

Confluence and Crossroads: Europe and the Fate of the Earth

1.

Bengal, where I am from, is a vast delta where thousands of creeks and rivers flow into each other to form a landscape that is mapped upon a grid of interlocking waterways. Here a confluence of rivers is both a seam and a separation – it joins distant shores even as it holds them apart. The Bengali word for confluence is *mohana* which reflects this ambiguity while also adding to it an element of beguilement that evokes, in my mind, the image of the ‘crossroads’ – a metaphor that is almost universally identified with riddles and paradoxes, confusion, and crisis.

Greece, where the idea of Europe was invented, is another land where water has a powerful hold on the imagination. For the Greeks, ‘Europe’ was defined by bodies of water – the Mediterranean, the Aegean, and the Hellespont (‘Sea of Helle’). These ‘seas’ were very much like ‘mohanas’ in that they were confluences as well as a kind of crossroads; they served to join as well as separate. The Mediterranean was the confluence that joined Europe to the continents on its far shores; and the Hellespont was the confluence that lay between Athens and Troy, Greece, and Persia. Without these confluences ‘Europe’ would not have been imaginable. Let us recall that the word derives from the legend of ‘Europa’, who was not herself a ‘European’: she was a Phoenician princess, who died, like so many modern migrants, while crossing a confluence that was also a crossroads.

But a crossroads is not just a link between points in space. It is also a junction in the axis of time, in the sense that it lies between the beginning of a journey and its end. This is one of the reasons why I want to use the twin images of the ‘confluence’ and the ‘crossroads’ to frame two issues that are of critical importance today, to Europe as well as the rest of the world.

2.

The first of these issues is migration. In recent years, as you well know, migration has come to be associated, in the minds of many Europeans, with a failure of cultural assimilation. But let us look at this from another perspective. Let us

consider the example of the hundreds of thousands – possibly millions – of Europeans who are now working on other continents: for example, in Dubai, Japan, Singapore, Brazil, Mozambique, South Africa, China, India, Thailand, and so on. Let us ask: to what degree do these Europeans integrate into their host societies? The reality is that many, if not most of them, make every effort to maintain a strict distance between themselves and the countries they live in. They have their own clubs, they send their children to their own schools, they live in their own neighbourhoods; and very few become conversant with the languages and cultures of the places they inhabit.

To make the matter even clearer, let us turn our gaze back, by a few decades: let us consider European populations living in colonial societies – in India, Indonesia or East Africa, for instance. Those circumstances were always characterised by a vast distance between Europeans and the wider population; they lived, in fact, in racially defined zones of exclusion where non-Europeans could only enter as servants. Similar situations persist even today, in the Gulf countries, and in parts of Asia and Africa. Compare this with the situation of Asian or African immigrants in Europe: no matter how sequestered their lives, it would be impossible for them to live in such complete isolation from the worlds around them.

If we look at the issue from this point of view – that is to say, if we start, not by looking at immigrants in Europe but by asking what Europeans do when they themselves live and work abroad – I think it quickly becomes apparent that most human beings respond in much the same way when they find themselves in an unfamiliar place. They look for what is familiar and reassuring; and if they fail to find it they begin to create it in their homes and neighbourhoods. In that process a strange thing happens. They forget about the travails and disappointments of home – all those things that prompted them to pack their bags in the first place – and they create a new home of the imagination, a place that is imbued with a sentimental glow. This was exactly what happened with European colonialists in the 19th and early 20th centuries: travellers from England and Holland who went to India and Indonesia were often amazed by how rigid and old-fashioned their colonial countrymen were, and how they made fetishes of traditions that had long been forgotten at ‘home’.

In the latter half of the 20th century there was an ironic reversal of this process. European governments, often with good intentions, responded to the presence of immigrant communities by providing support for what they saw as the most ‘authentic’ elements of their cultures. These policies – let us admit it – frequently had retrograde and damaging effects: the state’s money and support went to the most ‘traditional’ – which were also often the most hidebound – sections of migrant communities. The secularists and progressives were either ignored and treated as if they were irrelevant. I have known many immigrant feminists, secularists, and activists of different kinds, who have been confounded by this approach – embattled within their own communities, they also found themselves marginalised as ‘inauthentic’ by the wider society; sometimes they were even derided with variants of that peculiarly offensive French term *deraciné*.

The problem lies perhaps in squeezing the lived reality of life into rigid frames like ‘culture’, ‘tradition’, ‘religion’ and so on. The problem with these frames is that they set artificial limits on what people actually think and do; worse still, people come to believe in them and they even sometimes reinvent their lives to fit the frame.

Instead of thinking of ‘culture’ why don’t we think about everyday practices – what people actually do? Why don’t we think about the ways they spend their time; what they like to eat; what sort of music they listen to? When we think about questions like these, an odd thing happens. We find that migrants and their hosts are not so different after all; neither of them are stuck within their ‘cultures’. Both have evolved, unwittingly or not, towards each other. We find that Holland is a country of soccer-playing *rijsttafel* eaters who are famous for growing a Turkish flower – the tulip; we find that Britain is a land of cricket-playing, korma-eating reggae singers; Germany becomes a land of döner kebab and Eurovision and skateboarders. Why then should states support mosques and temples rather than football clubs and dance troupes and art exhibitions?

And why, in any case, should that support come from departments of welfare and social services? For many hard-working immigrants, who pride themselves on their self-sufficiency, the whiff of charity is a taint. Why shouldn’t the support come from those arms of government that serve the wider community – that is, ministries of sports, culture and so on? Why shouldn’t state-supported operas or museums or

theatres throw their weight behind such projects? For let us make no mistake: the temples of Western ‘high culture’ are among the most rigid and exclusionary institutions on this planet. The lines they draw between ‘ethnic’ and ‘classical’ music, and ‘folk’ and ‘modern’ art are among the most important barriers to dialogue and assimilation. They too need to be muddled in the confluence of modern Europe.

But the issue of cultural assimilation, as it arises in Western and Northern Europe, is not the most pressing problem in regard to immigration in the continent today. The issue takes on a completely different aspect at the edges of the confluence – that is to say in Southern Spain, and especially in Greece. As I see it, the violence that is being visited on immigrants in Greece today is just as critical a test for Europe as is the collapse of that country’s economy. Greece is sometimes looked upon as an exception. But in my view Greece is not a laggard but an outlier – it is a country that sometimes provides glimpses of things to come. When riots broke out in Greece in 2008, they seemed inexplicable. But in retrospect it is clear that they were the first signs of a wave of unrest that the currents of the Mediterranean would soon carry to Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Spain, and even beyond to England and the United States.

This is why Greece is so important: if the ascendancy of the fascist, anti-immigrant right continues its rise in that country, it will have profound consequences for all of Europe. These developments will spread beyond Greece, and the violence that is now being inflicted upon Africans and Asians will soon be turned against other Europeans – the problems that the Roma are facing across Europe is evidence of this. Soon the tide of prejudice will turn also against internal immigrants – southerners in northern cities, Eastern Europeans in the West, and so on.

One thing we can be sure of is that the pressures of migration are only going to intensify in the years ahead, not just in Europe but around the world. This is because the numbers of people displaced by climate change is going to grow very fast.¹ It is essential for Europe to take the lead in creating a template that can be used everywhere for dealing with the mounting crises of displacement that will arise from accelerating disruptions of our planetary environment.

¹ For more on this, see Campbell *et al.* 2007.



3.

From confluence to crossroads: I come now to a fork in the road that confronts not just Europe but the earth itself.²

In some ways the dilemmas that face Europe today are unique. But there should be no doubt that in a broader sense the crisis that faces this continent is not Europe's alone. The whole world is facing a crisis of multiple dimensions, in which economic breakdown, political paralysis, environmental degradation, and a broad cultural and imaginative failure are building up to a 'catastrophic convergence.'³

But even as I say this, I am acutely aware of the historical ironies that are implicit in using apocalyptic words like 'crisis' and 'catastrophe' in a place that is as prosperous and tranquil as Amsterdam; and indeed, at a moment when people around the world are living longer than ever before, and some would say, better than ever before, at least in that they are able to buy more things and consume more than at any time in the past. It is strange most of all, to be using these words in an era of peace, in the heart of a continent which has so often been convulsed by war – it forces us to recall other critical moments in the not-too-distant past. What, for example, was it like to be here in Amsterdam, in August 1914, when this continent was hurtling towards the killing fields of the First World War? What was it like to be here in May 1940, when Germany invaded Holland? To someone who had lived through those times, it might seem a gross exaggeration to use the word 'crisis' in relation to what we are faced with today.

But this is indeed what makes the present global crisis so unprecedented and so peculiarly confounding.⁴ Everything we have learnt from our forebears, everything in human history and pre-history – including, indeed, the instincts of our primate ancestors – teaches us to think of crisis in terms of conflict. But the crisis that we are faced with today is not, in the first instance, a situation of conflict between groups of human beings: this is exactly why it is so intractable – because it has no

² I am echoing the phrasing of climate scientist James Hansen (2009, , loc. 2202): "humanity has reached a fork in the road".

³ The phrase is Christian Parenti's (Parenti 2007, 7). What he means by it is not that several disasters happen simultaneously, but rather "that problems compound and amplify each other, one expressing itself through another." Similarly Bill McKibben (2010, 10) writes of "a crescendo of cascading consequences."

⁴ See Campbell *et al.* 2007, 33: "There is no precedent in human history for global disaster that affects whole societies in multiple ways in many different locations at once."

precedent in history. There is nothing in our past, nothing in our collective memory that equips us to confront this crisis – or even to recognise it as such. This is a crisis that is cumulative and, in a sense, invisible: that is exactly what makes it so easy to turn away from.

One universal aspect of the human experience is that we value the past and try to learn from it. But now we are at a moment in time when we have to unlearn much that we have learnt – a moment in which much of the wisdom of the past looks like folly, and what seems like success is revealed to be failure; a moment in which the remedies that were once seen as solutions are now identifiable as precisely the causes of the catastrophe that we are now confronted with.

What then is the nature of this crisis? Let me put it briefly: the resources of this planet, which we all inhabit, are dwindling very fast, while its atmosphere and climate are changing in ways that may bring an end to civilization as we know it.⁵ There is now an almost-universal consensus amongst scientists that human activity – that is to say, industrialisation and what is often called ‘development’ – have contributed significantly to changes in the world’s climate.⁶ The record shrinkage in the Arctic ice cap this year is proof that the changes are happening much faster than was anticipated by even the gloomiest forecasts.⁷ Yet the political economy – and indeed culture – of our world is moving ever faster in a direction that is certain to lead to catastrophe.⁸

⁵ See Kolbert 2006, Chapter 10: “It may seem impossible to imagine that a technologically advanced society could choose, in essence, to destroy itself, but that is what we are now in the process of doing.”

⁶ See Hansen 2009, , loc. 994: “human made climate forcings are now in total dominance over natural forcings,” and also Kolbert 2006, Chapter 1: “The American Geophysical Union, one of the nation’s largest and most respected scientific organizations, decided in 2003 that the matter had been settled. At the group’s annual meeting that year, it issued a consensus statement declaring, ‘Natural influences cannot explain the rapid increase in global near-surface temperatures.’” Also Chapter 2: “Arrhenius [1859–1927; Nobel, chemistry, 1903] recognized that industrialization and climate change were intimately related, and that the consumption of fossil fuels must, over time, lead to warming,” and Chapter 3, where she quotes Robert Corell, “an American oceanographer and former assistant director at the National Science Foundation, who says of a meeting of scientists: ‘Let’s say that there’s three hundred people in this room... I don’t think you’ll find five who would say that global warming is just a natural process.’”

⁷ See Parenti 2011, 58.

⁸ Kolbert 2006, Chapter 1. Kolbert quotes the report of the 1979 Charney panel: “We may not be given a warning until the CO₂ loading is such that an appreciable climate change is inevitable.” Since then “carbon-dioxide emissions have continued to increase, from five billion to seven billion metric tons a year....”

That very significant environmental change lies ahead is now a certainty. We know also that at a certain point cumulative change will lead to catastrophic change; that is to say, beyond a certain tipping point the climate will ‘flip’,⁹ bringing about a series of cascading changes that will doom hundreds of millions of people around the world.¹⁰ Scientists and environmental activists have been shouting themselves hoarse for many years, trying to wake us to this threat.

Why then is there so little urgency in confronting a catastrophe that has already begun to affect millions of people? Imagine for a moment a different situation, one of military threat – faced with an invasion, any country would respond immediately. Yet a major change in the planet’s climate is likely to cause much greater damage than most conceivable scenarios of military conflict. And still, far from acting to mitigate the processes of change, the world is moving in a direction that will only accelerate those changes.¹¹

How do we describe this process? To my mind it is summed up perfectly by a concept that is often used by climate scientists – ‘amplifying feedback loop’.¹² In the physical world, the feedback loop that is driving climate change starts with carbon emissions, caused by the steadily rising use of fossil fuels.¹³ But this loop is

⁹ Cf. Campbell *et al.* 2007, 3–4; Kolbert 2006, Chapter 1. Kolbert quotes a scientist: “You can tip it [the climate system] and then you’ll just go back...And then you tip it and you get to the other stable state, which is upside down.” Also Chapter 3: “Where once the system was thought to change, as it were, only glacially, now it is known to be capable of sudden and unpredictable reversals. One such reversal, called the Younger Dryas... took place roughly 12,800 years ago. At that point, the earth, which had been warming rapidly, was plunged back into ice age conditions”; and “The record preserved in the Greenland ice sheets shows that our own relatively static experience of climate is actually what is exceptional.”

¹⁰ Kolbert 2006, Chapter 5, where she quotes climate scientist David Rind: “I wouldn’t be shocked to find out that by 2100 most things were destroyed.”

¹¹ Hansen 2009, loc. 1022: “the rate of sea level rise is double that of the last century.”

¹² An example of such a loop is “when a microphone is placed too close to a speaker, which amplifies any little sound picked up by the microphone, which then picks up the amplification, which is again picked up by the speaker, until very quickly the noise becomes unbearable” (Hansen 2009, preface). A climate related example: “when Earth becomes warmer, ice and snow tend to melt. Ice and snow have high reflectivity, or ‘albedo’ (literally, ‘whiteness’), reflecting back to space most of the sunlight that hits them. Land and ocean, on the other hand, are dark, absorbing most of the sunlight that strikes them. So if ice and snow melt, Earth absorbs more sunlight, which is a ‘positive’ (amplifying) feedback” (Hansen 2009, loc. 878).

¹³ See Hansen 2009, Chapter 8 (‘Target Carbon Dioxide’); Kolbert 2006, Chapter 4: “Since preindustrial times, the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere has risen by roughly a third, from 280 to 378 parts

actually embedded in another one – a human loop, rooted in history, society, and politics. It is the helical pairing of these two loops that is pushing our environment towards a point of no return. The two loops cannot be separated from each other any more than the twin strands of the double helix that makes life possible: they are, so to speak, the paired strings of a helix of disaster.

The strands of these two loops were first joined in 17th-century Europe, when fossil fuels, in the form of coal, first came into widespread use. This happened to coincide with the ‘Age of Enlightenment’ and the emergence of a range of new industries, technologies and institutions, of which perhaps the most important was the nation-state.¹⁴ These innovations gave Europeans enormous advantages over the rest of the world and they were soon able to extend their power over the entire globe.

What made this ensemble of elements so peculiarly powerful was its claim of universality: in principle it was available to everyone in the world. The new era of progress and modernity promised limitless possibilities and endless growth to all who opted for it. And nowhere did this ensemble play a more important role than in the newly conquered continents of the Americas and Australia, where an abundance of land and resources reinforced the idea that growth could be truly endless and profit could be sought without limit.¹⁵

The universalism of this ensemble was self-fulfilling: in a very short time the countries that had invented it were the object of envy and aspiration for the whole world. People everywhere wanted to be included in this loop of nationalism, sovereignty, industrialisation, individualism, consumerism, and ever-expanding economic growth. People may have differed on the routes that were to take them into the loop – communism, socialism, dictatorship, democracy and so on – but the goal was shared by the leaders of every nation. Those, like Mahatma Gandhi, who

per million. During the same period, the concentration of methane has more than doubled, from 78 to 176 parts per million.”

¹⁴ See Kolbert 2006, Chapter 10: “According to Crutzen, the Anthropocene began all the way back in the 1780s, the decade in which James Watt perfected his steam engine. Arrhenius undertook his pen and paper calculations in the 1890s.”

¹⁵ This is how Tim Flannery (2006, 237) puts it: “America and Australia were created on the frontier, and the citizens of both nations hold deep beliefs about the benefits of endless growth and expansion.”

tried to define other goals for humanity, found few takers for their beliefs: for the most part they were dismissed as cranks and deluded dreamers.

Only after a substantial part of the world's population had succeeded in acquiring the package did the world at large get an inkling of a truth that many so-called savages had understood intuitively: the supposed 'universalism' of this path was a hoax, a fraud. This way of life was feasible only so long as it was practised by a few: the toll it exacted from the earth was too great for it be universally adopted.

For a century the West has held up its way of life as the standard of living to be aspired to by everybody. It was assumed that the whole planet would be a happy place if only everyone on it could share a Western lifestyle and participate in Western patterns of consumption. The United States has for decades offered this formula as a mantra of deliverance for the world at large. But just for a moment let us consider what it would mean if this actually came about. If people in Asia were to buy as many cars as Europeans, it would lead to a doubling or tripling of the world's present stock of a billion cars. Just to look at the numbers is to know that the planet would asphyxiate long before this pattern of consumption could become 'universal'.

What can be said about this trajectory except that it is powered by a dangerous delusion? How then do we break free of this delusion? Where does the solution lie? The United States is by far the world's most powerful and important nation. It is also the nation that has contributed the most to our knowledge of climate change. What is more, the US has already begun to feel the effects of climate change: large parts of the country are now in a condition of permanent drought; forests are dying in the mountains and many regions have been hit by severe floods.¹⁶ Australia is similarly suffering the effects of an extended drought.¹⁷

For all these reasons, the US and Australia should, by right, be taking the lead in addressing climate change. But instead of an awakening, what we see in the US is a determined, well-orchestrated effort to suppress public awareness of climate change. This effort presents a perfect example of how the feedback loop of carbon emissions amplifies and sustains itself at a political and cultural level. Corporate money, an economy founded on fossil fuels, a political system that is open to

¹⁶ See McKibben 2010, 5, 60.

¹⁷ See McKibben 2010, 5, 60.

manipulation by lobbyists,¹⁸ a history of consumerism, a powerful industry of persuasion, profit-driven media networks, a disinterested public, mired in an ethos of narcissism and fantasy; a nationalistic culture that glorifies profit-seeking and regards regulation with suspicion – all of these feed into each other in a self-reinforcing spiral. At a time when a sense of the collective interest, and the public good, is more necessary than ever before, these concepts seem to have lost all meaning in the world’s most important country.¹⁹ The same is true of Australia, which is perhaps even more reckless in its approach to these issues.²⁰

Where else then are we to look for leadership on this issue. Could it perhaps come from newly-emergent nations like India, China, Russia, Brazil, and South Africa? These countries certainly have much to lose in the sense that many of the people who are most vulnerable to climate change live in them. Yet to hope that they will take the lead on this issue is unrealistic, and in a sense, unfair. The emergent powers are all striving to raise the living standards of their own people; they are all motivated, to a greater or lesser degree, by a desire to ‘catch up’ with the West, in all things, including carbon emissions.²¹ Even though two of them are already among the world’s top three polluters, it is still true that at this point in time, their per capita contribution to the net stock of carbon in the atmosphere is small.²²

The rapid increase of emissions from these countries thus has a dual aspect: in one sense it represents a new level of intensification in the globe’s collective rush

¹⁸ See Hansen 2009, loc. 1805: “The role of money in our capitals is the biggest problem for democracy and for the planet”; Flannery 2009, 241: “Coal miners donated \$20 million to the Republican cause in 2000 and have added \$21 million since, ensuring that industry access to Vice President Cheney and his secret energy committee is unparalleled.”

¹⁹ Kolbert 2006, Chapter 8, writes: “the United States, having failed to defeat Kyoto, may be in the process of doing something even more damaging: ruining the chances of reaching a post-Kyoto agreement.” This judgement was proved correct at Copenhagen.

²⁰ For Australia’s resistance to the Kyoto Protocol, see Flannery 2006, 226–227.

²¹ Flannery (2006, 306) discusses this issue at some length.

²² These arguments have been recognised as well-founded by European nations (although not the US and Australia). Cf Kolbert 2006, Chapter 8: “Pieter van Geel, the Dutch environment secretary, described the European outlook to me as follows: ‘We cannot say, ‘Well, we have our wealth, based on the use of fossil fuels for the last three hundred years, and, now that your countries are growing, you may not grow at this rate, because we have a climate change problem.’”

towards disaster.²³ But in another sense it is also a challenge, a clear declaration that if there is to be any cutting back, if sacrifices are to be made, then they must come, in the first instance, from the West, which has gobbled up far more than its fair share of the world's resources. In other words, the emergent countries have taken the stand that history has absolved them of taking the lead in this matter: they are rather looking to be led – not by coercion, but by example.

Where can this leadership come from? This sorry process of elimination leaves us with only one possibility: Europe. If there is a silver lining in this grim scenario, it is that Europe happens to have arrived at a point where it is singularly well-suited to take the lead. Here are the reasons why:

Firstly, if there was ever a transnational issue then it is climate change – the weather has no respect for national boundaries and borders.²⁴ Yet in the face of this dire crisis, many nations, especially the larger and most powerful ones, are pursuing their national interests ever more aggressively. Nationalism is indeed one of the most pernicious threads in the helix of disaster.

Europe, where nationalism was born, and which has endured its worst excesses, is the only part of the world that has succeeded in articulating and acting upon a vision of political organisation that goes beyond the nation-state. Its progress down that path has been slow and fitful, it is true, but I think deep down Europeans understand and appreciate the world-historical significance of the project they have embarked upon (the recent Dutch elections are proof of this). A few other parts of the world have also moved towards transnational co-operation – South-East Asia and the Andean countries are two examples. If these pockets of post-nationalism could join hands they could have a significant impact.

Secondly, experience shows us that if climate change is to be tackled effectively then it will require stringent regulation and oversight by national and transnational bodies. That the issue has burst upon us at a time when much of the world is in thrall to an ideology of *laissez-faire* is but another aspect of the catastrophic

²³ Hansen 2009, loc. 3302, provides a damning list of all the ways in which the US is moving backwards on the carbon emissions issue.

²⁴ See, for example, Burke/Mabey 2006: "The biggest global problems that will dominate the 21st century, from terrorism to climate change, from mass migration to organized crime, cannot be solved by nations acting alone. They require a pooling of sovereignty. Europe is the world's most sustained and far-reaching experiment in the practical and political realities of sharing sovereignty."

convergence that we are now faced with. In the US, in India, and in many other countries the domain of the public interest has narrowed to a sliver, and corporations have effectively captured the machinery of government, including regulatory bodies.

In this too Europe is an exception: the public good continues to be a cherished ideal, and regulatory oversight is accepted to be one of the most important functions of government. This perhaps is why corporations have not been able to create an industry of climate denial in Europe. As a result, the European public is far better informed about climate change than people elsewhere.

Thirdly, climate change cannot be addressed without a historical reckoning. We are, as I have mentioned, at a moment when what once seemed like success is revealed to be folly; when old remedies are seen to lie at the roots of the disease. To move ahead will require a massive change of expectations amongst people. Unfortunately, in most countries around the world, this is politically speaking, an impossible message to communicate. In China and Russia, political stability is premised on the delivery of rising standards of living; in the US, India, and many other democracies, elections depend on stoking expectations. This is yet another thread in the helix of disaster.

Here again Europe holds the only possibility of hope. Europe knows what it means to disavow the past: this was one of the impulses that led to the founding of the European Union. But even here, it will not be easy to educate people into a realistic awareness of what lies ahead – but this is one place where it could succeed and if it does it will set an example for the world.²⁵

Fourthly, most European countries still continue to provide a high level of basic education. This is in marked contrast to the US and Canada, where, by some reckonings more than 40% of the population is functionally illiterate.²⁶ For this reason too, the public culture of Europe has not yet retreated into a world of celebrity-worship, spectacle and fantasy, as is the case in most English-speaking

²⁵ The European Union's documents on climate change, such as *Climate Change and International Security* and *Europe in the World* are salutary in their realistic approach to the issues, and also in that they do not envisage planning for climate change as a principally military exercise.

²⁶ Cf. Hedges 2009, 50: "A public that can no longer distinguish between truth and fiction is left to interpret reality through illusion." However, as the authors of *Europe in the World* point out, Europe has 'lost its way' on this issue as on some others.

countries and in India. This is one (perhaps the only) part of the world where the populace at large could understand the nature of the changes that confront us.

Finally, Europe is equipped to lead on this issue because it is the one part of the world that has already undertaken large-scale preparations for climate change. No country is a better example of this than Holland. As a non-European it is with awe and envy that I follow reports on the preparations this country has already made for dealing with sea level rise – the floating dwellings that have been made available to people; the plans for evacuating a third of the country, and so on.²⁷

The project of Europe has been flawed in many ways: it was excessively bureaucratic; it placed the interests of business above those of people; it was half-hearted in some respects and over-reached in others. But let us not forget Europe's successes. Along with Japan, it was Europe that took the lead in the negotiations for Kyoto; it has also tried in good faith to find a way towards an equitable solution to the problem of climate change.²⁸ Europe's credibility on this issue is such that it is in a position to lead, not as it has in the past, by dominance and coercion, but by example.

Through most of the journey that has brought the world to this fork in the road, Europe has led the way. In doing so, it has created an immense continent of carbon in the atmosphere, a dark shadow wholly out of proportion to its size. Now that we have arrived at this turn in the road, it is clear that what lies ahead is not a fork but an unbridgeable, steadily-growing chasm. We can only hope that Europe will now take the lead once again, in showing us how best to turn back.

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²⁷ Kolbert (2006, Chapter 6) provides an excellent account of these preparations.

²⁸ It is not unjustified for the authors of *Climate Change and International Security* to state: "The EU has demonstrated leadership both in international negotiations, in particular by advocating the 2°C target, and with its far reaching decisions on domestic climate and energy policies."

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