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## **The global future(s) of Europe**

Wolff, S.C.A.

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Prof.dr. Sarah C.A. Wolff

# The Global Future(s) of Europe



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Bij ons leer je de wereld kennen

# The Global Future(s) of Europe

Inaugural Lecture by

Prof.dr. Sarah C.A. Wolff

on the acceptance of her position as professor

International Studies and Global Politics

at Leiden University

on Friday November 29, 2024



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“The future depends on what you do today.”

*Mahatma Gandhi*

Esteemed Dean, your Excellencies, honourable members of the board of the Institute for History, dear colleagues, dear family and dear friends,

As we are entering into dark times,<sup>1</sup> marked by the victory of President Trump and tectonic geopolitical shifts unfolding in Ukraine and the Middle East, many of us are deeply concerned about what lies ahead. Key countries are contesting the liberal international order—defined by a rules-based order and embodied by multilateralism— most notably China and Russia on human rights while Trump’s presidency has already set the trend for withdrawals from the World Trade Organization in the past of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Liberal democracies are indeed experiencing significant setbacks and I want here to highlight those related to diversity, inclusion and human rights. First, the world today has more closed autocracies than liberal democracies for the first time in over two decades.<sup>2</sup> In terms of levels of democracy enjoyed by citizens globally, we have reverted to the levels of 1986 with 72% of the world’s population living under autocracies in 2022. Second, in the realm of gender equality, according to UN Women, all of the main indicators are regressing worldwide.<sup>3</sup>

Europe is no exception to these challenges and setbacks and one may wonder if we are witnessing the end of illusions?<sup>4</sup> Many are calling for Europe ‘to get its act together’<sup>5</sup> and questioning how the EU will navigate such a competitive world. Can it overcome and reach an age of maturity where it no longer depends on the US for security? At home, Europe faces mounting challenges with the rise of illiberalism- not just a backlash against liberalism, but also according to Laruelle ‘majoritarian, nation-centric or sovereigntist [turn]’ that favours traditional hierarchies and is encouraged by state structures and I would add EU institutions in the field of migration.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, despite the clear lessons of interdependence amongst economies and societies highlighted by the COVID-19 crisis—and the need for more global governance to address pandemics, climate change, gender equity, and diversity—Europe is showing signs of retrenchment. This is evident in restrictive European migration and asylum policies and the reduction of development budgets announced by governments in the Netherlands, France, and Germany.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, I would like to speak today about the “global future(s) of Europe.” Reflecting on the discipline of *European (Union) studies* and the practice of governing Europe— particularly its foreign policy—I argue that Europe’s futures need to be more global. This means pluralizing perspectives, acknowledging Eurocentrism inherent in International Relations (IR) and European studies and engage with the plurality of the world and interdisciplinarity. Such an approach is essential if Europe wishes to remain relevant in a non-European world order that could still evolve toward an inclusive, pluralist and more balanced order.

What does the future hold? What role could Europe play in the transforming global order? To your likely disappointment, I must confess that I do not have a crystal ball nor virtual reality googles and I have always disliked science fiction. I consistently caution my students against falling into the trap of futuristic prognoses. Perhaps this skepticism stems from the realization that we, as IR scholars, have historically been poor predictors of global events. We failed to foresee the end of the Cold War or the Arab uprisings, the latter occurring while I was finalizing my first book, forcing me to hastily revise my conclusions. However, based on the research I have conducted over the past 20 years, I can offer you some insights today

With this Chair in International Studies and Global Politics, which I am honored to accept today, I aim to engage with the social science tradition of analyzing *present futures*: how the futures constructed today shape agency, narratives, and

knowledge production critical to international studies and global politics. The central question is: Who gets to define the present futures of Europe and the global order, and what competing world visions are at play? This analysis should inform our roles as citizens, scholars, and students in shaping the world.<sup>8</sup>

Before delving into this presentation I want to stress that this approach is anchored in the humanities—including history, philosophy, languages, literature, and the arts—that provide a solid foundation for contrapuntal readings, allowing us to consider “other historical possibilities” and alternative futures.<sup>9</sup> Humanities have a strong tradition here at Leiden University, and I am proud to work with colleagues who strive to make international relations more humane while centering global justice, ethics, inclusivity, and diversity in their work. It is in this light that I must emphasize the risks posed by the current budget cuts in Dutch higher education. Limiting opportunities for students to explore the richness of the humanities would only exacerbate the retrenchment I have described.

Why should the futures of Europe be more global? To answer this, I will first revisit the origins of my work and research on the Mediterranean, which has focused on migration, democratization, gender and religion while exposing the pitfalls of Eurocentrism. Second I will discuss the relevance of pluralizing EU studies and Global IR and why this approach is vital for understanding Europe’s role in an increasingly contested world order. Third, I will examine how Europe’s present futures are being shaped, concluding with how a humanities-based perspective on international relations can offer a richer understanding of Europe and the international system.

### ***Mediterranean Thinking***

My earliest memories of the international are closely tied to the post-Cold War era. I vividly recall witnessing the fall of the Berlin Wall, the German reunification, and the first televised

images of the Gulf War. My 10th birthday was marked by the Winter Olympic Games in Albertville and the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. (*now guess which programme I insisted my friends should watch with me!*) A school exchange in Târgu Lăpuș, post-Ceaușescu Romania, left a lasting impression on me. As a young child, I perceived Europe in this new post-Cold War order as a driving force. To me, the European Parliament in Strasbourg symbolized the importance of Franco-German friendship, while the turbulent histories of my family, shaped by the annexations of Alsace-Lorraine, underscored Europe’s role as a safe and peaceful project to be cherished.

My interest in studying North Africa and the Middle East was sparked by reading Fernand Braudel. Braudel challenged the traditional, elitist focus on short-term events and political power, advocating instead for the study of the *longue durée*. He argued that the modern Mediterranean has historically been a space of mobility, deeply intertwined with Europe. The interconnection of societies, cultures, and economies in this region gave rise to what he called a Mediterranean civilization.<sup>10</sup> While his work has been critiqued for its Eurocentric focus,<sup>11</sup> it nevertheless highlighted the co-constitutive relationship between Europe and the Mediterranean.

However, as I began researching the region at the turn of the millennium, the ‘Mare Nostrum’ was being reframed by European policymakers as a space of crisis, defined by instability and migration, both seen as threats to Europe. Images of migrants climbing fences in Ceuta and Melilla, Spain’s enclaves in Moroccan territory, became emblematic of this narrative. It was in this context that I embarked on my doctoral studies to investigate the drivers and processes behind the EU’s externalization of migration and border control in the Mediterranean.

North African countries transitioned from being primarily countries of emigration to recognizing their roles as transit

countries, as small boats began departing their shores to reach Spain via the Strait of Gibraltar and, later, the Canary Islands. The EU, through its regional 'Euro-Mediterranean' approach developed a set of readmission agreements, trained North African border guards, transformed rescue at sea from a humanitarian duty into a border control issue with the extensive role of Frontex and investments in border control equipment for third countries, effectively created a system of 'remote control' and asking third countries to stop migration.

Today, this externalization has evolved into what is often called migration diplomacy, with deals struck with Turkey in 2016 and, more recently, with Tunisia, Mauritania, Lebanon, and Egypt. Over the past 20 years, a significant shift has occurred: the EU now replaced negotiating informal arrangements behind closed doors and instead has highly publicized handshakes between European leaders and authoritarian rulers, mostly to satisfy domestic public opinion. Now, the EU, operating as "Team Europe," namely close coordination between European Commission and EU Member States that negotiate these deals collectively, showcasing their unity.

My travels in Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, and Jordan have shown me how Europe's ignorance of its Mediterranean history—particularly the legacies of its colonial role in the region—helps explain the inefficiency of its policies there. Europe's projection of its values and norms, encapsulated in the concept of *Normative Power Europe*, further reinforces this disconnect. This concept frames the EU as a unique power in international relations, one that "shapes conceptions of the normal"<sup>12</sup> by championing norms like the Kyoto Protocol or democratization. However, Europe's tendency to see the Mediterranean through its own frames has often been misguided. It has relied on assumptions that democratization would naturally bring secularization or that economic liberalism would foster political liberalism—assumptions that have been unequivocally proven wrong.

In reality, as I argue in my latest award-winning book, the EU's projection of *Secular Power Europe*,<sup>13</sup> , overlooks the fact that secularism in the MENA context is often linked to authoritarianism and colonization. It does not carry the same connotations as the "enlightened" secularism developed in Europe. Meanwhile, economic liberalization has frequently stabilized authoritarian regimes rather than promoting political change.<sup>14</sup> For instance, in Tunisia's democratic transition, my research has shown that the EU's engagement with feminist organizations largely focused on urban, secular groups, failing to address patriarchy, socioeconomic inequalities, and the experiences of women in rural areas.<sup>15</sup>

That said, I am not suggesting we throw the baby out with the bathwater and that Europe's role is only producing negative externalities. However by having worked extensively on researching migration, gender, and democratization, I became aware of how Europe can be more self-reflective and broaden its perspective. This has been key to the work done with my colleagues at *the Journal of Mediterranean Politics* (which I co-edited for several years), where we have emphasized the need to rethink Europe's approach to the Mediterranean. Specifically, Europe must "Mediterraneanize our thinking." Or, as French philosopher Edgar Morin—whom I had the privilege to meet—put it: *penser la Méditerranée et Méditerranéiser la pensée*<sup>16</sup> ("think the Mediterranean and Mediterraneanize our thinking"). I needed to have a quote in French. Something that would serve better migration studies and policies.

Building on this perspective, my work on democratic projection practices has highlighted the need to move beyond the EU's tendency to export its models and policies to the region. Instead, there is much to learn from daily interactions across Europe with politically significant groups, such as religious actors, activist NGOs, civil society organizations, and street-level bureaucrats. Shifting the focus from formal institutions and elite discourses to the "everyday agents"<sup>17</sup> of democracy allows for a richer understanding of how these

groups practice democracy in their own contexts—and what Europe might learn from them in return.

### *Pluralising Europe in a multiplex world*

My research on the Mediterranean illustrates how European studies—and international relations (IR) more broadly—can benefit from adopting a more ‘global’ perspective. By ‘global,’ I do not refer to the process of economic and cultural globalization, but rather to the need for a broader way of thinking about the world and Europe. Global IR has challenged mainstream approaches and aims to make it as Barnett and Zarakol puts it a ‘more worldly discipline with a more inclusive infrastructure’<sup>18</sup> and caution about the need to make it a truly diverse set of thinking, against new centricisms and hegemonic way to think about IR.

6

As I take up this chair in International Studies and Global Politics at the Institute of History, I am particularly eager to work closely with historian colleagues who are researching these overlooked and marginalized histories, especially from colonial states. I firmly believe that Europe’s relevance in the world would be enhanced by adopting this more global, namely pluriversal, self-reflexive perspective. In an era when nationalistic regimes and policies are becoming mainstream across the globe, it is our duty as academics, at the heart of scientific inquiry and knowledge production, to continue broadening young generations’ understanding of diverse perspectives.

To address this, I believe three key steps are essential. First, we must critically confront and acknowledge the Western-centeredness of International Relations, challenging its assumptions and frameworks. Second, we need to unlearn and reconstruct the plural and diverse histories of Europe, embracing narratives that extend beyond dominant Western perspectives. Finally, we must actively engage with “the other” by rethinking and reshaping diplomatic practices to reflect an

increasingly multiplex world—a concept I will elaborate on shortly.

First it is about acknowledging that IR has predominantly been shaped by a Western-centric narrative. The “international,” as I recall from my childhood, was always presented through Western European eyes. Key events like the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, the Napoleonic Wars, the creation of International Relations as a discipline in 1919, and the First and Second World Wars are major milestones in European and Western history. In contrast, the smaller wars, the lesser-known histories from other parts of the world, are often overlooked.<sup>19</sup> Barkawi for instance illustrates this with the Anglo-Afghan wars at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Quite unknown in the global account IR, from an Afghan perspective however this has been an important war of resistance against imperial control.

Second, for scholars of European integration, as I have demonstrated in my work on decentring, we must begin by provincializing Europe, which entails understanding the multiplicity of its histories.<sup>20</sup> Even in the early days of the European Economic Community (EEC), France sought to include Algeria as the 7<sup>th</sup> member state during the Rome Treaty negotiations<sup>21</sup> —a strategic attempt to suppress calls for independence. This aspect of European history remains underexplored, with the Stora Report in France, aiming at the “reconciliation of memories,” still marking the beginning of a broader conversation about Europe’s colonial past. Russia’s invasion on Ukraine teaches us the relevance of grasping the plurality of histories of Europe.<sup>22</sup> Poland and the Baltic countries for instance have fought against their ‘subaltern’ projection of World War II histories and the perceived ‘misrecognition of Eastern Europe as ‘lesser European compared to its Western counterpart’.<sup>23</sup> For instance, Western narratives of the Second World War have often downplayed the significance of the Soviet occupation, reflecting a broader tendency to marginalize Eastern European perspectives. Today,

however, this post-Cold War narrative could be shifting, with Poland and the Baltic states emerging as pivotal leaders in the European response to Russia's war on Ukraine.

Alongside efforts to globalize Europe's histories, we must anchor them in the everyday realities that shape and transform European societies. This involves paying close attention to the mundane, daily, and often-overlooked ways in which Europe impacts ordinary lives. Given the diversity of European societies, this approach necessitates the inclusion of subaltern histories, particularly those of women and minorities.

European integration studies have long been preoccupied with an elitist perspective, focusing on the grand milestones of integration history. We continue to train students on the making of landmark treaties—such as the Treaty of Rome and the Maastricht Treaty—emphasizing the contributions of the so-called “Founding Fathers” of Europe: Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Alcide De Gasperi, and Altiero Spinelli. While the European Commission's webpage on EU pioneers highlights female figures like Anna Lindh, Louise Weiss, Nicole Fontaine, and Simone Veil,<sup>24</sup> textbooks and official narratives remain dominated by predominantly male and metropolitan perspectives.

This elitist framing struggles to resonate with ordinary European citizens. For instance, how many young people—or even members of this audience—find the 9th of May 1950, the day of the Schuman Declaration, personally meaningful as European citizens? Until we diversify and democratize these histories, connecting them to the lived experiences of all Europeans, the project of European integration will remain distant from the hearts and minds of those it seeks to unite. This is why I have for instance invested in creating a course on Everyday Europe in the past.

Third, I believe that decentring and pluralizing histories—viewing the world through international perspectives rather

than narrowly European ones—is both a moral responsibility rooted in Europe's imperial past and a strategic necessity for its future relevance. Amitav Acharya's concept of a *multiplex world*<sup>25</sup> provides a valuable framework for understanding these dynamics in an evolving international order. This multiplex world can be characterised by a post-hegemonic order, where no single nation dominates, though power inequalities and hierarchies persist. For instance the rise of Brazil, India, China, South Africa are diluting the dominance of the US. Another element is cultural and Political Diversity: the world has become increasingly more complex and like going to the movies where you can choose between different modernities, Europe and the West as leading a liberal, secular world order is only one of the models available. There can be the China's state-led capitalism, India's democratic federalism or how Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim majority countries ground its religious pluralism on the system of Pancasila that recognises six officially religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

7

### **Transformations of the (Liberal) World Order**

The ongoing transformation of the liberal world order—characterized by the clash between its foundational principles of national sovereignty, economic openness, and rule-based multilateralism—can also be seen as an opportunity for maturation. This evolution prompts us to ask fundamental questions: Is the DNA of the liberal international order rooted in economic or political freedoms? Is it truly a global system, or has it functioned more as a “club” of Western (or Westernized) democracies, diffusing or imposing their standards on others?<sup>26</sup>

Rather than signalling a decline, this transformation may indicate a shift toward a multiplex order. In this context, Europe must critically reflect on the role it seeks to play in shaping this new order. European diplomats are increasingly aware of the need to engage meaningfully with the rest of the

world to remain relevant. For instance, the 2022 UN General Assembly vote on a resolution condemning Russia's invasion on March 2nd, where a coalition of countries such as China, India, South Africa or Senegal abstained, served as a wake-up call for some European capitals, highlighting the urgency of rethinking outreach and engagement strategies in a multiplex environment.

However, the struggle for influence in this emerging system is far from over. While Russia and China may have gained traction in some areas, they have not yet “won.”<sup>27</sup> Global norms will likely continue to play a role in a post-hegemonic world, but their diffusion and internalization will face significant constraints. As Amitav Acharya observes, there will be ‘deep normative variation and contestation’ across states, social forces, and global governance interfaces.

8 Based on these three themes of Eurocentricism, decentring and the everyday as well as engaging with the other, this is why I believe that studying and imagining “present futures” is a valuable exercise. Envisioning the future inspires action in the present, equipping us to navigate and shape the unfolding complexities of a multiplex world. Europe must not only adapt to this transformation but actively contribute to defining the principles and practices that will underpin this emerging order.<sup>28</sup>

### ***What could the Global Futures of Europe look like?***

The future is often seen as a paradox—both uncertain and daunting, yet filled with the potential for transformation and hope. For Europe, it represents a horizon of possibilities for new generations and an opportunity to reshape its role within an evolving global order. Crucially, how we frame the future matters: the narratives we create today shape the power dynamics and priorities of tomorrow. As social constructs, futures are imagined in the present, empowering certain actors while sidelining others.<sup>29</sup> This underscores a humanity-

centered perspective—after all, “humans are the architects of their own fortune.”<sup>30</sup>

Engaging with the future is also an exercise in self-reflexivity. It encourages us to examine our current positions and privileges, reflecting on how today's assumptions and actions influence potential political outcomes. As one scholar aptly puts it, “thinking about the future is always thinking about the present.”<sup>31</sup> By imagining alternative futures, we equip ourselves to act with greater intention and responsibility in the here and now.

What are these alternative futures for Europe and the world? Drawing from my research, I see three main avenues for the global futures of Europe that merit attention: migration, diversity, and gender. Each of these areas not only reflects pressing contemporary challenges but also offers opportunities for Europe to redefine its identity and priorities in a multiplex world.

First, the global futures of Europe cannot be meaningfully envisioned without addressing the critical role migration will play in its future economy and demographic outlook. Current narratives, however, are dominated by catastrophic depictions of migration as a threat to our future, with demographic fears being weaponized both by European leaders and third countries to exert diplomatic pressure. This framing fuels restrictive policies and deals with authoritarian regimes, sidelining the reality that migration is not only inevitable but also essential for Europe's future. Eurostat projections show that by 2050, Europe will have nearly half a million centenarians,<sup>32</sup> and there will be two retirees for every active worker, posing serious challenges to sustaining our welfare systems. Europe's workforce is set to shrink by 2% by 2030, indicating an urgent need for legal migration. Meanwhile, the population in Europe's southern neighbourhood will grow significantly, from 235 million today to 282 million by 2030. These trends highlight an opportunity for Europe to

reframe migration as a necessity rather than a threat, nor as a disposable commodity for our societies.

The experience of the UK post-Brexit also serves as a cautionary tale. Despite promises of “taking back control,” migration to the UK has reached record levels and around 150,000 sea crossings in the Channel have occurred since 2018. This demonstrates that restricting legal pathways does not stop migration.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the narratives dominating policy discussions continue to frame migrants—especially—as existential threats, often tied to myths of “overpopulation”<sup>34</sup> and catastrophic futures. These fear-driven perspectives perpetuate harmful policies, including the criminalization of rescue operations at sea.<sup>35</sup> As a result, according to the IOM Missing Migrants project, 30,618 lives have been lost in the Mediterranean since 2014 and 340 in the English Channel since 2014.<sup>36</sup>

Second, I believe that to stay relevant in the future world order, Europe needs to understand how other regions of the world are projecting themselves in the future. How do Indigenous, Asians or African futurisms envision the future and what can Europe learn from them?<sup>37</sup> There are indeed a plurality of futures that are not just about ‘global catastrophic risk,’ ‘human extinction,’ and similar large-scale threats seen as fundamentally apocalyptic: because they anticipate the collapse of currently-dominant power structures as the ‘end of the world’ and the extinction of ‘humanity’.<sup>38</sup> Indigenous movements for instance have launched campaigns such as ‘Land Back Campaign’ to regain access to their territories, China’s Belt and Road Initiative or India’s space programme also demonstrates that the future is a place of competition which will challenge dominance of the West and colonial legacies.

In many parts of the world, futures are also not necessarily secular. As I demonstrate in my book over Secular Power Europe, secularism as a norm projected by the EU in its foreign policy, is actually likely to become the exception. By

2050, Pew research centre projections envision that Muslims and Christians will nearly be equal in numbers worldwide and that atheists, agnostics, and people not affiliated with any religion will be in decline, except in France and the United States. Buddhist, Hindu, and Jewish populations will grow, and Muslims are likely to make up roughly 10 percent of the European population.<sup>39</sup>

Third, Europe must prioritise global gendered futures. In times of significant backlash against gender equality, sustaining a feminist approach to European studies and in the practice of European integration should be a priority. Historically, the canons of European integration have been largely shaped by white, male US scholars such as Donald Puchala, Ernst Haas, Stanley Hoffman, Andrew Moravcsik. While their contributions have been undeniably meaningful, the field has gained much from the diverse women scholar perspectives, many of whom are here today in the audience. Progress has also been made in EU politics, with women like President Ursula von der Leyen for the European Commission, Roberta Metsola for the European Parliament, and Kaja Kallas the next High representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The underrepresentation of women in leadership is not just a question of fairness but also of effectiveness. In the field of conflict prevention and resolution, research has shown that ‘women’s participation in resolution processes decreases the chances of peace agreements failing by 64% and increases the chances of peace agreements lasting for 15 years by 35%.<sup>40</sup> While having more women in power does not guarantee a more peaceful world, it would ensure higher representativeness and inclusiveness, enabling more comprehensive and durable solutions to global challenges. We also need to go beyond quotas and gender equality and question what women in the world want to gain from gendered futures and these are also quite diverse and require a strong intersectional approach that considers, race, ethnicity, religion or also how some women in the world will be more affected

by climate change than others. This has to do also with the capacity of the EU to hear and engage with pluralist feminist voices, not just those that resemble the EU.

The future of academia can also gain significantly from greater diversification, particularly in efforts to globalize International Relations (IR) and ensure that research findings resonate beyond Europe. This starts here, at home, in this prestigious academic building where I am conscious to have the privilege to speak to you. According to the Rathenau Instituut in 2023 only 29% of Dutch professors and 35% of associate professors (UHDs) were women.<sup>41</sup> In the UK we know that only 1% of professors identify as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME).<sup>42</sup> Therefore I am conscious that today I speak from a privilege position and I am in debt to several amazing colleagues with whom I have had the chance to co-author several publications and have been able to join us today or are online.

I also believe that the global futures of Europe can gain from humanities and go beyond the narrow focus of EU studies. I recall the first interview I was invited to attend in Leiden. Seeing a gigantic mural with the motto 'we are humanities', I thought this is where I want to be, and where I see the future of my discipline. This chair is precisely about international studies and global politics, but is located in the humanities faculty where we pursue a humanities-based vision of international relations. In the age of hybrid warfare, spatial competition, artificial intelligence, the role of humanities is at times disregarded, mocked or overlooked. IR as a discipline and practices by states, including European, has valued power over humanities based explanations. The return of geopolitics, with the war in Ukraine and between Hamas and Israel, even Trump's election is probably continuing to bring ammunition to neo-realism in international relations. Yet many researchers are now arguing strongly that humans are ultrasocial animals, where empathy, cooperation and social relations are key to understand how international relations actually function and

should lead to a paradigm shift.<sup>43</sup> Emotions and social relations are now believed to matter importantly in international cooperation, therefore questioning the realist assumption of transactional diplomacy. Drawing from neuro-scientist work my colleague Mai'a Cross demonstrates that 'human morality [...] is universally based on cooperation and promotes cooperation.'<sup>44</sup> This is at odds with the idea that 'we cannot trust each other, how self-interest dominates the system of states, and why the miscalculation and fear of leaders regularly triggers brinkmanship, oftentimes spiraling to the precipice of war.'<sup>45</sup>

To conclude on the futures of Europe, Europe is able to demonstrate its agility and to innovate in times of crisis. Think about the Covid-19 pandemic when everyone was saying the EU would implode and how it managed to develop a remarkable capacity for resilience and adaptability to respond to crisis. This period saw what we have identified with my colleague S. Ladi as increasing coordinative Europeanization<sup>46</sup>—a more cooperative approach between EU institutions and European capitals—compared to the coercive coordination imposed during the 2008 austerity crisis. So the EU is able to avoid staying as a bystander to world developments, and to be part of the transformations only if it is able to stop seeing the world through European frames.

By way of conclusion, accepting this chair as Professor in International Studies and Global politics would not have been possible without the support of many colleagues, friends and relatives who are here today. In fact I believe that this is not a personal achievement but a collective one. First of all, I would like to thank the members of the Board of the Faculty of Humanities, the Board of the University and of the Institute for History, who appointed me. In particular, I would like to thank my institute's director, Professor Jeroen Duindam as well as my colleagues of International studies Professor Duyvestijn and Professor Gerrits, but also the Europe hub, who welcomed me as I transitioned from twelve years at Queen Mary University

of London to The Netherlands and trusted me to take up this position. It is truly an honor to be part of this university and to work with you.

I was not envisioning though that when I left a tiresome post-Brexit environment in the UK, I would join Dutch academia at one of its toughest moments given the governments' cuts in budget in higher education, especially in humanities, and the discussion regarding Dutch language. But I must say that every day when I go to my classroom I tell myself how fortunate I am to be here and I want particularly to thank my students, in Leiden, but also in London at the LSE, UCL and QMUL, and at the College of Europe in Bruges, from whom I learn a lot and who are patient enough to bear with me every time I ramble on over humanities-based international relations, Eurocentrism and decentring. Of course my colleagues from near and abroad have helped me to define and refine this scientific enterprise and through their critical and inspiring minds make sure to constantly challenge me. Some of them have also become friends and make it a much more enjoyable endeavor, so thank you for being here and also today along my side for those who have travelled to join me (Professor Sabine Saurugger, my mentor for many years, Professor Helena Farrand-Carrapico, Professor Moreno-Lax, Prof. Coman, Prof. Casier, Prof. Keukeleire and Dr. Piquet) and also to those listening online and those who could not make it but to whom I am really grateful for their mentoring notably William Wallace, Adam Fagan, Kimberly Hutching and David Williams.

Standing here in front of you would not have been possible without the unwavering support from my friends and family. Throughout my years in Grenoble, London, Paris, Brussels, but also in Rabat, Cairo or Amman I have made lifelong friendships. A special thank you goes to my friends in The Hague who constitute a solid circle of support. I want to thank my relatives who travelled to attend this inaugural lecture, notably my uncle and aunt, my cousin and my neighbors who patiently sat through the 45 minutes of this oration. This means

a lot to me, especially as I wished that my mum could have enjoyed this moment with us. She passed away too soon and is dearly missed every single day. She and my dad, who today sits proudly in the front row, always trusted me in my choices, and their love and care helped me to reach my aspirations.

But my biggest debt belongs to my own past, present and future: my daughters Norah and Zadie, whose curiosity and spirited love give me inspiration and stamina every day to shape together the future, and to Greg who is truly my most honest realist critic and fiercest supporter, including when it comes to balancing the demands of an academic career, with a bustling family life. Thank you for your love and encouragement.

To conclude, ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for your kind attention and your interest. And "Ik heb gezegd."

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## PROF.DR. SARAH C.A. WOLFF



Sarah Wolff is Professor in International Studies and Global Politics at Leiden University. She previously was Professor in European Politics and International Relations at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL), where she led the Centre for European Research and Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence NEXTEUK on the future of EU-UK relations and was the Director of the QMUL MA in International Relations in Paris. She researches EU foreign policy, European integration in times of crisis (Covid-19), EU migration and asylum policies, EU-Middle East and North Africa, EU-Islam as well as the role of gender and religion in foreign policy. Her book *Secular Power Europe and Islam: Identity and Foreign Policy* (Michigan University Press, 2021) was conducted thanks to a Fulbright-Schuman and a Leverhulme research grants and received the 2023 Best Book Award from the European Union Studies Association. She received the LISBOAN Research Award 2012 for her book *Freedom, Security and Justice after Lisbon and Stockholm* (Asser, 2012; co-edited) and also wrote a monograph on *The Mediterranean Dimension of the European Union's Internal Security* (Palgrave, 2012)

She is a member of the Editorial Board of the journal *Mediterranean Politics*. Before joining academia, she worked at the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Netherlands Institute for International Relations. Full list of publications is available at <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6225-3500>



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