stopped in his tracks. Ever since, the fertile Flanders farmland has marked a dividing line between Roman and Germanic Europe. This is where the Latin-derived languages gradually give way to German and its low-country variants, Dutch and Flemish.

To this day, the maps and road signs of Flanders show two names for every town—one in French, the flower of the Romance languages, and the other in Flemish. If you go to Ypres to visit the cemeteries and the fine museum of warfare there, a sign at the edge of town welcomes you both to “Ypres” and to “Ieper.” The British soldiers who trooped in by the hundreds of thousands at the start of World War I did their best to pronounce that French name, “Ypres,” and ended up calling the town “Wipers.” They even published a newspaper called the _Wipers Times_.

Flanders went on to become a battleground, and effectively a burial ground, for a long series of would-be conquerors of Europe. The frustrations of the Spanish Hapsburgs as they tried in vain to maintain control of the low countries spawned a common Spanish aphorism, *Poner una pica en Flandes* (“To station a spearman in Flanders”), meaning to attempt too much, to reach too far. Napoleon’s final trip to the region in 1815 made the humdrum Belgian village of Waterloo a global synonym for crushing defeat.

The deadliest years in the long, bellicose history of Flanders came
during World War I, when the region known as the “Ypres salient” hosted the mother of all trench warfare. From 1914 to 1918 the opposing sides lobbed shells and grenades and poison gas back and forth across the muddy lowlands. This long exercise in futility left millions of young men blind or maimed and a half-million dead, but produced almost no military result for any of the armies involved. The toll of death and injury in the trenches of Flanders did help, though, to produce an even bloodier European war just twenty-one years later. Among the German victims at Ypres was a twenty-nine-year-old private first class named Adolf Hitler, who was caught in a British gas attack on October 13, 1918, and temporarily blinded. “I stumbled back with burning eyes,” Hitler recalled in his memoir, Mein Kampf, “taking with me my last regret of the war. A few hours later, my eyes had turned into burning coals.” The memory burned even hotter. “We do not pardon, we do not forget,” Hitler told the German people four years later. “We demand vengeance!”

The death and destruction of the Ypres salient also produced deathless literature, as doomed young men on both sides sat in the muddy trenches writing poetry that perfectly captured the horror and the grisly fascination of warfare. During its brief existence, the Wipers Times published such distinguished writers as Rupert Brooke, who fell in the first year of the war but left behind a classic lyric:

If I should die, think only this of me
That there’s some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware . . .

as well as his comrade Julian Grenfell, another casualty of 1915 who saw what was coming beforehand:

The thundering line of battle stands,
And in the air Death moans and sings;

But Day shall clasp him with strong hands
And Night shall fold him in his wings.

These voices from the Ypres salient are generally presented today as spokesmen of an antiwar sentiment. A few of them fit that description, such as Wilfred Owen, killed in the trenches fourteen days before the war ended (“What passing bells for these who die as cattle?/Only the monstrous anger of the guns”). But most of the battlefield poetry was about the rectitude of the war, the manly importance of the call to battle, and the glory of fighting for one’s country, native or adopted. Alan Seeger, an American poet living in Paris, signed up to fight for France within days of the outbreak of the war. He was killed by machine-gun fire at age twenty-eight, charging a German barricade. He probably died happy, for he had written that death in the Great War was his mission in life:

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade
When spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple blossoms fill the air.

. . . And I to my pledged word am true
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

The most famous battle poem to come out of the Flanders fields was an outright plea for more battle. Dr. John McCrae, a sometime poet assigned as a surgeon to the Canadian Army forces at Ypres, watched in agony as his troops were slaughtered and buried, day after day. On May 2, 1915, McCrae’s closest friend, Alexis Helmer, killed by a German chlorine gas attack, was buried under a white cross in a field of wildflowers beside the Canadian encampment. That evening, Colonel McCrae imagined the message Helmer would wish to convey to his fellow soldiers: Keep on fighting. McCrae worked through the night putting the
thought into poetry, creating a lyric that quickly became a global favorite and is still being anthologized around the world:

In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard among the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved. And now we lie
In Flanders Fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe!
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders Fields.

McCrae himself sleeps now in the same Flanders field, having succumbed to pneumonia in the last year of the war.

In twenty-first-century Europe, such nationalistic and belligerent attitudes are out of place; nobody today would see much glory in an admonition to “take up our quarrel with the foe,” particularly if the foe were a fellow European nation. The new pancontinental mindset is apparent at the war museum—it’s called the In Flanders Fields Museum—in downtown Ypres, where the suffering of soldiers from every country is recorded, with all nations treated equally and no suggestion that either side was right or wrong. The same universal antiwar sentiment comes through at the Menin Gate, a giant marble arch at the entrance to the town. Each evening at sunset, buglers from the Ypres fire brigade gather under the arch to play “The Last Post,” the European version of “Taps,” in memory of the fallen. The brief, sad ceremony draws thousands of people every night from all over Europe. Many of them cry as the bugles play. The mournful sobs and the ringing call of the horns rise up into the darkening Belgian sky, there to mingle with the spirits of tens of millions of innocents killed in the hot and cold wars of Europe’s lethal twentieth century.

But barely an hour’s drive across the Flanders fields rises a gleaming memorial to a new Europe in a new century. The relentlessly modern office towers of Brussels’ Quartier Européen house most of the major institutions of the European Union, the ambitious effort to create a continent so integrated, so connected, that war will be impossible. With the sidewalks full of sharply dressed Eurocrats racing back and forth among the Euro-agencies with their bulging briefcases, the European Quarter looks and feels like the seat of a major government. It brings to mind Washington’s Federal Triangle or London’s Whitehall or Tokyo’s Kasumigaseki, except that the buildings are newer and there are many more flags.

Just about any time you turn a corner in the EU section of Brussels, you come upon a forest of flags—twenty-five national flags, plus the EU’s blue banner with its circle of twelve gold stars. The flags flap in the wind at the entrance to each of the EU’s office buildings. For my money, the most attractive piece of architecture in Belgium’s sprawling EU quarter is the European Parliament, an imposing block-long structure with the requisite flags lined up outside a broad covered portico where important people—or at least, people who clearly think they are important people—continually step into and out of limousines.

That huge parliament and the other massive buildings of the Quartier Européen represent the concrete manifestation of an idea that has been floating around Europe for several centuries, a dream that gained strength each time the various countries went to war with one another.
This dream was identified by many names in many languages: The Idea of Europe. L'Europe. Pax Europe. A Common European Home. In 1916, in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, James Joyce gave the Idea of Europe an interesting name:

I’m a democrat and I will work and act for the social liberty and equality among all classes and sexes in the United States of the Europe of the future.

This suggests either that Joyce had an amazing talent for seeing into the geopolitical future, or that—as most scholars believe—he was simply engaging in typical Joycean wordplay.

In the years after World War I, as European leaders looked back in horror on the four years that had virtually eliminated a whole generation of the continent’s young men, the Idea of Europe had considerable appeal. The French foreign minister, Aristide Briand—a bold if somewhat unrealistic thinker whose other great idea was an international treaty in which all nations would renounce war forever—toured the continent with his proposal for “A Moral Union of Europe.” This European Union was to be made up initially of the twenty-seven continental members of the League of Nations; it would have a legislative body with members elected from every country, and an executive branch with pan-European jurisdiction. In the late 1920s, committees were formed and multinational conferences were gathered to forward the Briand plan. But then the Great Depression came along. Ex-PFC Hitler, with his demand for vengeance, started winning elections in Germany. Briand died in 1932, and his Moral Union died with him. Europe was quickly engulfed in preparations for yet another war. World War II would kill five times as many Europeans as World War I.

Amid the smoke and splinters of the blasted, impoverished continent that emerged from World War II, a group of visionaries from several countries took up anew the dream of a united Europe. A loose aggregation emerged of government leaders, academics, business leaders, and writers, known collectively as the European Movement. In essence, they offered a completely new approach to an ancient concept. The Romans had forged a united Europe with a conquering army and a genius for government. The Holy Roman Emperors, the Hapsburgs (both Austrian and Spanish), Napoleon, and Hitler all tried to unify Europe using force. The European Movement set out to do the same thing using the popular will. Their timing was perfect. The shock of a war that had killed some 55 million people, together with the ruin and hunger that came in its wake—even for the countries that won, rationing was stricter in the immediate postwar years that it had been during combat—made this old idea more palatable than ever before.

For Americans, who often think of the European Union as an economic entity, a free-trade zone and little more, it is easy to forget the moral passion and the enormous hunger for peace that motivated the union in the first place. The European Movement had massive support in Germany and Italy; among people who felt a painful guilt about the horrific war their nations had started. A group of German church leaders, led by the Reverend Martin Niemoller, drew up a formal “Declaration of Guilt” in late 1945; posted and read to the congregation at churches throughout the Axis nations, it promoted the notion that Germany and Italy must now seek reconciliation and common ground with the countries they had attacked in the war. Catholic priests and lay organizations across Europe and Protestant movements like Moral Rearmament also campaigned for a single Europe as a way to avoid the sin of mass killing in future wars.

The clarion voice advocating European unity as an essential antidote to further European wars was Winston Churchill. At the end of World War II, Churchill was revered all over Europe—all over the earth, for that matter—as the man who stood up to Adolph Hitler and rallied the free world to defeat the Nazi terror. Churchill, of course, was fully aware of his postwar stature. One day shortly after the war ended, his six-year-old grandson, Nicholas Soames, heard something astounding on the radio. He ran into Churchill’s study to confirm it. “Grandpapa,” the boy
asked, "is it true that you are the greatest man in the world?" Churchill, deeply engaged in official papers, looked up briefly from his desk and answered, "Yes—and now bugger off."1

In 1946, however, the greatest man in the world had time on his hands. Just seven weeks after Churchill stood on the balcony at Buckingham Palace on May 8, 1945, to receive the adulation of millions celebrating VE-day, the prime minister and his Conservative Party were booted out of office by a British electorate already looking ahead to postwar arrangements. Churchill was crushed. When his wife, Clementine, told the exhausted seventy-year-old war leader that the election defeat might be a blessing in disguise, Churchill famously replied, "At the moment, my dear, it's certainly very well disguised."

Voted out of office, Churchill turned to work on his multivolume history of the war. With a cigar in his mouth and a team of stenographers on hand around the clock, he walked back and forth across the floor of his study, dictating each sentence of the book in rhythmic bursts that matched his paces.

In addition to his six-volume memoir of the war years, Churchill spent his postwar days looking ahead at Europe's future. He did not like what he saw. In one of those classic rhythmic sentences of his, he captured the brutal state of the continent after the war: "What is Europe? A rubble heap, a charnel house, a breeding ground for pestilence and hate." The Soviet Union's seizure of the eastern countries had divided the continent. The rubble, pestilence, and hate left over from the six years of all-out conflict seemed likely to spawn even more war. Something had to be done.

Churchill addressed these concerns in two famous speeches in 1946. For Americans, the better known of the two was the "iron curtain" speech in Fulton, Missouri, deploring the division between the Communist East of Europe and the (mainly) democratic West:

From Stettin on the Baltic to Trieste on the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals

of the ancient states of central and Eastern Europe—Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest, and Sofia. . . . This is certainly not the liberated Europe we fought to build up.

For Europeans, though—and for the purposes of this book—the most important Churchillian address of 1946 by far came on September 19, at Zurich. "I wish to speak to you today about the tragedy of Europe," the great orator began. He went on to lay out for a European audience, in that powerful rhythmic prose of his, the plight of the postwar continent. "Over wide areas a vast quivering mass of tormented, hungry, care-worn, and bewildered human beings gape at the ruins of their cities and homes, and scan the dark horizons for the approach of some new peril, tyranny, or terror. Among the victors there is a babel of jarring voices; among the vanquished the sullen silence of despair. That is all that Europeans, grouped in so many ancient states and nations, that is all that the Germanic powers have got by tearing each other to pieces and spreading havoc far and wide."

But Churchill had not traveled to Zurich simply to spread the word of doom. Rather, he promised a cure that would transform "as if by a miracle" the tragic state of postwar Europe. "What is this sovereign remedy?" Churchill went on. "It is to re-create the European Family, or as much of it as we can, and provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety, and in freedom."

The model for the structure Churchill had in mind was readily available for all to see: "The great Republic across the Atlantic Ocean." Europe had to become more like the United States of America, he argued. If Americans from places as distant and diverse as Texas and Massachusetts, Alabama and Oregon, could feel a shared sense of citizenship within their national framework, then surely Europeans could form their own 'national grouping.' "Why should there not be," Churchill went on, "a European group which could give a sense of shared patriotism and common citizenship to the distracted peoples of this turbulent and
mighty continent? And why should it not take its rightful place with other great groupings in shaping the destinies of men?"

In short, Churchill told his fellow Europeans, the pathway to a future of peace and prominence on the world stage was clear: "We must build a kind of United States of Europe."

For some Europeans, there were problems with Churchill's prescription. He insisted that the French would have to set aside their burning hatred for the Germans who had attacked Le Belle France twice in a short generation. "In this way only can France recover the moral leadership of Europe." He was right, of course, but it was still hard medicine for the embittered French, barely a year after the end of the war. Beyond that, Churchill didn't quite make it clear whether he expected Great Britain to play a role in his new United States of Europe, and that raised suspicions among the other countries. Was this just a British trick? (In Britain, the Eurosclerosis and the Euroseptics are arguing to this day about what Churchill had in mind about Britain's role in the new "United States.")

Overall, though, this forceful, ambitious, and optimistic vision of a united Europe, coming from the most respected leader on the continent, had an electrifying effect on a battered and war-weary people. It gave a huge burst of momentum to the nascent European Movement. Now a group of leaders in various countries began organizing and planning ways to create the new united states.

In addition to Churchill, the founding fathers of the European Union included political and religious figures from all of the countries that had suffered from Europe's assorted wars. Most were Roman Catholic, and they were largely motivated by a sense that Europe must regain its moral basis. The French statesman Robert Schuman had been a resistance leader against the Nazis; after the war, his countrymen thanked him repeatedly at the ballot box, twice choosing him as prime minister. The Belgian Paul-Henri Spaak held every senior post in his nation's government before and after the war; he was the first president of the United Nations General Assembly, in 1946, and decided that Europe needed the same kind of cooperative energy that had forged the UN.

Alcide de Gasperi was an anti-Fascist Italian who served as prime minister several times in Italy's constantly morphing postwar governments.

The German Konrad Adenauer had spent much of the war in a Nazi prison because he was suspected (accurately) of anti-Hitler sentiments. When he became the first chancellor of the new West Germany, he felt acutely Germany's need to express and demonstrate its remorse for what the nation had done to its European neighbors. The Spaniard Salvador de Madariaga, exiled because he dared to speak out publicly against his country's dictator, Francisco Franco, adopted the slogan "Fiat Europae!" or "Let there be one Europe!" The Spaniard was perhaps the most ambitious of all in his plan for a continent free of borders, both political and mental: "When Spaniards say 'our Chartres,' Englishmen say 'our Czestow,' Italians say 'our Copenhagen' and and Germans say 'our Brussels'... Then Europe will live."

If Winston Churchill was the voice of the United States of Europe, the pragmatic engineer who designed and built the foundations of this new political entity was a brandy salesman from the town of Cognac, France. Jean Monnet has often been called "the father of Europe." Not a man to hog the spotlight, Monnet himself spurned that title, but there's a good case to be made that he earned it. The young Monnet dropped out of high school at the age of sixteen to become a salesman for the family vineyard, J. G. Monnet Cognac. As the best English speaker in the company, he was dispatched to Britain, Canada, and the United States on sales missions at the start of the twentieth century. As he was packing for his first trip to London in 1904, his father offered some practical advice: "Don't take books. Your job is to talk to people."

In those foreign markets, the salesman from J. G. Monnet found his minuscule family firm competing against such titans of the cognac trade as Hennessy and Martell. And yet he found a pervasive atmosphere of cooperation among all the companies, large and small. By working together, Monnet noted in his memoirs, instead of constantly fighting, the cognac makers created a more prosperous, and a gentler, existence for everyone. Why couldn't nations learn the same lesson?
Charming, gregarious, a connoisseur of fine wine and cheese, Monnet was the kind of person who became friendly with everyone—including almost everyone who mattered in global affairs in the 1930s. Moving from the cognac business to international banking, he developed good working relationships with Franklin D. Roosevelt, Walter Lippmann, Philip and Katharine Graham, Churchill, Adenauer, Charles de Gaulle, and a host of other political and journalistic luminaries. During World War II, he did some ghostwriting for his friend the president of the United States; Monnet coined the description of the United States as the “Arsenal of Democracy,” a ringing phrase that Roosevelt used to convince isolationist Americans that the States should help the anti-Nazi cause in Europe.

Even before the war ended, Monnet was giving speeches in Britain arguing that “a European entity, encompassing a common economic unit” was essential to create a cooperative atmosphere and avoid further mass slaughter on the continent. After VE-day, he went back to France and began working for a communal Europe.

For Monnet and the other visionaries, Churchill’s great speech in Zurich served as the starting gun for a marathon run toward the goal of a united, communal Europe. For all the zeal and commitment, though, the first few years were unimpressive. A “Congress of Europe” was convened, with maximum hoopla, in The Hague in May 1948, featuring Winston Churchill as chairman and another inspiring Churchillian address to set the tone:

We must proclaim the mission and the design of a United Europe, whose moral conception will win the respect and gratitude of mankind. I hope to see a Europe where men and women of every country will think of being European, and wherever they go in this wide domain will truly feel, “Here I am at home.”

Out of the The Hague conference came a liaison committee, formally named “the European Movement,” and two meetings of a new “Council of Europe Assembly” at Strasbourg—that handsome city on the German-French border was picked because it had fallen to the opposing side, and thus changed its nationality, six times in the various wars between France and Germany from 1870 to 1945. These sessions were supposed to set the stage for a pan-European parliament. But the Strasbourg assembly turned out to be little more than a debating society. One of its key ideas, the creation of a European Defense Community—or “a unified European Army,” as Churchill bluntly described it—never got off the ground and was forgotten by the mid-1950s.

These high-minded meetings, and the high-flown rhetoric they generated, served a purpose by committing political leaders across Europe to the ideal of a pancontinental union. But they didn’t produce any practical result, in the 1940s at least. Rather, the major impetus for European unity in the half decade after the war came largely from the United States—a fact that many Europeans choose not to remember today.

Looking across the Atlantic at the “rubble heap” of postwar Europe, Harry Truman’s secretary of state, George C. Marshall, created a “European Recovery Program”—more commonly known as the Marshall Plan—to finance European economic recovery. The fund paid out more than $12 billion between 1947 and 1951. The Marshall Plan also set up a coordinating committee, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which forced the World War II combatants to work together on postwar development.

The Marshall Plan was breathtaking in its sheer scope; the total fund was the equivalent of hundreds of billions of dollars in today’s money. But the genuinely shocking facet of the American largesse was its evenhandedness. Marshall insisted that the money was to be shared among victors, vanquished, and neutrals. The Soviets refused to let their puppet nations east of the iron curtain accept the money, a key reason that Eastern Europe to this day has been unable to match the wealth and industrial might of the West. As the United States was sending those billions to Europe, Washington was also pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into the reconstruction of war-shattered Japan, a nation that had mounted a sneak attack on U.S. soil just five years earlier.
These huge grants of American aid to nations that had recently been bitter enemies were impelled somewhat by self-interest—the United States saw both Japan and Western Europe as bulwarks against the spread of communism—but also by a fundamentally generous spirit, a sense among the American people of a rich nation’s responsibility to assist the poor. The notion of paying Germany to rebuild its industrial base particularly rankled the French; but Paris had to accept the American rules in order to get its share of Marshall aid. In Britain, the concept of Americans paying the nations that had attacked them prompted a small gem of the silver screen, *The Mouse That Roared*. In that film, Peter Sellers plays the prime minister of a small, impoverished European nation that declares war on the United States so that it, too, can cash in after the inevitable defeat and surrender. (Naturally, things go awry; Sellers and the Army of Grand Fenwick accidentally capture New York.)

In addition to this forced economic cooperation, the United States showed the Europeans how to work together on military and security concerns as well with the creation of NATO in 1949, linking West European nations with the United States and Canada in a common defense alliance. NATO successfully fulfilled its chief function, which was to deter the Soviet bloc from making war on Western Europe. Beyond that, it served another valuable purpose. Although France has never been comfortable about NATO—particularly since West Germany was admitted, in 1955—the organization demonstrated that bitter adversaries in the two world wars could cooperate on military matters.

While all this made-in-the-USA cooperation was proceeding in the late 1940s, Jean Monnet and his friends in the European Movement were looking for ideas, processes, mechanisms—basically anything that would forge voluntary alliances among European states. As Monnet wrote, the first step down the path of unity would be crucial; if it went smoothly, it could lead, over time, to a broad range of cooperative endeavors in Europe—economic, military, cultural, and governmental. Monnet, the visionary, had ideas for Europe so ambitious that even his fellow founding fathers thought them hopeless. As early as 1949, Monnet was openly talking about a European Parliament, a European court system to enforce a Europe-wide bill of rights, a tariff-free trade market, a common antitrust czar, borderless travel, and even a common currency. Anybody could see the man was daft.

But what should the first step be? Monnet knew that it had to involve some limitation on military power, because the immense public desire to avoid more wars was the strongest force driving the concept of a union. The program had to involve economic cooperation and a joint governmental apparatus, to show the Europeans that such common institutions could be made to work. The arrangement would have to involve both Germany and France, the chief antagonists in Europe’s last three wars. If two or three other nations could be induced to sign up as well, all the better. And the plan needed the personal endorsement of a respected national leader.

In the spring of 1950, an opportunity came along, and Monnet jumped at it. The West German economy was reviving. Adenauer’s government, with the backing of the United States and Britain, was eager to restart the great steel mills of the Ruhr and Saar valleys. This prospect both tempted and terrified Germany’s neighbors. For the impoverished western regions of France and Belgium, the chance to sell coal in huge quantities to those German mills was tantalizing. For the struggling ports of Holland, German steel production promised a shipping boom. And yet the French, Belgians, and Dutch remembered all too well the shells and planes and Panzer tanks that had come out of the Ruhr and Saar the last time the Germans rebuilt their industrial base. Why let them do it again? Policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic looked at this dispute and saw a painful dilemma. The ever-inventive Jean Monnet looked at the same issue and saw the opening he had been waiting for.

A meeting among the French, British, and American governments was scheduled for May 10, 1950, to resolve the German steel question. Schuman, then the French foreign minister, went to his friend Monnet, desperate for a solution. Monnet sketched out a plan for a French-German industrial combine, with coal mining and steel production in
both countries put under the control of a joint authority. In essence, France could sell its coal and Germany could build its steel, but the cross-border governing board would see to it that neither commodity could be used for any military purpose. It was a plan for profits and for peace at the same time.

Schuman quickly saw the genius in Monnet’s idea. “Out of this,” he said when he read the proposal, “will come forth Europe, a solid and united Europe.” Monnet’s plan not only solved the immediate problem of German steel production; it could also serve as the genesis of economic and governmental cooperation that could eventually lead to the dream of “L’Europe.” With the media clamoring to know where France would stand at the May 10 meeting, Schuman called a press conference.

With Monnet at his side, the foreign minister set forth his ideas. This “Schuman Declaration” was so expansive, so ambitious—and, as it turned out, so accurate—that the text has become a sort of Declaration of Independence for the European Union. Just as Americans celebrate the declaration of 1776 with parties, picnics, and fireworks every July 4, the people of Europe today celebrate the declaration of 1950 with parties, picnics, and fireworks every May 9. The anniversary of the Schuman Declaration is feted in much of the continent as Europe Day—Europatag, Festa dell’ Europe, Le Jour d’Europe, and so on in over a dozen languages. (The British, still skittish about their connection with the union, make a careful practice of ignoring the celebrations altogether.)

Schuman met the assembled reporters on May 9, beneath the ornate chandeliers of an elegant chamber at the quai d’Orsay. He set forth Monnet’s novel solution to the steel production issue: “Le Gouvernement Français propose de placer l’ensemble de la production franco-allemande de charbon et d’acier sous une Haute Autorité commune.” (“The government of France proposes that French and German production of coal and steel should be placed under the control of a common authority.”) Other European countries would be invited to join the combined operation. This would teach France and Germany how to work with, rather than against, each other, Schuman said. Beyond that, it would eliminate the risk of unilateral military production on either side: “The solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible.”

But before the press could begin asking questions, Schuman offered an even more ambitious idea—a vastly broader vision of a united continent, with wartime adversaries joined together in a “European Federation” with a common economic system and unified political institutions. It was not a goal that would be achieved overnight, he added, but rather piece by piece, treaty by treaty, over a period of years or decades. In a statement that proved amazingly prescient about the next half century of unification, Schuman added: “The single Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single comprehensive plan. Rather, it will be built through a series of concrete achievements, each of which will create a de facto solidarity.”

Within days of this pronouncement, other European coal- and steel-producing nations asked to be included in the new communal undertaking. By the time the formal treaty creating the organization was signed the following spring, the new European Coal and Steel Community had six members: France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. (In a response that would typify London’s attitude toward European unity for the next fifty years, the British had an anguished debate over whether or not to join, finally decided to stay out, and eventually petitioned for membership ten years later, when the Coal and Steel Community had grown into a full-fledged Common Market.) The “Haute Autorité,” or High Commission, that managed the business was headed by Jean Monnet. The board of directors was an assembly of members appointed by the governments of each of the six countries.

As was predictable at a time when war-torn countries were furiously rebuilding, the coal and steel operation at the heart of Western Europe was a rip-roaring economic success. That prompted the member nations to expand the cooperative concept until it applied to all commercial and economic activity. In the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the six countries
formed the European Economic Community, popularly known as the Common Market, characterized by the elimination of all import tariffs, a common set of trade rules, and harmonized planning for transportation, agriculture, and taxes. That 1957 treaty was the source of three little words that have proven an accurate description of the sometimes sporadic European movement for the past half century: "ever closer union." There has been a clear momentum driving the nations and people of Europe closer, ever closer; and this momentum has so far proven strong enough to overcome almost every obstacle and argument against a closer union.

In the half century following the Schuman Declaration, "L'Europe" developed a bewildering network of councils, courts, commissions, and conferences (as we shall see in appendix 2). But the basic outlines of pan-European organization held fairly closely to the pattern Jean Monnet had designed for the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950. Just as Monnet's operation paid its own way, the European institutions today have their own dedicated revenue source—a value-added tax, or sales tax, assessed in each member nation—so that the union doesn't have to rely on voluntary contributions from governments. The underlying economic theory is that a sales tax, which is a tax on consumption, can be tolerated even in high-tax European countries because it does not penalize investment or production, the way income taxes might. Today that tax funds an annual EU budget well over $100 billion. Monnet's "Haute Autorité" has morphed over the years into the European Commission, the EU's cabinet, with members owing their allegiance not to their home countries but to Europe as a whole. That first multinational assembly has become the European Parliament, with members democratically elected from each country and aligned in a melange of political parties and groupings ranging from far right to far, far left.

As Schuman had foreseen, the growth from a coal and steel trading organization with six members to an economic, political, and cultural union of half a billion people did not happen all at once, or according to a single, comprehensive plan. For the first three decades or so of the community's existence, there was considerably more movement toward union on the economic front than in the area of shared governmental duties.

In the years following the Schuman Declaration, the European Movement took the continent by storm. To the hungry, chilly, deprived millions still suffering from the last war and worrying increasingly about the next one, the ideal of a "common European home" had enormous appeal. The "Idea of Europe" spread across the Atlantic and found forceful support in the United States—partly for the same pacifist, ideological reasons that made it so attractive to Europeans, and partly out of sheer realpolitik: for Washington, a unified Western Europe could be a strong ally in the struggle against the Soviets and their Eastern bloc. "Far from resenting the rise of a united Europe," President John F. Kennedy explained in 1962, "this country welcomes it—a New Europe of equals instead of rivals, instead of the old Europe torn by national and personal animosities." Just like Churchill, Kennedy saw the new United States of Europe as a sort of latter-day replica of the United States of America. As the Europeans struggled to come up with a mechanism for governing a continent, Kennedy said, "the debate now raging in Europe echoes on a grand scale the debates which took place among the American states between 1783 and 1789." In some instances, in fact, the debates were almost precisely the same, including the difficult question of how to balance the authority of large states with small ones in a federal union.

Initially, Europe's founding fathers hoped to build their new continent in many spheres at the same time. Just as Schuman's Coal and Steel Community was planned as both an economic and a political union that would necessarily force joint action in defense as well, the New Europe was supposed to develop as an economic, governmental, legal, and military combination. In fact, those four strands did not progress together. Schuman's famous prediction—"The single Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single comprehensive plan"—turned out to be exactly right. Beginning with the six-nation coal-and-steel combination,
the economic integration of Europe moved ahead faster and further than did the legal, military, or political track. For more than thirty years, in fact, the industrial and financial “community” was the heart of the European project; it wasn’t until the last decade or so of the twentieth century that the member nations made real progress in forging a pancontinental governmental structure.

There were several reasons why European integration advanced most quickly on the economic front.

For one thing, the development of political structures to govern a collection of sovereign states was difficult—just as it had been for the American states in the 1780s—because nobody knew quite how much sovereignty the individual members would surrender to the collective whole. Many of the founding fathers of united Europe—Monnet, Schuman, Spaak—were eager to form a “supranational” government that would effectively take over control from the nation-states and their parliaments. The political leaders of the nation-states, predictably, were less willing to cede national power to a central governing body. While Monnet and his ilk were dreaming out loud about a federal government for all Europe, leaders like Charles de Gaulle envisioned a Europe des patries—a Europe of cooperating, but not submissive, nations. As John F. Kennedy foresaw, it would take decades of debate to resolve these issues—or, more precisely, to begin to resolve them. To this day, Europeans are arguing about the relative powers of the individual countries and the overall union.

In contrast, Europeans had fewer scruples about cooperation in finance and industry. Since the Industrial Revolution, the nations of Europe had in fact led the world in devising international agreements necessary to make commerce and industry work across national borders. The International Postal Union, the International Conference for Promoting Technical Uniformity in Railroads, the International Meteorological Association, the International Congress of Actuaries, the International Association of Accountancy, the Committee for the Unification of Maritime Law—all these were European projects, with the lesser industrial powers like the United States and Japan admitted more or less as a courtesy. That’s why the global standards of weight and measurement are maintained to this day in Paris. That’s why the system of international timekeeping, necessitated by the advent of high-speed railroads and steamships, is based on an imaginary line that runs through London—the Greenwich Meridian.

Moreover, industrial leaders saw fairly quickly that a single market spanning the continent would greatly expand business opportunities. As the job of clearing away the postwar “rubble heap” and the rebuilding of shattered cities proceeded, the separate economies of Germany, France, Italy, the low countries, and Britain all soared. The twenty years following the war were described just about identically in many languages, from Britain’s postwar miracle to Italy’s miracolo to Germany’s Wirtschaftswunder. The confidence that came from that hefty industrial rebirth, together with the strong economic success of Monnet’s Coal and Steel Community, made it easier for the separate nations to contemplate a single, borderless European market.

The major motivations for economic integration, though, were developments far from the European mainland.

Across the Atlantic, the American industrial juggernaut raced ahead with the postwar boom, and the United States displaced all the great economies of Europe to rank firmly as the richest nation on earth. This was a jarring change for European countries that had ranked as the richest in the world for centuries. The United States, once a reliable customer for European industrial production, now emerged as a formidable competitor. If France, or Germany, or Britain hoped to regain their prewar economic dominance, they could only do so by working together. By itself, Great Britain couldn’t begin to match the industrial might of the United States; but working in a combination with the other great industrial and financial powers of Europe, Britain—or at least, Britain-in-Europe—could again be a contender.

The emergence of the United States as the world’s leading industrial nation was hardly a surprising development. The global development that did surprise the Europeans, though, was the end of the Age of
Empire. Even a statesman as insightful as Winston Churchill failed to
see it coming. When British liberals argued, at the end of World War II,
that the colonial era was a relic of history, Churchill huffed and puffed
and issued a famous denial: “I did not become His Majesty’s First Min-
ister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.” How wrong
he was.

For five hundred years—ever since the intrepid fifteenth-century Por-
tuguese explorers were dispatched by Prince Henry the Navigator—the
nations of Europe had been conquering, Christianizing, governing, and
looting vast areas of the world. They contested openly with each other for
the title of greatest imperial power, and that dubious honor passed
around freely. Political theorists have often noted the reverse correlation
between the size of the “mother country” and the reach of its empire: the
smaller the homeland, it seemed, the bigger the colonial horde. For about
a century, Portugal, a postage-stamp principality at the edge of Europe,
rang the world’s largest empire. The Netherlands, another vest-pocket
nation, had a turn at the top of the ladder, as did Spain. Next came
Britain, a compact island not much larger than Portugal. Despite the
early embarrassment of losing its chief American colony to a revolution,
the island nation collected the largest global empire in history and held
on to most of it for the better part of two centuries.

Over the centuries, eight European nations became major players in
the game of empire. And then, in less than a single human lifetime, the
game abruptly came to end.

- Germany lost its African colonies in the peace settlement follow-
ing World War I.
- Italy lost Abyssinia (now known as Ethiopia) with its defeat in
World War II.
- Spain collected an empire that covered most of Central and
South America and scattered places in Asia. The Spanish Em-
pire was essentially over by the end of the nineteenth century,
although Spain to this day still asserts a claim to some slivers of
African land on the northern coast of Morocco.
- The Portuguese Empire, roughly one hundred times the land
area of Portugal at its greatest extent, was the earliest European
colonial regime, and the latest. Portugal lost its African colonies
in the mid-1970s, and finally gave up its last handful of Asian
soil, Macao, in 1999.
- The Dutch Empire, at one point fifty-five times bigger than the
Netherlands, was taken over in 1942 by the Japanese, who care-
fully studied European colonial methodology and then bested
their teachers in the first months of World War II. The Dutch
organized local resistance movements in Indonesia to fight Japan,
telling these native fighters that they were battling for “libera-
tion.” As soon as Japan surrendered, Dutch governors showed up
again in Jakarta to reassert their authority. But the Indonesians,
now sold on the concept of liberation, were no longer willing to
be colonists. The Dutch departed for good in 1950.
- Belgium controlled a swath of Africa roughly eighty times as big
as Belgium, but lost its last foreign holding in 1960, when the
Belgians could no longer hold back the freedom fighters in the
Belgian Congo.
- France, with foreign colonies twenty times as large as France
itself, fought and lost a series of colonial wars following World
War II. Paris gave up in Southeast Asia in the 1950s; the north
and central African colonies peeled off in the 1960s.
- The British Empire, on which the sun never set, was already
shaky before World War II, and fell apart fairly quickly there-
after. Like the Dutch, the British had recruited local fighters to
overthrow the Japanese conqueror in East Asia—and then found
these locals resistant to British control as well. The power and
success of Gandhi’s revolt inspired not only India but a dozen
other British colonies to demand their independence. In 1997,
when the British finally handed the island of Hong Kong back to China, the scene of the Union Jack being hauled down over the last real colony sparked national celebrations in China, and national trauma in the U.K. The “liquidation of the British Empire” was complete. It was a blessing, in a sense, that Churchill did not live to see that last colonial flag come down.

Whether set forth in the blunt British rationale—“the white man’s burden”—or the elegant French formulation—mission civilisatrice—the official European explanation for these centuries of European domination tended to be that the colonial rulers just wanted to help. A more cynical, and probably more accurate, summary of the imperial impulse can be found in the mnemonic device used by generations of freshmen cramming for the final in European History 101: the colonists were driven by gold, God, and glory. The colonies provided a cheap, reliable source of profitable commodities—not just gold, but silver, iron, coal, corn, coffee, tobacco, palm oil, citrus—and they made a lucrative captive market for manufactured goods from the ruling power. But selfishness was not the whole story. The missionary impulse was also strong for most of the European colonists; there were few who doubted that spreading the one true faith to “lesser breeds without the law” was an admirable calling.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, there was patriotic glory. A colonial empire was crucial in terms of national prestige; by the second half of the nineteenth century, no self-respecting European power felt complete unless it held dominion over palm and pine in some distant corner of the planet. The lust for colonial glory was most evident in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. Having suffered the ignominy of defeat, Paris set out to find something its army could conquer. Over the next thirty years, the French grabbed a series of new colonies in Africa as well as the region that came to be known (in the West, at least) as French Indochina. These colonial holdings almost certainly cost the French far more, both in francs and in blood, than they ever produced. But nobody paid much attention to that minor shortcoming. By extending its tendrils across the map of the world, France had once again proven itself to be a great power.

Even today, when the Age of Empire is generally viewed as a lamentable chapter in world history, the glory years of foreign domination can still evoke satisfying memories for the nations of Europe. The capital cities of all the former imperial powers are cluttered with heroic statues marking the conquest of one province or the defeat of a rebellion in another, and many Europeans clearly like seeing those bronze and marble memorials of their former global sway. When the mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, proposed that the statues of British colonial heroes in Trafalgar Square were out of place in twenty-first-century Britain and should be replaced with more up-to-date figures—Livingstone even suggested a statue of Gandhi—the idea was shouted down in short order. In 2003, some four decades after Belgium surrendered its colonies, I went to Brussels’ legendary nightclub, the Ancienne Belgique, to hear an African jazz singer named Barly Baruti. Introducing himself, Baruti told the audience that he came from “a country that now calls itself the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Before that, it was Zaire. Before that, it was the Republic of Congo. And before that, it was the Belgian Congo.” With this reminder of the days when their nation owned a hunk of central Africa, the Belgian crowd burst proudly into applause.

The loss of empire, then, brought with it not only the loss of a key trading market but also the demise of a certain stature, a certain sense of importance on the world stage, that had marked Europe’s long colonial era. Looking for a new source of trading income and a new platform from which to reclaim their former global eminence, the former colonial powers found both gold and glory in their new European Union.

As we have seen, the first postwar venture in economic cooperation, the European Coal and Steel Community, turned into a runaway success, partly because of Jean Monnet’s adroit leadership and partly because a continent rebuilding itself after a horrific war was a perfect place to sell vast quantities of coal and steel. By the mid-1950s, with the community racing ahead, the six member nations (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium,
the Netherlands, and Luxembourg) were ready, indeed eager, to expand their cooperative endeavors. The creation of the Common Market—formally, the European Economic Community—in 1957 put the six on a path toward a single trade market with no internal tariffs and common laws on taxation, wages and hours, workplace safety, and so on. Because France in the 1950s already had a national law requiring equal pay for men and women, the French demanded that the other five members do the same; thus the Common Market's regulation on gender equality became a key model for the burgeoning feminist movement in the United States and other countries. The Common Market also endorsed a French-style farm subsidy program, with revenues from industrial growth guaranteeing steady prices and income for farmers in all the member nations. The European Economic Community, and its continuing drive toward "ever closer union," was so successful that other European nations came knocking at the door. At first French strongman Charles de Gaulle—who tended to see a united Europe primarily as a tool for advancing the interests of his own country—blackballed the outsiders. He vetoed the applications of Norway, Britain, Denmark, and Ireland. Norway, bolstered by the promise of immense wealth from newly discovered oil reserves in the North Sea, decided not to renew its application, and has remained outside the EU ever since. Britain was finally admitted in 1973, along with Ireland and Denmark. After Greece, Spain, and Portugal threw over their dictators—a popular democracy with a free market and guaranteed civil liberties was a requirement for entry—they, too, were admitted. With the addition of Austria, Finland, and Sweden, the original six had become fifteen by 1995, comprising most of the major nations of Western Europe and five of the world's ten richest nations.

For all the EU's economic success, the humanistic impulses that had driven its founding fathers were still paramount; the continent-wide conviction that working together was better than fighting against each other remained the strongest bond pulling Europe together. The moral aspect of European unity was powerfully revived by the historic transformation of 1989–91, when the Soviet Union collapsed and its unwilling satellites in Eastern Europe were suddenly freed. The end of the cold war happened so quickly that people and politicians on both sides of the iron curtain were left up in the air about its meaning. For one man, that metaphor was literally true: cosmonaut Sergei Krikalyev, who blasted into Earth orbit in 1991 to board the Soviet space station. Within weeks, he was a spaceman without a country. While poor Krikalyev was circling the planet, the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. When he returned to Earth in early 1992, the landing zone at what had been the USSR's space center was in an independent nation, Kazakhstan.

Gradually, a new sense of possibility began to emerge from chaos. The collapse of the Soviet empire, and the creation of more than a dozen newly independent states on European soil, inspired a new vision for European leaders—the dream of a continent completely united, from the Arctic Circle to the Azores, from Galway Bay to the banks of the Volga. As in the first days of European unity after World War II, religious figures played a key role in promoting this ambitious idea. A spiritual leader from the Eastern bloc (Poland) whose work had taken him to the west (Rome) was a key advocate of bringing the eastern states into the western union. "Europe has two lungs," Pope John Paul II preached. "It will never breathe naturally until it uses both of them." The rapid reunification of Germany, which went forward virtually without dissent despite an enormous fiscal burden for the prosperous West Germans, served as a model and an inspiration. "We are all Germans, after all," said the West German chancellor. In the same sense, the people of east and west were all Europeans, after all.

Since the days of Jean Monnet, European leaders had been arguing about the right way to expand the community of nations. The question came down to "broader" vs. "deeper." Advocates of a deeper expansion wanted the existing nations to expand the authority of the combined European government into new areas of policy first, and then reach out
to new members. The “broader” school called for sweeping more and more of Europe into the union first, and then adding to the powers of the collective entity. The collapse of the Berlin Wall more or less resolved this question by propelling both views forward. In the 1990s the EU became both broader and deeper. On the “deeper” side, the member states agreed to the common currency, the single central bank, borderless travel, uniform food and health regulations, and numerous other changes that increased the power of the EU government in Brussels and decreased the power of the national members to govern these issues individually. At the same time, the fifteen members opened their arms to their eastern cousins to make their union broader by taking in new member states.

Candidate countries had to accept endless conditions. Any would-be EU member was required to guarantee its citizens a popularly elected government, the full range of civil liberties set forth in the far-reaching European Convention on Human Rights, and a free-market economy. The applicants also had to agree to give up their national currencies in favor of the euro, and to incorporate some 80,000 pages of EU law—a package known as the aquis communautaire, or “common agreement”—into their own statute books. They had to accept most aspects of the generous European welfare state, the EU’s tough environmental laws and Western-style protections for criminal defendants, and they had to promise visa-free entry for anyone coming from another EU country. Most of the candidates, particularly those shaking off fifty years of Communist rule, were delighted to commit to these changes. The civil liberties requirement posed a serious problem to Turkey, which applied time and again for membership and was turned down on grounds that its human rights record was not up to EU standards.

In May 2004, ten new countries were formally inducted into the European Union. Seven of the new members—the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and the Slovak Republic—were former Soviet satellites. Slovenia was the wealthiest of the new nations formed when Yugoslavia split up. The final two members were small island nations in the Mediterranean, Malta and Cyprus. They were all eager to join the club; nine of the new members held referenda before signing up, and EU membership was approved by comfortable margins in each country.

To accommodate the newcomers, the EU expanded its list of official languages to include Czech, Latvian, Estonian, and so on, creating a fairly ludicrous situation in which every official meeting and most official documents had to be rendered simultaneously in twenty different languages. If nothing else, the European Union has been a fantastic employment boon for interpreters and translators. The union did not, however, change its flag to mark the expansion. The familiar design, a circle of twelve gold stars on a deep blue background—it was created in 1987, when the union had twelve members—did not expand to twenty-five stars. The notion of adding a star for each new member of the union was contemplated for a while, but adding a star was considered the American approach to flag architecture, and the United States of Europe is not inclined to take its cues from the United States of America.

The expansion to twenty-five member nations finally pushed the EU to take a long, hard look at its governing institutions, which had not changed in their basic outline since Jean Monnet first chaired a six-nation community of coal and steel producers. The EU set up a constitutional convention, with 105 delegates from twenty-eight countries (the twenty-five members plus three applicant countries not yet admitted), to design a new architecture for post-European government. As we’ll see in appendix 2, the constitution sparked some bitter disputes. Final ratification was stalled for many months by an argument—familiar to anyone who has studied the disputes that wrecked America’s convention in 1789—over how to allocate power among the big and the small member states. But in the end the convention did a reasonably good job.

The chairman of this rather unwieldy body was the former French premier Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, a smooth charmer with a sharp sense of history. M. Giscard constantly compared his convention to the representatives of thirteen confederated states who had gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 to write a constitution for the new United States of America.
The European newspapers loved this comparison, and regularly illustrated their stories about the convention’s discussions with the somber Junius Stearns oil painting of 1787, *George Washington Addressing the Constitutional Convention*. Giscard’s initial draft even proposed that the EU formally change its name to the United States of Europe, but this idea was rejected in the end—probably because it sounded too American.

In 2002 and 2003 I attended several sessions of Europe’s constitutional convention (it was formally titled the Convention on the Future of Europe). I found Giscard’s comparison to be apt. For an American, the questions at issue sounded like clear echoes of the debate two centuries earlier in Philadelphia. How much power should go to the central government, and how much should be retained by the individual states? How could the interests of small states be protected in a Parliament likely to be dominated by the delegations from much bigger nations? Which decisions should be made by the professional bureaucrats, and which should be entrusted to a popular vote? Many of the delegates spoke far too much, and many of the meetings went on far too long. But whenever I dozed off from sheer boredom, I snapped out of it by reminding myself that tedious arguments in a decorous debating chamber in Brussels were certainly preferable to the bloody disagreements that had killed so many million of Europe’s young men not far away, in Flanders fields.

The growth of the union, from the original six to the current twenty-five, has been accompanied by the rapid growth of a new European government in Brussels, with strong controls over business, finance, and commerce across the union. The European nations have a joint trade office; since the EU leads the world in both exports and imports, their combined clout is at least as strong as America’s in the World Trade Organization. The EU and its members have developed a sort of useful schizophrenia about these international groupings. When the issue is sheer size, the EU offers itself as a single market with a single government, representing nearly 500 million people and a collective GDP in the range of $10 trillion. But when it comes time to cast votes, the EU members suddenly become separate countries, with twenty-five separate votes to cast on behalf of the European position. At home, the member nations have set up a joint patent office, a common portfolio of consumer protection, credit, and banking laws, a common bankruptcy code, continent-wide merger and acquisition rules, and a pan-European food safety commission. The EU has a single competition czar who regulates antitrust matters in all member nations. This official is one of the most powerful figures in global business, a fact that another great business leader, Jack Welch, learned painfully (see chapter 4).

Meanwhile, the “Eurocrats” in Brussels are building an ever wider and deeper catalog of regulations governing European industry and finance. The flood of European regulations has sparked a backlash in parts of the continent, particularly among those who are philosophically or politically opposed to the idea of a single Europe. Although European countries generally don’t have the healthy disdain for government common in the American heartland, the Eurocrats have begun to generate the same sort of feeling. Some Europeans just love to hate Brussels, in the same way Texans or Alaskans love to hate Washington. For that reason, you have to bring a healthy sense of suspicion to many of the stories of ridiculous regulatory excess that commonly show up in the Euroskeptic, or conservative, branch of the mass media.

After extensive digging, I can confidently report that the alleged European regulations governing the shape of toilet bowls, requiring that fishermen wear hairnets, and banning square gin bottles—all cited in breathless exposés in the British press—have never existed. On the other hand, there really is an EU regulation governing the size of condoms (although it is not true, as the British papers gleefully reported, that the Italians lobbied to have the dimensions reduced). There are rules limiting the noise level of power lawn mowers. There is a required methodology that all member nations must follow when calculating their gross domestic product (GDP). Regulations govern the hidden police cameras that catch people speeding on European roads. Rules guarantee the comfort
of animals in transit to slaughter yards, and govern the maximum permitted curvature of cucumbers sold anywhere in the European Union. The minimum legal length of bananas that Europeans can buy is set at 14 centimeters, or 5½ inches. Another rule sets a minimum of 27 centimeters for the "grade" of bananas, whatever that is.

And then there is EU Directive 80-181-EEC, the pan-European regulation that made greengrocer Steve Thoburn a national hero—a reluctant one, but a hero nonetheless—in Great Britain.

In the rusty shipbuilding town of Sunderland, England—the ancestral home of George Washington—Steve did a bustling trade hour after hour at the tiny market stall he ran, "Thoburn's Fruit and Veg." The place is a veritable EU of greenery: Steve sold Dutch leeks, Spanish peppers, French apples, British spinach, and Greek olives, all neatly stacked and marked with country of origin and price per pound in Steve's firm hand. "I label everything," Steve explained. "I want me customers to know what they're buying."

An intense but likable thirty-something with curly hair and a gold ring in his right ear, Steve was caught red-handed weighing and selling bananas by the pound. He was charging 34 pence (about 55 cents in U.S. money) per pound. This was a bargain price, by English standards, but the sale was a blatant violation of EU Directive 80-181-EEC, a regulation requiring that fresh produce sold in any EU country must be priced and weighed in metric measures—that is, liters and kilograms. Under a statute incorporating EU trade regulations into British law, Steve was charged with violating the Weights and Measures Act. Prosecutors said this was simply a matter of enforcing the law; Steve, though, saw an official conspiracy against small business. "They're after me because all I have is this little market," he said. "Anybody in this town can still go to McDonald's and buy a Quarter-Pounder. Why doesn't that have to be a 113-Grammer?" (In fact, McDonald's outlets throughout Europe are required to list the metric proportions of all their food and drink items.)

Anyway, Steve went on, the women of Sunderland had always bought bananas by the pound, and they wanted to continue. Steve Thoburn was determined "to give me customers what they want." Accordingly, he stubbornly refused to replace his pound-and-ounce scale with a metric version, even when the town prosecutor indicated that Thoburn's Fruit and Veg could face fines equal to $6,000 if convicted on the two pending counts.

Britain's national newspapers had a field day with the story—they dubbed Thoburn the "Metric Martyr"—and Euroskeptics across the nation adopted him as the symbol of their anti-Brussels campaign. On a chilly January day, Steve went on trial in Sunderland Magistrate's Court; the judge declared that the case centered on "the most famous bunch of bananas in British legal history." Inside the courthouse, Steve was represented by a high-powered defense lawyer who had been hired by a national Euroskeptical organization and imported from London to argue the case. Outside, a noisy crowd was waving flags, banners, and bananas. Their posters read: "Metric Martyr on trial here! Hoot to support!"

Some passing motorists did hoot their horns that morning, but many others drove past silently. Even in Sunderland, an insular, self-contained city in the north of England, feelings about Brussels and the European Union were mixed. It was easy, of course, to build up an indignant head of steam against arrogant foreign regulators, daft government rules, and prosecutors determined to turn a pound of bananas into a federal case. On the other hand, there was hesitation in the city about attacking the European Union. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the EU had become crucial to Sunderland's well-being. The few contracts still being awarded at the aging, inefficient shipyards along the river Wear were largely funded by EU grants to local fishermen and shipping companies. And the largest single employer in Sunderland these days is a new Nissan plant, located there specifically to give the Japanese auto maker a European presence. By building its cars in an EU nation, Nissan can export to any other EU member country free of tariffs, duties, and regulatory hassles.

Even Steve Thoburn was ambivalent. When I went up to Sunderland to meet the Metric Martyr, Steve complained that he was thoroughly
uncomfortable with that title, and with the way his case had been turned into political fodder for the anti-EU campaigners. “I don’t give a toss about politics,” Thoburn said, carefully arranging matching hillocks of red and green peppers on his market shelves. “I’ve never cast a vote. I have nothing against metrics. If somebody come into me premises and says, ‘C’mon, luv, give us a kilo of bananas,’ I’d sell it to her. But nobody ever asks for that.”

Steve had no particular problem with the European Union, either, or with the Eurocrats, or with Brussels. In fact, the day I dropped by Thoburn’s Fruit and Veg, the special offer of the day was none other than brussels sprouts. “Oh, I love brussels sprouts,” Steve told me, holding a firm green specimen between thumb and forefinger. “You put this on the roast platter on Sunday, and that’s the king of veg.”

Despite the efforts of that high-powered London lawyer and his political backers, the Metric Martyrs was convicted on two counts in the town court. The Euroskeptics then launched a series of high-profile appeals, promising to go to Britain’s highest court, or even to the European Court of Justice, which can overrule the top British judge. All that seemed likely to delay a final decision in the case for years. Steve Thoburn, with his fines on hold while the legal battle went forward, did his best to get back to the business of selling fruit and vegetables. When customers said, “C’mon, luv, give us a pound of bananas,” he did exactly that. His message to the European Union was simple: “Leave a bloke alone so he can give his customers what they want.”

For many Europeans, though, both business owners and their customers, the ethic of standardization at the heart of Europe’s regulatory regime has paid significant dividends. No matter how vast its international structure may be, any corporation can benefit from a strong, profitable home market, and the twenty-five-nation common market of the EU gives European countries unfettered access to the largest single trade market on earth. As we’ll see in chapter 5 of this book, uniform rules and pancontinental technical specifications emanating from Brussels have helped make European companies world leaders in several key industrial areas. In some cases, such as passenger aircraft, providing that kind of advantage over American industry was a key rationale for Europe’s unified stance—a strategy that American competitors often recognize too late.

But the boldest and most far-reaching act of economic union—the change that made the European Union a tangible daily reality for more than 300 million people from the Arctic Circle to the Azores—took place on January 1, 2002. That New Year’s Day was known in Europe as E-day, because that was the day when Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain adopted the euro as their common currency.

Each of the new euro nations held noisy, splashy celebrations on New Year’s Eve to greet their new money. Fireworks filled the frigid night sky, and bands blared in celebration. At Willy-Brandt-Platz in Frankfurt, a statue of the euro symbol five stories high was unveiled, and a pop group offered the world premiere of a jaunty number called “With Open Arms (EuroWorldSong).” At an elaborate sound-and-light show in Brussels, the EU’s finance minister told a cheering crowd that the arrival of the euro was “the most important event of mankind’s monetary history”—an exaggeration of absurd dimensions, perhaps, but a comment that captured the mood of a continent that night. Newspapers went wild, with full-page greeting cards welcoming the currency and odes of fond farewell to the outgoing money. (“Arrivederci, amica lira,” read the headline in the Italian sports daily La Gazzetta dello Sport.) The obituary columns of the Paris daily Libération included a report on the life and death of “the late French franc.” Several British papers hit on the perfect January 1 headline to greet the new arrival: “Happy New Euro.” Even the respected, sober French newspaper Le Figaro got into the act, changing its name for one day to Le Fig-Euro and adopting a permanent new price of one euro per day (a price cut of about 11 percent from the former daily rate of seven francs).

As the final minutes of 2001 ticked away, Europeans left their New Year’s parties and lined up, in tuxedos and evening gowns, outside ATM
machines to get their hands on euros. Near the place des Martyrs in Brussels, I met Phillipe Bruseau outside the Kredietbank a few minutes past midnight. Sounding just a little embarrassed at himself, this decorous gentleman asked me to take a photo as he withdrew euro notes from the bank machine for the first time. "How many thousand times have I gone to the ATM?" he said. "But this time, it's history." M. Bruseau seemed downright surprised when he pushed the buttons and four crisp, never-folded twenty-euro bills came out, like clockwork. "I had convinced myself they couldn't make it work," he said. "But they did it! How did they make it work?"

That overnight switch to the euro was not merely an historic milestone in the emergence of a United States of Europe. It was also a formidable achievement. It was by far the largest currency conversion in world history, and it went off right on schedule, without a hitch. How did they make it work?

"The introduction of the euro," wrote Robert Mundell, an American Nobel laureate in economics and one of the world's leading experts on currency unions, "is one of those epochal events that can only be understood in the context of long periods of history." The history that Professor Mundell had in mind was that covered in the last chapter; his point was that the crisp new euro notes that appeared in January 2002 amounted to a significant piece of history folded up in every European's wallet. And the launch was epochal, Mundell explained, for two reasons.

In the first place, nothing like it had ever been attempted before. New currencies have been introduced from time to time in many nations, but there had never been a multinational conversion on a continental scale involving so many millions of people, so many wealthy countries, and such well-established, healthy currencies as those the euro replaced. The project involved seven years of planning, and even then most of the euro nations arranged a safety valve in case things went wrong; they allowed people to use both old and new currencies for a couple of months to smooth the changeover. Only the Germans, with their consummate faith in the technocrats at the Bundesbank, were willing to go cold turkey. The euro became Germany's sole legal tender effective at midnight on January 1, 2002; from that moment, the deutsche mark was no longer
The European Social Model

From the day our American family moved to London, we found a lot to love in Britain. The grand old palaces, the stunning new architecture in the big cities, the rolling rural downland, the lush green parks, the cheery village pubs, the charming street markets, the sweet voices of the boy choirs (and, more recently, girl choirs) in the majestic cathedrals, the roomy black cabs, the red double-decker buses, even London’s crumbling, antique subway system—it all won our hearts. We found it much harder, though, to love the prices of things in the United Kingdom, with everything running about one and a half to three times as much as it costs in the United States. Adding injury to the insult was the stunning sales tax—a 17.5 percent tax tacked on to every purchase. Seventeen and a half percent! That’s way above the combined city and state sales tax even in the most taxing American states, and more than twice as much as we paid back home in Colorado. I kept wondering: Why do the Brits put up with a tax that high?

And then, barely a week after we arrived in London, our youngest daughter woke up with a painfully infected ear, bright red and swollen like a chestnut. We could guess the cause—it must have been that dubious ear-piercing shop in one of the charming street markets—but had no idea how to fix the problem. We had barely unpacked our suitcases and certainly hadn’t had time to find a doctor in our new home. Feeling desperate, we piled into a roomy black cab and asked to go the nearest hospital. Within minutes, we were in the emergency (sorry, “casualty”) ward at St. Mary’s Hospital, an ancient, much-the-worse-for-wear institution just down the street from Paddington Station. After a quarter hour’s wait there, a gentle nurse and an authoritative doctor took command of the case. They carefully removed the offending earring, reduced the swelling, treated the infection, and offered polite but firm instruction on the right way to care for pierced ears.

Our daughter—and her parents—felt an enormous sense of relief. I pulled out my checkbook (sorry, “chequebook”) and waited for the bill. I knew this treatment was going to be costly—emergency rooms always are—but frankly, I was willing to pay for the excellent and reassuring medical care we had received. The nurse, evidently accustomed to American patients, smiled at my mistake. “You can put away your cheques,” she said, crisply and proudly. “There won’t be a bill to pay. We do it a bit differently here. In the National Health Service, we don’t charge for medical treatment.” With that, she sent us home.

Had the same minor medical crisis occurred in America, we would surely have received the same level of professional treatment. But we would have received something else along with it: a wad of bills. Having had a similar experience with emergency wards in the United States, I would expect that treatment like we got at St. Mary’s in London would have brought bills of about $200 from the hospital, another $150 or so from the doctor, and another $100 from some lab technician. And I would likely have faced a three-month battle with an insurance company trying to get the bills paid. In Britain, there was no need to argue with the insurance company over the bill, because there was no bill (and consequently, no insurance company). As we left the hospital, my wife said quietly, “Now I see why we pay that 17.5 percent.”

In the aging but efficient casualty ward at St. Mary’s Hospital, our family had come face-to-face with something that evokes enormous pride among Europeans—a phenomenon they call “the European social
model.” This is an elaborate and expensive network of publicly funded, cradle-to-grave programs designed to protect everyone in Europe against the vicissitudes of contemporary life. Whether the threat to a person’s health, comfort, or economic status is natural or man-made, the European social model is there to assist. In principle, this is not a foreign concept to Americans (or East Asians or Australians). If you topple off the tight wire of normal life in the United States, you will be caught by a “social safety net” that is supposed to provide some level of sustenance, shelter, and medical care. But in Europe, falling into the “safety net” is more like falling into a large, soft bed with a down comforter for protection against the cold and a matron standing by with a warm cup of tea to soothe the discomfort.

Access to the generous benefits of the social model is seen as a basic right of every European—and the word every is crucial here, because the social model is relentlessly egalitarian. At the same time, paying for the social model is seen as a basic responsibility of every European. And this widely shared sense of the government’s social responsibility to everybody is another unifying force that makes Europeans feel they all belong to a single place—a place, they believe, that is definitely not American.

The responsibility for all to help pay is reflected in the tax structure that supports the continent’s extensive welfare programs. European nations have the same panoply of corporate and personal income taxes, inheritance taxes, property taxes, and so forth as the United States, with the same type of exemptions that essentially exclude the poorest citizens from paying these wealth-based taxes. But the European countries rely much more heavily than most of the world on sales taxes—the Europeans call them value-added taxes—which are paid by just about anybody who buys anything. This system was created deliberately to make sure that lower-income people help pay for the social system. And do they pay? For an American, even an American who lives in a “high-tax” state like California, New York, or Washington, the VAT rates in European countries seem mind-boggling:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>VAT Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which is to say, when we paid that heavy 17.5 percent VAT tax on our purchases in Britain, we were actually living with one of the lightest sales-tax burdens in all of Europe. When I was traveling around Europe, I wasn’t surprised to see that the Scandinavian countries had high rates of VAT tax; they are rich, and they are famous for their high taxes. It was surprising, though, to find that even the poorest countries in the EU—Greece, Portugal, Hungary, and Slovakia—imposed sales taxes at rates that would start a taxpayers’ revolt in most of the United States.

But if the burden is spread fairly equally, the benefits of the public welfare programs in the European social model are also distributed with a fairly even hand. To Americans, it is simply a matter of common sense that rich families get better medical care and better education than the poor; the rich can afford the doctors at the fancy clinics and the tutors to
get their kids into Harvard. But this piece of common sense does not apply in most of Europe. The corporate executive in the back seat of the limo, her chauffeur up front, and the guy who pumps the gas for them all go to the same doctor and the same hospitals and send their children to the same (largely free) universities. It’s not that the truly rich are resented, or hated, in Europe. People who have made billions in business—people like Stelios Haji-Ioannou, the budget-airline wizard from Cyprus (whom we will meet in chapter 8), or Britain’s Richard Branson, or Austria’s Dietrich Mateschitz (whom we’ve met in chapter 5)—are treated like heroes in their native countries. But no European would agree that a Stelios or a Mateschitz should get better health care or education just because they’re rich.

This zeal for spreading the wealth fairly equally is reflected most dramatically in poverty rates. European nations certainly do have families living below the established poverty line (according to the definition preferred by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, “poverty” means a family income at least 50 percent below the mean personal income in the nation as a whole). But they have a lot fewer poor families than the United States does. In America, about 20 percent of adults are living in poverty at any given time. In France, the comparable figure is 7.5 percent; it is 7.6 percent for Germany and 6.5 percent in Italy. Britain, with a somewhat leaner benefit system than its continental neighbors, has about 14.6 percent of its adults in poverty.

The helping hand of the social model is particularly evident when a worker becomes unemployed. Americans on the unemployment rolls tend to get a monthly government check, together with help in buying food and paying heat and light bills. At some level, when his savings fall low enough, an unemployed American worker may also apply for free government-supplied health care through Medicaid. In Europe, by contrast, a worker who is “made redundant”—that’s the brutal British term for being laid off—will get a housing benefit, a heat and light benefit, a food benefit, a child care benefit, and a monthly unemployment payment that is almost always higher than the American standard. The European, of course, will have the same access as everybody else to the public health-care system. The American system, in which you lose your health insurance when you lose your job, strikes the Europeans as exactly backward. “I don’t understand your approach to health care,” a junior minister in Sweden’s health department told me once. “It seems to me that your country takes away the insurance when people most need it.”

Economists have a gauge to measure the relative generosity of unemployment assistance programs. It’s called the replacement ratio—that is, how much of the worker’s former income is replaced through benefits. In the United States, the figure varies from state to state, but overall a couple with two children and an income a little below average will have about 50 percent of earnings replaced by public assistance in case of unemployment. In France, the replacement ratio for the same family is 86 percent; in Britain, 83 percent; in Germany, 74 percent; in Sweden and the Netherlands, 90 percent.

This benevolent helping hand, funded by the taxpayers, tends to be described in the United States as a “welfare state,” a phrase used derisively by American politicians to attack those who want to give away huge sums of public money. In Europe, too, the social safety blanket is known as the “welfare state,” but in Europe people are proud of that term. I learned this on the campus of one of the world’s greatest educational institutions, Oxford University. On a cold fall day, the students were holding a mass protest against one of Tony Blair’s more daring government innovations: a tuition fee for college students. In Britain, as in most of Europe, nearly all universities are public institutions. Until 1999, university education was free in Britain, as it still is in most of Europe. To help balance his budget, Blair proposed a modest tuition fee, based on each student’s family income, with a maximum payment of £1,000 per school year—a bout $1,500. Since then, Blair has raised the fee to a maximum of £3,000. Compared to, say, Princeton or Harvard (both running about $38,000 per year), this is a fantastic bargain. To Oxford students, it
was an outrage, and that’s why they were protesting. “Education Must Be Free,” read the bedsheets draped above the leaded windows of the stately Gothic colleges.

Just for the sake of argument, I approached the student leading the demonstrations—Phillipa Warner Smith, the daughter of a lawyer from a tony London suburb—and suggested to her that education really isn’t free. “Somebody is paying your professors,” I said. “Somebody has to pay the light bill in the classroom,” Ms. Warner Smith didn’t flinch. “Education benefits society as a whole,” she replied. “So the general society should pay the bursary.” At that point, somebody turned on a microphone at the front of the crowd and a white-haired gentleman stepped up to give a speech. This turned out to be Tony Benn, a venerable leftist member of Blair’s Labour Party, who took sharp issue with his prime minister on the subject of tuition fees. “Education benefits society as a whole,” Benn declared, precisely echoing the student argument. “And government should pay for socially beneficial functions. This is an essential element of the welfare state that we have been building for the past century on this continent.” The striking thing for me was the obvious pride in Benn’s voice when he mentioned the welfare state, and the huge roar of approval from the crowd that greeted that term. “Protecting our welfare state,” Ms. Warner Smith told me, “is probably the most important job that government has.”

“Our welfare state”—that phrase nicely sums up the sense of ownership, the sheer pride, that Europeans feel toward their network of social support mechanisms. The social model is often cited as one of the key elements that make a European country European. “Europe’s welfare states,” asserts the British analyst Will Hutton, “arise from... core European values and the European settlement. They define European-ness. They are non-negotiable European realities.” The Europeans argue that the generosity of their social model is the main thing that makes Europe different from other developed regions of the world. I heard the prime minister of Serbia, Zoran Djindjic, a Generation E member, make this point at a forum for Eastern European countries hoping eventually to be admitted to the EU. The session was a sort of beauty contest, to test whether the potential applicants were up to snuff, and Djindjic clearly passed the test. His great moment came when he was asked to give a Serbian view of what “Europe” is all about. “Modern societies are defined by three elements: political democracy, market economy, and social identity,” the prime minister said in his smooth English. “It’s in this third aspect—their attitude to social solidarity—that the Europeans seem to have an identity that is distinct from either Asia or America.”

Citizens of the United States of Europe particularly like to brag that their social model makes them superior to the United States of America. “The simplest difference between the USA and Europe is that we have welfare states, and they do not,” wrote the Irish political scientist James Wickham. Wickham applauds Americans’ willingness to support charity and volunteer programs, but he argues that charity is not enough. “Social rights cannot depend on the voluntary goodwill of others... The welfare state, enforced by law, is a defining feature of Europe.”

Of course, the welfare state also forces Europeans to pay sky-high taxes. And the plush arrangements provided for people who are out of work may explain why Europeans who are laid off tend to accept their fate as a fairly permanent condition, rather than getting up and looking for a new job. But these problems tend to be ignored, except by a few marginal voices on the right, because Europe in general assumes the social model is preferable to what’s going on in other parts of the world. “The reason why Europe compares so favorably with the US in respect of social and income mobility,” Will Hutton says, “is that every European state sets out to offer equality of opportunity to all its people; the American neglect of the bottom 50 percent in the name of individualism is not reproduced in Europe.”

The European social model involves a much bigger role for the public sector in daily life than Americans are comfortable with. The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in the United States fills a fairly small niche in a TV and radio world dominated by giant private companies. In most European countries, by contrast, the public broadcaster tends to be
largest and the most prestigious by far. Britain’s BBC, funded by a tax of $170 per year paid by every home and office that has a television set, operates six TV and five radio stations. France’s TF1, Germany’s ARD, and Italy’s RAI are more popular and more respected than any private network. Public transit systems are much more pervasive in Europe than in the United States, as are public art, public universities, and public medical systems. Public housing is so common in major European cities that it can’t all be stacked away in a few big complexes. Instead, government-owned homes and apartment buildings are found in every neighborhood of every city and town. The inhabitants include not just the poor but a good proportion of the middle class as well.

Still, Europe’s welfare state is not “European” in the sense that it is standardized or uniform across the EU. Brussels sets some minimal standards, but each country establishes its own menu of public assistance. Not surprisingly, considering its importance in everybody’s daily life, the welfare state has been studied to a fare-thee-well by European academics. They divide the various approaches to state welfare into several categories: there’s a Nordic model, generally covering the Scandinavian countries. There’s the Rhineland capitalism model, developed in Germany and now common in Austria and the Benelux countries. There’s a southern Catholic style, common in the Mediterranean nations. At the EU’s eastern edge, the former Soviet states have largely maintained welfare programs inherited from Communist times. Britain, which is struggling to run a European welfare state with tax rates somewhat closer to the American standard, is in a class of its own. The Irish are more European than the Brits in this regard. Still, common features mark the social model across the continent.

Europe’s welfare state begins at birth, with government payments to each newborn citizen and generous support for parents. In essence, the European governments pay new parents to leave their jobs temporarily and stay home. “We have made a fairly basic decision,” Valgard Haugeland, the leader of Norway’s Christian Democratic Party and the cabinet minister for children and family affairs, told me. “We have decided that raising a child is real work. And that this work provides value for the whole society. And that the society as a whole should pay for this valuable service. Americans like to talk about family values. We have decided to do more than talk; we use our tax revenues to pay for family values.”

In a small but comfortable two-bedroom apartment on a leafy green hill high above the ice blue Oslofjord, I came face-to-face with Norwegian family values. When a beaming blue-eyed girl with golden hair was born to Martin Aenstad and his wife Suranhlid, Suranhlid decided to leave her job as a secretary in downtown Oslo and stay home to raise her daughter, Serine. This cost her nothing. Suranhlid was “hired” by the Norwegian government to be the mother of her baby. The state paid her a yearly salary equivalent to $18,800, or 80 percent of what she made as a secretary. With the savings on clothes and commuting, Suranhlid came out slightly ahead.

Shortly after Serine’s first birthday, Suranhlid went back to her office job; her employers were required by law to take her back, in the same position. At that point, Martin took over the parental slot, taking a year’s leave from his job as a junior engineer and drawing his paycheck as a father for Serine’s second year of life. Sitting in his cozy apartment here, with eighteen-month-old Serine bouncing happily on his knee, Martin Aenstad told me that he felt no qualms about being a stay-at-home father. “I’ve had jobs, and now I’m raising my daughter. And I can tell you that being a housefather is hard work. At least when I was on the job, they gave me a lunch break. If Serine is hungry or crying or has a full diaper—well, you try telling her that Daddy needs a lunch break.” Martin’s pay was considerably lower than his wife had received, because the second year of parenting only draws a third of the worker’s normal salary. But Martin knew that his old job was waiting for him when his year as full-time daddy came to an end. For her third year, Serine would go to a state-run child-care facility called a Kindergarten.

The United States pays a small percentage of its mothers a monthly stipend to help them raise and feed their children. The recipients are known as “welfare moms,” and are generally stigmatized as women who
can't find a real job. Norway, in contrast—like most other European countries—treats the monthly payment to parents as a salary. Income and social security taxes are withheld, just as with any paycheck. The payment is specifically designed for working parents, to encourage them to leave their jobs for a while and raise their children. Parents who don't have a job outside the home also get a monthly benefit for raising children, but it is considerably less than the "surrogate salary" provided those who leave a job to be full-time parents. In America, the White House and state governors routinely boast about how much their welfare rolls are being reduced. In Norway, the government takes pride in statistics showing that the number of recipients has been growing rapidly. For the past few years, the national parliament, or Storting, has been debating proposals to extend the plan to the child's third year.

With her baby chortling happily on her lap, Suranhild Aenstad told me that the parental-pay system is not perfect. For women like her, in their mid-twenties, the maternity-leave law makes it harder to get a decent job in the first place. "Women can suffer," she said, speaking excellent English. "We all know that some companies don't hire a woman if they expect you are going to take maternity leave in a few years." Cabinet Minister Haugland agreed that that is a problem. "Of course we have made it illegal for an employer to turn down a young applicant for this reason," she said. "But how do you prove it? They will never say they rejected somebody because of maternity leave."

Other European countries can't afford to pay as much for parenting as wealthy Norway does. Still, parental leave programs are standard, whether funded through state payments or by requiring employers to continue paying a salary while the employer is at home being a parent. Beyond that, European parents can expect a monthly benefit check from the government for the first eighteen years of each child's life. Health care and prescriptions are free for children up to a certain age, even in those countries that require a copayment from adults at the doctor's office. Education tends to be free, or at least extremely cheap by American standards, all the way through college. In Europe, the most presti-igious universities are nearly all public, so the best college education in Sweden, say, or Scotland is available essentially for free to those who can gain admission. (At least, to those who come from EU member countries. American, Japanese, and Middle Eastern students at European universities pay handsomely for the privilege, and this flow of income from foreign students is one of the ways Europe pays for higher education.)

Once a European is educated, she moves on to the labor market and the broad array of employment rights that are considered a basic element of the social model. Wages are often not left to market mechanisms. They are set, either by union or by government formulas, generally on a regional or sectoral basis, so that all auto companies, for example, pay all workers about the same weekly amount. As we have seen, mandatory programs of sick leave and family leave are far more expansive in Europe than the United States. Working hours tend to be restricted by law or union agreement. Italy and France have both made the thirty-five-hour week de rigueur. This doesn't mean that no worker can stay on for the thirty-sixth hour in a given week; rather, thirty-five hours is the point at which an employer is required to start paying overtime rates. This is supposed to encourage companies to hire more people—on the grounds that it is cheaper to pay a second man at the basic rate than to keep the first one on at overtime—but the economists don't agree on whether the laws have achieved that purpose. Holidays and paid vacations are generous; in much of Europe, a worker can expect five weeks of vacation from the first year on the job. British law mandates at least twenty-three days of paid holidays per year; France requires twenty-five days or more; Sweden, at least thirty. In contrast, the wretched overworked Americans have to get by with a meager four to ten mandatory paid holidays, depending on the state. The results of all this are evident in the OECD's ranking in average hours worked. In 2003, Americans worked an average of 1,976 hours; German and French workers averaged some 400 hours less. That is, Joe Sixpack works some ten weeks more in one year than his counterparts Jacques and Johann. Even British workers, who put in more time on the job than anybody else in Europe, work 200 fewer hours per year than
Americans do. And while they are enjoying those long vacations, European workers don’t have to worry much about losing their jobs; in many European industrial sectors, layoffs are illegal.

It is conventional wisdom among American economists—and many of their continental counterparts as well—that this extensive coddling of employees who don’t work all that much and can’t be laid off is a key reason for Europe’s relatively weak economic performance. In good times and bad, European countries tend to show lower gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates than the United States does. In good times and bad, unemployment rates for many European countries are far higher than in the United States. In the first years of the twenty-first century, U.S. unemployment rates ran near 6 percent; for Europe as a whole, the figure was about 9 percent. This lingering malady, marked by slow growth and high unemployment, is commonly known as Eurosclerosis. The reasons for it seem blatantly clear. A French employer who can’t fire any employee is going to think twice before hiring any employee. A German factory that has to pay its workers for ten weeks of holidays and vacations out of each fifty-two is going to spend more, and produce less, than a U.S. factory that gets five more weeks of work from each hand for the same annual pay. The American system is more flexible, and accordingly more dynamic; jobs are more easily eliminated in the United States, but they are more easily created as well. To Americans, this all seems plain as day.

But there’s another point of view. Europeans who support the labor protections built into the social model point out that many European companies do just fine, thank you, despite the rigid regulatory regime imposed on them. Volvo makes its cars in Sweden and the Netherlands, two of the strongest bulwarks of the welfare state—and yet Ford Motor Co. makes more money on its Volvo division than it makes from Lincoln and Mercury models it builds in the United States. Nokia’s global workforce is about 70 percent European, but it manages to stay far ahead of its chief American competitor, Motorola, which employs most of its people either in the United States or even cheaper labor markets. It was Germany’s third-largest automaker, Daimler, that bought America’s third-largest automaker, Chrysler—not vice versa. Over the past decade, employment has grown faster in Ireland, Denmark, and the Netherlands than in the United States, although those three countries are full-fledged backers of European-style labor perquisites.

The Europeans also challenge economic comparisons based on gross domestic product, the standard measure of a nation’s wealth. When American citizens or governments spend money on deadbolt locks, barred windows, car alarms, police, and prisons, all that expenditure creates employment and adds to the GDP total. But does it make the United States a more desirable place to live than Europe, where there is less need for home security or prison guards? Those extra ten weeks of paid leave that a French worker enjoys have a negative impact on GDP statistics. But are Americans better off because they have to work ten more weeks per year? Martin Wolf, a conservative British economist who is generally critical of the excesses of the social model, admitted recently that he finds this question confusing. “Like many Europeans, I find the U.S. addiction to ceaseless work appalling,” Wolf wrote. “I also dislike the determination of some European governments to force people to work fewer hours. But if Europeans want to enjoy some of their wealth in the form of greater leisure, why not?”

While the proworker policies of the European social model clearly make labor costs higher than in more laissez-faire societies like the United States, European employers have an advantage over their American competitors because of another key element of the welfare state: public health-care systems. Although the mechanisms and the finances of medical care vary significantly from one country to the next, all European nations have health-care plans that cover all citizens, with the government paying most (or all) of the bills. By many measures, these systems of “socialized medicine” work better, and more efficiently, than the mainly private American health-care system. The European countries have better public health statistics than the United States, and a higher rate of satisfaction among patients, even though they spend a much smaller
share of national income on medical care. This chart, based on data from 2001–2, makes the point:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
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<th>Sweden</th>
<th>U.K.</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>9.4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% paid by gov't.</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male life expect.</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some European health-care systems—notably those in France and Germany—use an insurance model for payment. Citizens join a plan and pay fairly small premiums, with government making up any shortfall. For someone who has a job, the employer is expected to pay a sizable chunk of the health insurance premium; for others, the government makes up the difference. In other countries, the state not only pays for, but also provides, medical service. Britain's National Health Service (NHS) is the prime example; Italy and Sweden use variations on the NHS system. The British are passionate about the concept of “free at the point of service,” which is to say that you can “put away your cheques,” as the nurse at St. Mary's Hospital told me, when you visit the doctor's office or the hospital. The payment comes through that 17.5 percent sales tax, and other taxes. The French, in contrast, make the patient pay a doctor's bill at the office, and then seek reimbursement from the national insurance plan.

In recent years, as the technology, and the cost, of modern medicine has increased, health systems have struggled with efforts to control costs. Just as in the United States, health care is rationed. New drugs are carefully reviewed before they are made available. If you are dying of heart failure, you probably get surgery right away. But if your problem is a painful knee or a cataract, you could spend months on a waiting list before you get to the operating table. Outside Britain, governments have begun to impose copayments for doctor visits. In Sweden, for example, the out-of-pocket fee is tied to the price of a movie ticket in Stockholm—about $12.

The advantage for European industry comes in avoiding the kind of health-care costs that pose an increasingly heavy weight pressing down on American companies. With the government picking up most of this burden—even in the Netherlands, with the biggest private-sector medical industry in the EU, the government pays 70 percent of health-care costs—the cost to employers is small, at least in comparison to the medical costs American firms have to pay. William Clay Ford Jr., the chairman of Ford Motor Company, says that fact is a key reason that a company like Volvo can compete on global markets; wages, pensions, and other benefits are more costly in Stockholm than in Detroit, but the huge saving on health insurance costs makes overall labor costs roughly equivalent. In the United States, more and more employers are responding to the sharp increase in health-care expenses by dropping medical insurance altogether for their employees (or at least for their blue-collar employees). In the spring of 2004, some 45 million Americans had no health insurance whatsoever. That option is simply unthinkable in Europe. The notion that everybody must have equal access to health care is a basic and incontestable fact of European life. Universal medical care is one of the things Europeans always mention, with pride, when they talk about the differences between the EU and the United States.

For these reasons, public health systems are entrenched in Europe and cannot be replaced by private medical care. Even if a conservative government swept into power somewhere, the “socialized medicine” system would be untouchable. Nigel Lawson, a former chancellor of the Exchequer in a Conservative British government, noted in his memoir that even an arch-Tory like Margaret Thatcher never dared take on the health service. “The NHS is the closest thing the English have to a religion,” Lawson said. Political debate over the NHS in Britain tends to be predictable, even formulaic. The opposition parties complain that the health service is underfunded, that hospitals are leaky and crumbling, that
citizens have to wait months or even years for surgery, that something must be done. In reply, Tony Blair stands up and says that the National Health Service is a national treasure, a shining jewel in the British crown, and his Labour Party, at least, has no intention of “turning it into a profit-making corporate endeavor as the Americans have done.” Now, Tony Blair knows full well that nobody in Britain—nobody in Europe, for that matter—has any intention of creating an American-style health-care system. But Blair always falls back on this threat to end the argument.

As an American, I would rather see my country move in the European direction on health care than vice versa. I base this conclusion on our own family’s experience with European-style medicine. After our initial experience with British health care in St. Mary’s casualty ward, we stuck with the National Health Service all the years we lived in Britain. For our normally healthy family, the NHS did fine. Back in the United States, I work for a major corporation that offers an unusually generous package of health insurance benefits. But the availability and quality of the care we had in Britain were about equal to what we have at home—better, in one sense, in that British doctors still make house calls. We generally got to see the doctor on the day we called. The doctor’s office (sorry, “surgery”) down the street from our house had a notice warning, “The average consultation should last 10 minutes,” which seemed rather brief. But once in the office, we never had the feeling that we were being rushed out the door. Looking at the waiting lists at British hospitals for major operations, and the long-term survival rates for cancer and other major diseases, I think I’d rather be in the United States than in Britain if somebody in my family contracted a serious disease. But for flu, colds, rashes, intestinal complaints, eye exams, and the occasional broken bone or sprain, the NHS doctors performed on par with any treatment we have had in the United States. And all for free.

Partly to save money, and partly because the threat of malpractice litigation is much lower for a British doctor, we found the NHS less inclined than American doctors to do tests and X-rays. The Brits wouldn’t even give me an annual physical; my doctor explained that NHS economists had decided the savings did not justify the costs, at least for basically healthy patients. In the United States, a man my age is routinely given a PSA test to check for prostate cancer. I was never able to convince the NHS to do this for me. Even when I was sent to a neighborhood hospital for a blood test, the doctor declined to check the spot on the form calling for a PSA test as well. “We don’t find it cost-effective,” he explained. Of course, most patients would probably consider the test extremely effective if it spotted a cancer early enough to be treated. The determining factor, though, is what the NHS finds cost-effective.

For me, the best part of British medicine was the dog that didn’t bark. There were no bills. We did pay for glasses and for dental care, which are not covered by the NHS except for particularly needy families. The adults in our family paid £6 ($9.50) for prescriptions; medicine was free for our children. But for all other treatment—even emergency ward visits and hospital stays—we never even saw a bill. This business of getting medical care for free can be habit-forming. Shortly after we moved home to the United States, I got a frantic call one day from one of my teenagers. Her cross-country team required a blood test at the beginning of each season. While we lived in Europe, she took care of this every year at a place called the Royal Free Hospital, near our home in London. But once we moved home, she went to a U.S. hospital for the test. There, something amazing happened: they asked her to pay money! “Dad, they want $95 for this!” she said in shock over the phone. I explained that this seemed about the right price to me. “What do you normally pay for a blood test?” I asked. “Pay? I never pay,” this distraught young woman replied. “In London, I just walked into the hospital, and they never asked me to pay.”

In addition to protection of livelihood, family, and health, the European social model also involves protection of civil liberties and individual legal rights. In this area, the social model is much more familiar to Americans. In fact, the Bill of Rights that America’s founding fathers added to the new Constitution in 1790 and America’s federal court system were key models for the EU’s founding fathers when they set up the initial
supranational institutions in the late 1940s. Winston Churchill and Jean Monnet, two Europeans who understood and admired the United States, were instrumental in the creation of Europe's own bill of rights and its pancontinental courts.

From its beginning in 1951, Monnet's European Coal and Steel Community included a cross-border judicial arm to adjudicate international disputes. This "European Court of Justice" is still operating in Luxembourg. Its main job is to deal with disputes between countries, and to check the legality of actions of the EU government in Brussels. There is a separate European court to deal with issues touching individual liberties. When Churchill presided over the first Congress of Europe at the Hague in 1948, he drafted some British lawyers, led by Sir David Maxwell Fyfe (later to serve as chief British war crimes prosecutor at Nuremberg), to compose the European Convention on Human Rights. As Churchill said, it was a written guarantee of the basic freedoms the Allies had fought and died for in World War II. The document was eventually adopted by virtually every European country, including some that are not EU members. Although the convention was a British product from the start, the Euroskeptic Brits didn't get around to adopting it until 1998, when a pro-Europe prime minister, Tony Blair, rammed it through Parliament. Although many of the liberties it guaranteed came straight from English common law, the convention was the first written bill of rights ever granted to the English people. (Up to then, the English people had relied on judicial opinions to guarantee their civil liberties.)

To enforce the Convention on Human Rights, the 1948 Congress set up the European Court of Human Rights. Now headquartered in a dramatically modern courthouse in Strasbourg, this court acts something like a European supreme court. Citizens from any member country can bring a suit claiming their rights were violated. The Strasbourg court can, and regularly does, declare laws of the separate states to be invalid, and reverse the holdings of the highest courts of the member nations. Its mere presence, and the threat of an embarrassing ruling, tend to make the individual governments more sensitive to civil liberties than they would likely be without the court hovering over them.

When Mike Tyson went to Britain in the summer of 2000 to fight the European heavyweight champ, Lennox Lewis, the uncontrollable American boxer caused a furor at the weigh-in when he pointed at Lewis and roared: "I'm gonna rip out his heart! I'm gonna eat his children!" Coming from a man who had already eaten the ear of an earlier opponent, this unorthodox line of commentary shocked members of the British Boxing Board of Control. They responded by prohibiting Tyson from fighting in a British ring—a ruling that would have canceled the Tyson-Lewis bout and cost both fighters millions of pounds. But Tyson hired a famous British civil rights lawyer, who told the boxing council that punishing the American heavyweight simply for expressing his "views" would amount to a violation of his right to free speech under the European Convention on Human Rights. Faced with the possibility of a humiliating reversal from Strasbourg, the Board of Control backed down and let the Tyson-Lewis match go ahead. Unfortunately for Tyson, he proved a much less effective fighter than his lawyer. Lewis whipped him decisively, and Tyson's hopes to regain the heavyweight championship once more went down the drain for good. But at least his human rights had been protected.

The original 1948 text of the Convention on Human Rights has been amended and enhanced over the decades. Its current manifestation, approved in 2000, is a twenty-two-page document known as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (or the Carta de los Derechos Fundamentales de la Unión Europea, or the Charta der Grundrechte der Europäischen Union, or the Grundlagender ratsigheterna i Europeiska unionen, and so on in twenty languages). This charter has all the basic freedoms familiar to Americans. Article 10 guarantees "Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion." Article 20 states simply, "Everyone is equal before the law." Article 41 incorporates the same basic stance vis-à-vis government that forms the core of American administrative law: the right of all interested parties to fair notice and a public hearing
before a government agency takes an adverse action. Freedom of speech, freedom of movement, the right to vote, the presumption of innocence, protection against double jeopardy, equal treatment of different races and genders, and freedom from torture and cruel punishment—all those familiar rights are set forth explicitly.

But the Charter of Fundamental Rights goes well beyond the range of civil liberties protected in the U.S. Bill of Rights, or most of the other constitutions around the world. To some extent, this stems from the particular situation of a multinational union. The charter says that "every person" has an inalienable right to write to the EU in any of the twenty official languages, and get a reply in the same language. It says that a citizen of any EU country can live, work, or run a business in any member nation, and vote or run for election in the country where she lives. For refugees, the charter declares that "the right to asylum shall be guaranteed." Other fundamental rights set forth in the charter come directly from the European social model: there is a basic human right to health care, a right to free education, a right to join unions and go on strike, a right to "limitation of maximum working hours, to daily and weekly rest periods, and an annual period of paid leave," and a right to "parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child." Article 29 even declares, "Everyone has the right of access to a free placement service" to help find a job. For good measure, the charter says that all workers employed in a country, no matter what their nationality, are entitled to all the benefits provided to nationals of that country.

But the expansive menu of rights and privileges guaranteed to every European doesn't stop there. The charter (Article 17) guarantees a right to "environmental protection." It demands (Article 18) that all shall receive "a high level of consumer protection." It assures the elderly (Article 25) the right "to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life." Article 7 establishes a sweeping right of privacy, and Article 8 assures the "protection of personal data," which amounts to a legal right to see any dossier maintained on you, government or private, and to have it corrected if it's wrong. Article 21, the right to nondiscrimination, contains what is probably the most sweeping definition of "discrimination" ever put on paper:

Any discrimination based on grounds such as sex, race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age, or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.

This just about covers the waterfront, doesn't it? But just in case, that powerful phrase "such as" means the charter may also be invoked to ban some other form of discrimination so abstruse that the authors couldn't articulate it.

With the prestigious and powerful European Court of Human Rights backing it, Europe's Charter of Fundamental Rights has had a broad impact on contemporary Europeans. The court has used the antidiscrimination chapter of the charter to force all European nations to allow homosexuals in the military. Citing Article 24 of the charter ("The rights of the child"), the court has banned spanking in all schools—even in the old "public schools," the British term for what an American would call private schools—where a swift swat on the rear end had been the basic mode of discipline for centuries. On the other hand, the court declined to say that required school uniforms violate the charter. While the United States held hundreds of possible terrorists locked up for years without charges and without the right to a lawyer following the 9/11 attacks, the European Court of Human Rights pressured Britain's home secretary to provide legal help and a formal notice of charges to terror suspects in his country.

One particularly rich area for litigation has been sparked by an apparent conflict in the charter between Article 7, guaranteeing a respect for personal privacy, and Article 11, which preserves "freedom . . . to receive and impart information and ideas." Thus the movie star trying to keep her romantic life out of the papers insists on her "right to privacy," and the tabloids insist on their "right to impart information." This conflict
sometimes centers on the bizarre habit of European matinee idols to sell the rights to their weddings to a particular picture magazine. An exclusive contract for pictures and interviews at a hot couple’s marriage ceremony can easily bring in a million euros. But other magazines, of course, sometimes choose not to honor the exclusive arrangement. When Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones sold rights to their wedding (for a reported $1.5 million) to a British fan magazine called O.K.! they were outraged to see that a competing magazine called Hello! got hold of some photos and printed them without paying a penny to the happy couple. The newlyweds and O.K! went to court, invoking their right to privacy, and won a sizable judgment.

The same kind of dispute broke out when a London tabloid, the Mirror, reported that supermodel Naomi Campbell was being treated for drug addiction. Campbell didn’t deny the truth of the story but sued for damages anyway, on grounds that it had violated her privacy. The Mirror said the report was a perfect example of press freedom (and added that a woman who maintained a battalion of publicity agents and who regularly discussed the intimate details of her life with the fan mags had no legitimate expectation of privacy in any case). Both sides invoked the European Charter on Fundamental Rights. The British judge split the difference, awarding Campbell a judgment, but not even enough damages to pay her legal bills.

To the consternation of some American conservatives, the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights and the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights have become a point of reference for judges around the world, even in the United States. In cases like Grutter v. Bollinger, involving affirmative action for minority applicants to the University of Michigan, and Lawrence v. Texas, the decision that voided a Texas law for banning homosexual, but not heterosexual, sex, the U.S. Supreme Court cited the European charter and decisions of the Strasbourg court in support of its rulings. In the Texas case, Justice Anthony Kennedy noted that “the rights of homosexual adults to engage in intimate, consensual conduct” had been upheld by the European court, and should be upheld in the United States as well. Similarly, when the Supreme Court considered the death penalty for mentally retarded criminals, Justice John Paul Stevens noted the European legal position (“overwhelming disapproval”) in deciding to ban the practice in the United States as well.

There’s nothing particularly new about American jurists turning to European legal principles for guidance. U.S. judges, including conservative judges, have been citing English cases and English common law in their opinions for two centuries. But the reliance on the sweeping European notion of human rights bothers some judges. In the Texas case, the invocation of European ideas of human rights prompted a sharp dissent from justices William Rehnquist, Clarence Thomas, and Antonin Scalia: “The court’s discussion of these foreign views . . . is meaningless dicta. Dangerous dicta, however, since this court should not impose foreign moods, fads or fashions on Americans.” The tendency to look to Europe for guidance on human rights concerns has also drawn the ire of former federal judge Robert H. Bork. “One would have thought the meaning of our Constitution derived from the understanding of those who wrote, proposed, and ratified it,” Bork wrote, “not by foreign courts.”

Article 2.2 of the charter incorporates a key element of the contemporary European worldview: “No one shall be condemned to the death penalty, or executed.” This principle has become a pan-European crusade of sorts, and Europeans seem to believe that they have a responsibility to abolish capital punishment not just in Europe but all over the world. This is not exactly a timeless European value. The crucifix, the gallows, the firing squad, and the guillotine were essential elements of European law enforcement for millennia, and the elimination of this final sanction is a recent phenomenon. Most European countries still used capital punishment for two or three decades after World War II. France was killing criminals with the guillotine—the guillotine—until the 1980s. Indeed, Robert Badinter, the eloquent, elegant French politician who fought the death penalty in his country and eventually convinced the parliament to do away with it, has said that the very fact that the antique, bloody guillotine was still in use was a useful point in the argument against capital
punishment overall. When he was France’s minister of justice, Badinter rose in the Parliament and asked his fellow members “to imagine the sound of the blade as it slices a living human being in two.” This chilling image was evidently powerful; France joined the rest of Europe in banning executions. Even today, after a particularly heinous mass murder or rape on the continent, opinion polls in some countries show a surge of new support for the death penalty. For the most part, however, the broadly held European view of capital punishment is close to the opinion of M. Badinter: “It is simply barbaric.”

The death penalty has become a fairly potent point of division between Europe and the United States, and its abolition is thus another unifying force pushing Europeans toward pancontinental integration. Europeans are downright proud that they have moved beyond capital punishment. The United States may be the world’s dominant military, cultural, and financial force, but the United States still executes criminals. That point alone, to tens of millions of Europeans, makes the European Union a better place to live than the American one. “I am regularly asked to speak about this at [European] universities,” Badinter told me. “I wish you could see the students, how perplexed they are, how amazed they are, that the U.S. permits this barbarous deed. After all, U.S. pop culture is part of their life. U.S. technology is on their desks. But when it comes to the death penalty, the U.S. is not a leader. Your country stands with China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in number of executions. And the students say, ‘What the hell has the U.S. to do with those four dictatorships?’” A Generation E friend of mine in Germany, Hans Robert Eisenhauer, told me that “for us, the death penalty stands even with torture, with slavery. It should by now be ancient history! Why would Americans want still to use?”

On this point, the sense that “we’re superior to those bloody Americans” is not restricted to the political left or to a noisy student generation. Right-wing politicians and media across Europe also denounce the electric chair. Most of the criticism in Europe comes from the political left, but this is an issue on which conservatives, too, tend to criticize the United States. When a six-year-old shot and killed a first-grade classmate in Michigan, an arcondervative British tabloid, the Sun, editorialized that the most likely American response would be to build a kiddie-size electric chair. When George W. Bush became president, the Daily Mail, the farthest right of the British newspapers, noted acridly in a profile that the new president is “best known for signing 153 death warrants.”

In fact, Bush’s advocacy for the death penalty while he was governor of Texas is one of the factors that made him a despised figure in Europe, long before the war in Iraq. The president’s reputation as “the world’s leading executioner”—as Robert Badinter describes him—was the main thing anybody in Europe knew about him when he entered the White House. Just before the George W. Bush inauguration, newspapers all over Europe were full of stories about a convicted rapist and murderer named Johnny Paul Penry. Penry became the 150th person executed since Bush had become governor, and this milestone was treated as major news. Penry, the convict, was portrayed as a victim; he was mentally retarded, the Europeans reported, and many stories said that he still believed in Santa Claus. Britain’s second-biggest daily newspaper, the Mirror, devoted its first six pages completely to reports on Penry and the preceding 149 prisoners on Texas’s death row (headline: “The Texas Massacre”). On page 7, it ran an editorial: “Bush makes no apology for his hideous track record. And disturbingly, he has mass support from Americans, driven by their out-of-control gun culture and blood lust for retribution.”

There are political points to be won in Europe by opposing capital punishment in the United States. For this reason, it is against the law in any European country to extradite a prisoner to the United States for a crime that could bring the death penalty. A British official told Washington that not even Osama bin Laden would be extradited, if captured by Europeans, unless the Americans promised not to execute him. European politicians routinely cross the Atlantic to meet the condemned, generally with the media tagging along. When French education minister
Jack Lang was preparing to run for mayor of Paris, he traveled to Texas to talk with convicted murderer Odell Barnes Jr., who was due to be executed in a few weeks. Claudia Roth, a popular Green Party member of Germany’s Reichstag, traveled to the Arizona state penitentiary to talk with two convicted murderers, Karl and Walter LaGrand, before their execution. This did not generate precisely the kind of news footage Roth had in mind. Although the LaGrand brothers were born in Germany, they had spent their entire adult lives in the United States. When they met with Roth, they didn’t protest their innocence. In fact, they didn’t say much of anything, because neither brother was able to speak a word of German. Undeterred, Roth told the German press later that the meeting “made me really proud of my country and our constitution and our European Charter on Human Rights. A state is not strong only because it executes people. It can be strong in showing mercy.”

On dozens of occasions, the European Union and the European Parliament have issued formal declarations of protest against scheduled executions in the United States, usually those involving youthful or mentally deficient defendants. U.S. diplomats in Europe say they are deluged with complaints about capital punishment, some from organized political groups and many from citizens who have read about an upcoming execution in the newspaper. In response, the U.S. embassy in Paris hands out an explanation of the issue; it is defensive in tone, and almost always with the European view. “The death penalty is an emotional and controversial subject,” it says. “Public opinion polls have shown that 66 percent of the American public support the death penalty. On the other hand, some major American organizations, such as the American Bar Association and the Texas Catholic Bishops, have called for a moratorium on its use on humanitarian and human rights grounds.”

For all the depth of feeling, there is considerable ignorance in Europe about the death penalty in the United States. It seems to be conventional wisdom that thousands of Americans are put to death every year. (The actual number is around eighty.) Very few Europeans seem to understand that capital punishment is largely a matter of state law. When I was dragged into debates on this topic on European TV networks, I always pointed out that thirty-seven states have the death penalty, and another thirteen, plus the District of Columbia, have decided against it. “You see,” I would argue, “this is really a case of democracy at work. The people of each state get to decide if they want it to be used where they live.” Generally, that line of debate was a flop. When I tried this tack on the BBC, the brilliant Simon Jenkins, a columnist with the Times of London, was unimpressed. “Yes, democracy is a wonderful thing,” Jenkins said sardonically, “but not when the democratic will is endorsing an act of barbarism.”

At the same time, there seems to be ignorance in the United States about the depth of feeling, the sheer revulsion, in Europe regarding capital punishment. Not long after the 9/11 attacks on America, I attended a meeting in London between U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft and his British counterpart, David Blunkett. Ashcroft explained that he was touring five European countries, hoping to convince the justice ministers that alleged terrorist prisoners could be extradited for trial in the United States. Blunkett explained, diplomatically, that it is contrary to law in any European country to extradite a criminal who might face the death penalty overseas. Ashcroft replied smoothly that he hoped to change the minds of his European counterparts. He would try to persuade them that, when it comes to terrorism, the death penalty is a just punishment. Of course, there was not a chance in the world that any American could persuade Europeans on this point. In fact, Ashcroft failed in his quest; the French justice minister even went to the theatrical extreme of canceling her meeting with him at the last minute to show her disdain. To the Europeans, the amazing thing was that a senior U.S. government official didn’t recognize the force of Europe’s Charter on Fundamental Rights, and particularly of Article 2.2. Reporting on Ashcroft’s visit that evening, BBC anchorman Jeremy Paxman looked at the camera and said, “What planet does the American attorney general live on?”

The basic principle of the European social model—the idea that the
state has a responsibility to insulate and protect people from the harsh vicissitudes of modern life—is also reflected in the European approach to drugs, drug dealers, and drug addicts.

A few nations on the continent still follow the traditional law-enforcement pattern favored in the United States—that is, firm prohibitions on growing, selling, or using narcotic drugs and stiff prison terms for those who do. Sweden and Greece hold fairly forcefully to this "just-say-no" approach. Most European nations, though, have shifted to a new mindset. As described by Professor Jonathan Cave, a drug policy expert at Britain's Warwick University, the standard European approach has changed from "use reduction" to "harm reduction." The basic thesis of "harm reduction," Cave writes, is that drug addicts are people who need treatment, not punishment. "People do obtain and use drugs, even if you spend billions trying to stop them. The U.S. war on drugs demonstrates that. Government doesn't want this to happen, but it happens. The goal is to have it happen without the risk of overdose, of HIV, of random crime to support the habit. The government's job is seen as offering support to people who need help."

Some European countries, including Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Luxembourg, have rewritten their laws to decriminalize possession and use of most drugs. Other nations have effectively done the same by eliminating criminal penalties for addicts who are not found to be dealing. For the most part, users of "soft" drugs like marijuana and Ecstasy are simply ignored by the police in European countries; people caught using heroin or cocaine are picked up but delivered to a treatment facility rather than to jail, unless they are found with so much of the drug they are presumed to be dealing in it.

The "harm reduction" approach stems in large part from the same concerns that built Europe's welfare state—the belief that people need to be taken care of by the government and not left alone to bear the consequences of ill fate or their own bad decisions. To this mindset, a drug addict is by definition a sick person, and Europe's social model does not allow the sick to go untreated. But the shift in drug enforcement is not simply a matter of a benevolent state doing what's best for all. There's also a strong dose of pragmatism involved. Since people are going to use drugs anyway, the thinking goes, it is a waste of police time and public money to try to catch them all and jail them. The Eurocrats in Brussels strongly support this approach. "The general trend across Europe," says Georges Estienne, a Frenchman who runs the EU's Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction, "is an approach that focuses on the traffickers and does not pursue the drug user as a criminal. The basic premise is that it is not in the interest of society to put these people in jail, where they don't get treatment but do get fairly easy access to all kinds of drugs. Some people refer to this as the 'pragmatic approach.' It assumes that drug use is a fact of life that society can't stop, so policymakers should try to control the damage."

The pragmatic approach was pioneered in the last century by the Netherlands, where the government permitted development of the famous "hash houses" that draw a steady clientele of locals and tourists. In the dark coffeehouses that line the old canals of Amsterdam, customers are faced with two different menus. First you pick the type of coffee you want—espresso, cappuccino, and so on. Then you pick from an even wider selection of hash varieties—"Nepal," "Kashmir," "Thai," "Kabul"—and the barman rolls a joint. A joint costs about $3. For nonsmokers, there are "space cakes," the Dutch version of that famous hippie dessert, the marijuana-laced brownie. Contrary to Amsterdam's freewheeling reputation, the hash houses tend to be quiet and controlled. At risk of police closure, the shops strictly enforce the mandatory age limits—customers have to be eighteen to buy hash, two years older than the legal drinking age. They refuse requests for a doggy bag to take extra joints home. This decriminalization has worked fairly well in the Netherlands. Drug use in general in the Netherlands appears to be lower than in the prohibitionist United States. Among teenagers Dutch government polls indicate that that about 18 percent report using some narcotic drug at least once a
month; data for the United States show usage above 25 percent. The Dutch police say that few of the hash-house customers move on to harder drugs.

The pioneer of the harm-reduction approach for harder drugs was Portugal. This small country had always had a drug problem, fueled largely by heroin carried across the Mediterranean by smugglers from north Africa. For decades, Portugal’s dank, grimy national prison at Leiria was filled primarily with drug offenders; it was also the scene of a lively market in heroin and cocaine among the inmates. Police spent much of their time pursuing drug dealers and users, often sending the same people back to Leiria time and time again. All this seemed futile and frustrating to an urbane, articulate Lisbon law professor named Vitalino Canas. When he was offered a government job, Canas (the name rhymes with panache) jumped at the chance to abandon the prohibitionist policy that Portugal had followed.

As the federal drugs commissioner at the start of the century, Canas convinced Portugal’s parliament to decriminalize the use of all drugs, and to guarantee treatment rather than imprisonment for all addicts. For political reasons, Canas regularly reminded his conservative countrymen that the new law would not tolerate or legalize hard drugs. “You have to be very careful about the message you send,” Canas told me. “We do not say, we have never said, that it is good to use heroin or cocaine. These drugs are still forbidden. What has changed is the means we use to prevent their use. Under our law, the traficante [the dealer] is still a felon and faces a severe prison term. But the person buying heroin is not a criminal. He is a sick person. He needs treatment, and we now know that jail does not work as a clinic.” Portugal’s drug law is so indulgent toward drug takers that it rejects terms like addict or user. Rather, the person hooked on hard drugs is referred to as a “consumer.”

To decide who is or is not a traficante, Portugal, like the other “harm reduction” countries of Europe, has made rules based on quantity. When Portuguese police arrest a person on drug charges now, the crucial point at issue is how much heroin or cocaine is found at the time of the arrest. If the arrestee has less than ten days’ personal supply of each drug, the amount is considered to be for personal use, and the individual is declared to be a “consumer.” If there is more than ten days’ supply, the suspect can be charged with dealing drugs and is subject to prison.

The distinction between a “consumer” and a “dealer” is not always clear, of course. At a treatment center in Lisbon, I came across a man who might fit in either category—Miguel Soares, a sometime auto mechanic and longtime addict. Miguel was twenty-nine, he told me, and had been using heroin and cocaine for a dozen years. He spent between $20 and $100 per day on his habit. To raise the money, “Sometimes I worked in a garage. Sometimes I stole. Sometimes, I sold drugs, if I had extra. I did whatever I had to do to get the money for my next shot.” Although Miguel was exactly the kind of person most affected by Europe’s new attitude toward drug users, he had never heard of the new policy until he was picked up by the cops in the spring of 2002 carrying one envelope with several grams of heroin and another with a slightly smaller stash of cocaine. “I thought, Oh, Lord, here we go again,” Miguel told me with a grim look. “I figured I was headed straight back to Leiria. I already had two terms in there.” In fact, Miguel didn’t have enough contraband on his person to qualify as a traficante, so he was spared another stretch behind bars. When I met him, he was a free man, dividing his time between part-time work as an auto mechanic and outpatient treatment at Lisbon’s biggest drug treatment clinic. “It’s a good deal, because what I really want is to give up drugs,” he said. “And I could never do that in prison; in there, the dealers were living right next to me.”

Shortly after I met Miguel Soares, I ran into the drug commissioner, Vitalino Canas. I told him what had happened with Miguel, and the politician was pleased as punch. “It does not make sense to put a man like that in prison,” Canas said. “Prison will not cure his addiction; prison will probably make it worse. And the whole point of government is surely not to make personal problems worse. A government must exist to help people with problems. Isn’t that what government is for, in the end? That’s the point of our social system.”
In drug policy, the European social model has produced a result that meets the basic goal of the welfare state and saves money at the same time. The fact is, it is cheaper to treat addicts than to jail them. In health care, too, the Europeans provide universal coverage and state-of-the-art treatment for far less money than America spends for a less extensive system. For the most part, though, Europe’s cushy welfare state is also costly. Expenses for health care, child care, education, unemployment support, pensions, and so forth comprise by far the largest single chunk of every European nation’s budget. Of course, that kind of cradle-to-grave welfare is important to the Europeans, a key element of their definition of what it means to be European. But it takes money. One way the EU nations can find enough public money to fund the social model is by cutting back on another essential form of public spending. But that’s another story, which we will take up in the following chapter.

Yiannos Papantonio was excited. “Today is a great day, an historic day, for the European Union,” the Greek minister of defense declared in his nearly perfect English. “One of the main goals of the new Europe, and of the Greek presidency, has now been achieved. With the agreement of all 25 European Union defense ministers, we can today declare that a dream has been fulfilled. We have reached political agreement with NATO and ensured EU autonomy. We have given the green light for the first actual operation of the EuroArmy.”

Given his obvious enthusiasm, it is surely excusable that Defense Minister Papantonio used an unofficial—and indeed, politically incorrect—term on that May afternoon in 2003. Because his nation happened to hold the six-month “presidency”—that is, the rotating chairmanship—of all EU institutions in the first half of that year, it fell to the Greek defense minister to announce a significant development in European military affairs: the initial mission of a new fighting unit that was created to give the European Union some military clout of its own, outside of NATO and NATO’s American commanders. The new air, land, and sea force, under European command, was being dispatched on a peacekeeping mission to Macedonia, replacing a NATO operation there. It was hardly
are weaker—that soft power amounts to greater power. The Oxford historian John Pinder makes this point: “Too much American hegemony is dangerous for the Americans as well as for others. The burden is too great for one country to carry alone. Only the EU has the potential to be at least an equal partner with respects to the economy, the environment, and soft security, though not defense.”

EIGHT

Generation E
and the Ties That Bind
the New Europe

“...It is the crap, it is totally crap, you know, but I love it,” Gregor said in his heavily Slavic-tinged English, an exotic variant on the language, all ee’s and z’s, that might remind an American of Zsa Zsa Gabor. He took a large swallow of a Vodka Bull, leaned onto the bar, and continued: “I mean, this is rubbish—zeess eess rooheesh—but I cannot miss. Every year, I never miss it. That’s why we are all here tonight, you know because we all love how strange it is, how crazy. Everybody loves Eurovision. Everybody my age, but not just my age! Everybody loves, because it is totally crap!”

On a Saturday evening in May, as crowds jammed nine and ten people thick around each of the big TV screens in the London club, it was hard to disagree with Gregor. Across the continent, nearly everybody seems to love the annual Eurovision song contest, a pan-European pageant of kitsch, bad taste, and third-rate lounge acts that has been drawing TV viewers by the tens of millions for nearly half a century. Eurovision is to Europe what Oscar night is to the United States, or the Super Bowl—a time when everybody gathers around the TV screen for something that has no importance whatsoever, except for the four hours when everybody is tuned in. Perhaps the closest American equivalent to Eurovision, for
pure schlock value, is the Miss America pageant. But the European extravaganza differs from its glitzy American cousins in significant ways. For one thing, the Europeans are more democratic. The winners of Eurovision are chosen not by opening an envelope or consulting a panel of high-minded judges. Instead, the people of Europe get to vote for the winner. On the night of the contest each May, millions and millions of people across the continent phone in their choice for Europe’s best pop song. After many hours at Eurovision parties, many of the voters are probably drunk as skunks, which may help explain why the popular favorite is not always determined by the quality of the music. One year, the winner was a German band that displayed minimal musical talent but had the marketing sense to give itself a bizarre name, Orthopedic Stockings. This proved a powerful vote-getter.

Beyond that, Eurovision—unlike the National Football League, say, or Miss America—is a multinational phenomenon. More than two dozen nations from Iceland to Italy (not to mention that well-known European country, Israel) send representatives to compete each year, and the show is televised simultaneously in thirty nations. Amid its sequined slit-thigh skirts and glittering gold lamé suits, therefore, the annual Eurovision Song Contest is playing an historic role. Eurovision has become a celebration of European-ness, a great annual coming-together that strengthens the growing sense among 500 million people that they all belong to a single place on the world map. It is thus one of several forces creating the “common European home” that the founding fathers of united Europe dreamed about in the aftermath of world war. The unification of Europe is not merely a matter of politics and economics. All sorts of borderless links are developing at the dawn of the new century, creating physical, cultural, culinary, legal, technological, and athletic networks that make the continent more connected than it has been in two millennia.

Although Eurovision seems to appeal to all makes and models of Europeans, the annual exercise in televised tastelessness has its strongest following among people like Gregor Sandyk, the twenty-seven-year-old securities trader whom I met on Eurovision night at a popular club in London. Gregor is a Croatian by birth, but there is nothing about his résumé that tells you so. He graduated from a German university and a French business school, then worked at banking jobs in Paris and Rome before taking his current position at an investment house in the City of London. Gregor’s coworkers at the office are Brits, Finns, Germans, and Czechs. “There is no need for me to go back to Croatia to go home,” Gregor told me. “I am home right here. I am Croatian, yes, but not so much, you know? I will say I am European.”

Gregor is a member of “Generation E”—the young adults of Europe, a continent that has been essentially without borders since the time they finished school. While the Eurocrats in Brussels toil away at the job of creating a unified Europe in the markets and the law books, Gregor and his cohort—the age group ranging from about eighteen to forty—are creating a unified European society of their own, in offices and bars, in soccer stadiums, health clubs, and Internet cafés. Sociologists love to study Generation E, because it represents a new breed of European: a person who considers the entire continent—not just one country or city—to be “home.”

For the postwar generation of Europeans, the ideal of a continent where a college grad from Dublin would routinely find herself working in Lisbon or Helsinki was a distant dream. Today, Generation E takes it for granted that the ability to live, work, and study anywhere on the continent is a birthright. For a Croatian like Gregor to live and work in London today is no different than a Texan taking a job in Tallahassee. This kind of mobility has been most common among college graduates—still a minority of the European population. But more and more, blue-collar workers are on the move as well, finding new jobs and new friends wherever they land. The night Gregor went to that club to watch Eurovision, he was accompanied by three pals, all certified Generation E types: a banker from Gregor’s birthplace, Zagreb, a beautiful blond student from Sweden, and a journalist from Britain. They laughed and cheered and talked the night away in a language that was about 60 percent English,
telecast on the European Broadcasting Union’s fledgling pancontinental broadcasting network, then known as “Eurovision.” The annual contest quickly became the most popular program the Eurovision network broadcast each year, and soon the singing event took over the name.

Eurovision—the contest, not the network—made a quantum leap in public awareness in 1974. That year, an unknown Swedish group won the event with an irresistible pop tune. This previously unsung band was none other than Abba, and their Eurovision entry, “Waterloo,” started them on the road to global stardom. Suddenly, Eurovision became important to the music industry, and to the audience. Numerous other pop stars got their starts at Eurovision, including Olivia Newton-John (a ringer from Australia who nonetheless represented Britain in 1974), Celine Dion (a ringer from Canada who nonetheless represented Switzerland in 1988), Nana Mouskouri (a Greek who represented Luxembourg, for some reason, in 1963), Julio Iglesias (a Spaniard who sang for Spain in 1970), and t.A.T.u., the Russian “technoiezpop” duo—two young women given to fondling and kissing each other on stage—who were the pre-event favorites in 2003 but finished a disappointing third.

Eurovision allows each country to enter one singing act, group or solo; each entry is supposed to perform an original song, although many of the numbers are already staples of the nightclub scene in their home countries. The singers are almost always accompanied by hyperenergetic dancing troops in lavish costumes who whirl, leap, tumble, and simulate assorted sexual acts in the background while the music plays. (Turkish singers generally recruit a few belly dancers for backup purposes.) It is de rigueur for Eurovision contestants to wear outlandish outfits in an effort (usually futile) to distinguish themselves from everybody else. Thus the night turns into a bewildering procession of middle-aged men wearing high heels and pink hair, breathy torch singers in white leather boots and tight gowns revealing extensive décolletage, or teenage starlets in tiny vinyl microskirts. In 1997, a British girl band stunned the continent by ripping off their sequined skirts midway through their number—to reveal matching sequined G-strings beneath—and walked away as the
new roads, rail lines, bridges, and tunnels. This growth in the transportation infrastructure is largely a result of the European Union—and massive EU subsidies for trains, airports, highways, and harbors. As a result, a Europe that is coming together politically and economically is growing closer together physically as well.

There's the huge new Europabrücke—"the Bridge of Europe" in Austria; there are new tunnels to carry truck and train traffic under the Alps and across the Pyrenees. In a belated effort to make transcontinental travel as straightforward as it was in Roman times, the EU is pouring about 100 billion euros into the reconstruction of the ancient Via Egnatia, the long, straight Roman road that connected Italy and Greece to the Balkan states and on to the Middle East (this was the "road to Damascus" where the Apostle Paul had his great revelation). Europe's greatest water highway, the Rhine, has been dredged and cleared and linked by canals to the Rhone, creating so much barge traffic that the Rhine delta at Rotterdam has become the world's busiest freighter port. It is known today, inevitably, as the "Europaort."

A key milestone in this drive for improved connections was the completion of the planet's longest undersea rail line, the Channel Tunnel. The thirty-two-mile, $50 billion "Chunnel" has linked the island of Great Britain to the European mainland for the first time since the ancient land bridge melted at the end of the last ice age some 12,000 years ago. The idea for a connection between France and Britain had floated around for at least two centuries, but one side or the other had always quashed it in the past. The project almost came to life in the 1890s, when the same French engineers who built the Suez Canal decided they could build a railroad beneath the seabed between Calais and the white cliffs of Dover. The idea moved ahead rapidly until it ran into a royal obstacle. Queen Victoria was not amused. Her Majesty remarked in 1896 that Britain's greatest defense had always been the island's status as "virgo intacta"; she was not going to let this unsullied virgin be penetrated by some Frenchman's long rail. A century later, though, the drive for a unified Europe overcame this ancient objection. When the Chunnel opened

In real life, the Irish victory streak came to an end near the end of the last century, with the result that the Eurovision Song Contest has moved widely around Europe in recent years: Manchester, Tallinn, Riga, Istanbul. But Generation E music fans who wanted to be present each year would have found it easy to make the transcontinental trek, because of a huge expansion of the basic transit links connecting the continent. As pan-European consciousness has grown, there has been an outpouring of
in 1994, the trying seven-hour car-and-ferry journey from London to Paris became a pleasant two-and-a-half-hour train trip. Not surprisingly, the Eurostar trains flashing back and forth between Paris or Brussels and London have become a common meeting place for the members of Generation E. Because the London-Brussels train makes a stop in northern France at the gate of Euro Disneyland, the Channel crossing has also become a standard place to see the children of Generation E, particularly on weekends.

To match that east-west link, a pair of massive projects in Scandinavia at the dawn of the new millennium finally made the continent a connected whole from its northern tip to its southern toe. First, a bridge and tunnel joined the main islands of Denmark to the Jutland Peninsula, the long thumb of land jutting northward from the heart of Europe into the Baltic. The main event, on a typically Scandinavian summer's day—cloudy and blustery—came in July of 2000, when Queen Margrethe of Denmark and King Carl Gustaf of Sweden shook hands and exchanged air kisses on a spectacular new bridge over the Øresund Sound between Copenhagen and Malmö, Sweden. The 4-billion-euro "Øresund Fixed Link"—a bridge, a tunnel, and an artificial island to connect them—spanned ten miles, providing both a highway and a railroad line across the sea and essentially shutting down the ferry services that had plied that ice-blue strait for centuries. As a result, a car, truck, or train can travel in a roughly straight line from the Arctic coast of northern Norway to the Mediterranean shores of Spain.

The Scandinavians put up most of the money for the Øresund project—with Brussels throwing in a few hundred million euros for good measure—but they did not think of it so much as an inter-Scandinavian connection. Of course, a lot of Swedes come across the bridge now to take advantage of the lower liquor taxes in Denmark; for that reason, the locals tend to call their sleek new link not the "Øresund" but rather the "Olesund," the "ale bridge." But the point of Øresund was something bigger: "We would not have spent billions on a link between Sweden and Denmark," the mayor of Copenhagen, Jens Kramer Mikkelsen, said rather bluntly. "We get along well with the Swedes, but we did not need this just to get to Malmo a little quicker. The bridge came about when we realized that we are no longer just Danes and Swedes. We are Europeans, and Scandinavia needs connections to the European mainland. We needed to have that mental bridge before we could build the concrete one."

No matter where Generation E travels, it likes to travel fast. Europe in the twenty-first century has the world's fastest passenger planes, trains, boats (a fleet of hydrofoil ferries that zip across the sounds and straits at speeds above 50 mph), and highways. Europeans invented the automobile and the limited-access expressway—General Dwight D. Eisenhower was so impressed with the German autobahn during World War II that he brought the idea home with him and created the Interstate Highway System—and the EU has maintained the tradition by funding the fastest network of highways on earth. The speed limit on the various autostrade, autorien, and dual carriageways that link Europe's major cities is 130 kilometers per hour (that is, 81 mph) or higher. Racing to a meeting in southern Germany one spring morning, I was tootling down the smooth, fluid autobahn at 120 miles per hour. Yet I lost count of the number of young European drivers who came up from behind and passed me. There was nothing illegal about it, either; the speed limit on German expressways is whatever you can safely maintain.

But the grandest way to get around the united Europe is the rail network, with the fastest trains on earth. In 1981, the French national railway designed a new locomotive specifically to beat the 220-kilometer-per-hour speed of the Japanese Shinkansen, or bullet train. After two decades of improvements, the sleek, missile-nosed TGV—that's the Train à Grande Vitesse, or "Train of Great Velocity"—races today from London to the Alps, from the North Sea to the Mediterranean, at some 300 kilometers per hour, or 186 mph. (For comparison, the fastest American train, Amtrak's Acela, hits 150 mph at points on its run from Washington to Boston.) Aboard the TGV, though, you never know that you're traveling that fast. You zoom smoothly along in quiet comfort, glance at the headlines in Le Monde, sip a perky young Beaujolais, and watch the
medieval villages and the handsome rectangular church steeples of rural France race by outside the window. *C'est magnifique!* The one little flaw in this magnificent mode of travel, though, comes from another aspect of pan-European connectivity. Unless you are careful enough to seek out the car with the understated sign reading “Pas de Telephone, S'il Vous Plait,” your silent windowside reveries are interrupted every thirty seconds or so by the dreadful bane of European classrooms, theaters, planes, and trains: the biddly-biddly-beep of somebody’s cell phone.

American rail fans are always told that the United States is too wide and too sparsely populated to support a serious passenger rail operation. Somehow, these problems haven’t stopped the Europeans. The distance from Moscow to Madrid, something over 2,100 miles, is roughly equal to a trip from Denver to New York. But there are crack trains crossing that route every day, and passengers to ride them. Tens of thousands of tiny towns in sparsely populated areas of Europe are served by train, which helps explain the popularity of the European hobby of “rambling,” or cross-country trekking. You can ride a train in the morning to Little Whining, ramble across the pristine countryside to the station at East Twee, and board a train there to get home. Another admirable feature of European trains is that most routes have names: the Royal Scot, the Eurostar, Artesia, Le Train Bleu, and so on. The best named route in all of Europe, for my money, is one that links the two major seats of the European Union, Brussels and Strasbourg. Since the EU is the only reason to connect those two cities, and since Eurocrats and European Parliament members are the main passengers on the route, somebody with a nice sense of history named this comfortable train the Jean Monnet.

Another transcontinental connection beloved by Generation E travelers is the plethora of budget airlines. Europe has some of the most expensive airline tickets on earth, on the great flag carriers like British Airways, Air France, and Alitalia. But the continent is also home to most of the world’s cheap airlines—and here we mean dirt cheap, with prices along the lines of 10 to 30 euros (that is, $11 to $33) for round-trip international connections, if you book early enough. These airlines have deliberately

friendly, nonbusinesslike names along the lines of Go, Buzz, Debonair, and (my favorite) Be My Baby. The Henry Ford of this kind of travel is a classic Generation E figure, Stelios Haji-Ioannou, a Cypriot who studied in France and then rented an office in the London suburbs to house the company he created, a budget airline called easyJet. Stelios—he’s always referred to by his first name—created the business model that all the other no-frills airlines try to follow. The basic rule is that prices are low, and so is service. There are no tickets, no refunds, no assigned seats, no meals, and nobody to help if your plane happens to be late or gets diverted to the wrong city. You bought a no-frills ticket, so it’s your job to cope with any problems that develop. The pricing plan is simplicity itself: the earlier you book, the cheaper your seat. To get that 10-euro round trip from London to Brussels, you have to reserve, and pay, a month or more ahead of time. If you buy a seat on Buzz or easyJet an hour before takeoff, you’ll pay just about as much as you’d pay on Lufthansa or KLM. Younger Europeans have become past masters at dealing with these cheap but difficult airlines, and that’s one reason why Generation E is constantly in transit around the continent. Since every major European airport has a big train station in the basement of the terminal, Euro-travelers can jump off the plane and straight onto the TGV train to complete the journey.

European travelers don’t even have to slow down anymore when they cross from one country to the next; indeed, passport-free travel was considered a key element of European unification from the days of the founding fathers. One of Churchill’s contemporaries, the postwar British foreign minister Ernest Bevin, observed that a key reason for bringing Europe together “really was to grapple with the whole problem of passports and visas.” Bevin said he wanted to “go down to Victoria Station, get a railway ticket, and go where the hell I like without a passport or anything else.” Today, the European Union officially describes itself as “an area without internal frontiers.” In a treaty signed at Schengen, Luxembourg, in 1985, the member states agreed to eliminate border controls between EU countries—and to strengthen the borders at the union’s external boundaries, to control the flood of immigrants trying to get to
rich European countries. Today, nearly all EU members have signed up to the Schengen agreement. Britain—where the anti-immigration lobby remains strong—and the Republic of Ireland, which had to stay out of the Schengen deal in order to keep its traditional open border with the British province of Northern Ireland, are the main abstainers.

Anybody traveling around Europe these days will see that Schengen works. In a car, you often don’t know that you’ve crossed a border until you see the language on the highway signs begin to change. On the train, there’s no longer an immigration guard to check your passport, no matter how many countries your trip will go through. This borderless travel has been one of the most popular innovations of the united Europe, but it is not at all popular with travelers like me, who used to cherish all those exotic visas stamped in the passport. For citizens of any EU country, there are no limitations on working or studying in any other member nation, and that’s a key reason why Generation E has been so mobile. Paradoxically, this elimination of internal border controls has required the extension of border policing for nations at the fringe of the EU. Poland, which has always maintained open borders with its giant neighbor Russia, suddenly had to set up a whole new immigration control apparatus there. Otherwise, anybody crossing into Poland from the East would be free to travel anywhere else (except Britain and Ireland) in the EU without a glance from a border guard.

With all the new bridges, concrete and otherwise, that are sprouting across Europe, it’s not surprising that Europe is also developing cultural norms that transcend the old borders, customs, and culinary traditions. Yes, the Finns still love a good reindeer steak, the French have a thousand different cheeses, and the Greeks like to put olive oil on everything. And yet, as the continent unifies politically, economically, and culturally, there is a common European diet emerging—particularly among the younger Europeans, Generation E and their children. From the top of Norway to the toe of the Italian boot, you find a standard breakfast: a cup of severely strong coffee together with the kind of sweet roll that Americans, for some reason, call “Danish pastry.” You can get a “Danish” in Denmark, but no Dane ever calls it a Danish pastry. In fact, no Europeans use that term, except for TV comedians making fun of Americans. In Denmark, and in most of Europe, that breakfast pastry is generally called Wienerbrod, or “Vienna bread.”

The favorite quick lunch for young Europeans almost everywhere is a crunchy baguette sliced lengthwise and turned into a sandwich about the length of a forearm. The continent’s standard snack is frites, the food that Americans call “french fries”—another culinary term that leaves Europe mystified. “I don’t know where you get that ‘french fry,’” complained Jacques Urtel, the chief potato fryer at a sidewalk friteries on the ancient market square in the beautiful town of Bruges, Belgium. “Everybody knows that frites are all over Europe.” The French are particularly annoyed with the term “french fries,” or least with the product sold under that name in the United States. When Americans turned against France during the second war in Iraq, restaurants all over the country—including the House of Representatives dining room in Washington—sought to show their displeasure with Paris by renaming “french fries” to “liberty fries,” or some such. If this change of nomenclature was intended to punish the French, it probably didn’t work. To the gourmets of France, it is a greater insult to see their country’s name attached to the large, puffy, greasy potatoes sold as frites in America.

Despite Europe’s world-renowned vineyards, the real national drink of Europe—and particularly for Generation E—is beer. Europeans consume vast quantities of black beer, white beer, red beer, gold beer, cherry-, lemon-, and strawberry-flavored beer, beer for breakfast, beer at bedtime, beer even at McDonald’s. (A beer with your Big Mac costs about 90 euro, roughly $1.15.) When European soccer teams played in the World Cup in Japan and Korea in 2002, parliaments all over the continent had to rewrite their liquor laws to allow bars to serve beer at the crack of dawn. A midafternoon kickoff in Tokyo meant the game began at seven-thirty in the morning in Paris or Berlin. Since much of Europe equates a game of soccer with the consumption of beer, the fans demanded that the law be changed so that the taps could be opened.
The various parliaments might not have made that change for just any sport, but soccer is not so much a sport today as it is a passion that spans all cultural and political borders—and thus serves as another force unifying Europe. There are, of course, national sports across the continent. The Norwegians idolize cross-country skier Bjørn Daehlie; the French love bike racer Laurent Jalabert; the Dutch are wild about speed skater Rintje Ritsma. But these local enthusiasms pale compared to the transcontinental obsession with soccer—or “football,” as it is known in most of Europe. In America, where the game has never really caught on, the notion of soccer in Europe brings to mind drunken hooligans battering in the stands. That happens. But mostly, European soccer is a pastime that draws tens of millions of fans every weekend and reaches across all national borders. On any given Sunday or Monday, virtually every European newspaper will have page after page of soccer results, reporting on games from every country on the continent.

In a tiny farming village in Alsace, on the border where France and Germany meet, I met a cable TV salesman, Jacques Laurent, a thirty-three-year-old Generation E type—born in France, works for a German company, and routinely visits ten other countries on the job. When our conversation turned to sports, M. Laurent gleefully compared European soccer to American football and baseball. He gave no quarter. “Baseball is a good game,” he said, “but in the championships, where do you get the right to say it is the ‘World Series’? You have just one country playing, or maybe two. I think they let the Canadians get in now and then. In Europe, every nation plays football, every nation plays every other nation, and every fan knows the teams and players from anywhere in Europe. We have the European Cup, and the UEFA [that is, the Union des Associations Européennes de Football] Cup, and the premier league. The teams play in every country. It is not just German teams against Germans, the way you Americans do it.

“Football brings millions and millions of us together,” Laurent went on. “I myself have traveled to, let’s see, nine countries at least, to see games. Football is Europe, don’t you see? If I meet somebody from

England, or Norway, or Spain, I just say, ‘David Beckham,’ and we immediately have something we share.”

David Beckham, the soccer superstar who plays for Spain’s Real Madrid, is a Generation E idol, a common property who tends to make Europe more like a single nation than a divided continent. Beckham has been called Europe’s version of Michael Jordan, and the comparison is apt. Both men are surpassingly good at putting a ball into a net, both have earned hundreds of millions—of dollars, pounds, or euros—for doing it, and both have built global followings. In fact, though, Beckham, as the highest-paid and highest-ranked star of Europe’s biggest sport, has a kind of stature and celebrity that exceeds anything Michael Jordan achieved during his tenure as America’s ranking basketball hero. There are tens of thousands of young women, from Spain to Japan, who like to cut their hair in whatever style David Beckham is using at the moment—a trend that made for some strange scenes on the streets of Madrid and Tokyo in 2002–3, when Beckham sported a Mohawk. When Beckham suffered a minor foot injury shortly before the 2002 World Cup championships, reporters overheard the queen of England and the president of France debating the proper treatment of his fractured metatarsal. (Her Majesty’s prescription: massage therapy.)

The Beckham home life is also a pan-European concern. The soccer star himself is a quiet, understated individual who lets his trademark free kicks and crosses do all the talking. This makes him just about the polar opposite of his wife, Victoria Adams Beckham, the former Spice Girl who was assigned the nickname “Posh Spice” during her career with that British pop group. Since her $2 million wedding to the soccer star in 1999—with bride and groom seated on matching gold-and-chromium thrones, a classic Posh Spice touch—Victoria has done her best to live up to that sobriquet. On the eve of the English team’s departure for the World Cup in 2002, Mrs. Beckham hosted a going-away party at the couple’s home—a sprawling rural mansion popularly known as “Beckingham Palace.” It was a classic demonstration of the Posh style, with 60,000 orchids, a seven-acre tent, two dozen geishas to greet guests,
say, Greeks, Swedes, and Spaniards get together. This is true even in the
guest offices of the European Union itself. At the European Central
Bank, in Frankfurt, Germany, the official language for all business is
English. Even at the European Parliament, with elected members from
all twenty-five member countries, English rules. A staff member, Thomas
Lynn, did a study of the language used in hallway conversations. The
conclusion: about 80 percent of all conversations are in English now.
Companies operating across borders in Europe routinely require their
employees to converse in English. On MTV Europe, about 80 percent of
the DJs use English; the songs are primarily in English—or as close to
English as contemporary rap lyrics ever come. Even Le Monde, that
venerable organ of the chauvinistic French intelligentsia, now prints a daily
section in English, to make the paper accessible to traveling Europeans.

English is the language of European baseball caps, backpacks, T-shirts,
and tattoos. English is the language of almost every new song performed
at Eurovision. English is even the common language of European anti-
American rallies. The German, Swedish, and French demonstrators
paint their big banners—"No More McDonald's"; "Bush Is the Real
Terrorist"—in English, partly for the benefit of American TV viewers,
but mainly because it is the language that all of Europe will understand.
And of course, English is the common language of the text message—
or, more precisely, the txt msg—the abbreviated lingo that a hundred
million young Europeans use every day to communicate by mobile phone
(because the GSM system makes it possible to send a txt msg to any
user on any network in any GSM country). A message like "CNT W8
2C U 2NT. F I M L8, U GO B4"—meaning, essentially, "I can't wait
to see you tonight. If I'm late, go ahead before me"—is lingua franca now
for Generation E members, no matter what their native tongue. Deathless
lines from English literature have been turned into txt msg form:
"2B R NT 2B?"

Europe's common language has become so common it appears in un-
expected places. The advertising slogan of the postal service in Belgium—
a nation of French, Flemish, and German speakers—is the English phrase "Belgian stamps are cool." On the steep mountain pass that links German-speaking Austria with Slavic-speaking Slovenia, there's a billboard that declares, in huge letters, "Hit my airbase!" This turns out to be a popular sales campaign for an Austrian cigarette brand called Memphis Blue Lights. Maria Ortega, a Generation E ski instructor—she's a Spaniard who works in France in the winter and Switzerland in the summer—told me, at a French resort high in the Pyrenees, that she is a native Spanish speaker and a fluent French speaker, but prefers to deal in English. "The thing about English is, you can use it anywhere in Europe," she said in accented but excellent English. "I guess you can use it in America, too, but I never go there. Up here in the mountains, when I meet someone, I try Spanish. Then I try French. And if it's not working, I say, 'Hello.' That's the signal, and we communicate no matter what country we come from."

While the New Europe, and particularly the younger generation of Europeans, has drawn closer together because of this broadly shared pop culture, twenty-first-century Europe has lost—or at least, almost lost—one of its most powerful connections, which virtually defined the continent and its inhabitants for much of modern history. For nearly 1,500 years, Europe was more or less synonymous with Christendom. From the fourth century AD, when the Roman Empire became a Christian empire, through the Holy Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, and even through the wars of the twentieth century, Europe was a devoutly Christian place, and the global center of the Christian faith. The power of religious conviction spawned bloody battles, inspired timeless works of art, and spurred thousands of people to spend decades or centuries erecting the awesome cathedrals that mark all great European cities. Christmas, Easter, and the other great ceremonial days of the Christian calendar defined the European year. Until well into the last century, the majority of educated Europeans got their education, at least in part, in Christian schools. Europe's great art and architecture, music and literature, were all deeply touched by the pervasive influence of the church. The faith created bonds that reached across all borders.

But today, Western Europe—the home of the world's biggest religious denomination, the Roman Catholic church, and the birthplace of most major Protestant faiths—has turned its back on religion. The Dutch sociologist Nan Kirk de Graaf, who studies faith and belief around the world, reports that twenty-first-century Europe has "one of the least religious populations in the world." A continent that is full of ancient churches and religious shrines is increasingly empty of practicing religion. In Britain, France, Germany, Holland, and Belgium, fewer than 10 percent of the population attend church as often as once a month. Only 12 percent of Britons describe themselves as "active" members of the Anglican Church. In Scandinavia, the handsome high-steeped churches that mark every city and village attract less than 3 percent of the people, and governments no longer subsidize the disestablished Lutheran Church. In Amsterdam, the Dutch Reformed hierarchy is converting cathedrals into luxury apartments to pay its bills. In the former Soviet satellites east of the iron curtain, nobody has seen a need to restore many of the ancient churches that the Red Army turned into barracks or warehouses.

I have attended church on Sunday morning in dozens of European cities and villages. Sitting in those marvelous old cathedrals, listening to the mighty organs echo in the vaulted ceilings, two things always struck me: how beautiful those structures were, and how empty.

Beneath the towering steeple of the 700-year-old St. Jacob's Church in the heart of Stockholm, I counted 29 people at the only Sunday service—in a stupendous church that would comfortably fit 900. The pastor, David Olson, was hard-pressed to this. "That's about a normal turn-out now," he told me with a shrug after the service. "Showing up at church on Sunday morning, that's not the Swedish way anymore. It's a secular society. People don't even know how to go to church. They call me up and say, 'Do I need to reserve a seat for Sunday morning?'"
On a beautiful spring Sunday during Lent, I wended my way to Canterbury, England, and the majestic old cathedral that used to draw multitudes of pilgrims who came, as Geoffrey Chaucer put it in the first great book in the English language, "the holy blissful martrir for to seke." But the multitudes are no longer present. At morning prayer the day I was there, Canterbury Cathedral—the mother church of the worldwide Anglican/Episcopal faith—hosted a grand total of 13 worshippers. At a midday communion service, the tally of churchgoers reached 300—but only if you counted the choirboys in their white ruffled collars and a phalanx of tourists with video cameras. That still left 80 percent of the seats unused. Among those in my pew was Yves Everoux, a high-school student from Normandy who came to Canterbury on a class field trip. "For us, this is just the history lesson," Yves told me (in excellent English) after he asked me to take his picture at the cathedral's marvelous vaulted entrance. "I don't go to church, not ever. My parents not either. The most exciting thing about the cathedral, Yves said, was the murder that took place here in 1170, when Saint Thomas à Becket—Chaucer's "blissful martrir"—fell victim to a long-running battle between clergy and monarchy.

European clergy have different attitudes toward this turning away from the church. Some say it is an inevitable consequence of the modern era. "It's a secular age," Canon Michael Chandler, the vice dean of Canterbury Cathedral, told me on that Lenten morning. "We're breeding a whole generation without much spiritual perception. We can, and do, try to fight it, but this is the age we live in." Churches are trying to accommodate this trend by tolerating greater skepticism among believers and clergy alike. Until 1980, the Church of England required new priests to swear that they "unfeignedly believe all the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testament." Today, potential clerics need swear only that they "accept the holy scriptures as revealing all things necessary for eternal salvation through faith."

On the other hand, there are religious leaders who say that the decline in organized religion is a demographic blip that will quickly be reversed. The argument here is that the big problem facing institutional religion in Europe is not the religious part of the equation, but the institutional aspect. That is, more and more Europeans tend to act out what faith they have outside the official structure. They pray at home—or in the car during the morning commute. They flock to carol services at Christmas and buy CDs of religious music, which perhaps explains why records of Gregorian chant have been best-sellers in several European countries in recent years. Europeans still travel to places like Vatican City or Lourdes for personal moments of religious rapture. That flicker of individualized faith is one of the great hopes of European church leaders. Another is that non-Christian religions seem to be healthy. Hindu and Muslim denominations, brought to the continent by a wave of mass immigration, are expanding rapidly. In the same cities where churches stand empty, Islamic immigrants are building immense new mosques. The continent's Jewish population is holding steady; although the United States has more Jews than all of Europe combined.

But the striking fact remains that "Christian Europe" is hardly Christian anymore, except as a collection of inspiring Gothic reminders of Christianity's past. "For the first time in 1500 years," wrote historian Norman Davies in the late 1990s, "Christianity was becoming a minority religion" in Europe. The European Union in particular is a pervasively secular institution. When Giscard d'Estaing's Constitutional Convention produced its proposed constitution to govern the expanded, twenty-five-nation union, the draft text made no mention of Christianity or God. The Vatican and other Christian leaders complained loudly about this omission. But the members of the drafting committee argued that Europe's constitution should deal with government, not faith—this on a continent where nearly every nation has had an official, government-subsidized Christian denomination.

It may be a sign of the demise of religious practice that the institution of marriage is also in decline among Generation E members, particularly in Western Europe. Europeans still form monogamous unions, raise children, attend parent-teacher night at school, and buy out the toy stores.
in the weeks before Christmas. But they do all this without bothering to get married. The result is that the wealthy nations of Europe—particularly the northern countries—have the world’s highest rates of children born out of wedlock. Americans who are disturbed that some 30 percent of babies in the United States are born to single mothers should perhaps be relieved they don’t live in Norway (49 percent of all births to unwed parents), Sweden (48 percent), France (41 percent), Britain (38 percent), or Ireland (31 percent). On the other hand, most of the “out-of-wedlock” children in Europe are actually living with both parents—a significant difference from the United States, where the typical single mom doesn’t have the father around the house. It’s just that European cohabitators—they call themselves “partners” or “companions” or sometimes “spouses”—don’t ever go to church, not even to be married. A Norwegian named Haakon lived happily with his partner and their child for years without being married. Eventually, Lutheran leaders convinced Haakon that he should, indeed, find the time for a formal marriage ceremony—since he is, after all, Norway’s crown prince. In Ireland, Prime Minister Bertie Ahern raised a few eyebrows when his unmarried companion moved in with him—but not many, evidently, because Ahern was easily reconciled at a time when the whole nation knew that he was “living in sin,” as the church used to say. Perhaps because they are eager to encourage marriage in any form, European countries have been significantly more open than American jurisdictions to same-sex unions. Belgium and the Netherlands both offer full legal recognition of gay marriages, and most other European countries have authorized civil ceremonies that give gay couples all the legal benefits that their heterosexual neighbors are entitled to.

Does it make any difference in daily life whether Europeans still believe in God, or go to church? It is hard to argue that twenty-first-century Europe is a less moral or caring society than the church-going United States. Yes, Americans put up huge billboards reading “Love Thy Neighbor,” but they murder and rape their neighbors at rates that would shock any European nation. Corruption in business and government seems equally prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic. Norwegians don’t go to church much, but they give away ten times as much per capita as Americans do in aid to poor countries. Indeed, every West European government devotes a considerably higher share of its budget to foreign aid than the United States does.

On the other hand, the weakness of Christian belief makes it harder to transmit Europe’s cultural tradition. When Generation E tours the great art galleries, it is confused by the most basic iconography of the art on display. The National Gallery in London reports that visitors keep asking what the label “INRI” stands for in the great crucifixion paintings.1 People don’t recognize the saint who is depicted with birds and forest animals.2 Even in Scotland, schoolchildren don’t know anymore that the saint who is always depicted with an arrow through his hand is Saint Giles, a Scot who was wounded, the chronicles relate, when he stepped between a hunter and a deer in order to spare the animal’s life.

Perhaps the most significant implication of the secularization of Europe is that it deepens the divide between Europeans and Americans. Depending on how the question is asked, up to 95 percent of Americans say they believe in God; in most of Europe, the figure is closer to 50 percent. The public religiosity that is part and parcel of American life is rarely seen on the continent; the only televangelists on European screens are piped in via cable from Newport News and Houston. Europeans tend to be surprised, or amused, when U.S. politicians end a speech with the words “God bless America.” “When they hear that, the intellectuals break out in a little smug smile,” reported Jonathan Freedland, a columnist with London’s Guardian newspaper. “It’s almost impossible to imagine a prime minister over here saying ‘God bless Britain’ or ‘God bless Sweden.’” When George W. Bush cited “holy scripture” and argued that going to war in Iraq was a straightforward matter of “good against evil,” demonstrators by the million took to the streets of Europe. “Don’t send us to fight religious wars,” read a banner I saw at a demo in Salzburg. At a time when many European leaders are vigorously promoting the notion that the united Europe should stand as a counterpart to American
influence in the world, the different status of religious belief serves to
heighten the notion that there is a basic difference of worldview on the
opposite sides of the Atlantic.

Another fundamental difference between the American worldview
and the outlook of today's Europeans is their attitudes toward technol-
ogy. Europeans are rich enough to have access to all the high-tech equip-
ment and inventions of modern life, and they use the stuff. But Europeans
are often afraid of advances in science and engineering, and that fear has
draped a blanket of worry, of insecurity, over some aspects of contempo-
rary life that Americans take for granted.

Well-educated, well-read Europeans will tell you, in perfect seriousness,
that a bowl of cornflakes can kill you—not to mention a ham sand-
wich or a T-bone steak. Getting vaccinated can kill you. Flying economy
class can kill you, and business class isn't much better. The rubber duckie
in your bathtub can kill you (and your children). And even though they
use their cell phones far more than Americans do, the members of Gen-
eration E do so with a nagging sense that a cell phone might kill you, too.
In fact, the woeful catalog of warnings about this food or that technological
device is such a standard part of modern European life that the contin-
ent seems to veer almost every month from one health panic to the next.
The fact that there's often no scientific basis for these fears doesn't stanch
the flood.

A good example of how this works is the scare surrounding the measles-
mumps-rubella vaccine, a standard preventative shot given to babies in
virtually every developed country. In 2001, a single British doctor sug-
gested, in a TV interview, that there might be some link between the
MMR vaccine and autism. Both the British and the EU departments of
public health quickly issued clarifying reports pointing out that there was
no basis for this alarming statement. No study had ever found such a link,
and there was no scientific rationale as to why there should be one. Babies
in the United States, Asia, Africa, and so on continued to get the shot as
advised. Tony Blair—the father of a child born in 2001—was seen on TV
screens across Europe advising parents that MMR was both safe and es-
ential for infant health. Nonetheless, many European parents—particularly
Britons—decided not to "take the risk" of having their children vaccinated.
The result, sadly predictable, was that rates of measles, mumps, and rub-
ella went up dramatically among the eighteen-month-old children of Gen-
eration E. (There was no decrease in the rate of autism, further proof
that the supposed connection to the vaccination never existed.) By the
summer of 2003, a British study found that measles—a disease that had
been virtually eradicated from western Europe a decade earlier—was
once again a common threat for British toddlers. The moral is ominous:
in contemporary Europe, the completely unfounded fear of a new health
threat can be strong enough to overcome parental worries about a tradi-
tional baby killer.

The strongest and most consequential scares sweeping modern Europe
involve food—especially any food product produced with new technolo-
gies. Most intense has been the reaction against genetically modified
crops, known in Europe by the shorthand term GMO, for genetically
modified organism. Some 300 million Americans and Canadians con-
sume genetic hybrids of corn, soybeans, and other foods every day, with
no evidence of a health risk. A U.S. National Academy of Sciences study
concluded that new varieties are no different from traditional hybrids.
Britain's Royal Academy reached essentially the same conclusion. And yet
GMOs are restricted across Europe; the media treat the crops as if they
were lethal. When it was reported that minute quantities—well below
1 percent—of GMO seeds had inadvertently been mixed into bags of
Canadian seed sold to European farmers, newspapers across the contin-
ent warned of "contamination" and "poisoning." Frightened consumers
returned boxes of cornflakes to grocery stores, demanding refunds.

In Norwich, England, a group of Greenpeace demonstrators broke
down a wall and fence to storm a farm. They wrecked tens of thousands
of pounds worth of tractors and harvesters, and trampled acres of grain
just before it was ready to harvest. When the farmer took these vandals to
court, a jury found for the protesters. The farmer had been growing an experimental crop of genetically modified corn, and that was considered a greater crime in Norwich than the destruction of the man’s property.

Similar scares surround beef and pork fed with growth hormones; steaks and hams from such animals are consumed daily around the world, but not in Europe. Rubber toys containing softeners called phthalates have been the subject of health scares. In 2002–3, the British newspapers identified a major new health threat they called “economy-class syndrome”—the fear that long hours spent in a cramped airplane seat will lead to “deep vein thrombosis,” causing blood clots to travel to the lungs. There have been a minute number of reported cases of this syndrome (one of them involving a passenger in business class). Still, all the major European airlines felt the need to issue written warnings to all passengers; many people have changed their travel routines so as to break up long flights into a series of smaller segments. Even Europeans’ beloved cell phones contribute to general dread of technology. In 2000, a consumer group warned that transmission signals from these phones might cause brain damage; its report suggested the use of earphones, to reduce the risk that supposedly results from holding a phone next to the brain. Just as European worries were getting accustomed to that, another blue-ribbon panel suggested a year later that earphones might increase the risk. The British government issued a study showing no linkage at all between cell phones and brain damage, but the worries are still prevalent.

The pervasive technophobia that throbs like background music beneath the rhythms of daily European life came as a surprise to me. Europe, after all, gave the world the Industrial Revolution, quantum physics, and modern genetics. Europe is the proud home of the Nobel Prizes, the world’s most prestigious awards for scientific innovation. Why should Europeans, of all people, be scared of technology? I got the chance once to ask that question of Tony Blair, the British prime minister. He had obviously spent time pondering the same paradox, and he had a ready explanation.

“There’s been a loss of faith in science, without any doubt, in Europe,” Blair said. “There is a sense, you know, that scientific advances are harm-

ful as often as they are helpful. There’s a distrust of scientists, and a distrust of government when it relies on science. This feeling is real and it is strong—and you can trace it straight back to the horrible experience we all had with BSE.”

Blair was referring to the outbreak—first in Britain and later in France, Germany, Italy, and Scandinavia—of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, a disease sometimes known by its abbreviation BSE, but more commonly as “mad cow disease.” When the epidemic was first detected on British beef farms, government officials went out of their way to assure the public that there was no danger to consumers of beef. (One British health minister actually led his four-year-old daughter to the television cameras and fed her a hamburger made with British beef—a stunt that revolted the public and effectively ended the minister’s political career.) In fact, humans could contract a form of the disease, and several dozen people died. By this time, government officials across the continent had reversed their tune and ordered the slaughter of millions of head of cattle. The public, looking on, concluded that there really was a health problem, and that government types were not to be trusted when they tried to suggest otherwise. “When there’s some kind of scare now,” Blair explained, “people are just not very willing to listen to experts who say ‘There’s nothing to worry about.’”

Mart Saarma, a biologist at the Helsinki Institute of Technology, has studied European health scares, looking for a common thread. He concluded that it is not any inherent danger in innovation that sparks European fears; “if these stories were true, we should all be dead by now,” he says. Rather, the root of the fear is in the European psyche. “It is a matter of emotion. Americans seem to be pragmatic about new ideas and inventions. Europeans tend to be pessimistic. That leads to this concept of being always on the safe side—being against anything new until it is absolutely proven.” Saarma says that Europe’s constant wariness reflects the feeling of anomie of systemic breakdown, that is central to a lot of contemporary European philosophy. The choirmaster for this particular European chorus is surely Günter Grass, the German novelist who has championed
the emergence of a peaceful union across the European continent. "The proper response to the lusty appeals of progress is melancholy," according to Grass. "In contrast to the American conception of happiness embodied in the say-cheese smile," he goes on, "the European is more comfortable with the knowledge that engenders disgust."

Whatever their cause, the recurrent health scares and the distrust of technology have become another aspect of European life that tends to build a sense of common belief, common lifestyle, among the citizens of the EU. Grabbing the chance, the Eurocrats in Brussels have on occasion taken advantage of these fears to serve their own political purposes. As we will see in chapter 9 of this book, Brussels has played on the fear of genetically modified crops and livestock growth hormones to keep American-grown commodities out of Europe’s markets. This gives European farmers and food processors some protection against overseas competitors; meanwhile, it plays perfectly to the anti-Americanism that is never far from the surface among Europe’s intellectuals.

In all these varied ways, the people of the New Europe—and particularly the members of Generation E—are moving toward a common European culture. Despite the continent’s potpourri of languages, customs, cuisines, and a long history of cross-border animosities, they’re doing a pretty good job of it on their own. Nonetheless, the leaders of the EU are constantly looking for ways to help forge a unified continent. The Eurocrats in Brussels turn out a bewildering array of books, brochures, pocket cards, posters, pamphlets, TV ads, and educational materials at every grade level to remind the people of Europe about their new supranational government and the union it serves. One of the major efforts at building unity occurs each May 9, the day the EU wants to be celebrated as the Fourth of July of the United States of Europe. "Europe Day" is not as important yet for most Europeans as, say, Eurovision. But in several countries, the celebration has caught the public’s fancy. I was in Belgium in early May one year and saw a poster advertising the national Europatag celebration: there

would be picnics and concerts, essay contests and costume parties (dress up like your favorite EU country). But the biggest event scheduled was a free guided tour of the EU headquarters, in Brussels’ Quartier Européen. I laughed out loud. A tour of an office building! That will really draw the crowds! In fact, this was no laughing matter to the Belgians. On the morning of May 9 literally thousands of people formed a long line outside the headquarters building, waiting for the tour.

Not every European nation responds quite so enthusiastically to Europe Day pageantry, but a few things are supposed to be observed at every May 9 celebration. The twelve-star EU flag must be abundantly evident, of course, and a map showing the twenty-five member countries and the applicant nations hoping to be admitted. There should be demonstrations of regional arts and cuisine from all the corners of Europe—tacos, pizzas, sauerkraut, Wienerbrot, and on and on. Finally, all Europe Day events are supposed to end with a rousing rendition of the EU anthem, the "Ode to Joy" from the fourth movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. And therein lies a major problem. Nearly every European knows that classic melody, but nobody has yet agreed on what the words should be for Europe’s national anthem.

There is a strong movement—centered in Germany, naturally enough—to keep the text that Beethoven had in mind when he wrote that great choral movement. That, of course, was the German poet Friedrich von Schiller’s "Ode to Joy." Indeed, some verses of his 1786 poem do seem to suggest, in a vague way, the political, economic, and cultural union that the EU stands for:

Deine Zauber binden wider,
Was die Mode streng geteilt;
Alle Menschen werden Brüder,
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.

With your magic, reunite us
Whom the times did once divide.
Then we all shall stand as brothers
Where your gentle wings spread wide.

But there are also forceful advocates for a new lyric that will celebrate the new Europe born out of the horror of last century's wars. The Europe-wide association of Chambers of Commerce (an organization known, inevitably, as "Eurochambers") has launched a transcontinental contest to write new, EU-specific lyrics for the EU anthem. The basic concept is a common verse in (what else?) English, and then nineteen more verses, one in each of the nineteen other official languages of the union. Hundreds of entries have been received, although the early favorite seems to be this one, submitted by a German songwriter, Karl Wolfgang Barthel:

People, gather close together
On this ancient continent.
We are all now Europeans
No war keeps us separate.

It's fairly easy to suggest what themes ought to be represented in an anthem to the New Europe. The verse would have to include a reference to the dogged pursuit of peace, the primary motivation that prompted founding fathers like Churchill, Monnet, and Schuman to start dreaming of a United States of Europe in the first place. An anthem to the cause of European unity might also set forth some of the things that today's unified Europe has in common—the food, the fears, the faith (or lack of same), the sports and music, the vast transit infrastructure, the shared language, and maybe even Eurovision. And perhaps the anthem should also pay heed to another basic impulse that has always been central to the drive for "ever closer union"—the concept of the United States of Europe as a force in the world equal to the United States of America.

Waking Up to the Revolution

This book began with a warning that Americans have been ignoring a revolution. A geopolitical earthquake is taking place in Europe that will have a profound effect on the world of the twenty-first century, and America's place in it—but so far most Americans have chosen to overlook the tremors. The construction of the New Europe, with more than two dozen nations ceding much of their sovereign authority to a common central government, has created a new species of united state: a largely borderless federal union that is not exactly a single country, but is much more than just another international organization or trading bloc. The European Union was originally designed to be an alternative to warfare, and it has achieved that noble goal with stunning success. In its first six decades, the EU has proven to be an effective instrument of peace on a continent that was lethally divided for much of the last century. This has saved the people of Europe from the horror of war. It has also saved the finance ministries of Europe from the need to finance national defense. Europeans don't have to spend anywhere near as much tax money on military matters as Americans do—in part because Europe has managed to get the United States to pay most of the expenses of the common defense shield, NATO. The huge saving on military expenditures makes it possible for the EU nations to fund the world's most generous network of