



The Geopolitics of Europe. From the Atlantic to the Urals.

## 1- A Singular Geographical Space

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**A geopolitical study of Europe reveals the existence of different geographical scales depending, for example, on whether or not we include Russia or the Outermost Regions (OMR).**

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An examination of the geophysical inland features of the European oecumene is relatively straightforward : the northern half of the European territory is essentially covered with plains : Germano-Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian. This northern half also includes two vast plateaux : the Central Russian and the Volga. It only has one significant mountain range, that of Scandinavia. Most of the mountains in the European territory lie in the southern half. The Massif Central, the Alps, and the Carpathians lie in the continental part ; the mountains of Spain, the Italian Apennines, and the Dinaric Alps lie in Europe's peninsulas ; and the Pyrenees are "isthmic" in nature, stretching from the Mediterranean to the nearest point on the Gulf of Gascony.

However, it is immediately harder to define a line of demarcation between Europe and the planet's other territories. While some geographical ensembles such as America are easy to distinguish, insofar as they are almost unquestionably bounded by seas, this cannot be said for the geographical perimeter of the territories referred to as "Europe". Our analysis will show that Europe is a singular space whose geophysical specificities go a long way to explaining certain traits in the spheres of both external and internal geopolitics.

## **I. The geophysical characteristics of Europe**

Is Europe a continent ? Where do its frontiers lie ? These are delicate questions as the geophysical characteristics of Europe are complex, its coastlines tortuous and so many islands have been attached to it.

### **Europe : not a continent, but part of Eurasia**

According to the classic definition, a continent is defined as a "large expanse of land bounded by one or more oceans". This definition is based on etymology as "continent" derives from the Latin *continere* meaning, transitively, "to hold together" and passively or intransitively, "to be joined to", "to communicate with", "to be continuous". The first criterion in the definition of a continent lies then in the continuity of land, but is clearly insufficient, as, on these grounds alone, the tiniest island would qualify as a continent. A second criterion therefore has to be that of size. This, however, is too vague to be sufficient. If we set out to list the continents, starting with the vastest existing expanses of land, with no natural interruptions, three are immediately identifiable : the Old Continent (often called the "Old World"), America ("the New World") and the Antarctic. Then, given the extreme slenderness of the Isthmus of Suez, it is reasonable to add Africa, distinguishable from Eurasia.

This leaves us with a number of other territories the status of which can legitimately be

queried, namely Australia, Greenland and even Madagascar. Here geophysics comes to the rescue of geographical knowledge and the judicious geographer will think like a physician, acknowledging that continents are only the main continental crust landmasses of the lithosphere plates ; i.e. the most superficial rigid envelope of the Earth. Since it is the continental crust that determines the continent, true intercontinental separations, when they exist, are not so much an interruption caused by seas than by the limits of lithosphere plates. Hence Madagascar, which is no more than a continental crust landmass of the African plate, is geographically only an island and, in geophysical terms, a satellite of the African continent. By the same token, Greenland is part of the American continent.

Australia, however, though sometimes held to be an island, is a continent : it is the main discrete portion of the continental crust of the Indo-Australian Plate, with its satellites : Tasmania to the South-East and Guinea to the North. These islands are effectively a geophysical part of the Australian continent as there is no break in the continental crust in either the Bass Strait or the Sea of Arafura. On these grounds, it would however be incorrect to consider Oceania as a “continent” by including, in addition to Australia, the myriad Pacific islands, as this complies with neither the geophysical nor the geographical definitions ; Oceania is therefore a world region, but is not, *stricto sensu*, a “continent”.

Our planet’s five continents are consequently : Africa, America, Antarctica, Australia and Eurasia. Unlike the names of the other five continents, *Eurasia* is a portmanteau of two geographically contiguous regions. Yet are Europe and Asia, which form the Eurasian continent, sufficiently well distinguished from each other by their geographical characteristics to each have a specific geographical identity ? It is customary to invoke the Urals as the dividing line between Europe and Asia ; but how well grounded is this assertion ?

### **The Urals : a commonly invoked but debatable boundary**

In reality, as explained by Jacques Rupnik and Christian Lequesne :

« The status, ascribed to the Urals, of a conventional frontier between Europe and Asia, is a human contrivance. We owe it to Tatichtchev, the official geographer of Tsar Peter the Great, who hit on it at the start of the 18th century for strictly political purposes. His goal at the time was for Moscow to be considered as a European city, for two reasons : firstly, to legitimate the strategy of alliance with resource-rich Western powers - notably military - liable to modernise the Empire ; secondly, to legitimate a series of military victories against the Turks and the Tatars. »

Once awarded to the Urals, a range which runs north to south, this frontier status has been regularly consolidated. For example, Jules Romains wrote in *Men of Good Will* (1932-1946) : “Assembled from the Urals to Gibraltar, from Thrace to the Hebrides ; with its series of empires, [Europe] could have defied the world”. Worthy of mention also is General de Gaulle’s celebrated perception of Europe as stretching “from the Atlantic to the Urals”. This approach has the advantage of being relatively accurate from a demographic viewpoint. Effectively, the population of Russia, the world’s biggest country, is essentially concentrated to the west of the Urals, even though most of Russia’s territory lies to the east.

Yet to consider the Ural range as a boundary between Europe and Asia is no more than received wisdom. Firstly, the Urals are not a real barrier, their highest point attaining only 1,895 metres ; above all, the mountain is easily negotiated. Secondly, through its location, climate, vegetation and azonality, this mountain range is already part of Asia and does not bound it. If we then venture into the sphere of cultural geography, we find little evidence to

uphold the theory of the Urals as a frontier. Asian peoples of Muslim confession, such as the Tatars and the Bachkirs, live to the west of the range, while to the east the population is predominantly European (mainly Russian), as a result of the colonisation of Siberia. For example, nearly 90% of the inhabitants of the oblast of Sverdlovsk are ethnic Russians, a proportion that is in excess of Russia's national average. In terms of political geography, the Urals have no structural role. Firstly, the range has never been a political boundary. Secondly, given its strategic functions, with the command centre at mount Kosvinsky and the underground complex of unknown purpose at Mount Yamantau, the Urals might even be considered as the heart of the Russian state and, in no circumstances as a geopolitical boundary.

A second Eastern frontier often mooted for Europe is the Caspian Sea, if only because, as a sea, it would appear to fulfil the basic criteria whereby a continent is bounded by seas. Yet its Western shores have Asian characteristics, with a steppe landscape marked by sparse vegetation. Furthermore, on the cultural level, it is home to the Kalmyks, Mongolian-speaking Asian peoples of Buddhist faith, concentrated in the Republic of Kalmykia.

Europe can therefore be neither defined by the geographical concept of "continent", nor distinguished as a western part of a Eurasian continent clearly bounded by a mountain range. To pin down the geographical identity of Europe, we therefore need to look elsewhere for specific characteristics.

### **Peninsular and insular specificity**

Europe has three easily identifiable boundaries. The Atlantic Ocean, separating Europe from America by thousands of miles, offers relatively obvious Western limits. From the Straits of Gibraltar to the North Cape, Europe is effectively terminated by either peninsulas (Brittany, the Iberian Peninsula), or islands (Great Britain, Ireland, and Iceland). The Northern limits are also sharply drawn, with the glacial Arctic Ocean separating the north of Europe from America. Finally, the southern limits are also relatively obvious, as the Mediterranean Sea separates Europe from Africa.

Thus Europe can be portrayed as a peninsular and insular ensemble located on the Eastern seaboard of the North Atlantic Ocean, an ensemble whose peninsular part forms the westernmost part of the Eurasian continent. This definition of Europe based on its relationship to the ocean brings into the discussion the importance of the latter's climatic influence on all European regions. The potency of this influence is decisive as it goes a long way to explaining Europe's singularity. Europe's contours therefore define territories in which the compenetration of land and sea is unequalled on the planet.

The cluster of European peninsulas effectively produce a ratio between length of coastline and surface area that is, on this scale, the highest in the world. The main central peninsula, running along an East-North-East to West-South-West axis, becomes increasingly slender as we follow it from the regions lying between the White Sea and the Black Sea to the sub-peninsula of Brittany. Less than 2,000 km of land separate the White Sea — an extension of the Barents Sea, curling around the peninsula of Kola — from the Sea of Azov, which, notably, forms the Eastern seaboard of Crimea. The Baltic Sea is less than 1,200 km from the Black Sea, while less than 1,000 km separate the North Sea from the Adriatic.

The main central peninsula of physical Europe has add-on peripheral peninsulas. These fall into two groups. The first, the most northerly, includes the Fennoscandian and the Danish. The second, the Mediterranean group, includes the Iberian, Italian, Greco-Balkan and Anatolian peninsulas.

As for the insular entities, they fall into two ensembles. The most outlying islands range from the Azores to Svalbard, and include Iceland and Jan Mayen. The peri-continental islands fall into two groups : northern and Mediterranean. The former includes the two main British Isles, namely Ireland and Great Britain, with their satellites (the Faroes, the Shetlands, etc.), and the myriad islands dotted along the coast of the Fennoscandian peninsula. Finally, the Mediterranean group has three large Tyrrhenian islands (Corsica, Sardinia and Sicily) and its satellites include, from west to east, Alborán, the Balearic Islands, Pantelleria, Malta and Gozo, Crete and Cyprus, as well as the Dalmatian and Aegean archipelagos.

Finally, the maritime identity of Europe is accentuated insofar as many ocean-going rivers, with numerous tributaries, cross the territories on their journey seaward.

As for the change in geophysical nature between the European and Asian parts of the Eurasian nation, it was underlined, for example, by Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837), in *A Journey to Arzrum*. Travelling from Moscow, he noted the following between Novocherkassk, a city close to Rostov-on-Don and Stavropol :

« The transition from Europe to Asia becomes increasingly marked by the hour : forests become rarer, the hills flatten out, the grass becomes thicker and the vegetation become vigorous ; birds unknown in our forests fly up out of nowhere... »

## **II. From a geographical identity to the sources of internal geopolitics**

Is the geopolitical structure of Europe, with the current breakdown into 44 States, the result of Europe's geographical characteristics ?

### **Natural frontiers that sometimes lead to political frontiers**

To answer this question, we have to examine the extent to which the geopolitical structure of Europe can be explained by two classic theories : that of natural borders and the principle of linearity.

Natural border theory is based on the idea that international borders should comply with natural logic, following draining divides or water courses that provide a clear way of tracing the lines separating nations.

Many players in geopolitical arenas have found it practical to use draining divides — the topographic limits between two draining basins — as state frontiers. In other words, on each side of a line of this type, water drains into different ocean-going river networks. In mountainous areas where borders broadly lie along draining divides, geopolitics is based on physical geography, examples being the Franco-Spanish, Franco-Italian and Swedish-Norwegian borders.

As we are aware, the Franco-Spanish border is well-established, going back to 1659 when the Kingdoms of Spain and France agreed, in the Treaty of the Pyrenees, that it would very largely espouse the main draining divide provided by the Pyrenean mountain range, even though a number of exclaves were consented as a sop to local sensitivities. The current border, set by the Treaty of Bayonne in 1856, then slightly amended in 1984 above Arette (France) and Isaba (Spain) (an area of 0.27 ha - 0.67 acres), consolidated the existing agreements.

If we turn our attention to France's south-east border, one of the Treaties of Utrecht, that of 1713, set the limits between two states, Savoy and France, as being "where the water flowed [eastward or westward] "from the top of the Alps" : a rule that still applies. On February 10 1947, the peace treaty signed in Paris between France and Italy extended the boundary to the

drainage divide in the upper valleys of the Tinée and Vésubie Rivers, subject to subsequent amendments, with Tende and La Brigue being ceded to France with acceptance by local plebiscite on October 12 1947. The other rectifications were of minor geographical importance — a few square miles each — but, in legal terms signified the victory of the integral natural criterion : the political border was set along a natural limit, with no concessions. Throughout this part of the Alps, the concept of natural frontier is opposed to that of the enduring existence of States holding control over mountain passes and the approach roads in the valleys.

In 1792, in France, the theory of natural frontiers was invoked for geopolitical ends to justify external conquests in the Hainaut region of Belgium, and, in the south-east, the County of Nice and Savoy. On January 31 Danton justified the French borders in these terms in an address to the Convention :

« I say that those who wish to raise fears about extending the Republic too far do so in vain. The borders of France have been marked out by Nature. We will obtain them in all quarters, namely the ocean, the Rhine, the Alps and the Pyrenees. The boundaries of our Republic must be there. »

There is a further implementation of the natural border theory in northern Europe. Here, the border between Sweden and Norway was internationally acknowledged in 1905 when Norway gained independence. Along most of its 1,619 km, it largely follows the main drainage divide of the Scandinavian Mountains.

In Central Europe, where Poland's Eastern and Western frontiers have been subject to numerous vicissitudes, the country's southern border with the Czech Republic and Slovakia follows the Carpathians and the Sudetes that form a natural border.

### **From “hydrofrontiers” to the principle of linearity**

Apart from drainage divides, other geographical characteristics influence state boundaries in Europe, with ocean-going rivers and lakes forming “hydrofrontiers”. In the North of Europe, since the signature of the Treaty of Fredrikshamn in 1809, whereby the Kingdom of Sweden put an end to the war with the Russian Empire over Finland, the border between Finland and Sweden, starts in Lapland, then works its way south following the Könkämäeno and Muonio rivers, then the River Torne, before reaching the northernmost part of the Baltic Sea, the Gulf of Bothnia. On the opposite shore of the Baltic, the downstream section of the Neman River marks the boundary between the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad and Lithuania.

In the Balkan peninsula, part of the downstream section of the Maritsa River provides a border between Greece and Turkey. In Western Europe, the Rhine forms the border between Liechtenstein and Switzerland, then part of the border between Austria and Switzerland, before Lake Constance takes over. After crossing the latter, the Rhine almost constantly separates Germany firstly from Switzerland, then from France. At the other end of France, the Bidassoa River marks the border with Spain over a distance of 10 km in the flattest land between the neighbouring countries.

The Danube, Europe's second longest river after the Volga, serves as a frontier along much of its course. When it enters Slovakia, the Danube initially marks the border with Austria before flowing through Bratislava. Downstream from the Slovakian capital, it provides part of the border between Slovakia and Hungary. Then, after crossing Hungary from north to south, it acts as the border between Croatia and Serbia ; finally, after crossing Serbia, it acts as Bulgaria's northern border, separating it from Romania over a distance of 500 km.

Finally, in the aftermath of World War II, other water courses became symbols of peace

between European nations : these are the Oder and the Neisse. True, this hydrofrontier, the Oder-Neisse line, named after the ocean-going river and its tributary, located to the west of Poland, and 472 km long, is historically recent. It owes its existence to WWII, during which the German border was pushed back to the west of the Oder-Neisse line, whereas pre-war Germany held almost the whole of Silesia, around half of Pomerania, part of Eastern Brandenburg and a small area of Saxony. This is further explained by the fact that the great Germano-Polish plain offers little in the way of natural frontiers. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Germany recognised the border, signing the Treaty of Moscow on September 12 1990, whereby it waived all subsequent territorial claims. In other words, while history determined the border region, geography gave it a clear limit.

Moreover, many internal geopolitical boundaries are hydrofrontiers, an example being the Rhine which separates the German Länder of Rhineland-Palatinate (left bank) from Baden-Württemberg and Hesse (right bank). In France, the Loire marks part of the limit between the Burgundy and Centre regions, while a section of the Rhône separates Languedoc-Roussillon from Provence.

As for the principle of linearity, it was analysed by Nelly Girard d'Albissin in her study of the Franco-Belgian border. In 1678, the Treaty of Nijmegen put an end to enclaves, what Vauban described as the "pell-melled friendly and enemy places", replaced by a line of fortifications that would be easier to defend. This principle of linearity thus gives precedence to military considerations, while facilitating customs procedures.

### **Which is geopolitically stronger : continental or maritime Europe ?**

In a Europe which, for the sake of simplicity, is geographically dual, which part enjoys geographical superiority : the most maritime or the most continental ? To address this question, we must first refer back to the British geographer Sir Halford MacKinder (1861-1947), who contributed to promoting the theory, influential in the English-speaking world, yet debatable, of a fundamental dichotomy between continental and maritime powers, locked in a constant geopolitical opposition. The theory postulates that Eurasia is the "pivot" of the world, where balance is struck and lost, and where lie the resources, the economic growth and the secular confrontations that have been the makings of history.

In his writings MacKinder examined the potential threats to British supremacy. His enquiries led him to postulate his theory of the "heartland, the geographical pivot of history", whereby the birthplace of all conflicts lay in the attempts of the continental powers to control coastal outlets (the coastland). MacKinder firstly located the pivot in Germany (*The Geographical Pivot of History*, 1904) then in Russia (*The Round World and the Winning of Peace*, 1943). More exactly, he located it in European Russia, as distinct from Siberia (*Lenaland*). Russia's strength, he argued, lay in having population and wealth in the western part of the country, and a vast Eastern space, offering resources and, above all, a strategic depth that consequently guaranteed a fall-back capability (smartly used against Bonaparte), a place to relocate industries and the impossibility of being totally invaded.

However long, the frontiers of the heartland can be defended because strategic retreat is always an option. Modern terrestrial transport capacity enables the land to be used profitably and defended efficiently, making it similar to the maritime powers which, till then, through control of the seas, were alone able to access places where they had interests. The heartland could not be accessed by maritime powers, because its strategic depth and self-sufficiency made any blockade strategy unworkable. Conversely, it could become a maritime power. Though a critical analysis of MacKinder's thinking does not lead one to conclude that the

*heartland enjoys systematic supremacy*, his theory does confirm the role of geography in conflicts. An instructive example in contemporary geopolitical history is that of the Norwegian port of Narvik, largely explained by its geography. Narvik enjoys the influence of the Gulf Stream, the warm marine current that occurs in the North Atlantic and that ensures that the European coastline remains navigable all year round as far as the North Cape and even the Barents Sea, while many ports in the north of the Baltic remain icebound for months each year. As from the first days of April 1940, and though Norway was, at the time a neutral state, Nazi Germany invaded the country to ensure control of the supply line of Swedish iron from the mines at Kiruna (Swedish Lapland) to Narvik, with its direct access to the Norwegian Sea and navigability throughout winter. Germany's first defeat in WWII was also based on geographical logic : France, the UK and Poland were easily able to dispatch their armed forces and win the naval battle at Narvik, followed by the land battle between April and June 1940. One of the consequences of this defeat was the end of Norwegian neutrality, the country becoming a founder member of NATO.

Thus European maritime space opens stronger advantages in terms of connections, especially when they are navigable all year round, whereas continental space opens up strategic advantages. In both cases, geography is not neutral : it has geopolitical impact.

### **III. A maritime geography with multiple consequences for external geopolitics**

While helping us to understand its internal geopolitical developments, Europe's geographical characteristics also engender external geopolitical effects. Notably, the maritime nature of the European isthmus offers important and enviable potential, while giving ideas about possibilities beyond the seas.

#### **A maritime advantage in the Mediterranean and geopolitical *mare nostrum***

Thus, at the time of the Roman Empire, Europe built an unshared hegemony over the Mediterranean, especially as the coastline offers a number of easily accessed ports. After reducing the power of Athens, admittedly weakened by internecine squabbling, Rome achieved the exceptional historic situation of being a European-based political entity encompassing all the Mediterranean shores. There were three key dates on the way to this success. Left to Athens by the Romans in 166 BC, Delos became an international and cosmopolitan logistics hub, symbolising maritime supremacy. In 146 BC, the destruction of Carthage ridded the Romans of a heavyweight rival in the Mediterranean. Finally, in 67 BC, the Roman Senate took a vital decision : Pompey, elected consul, succeeded in obtaining extraordinary powers (*lex Gabinia*) to take on the pirates who were wreaking havoc in the Mediterranean. In a matter of months, killing or capturing 30,000 pirates, Pompey stamped a Roman order on the Mediterranean, eliminating piracy until at least the 3rd century AD. Thus the Romans were able to claim the Mediterranean as their sea, the *mare nostrum*, extending their Empire around the whole Mediterranean basin. The imperial era saw maritime life at its peak even though in winter the *mare nostrum* was as often as not a *mare clausum* — a closed sea — because of the high risks that went with sailing during the season.

A power, centred on Europe, in Rome, imposed its sovereignty on the Mediterranean, thereby forming in the territories around its rim a sort of "common market" or rather "single market", to borrow the vocabulary now used in reference to the European Union. Taking advantage of



the technical progress achieved in the naval sphere, Rome used its shores to make the Mediterranean its own, geopolitically the inland sea of a European power.

The Mediterranean had two advantages for Rome. Firstly, it enabled a considerable volume of trade as the design of big rounded boats, with a shipment capacity of nearly 2,000 metric tons, made up in size what they lacked in relative velocity. Secondly, the Mediterranean was vital insofar as transport by sea was easier and cheaper than land alternatives, the Mediterranean ports of call forming the Empire's main transport network.

However, the Mediterranean was also a source of issues in health, the economy and politics. As regards health, as from the second half of the 2nd century AD, the plague was propagated via merchant ships. Contracted firstly by those who bought the goods, it then spread to inland areas. For example, in 262, a deadly epidemic at least temporarily shook Roman geopolitical power.

The second problem caused by the *mare nostrum* was related to the cost of making the seas safe. To maintain the communication system meant raising funds. The cost was obviously easier to live with in places with the highest population density. This undoubtedly explains why, as from the 2nd century AD, the centre of the Empire tended to shift towards the Eastern Mediterranean basin, where the Greek language prevailed, because the Asian province made up of Syria and Egypt was at the time more densely populated than Italy or Sicily.

Finally, the *mare nostrum* was directly dependent on the construction of political unity, the undermining of which triggered the fragmentation of the Mediterranean. The end of the Roman Empire was accompanied by a significant decline in population that smashed economic growth and reduced trade, while insecurity at sea resurfaced. For several centuries, a European power had, however, been able to use the geographical advantage offered by its maritime characteristics.

Centuries later, other European territories also cashed in on seaboard advantage for geopolitical purposes. For example, as from the 13th century, geography provided the basis for an agreement between two ports, Hamburg and Lubeck : the Hanseatic League came into being, firstly, to ensure the political autonomy of the port cities with regard to princely powers and, secondly, to ensure safe commercial navigation, primarily in the North Sea and the Baltic. The Hanseatic League thus created a prototype for a maritime common market which, at its apogee, with dozens of ports joining the movement, stretched from the Baltic to the Western Mediterranean, via the North Sea, the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean.

As mastery of navigational techniques progressed, the maritime parameters of the European isthmus became essential aspects of European geopolitics that started to leave a global footprint as from the end of the 15th century.

### **The maritime nature of the European isthmus at the heart of geopolitics**

The latter part of the 15th century was a time of achievement at sea, crowned by Christopher Columbus' discovery of America (1492) and the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope (1498) by the Portuguese navigator Vasco de Gama, giving Europe access to Asia.

At the end of the European isthmus and cut off from the rest of Europe by the "wall" of Spain, which precluded any form of eastward territorial expansion, Portugal had only one other neighbour : the Atlantic Ocean. In the 15th century, this small country, independent since 1143, prioritised this geographical asset to embark on a substantial maritime expansion, mastering two technologies : transport and communication. Portugal became extremely skilled in mapmaking, notably by importing methods from the Genoese. It devised the sextant, enabling ships to take their cue from the stars, and hired high-quality sailors from all over

Europe. Effectively, the Portuguese navy did not staff galleys with convicts but opted to use professional sailors trained also in combat techniques. Moreover, Portugal managed to build very mobile carracks (*nau*) enabling far more flexible navigation than other vessels. In the 15th century, this advantage enabled the Portuguese to successfully build a considerable empire that was extended to the full by either conquests or alliances with local populations. Likewise, Spain, whose potential for northward expansion came up against the barrier of the Pyrenees, also made use of its maritime potential. Subsequently, as the second half of the second millennium unfolded, other European countries decided to create the geopolitical conditions that would enable them to procure the resources they lacked in the northern hemisphere, but that were essentially available on other continents. France, England and the Netherlands used their access to the seas to lay their hands on products that were either non-existent, or insufficiently available in Europe : spices, gold, ivory, silver, sugar, furs, cotton, tobacco, cacao, rubber, coffee, tea, tin, copper, etc. This led to repeated overseas conflicts between European powers, but also initiatives to solve the issues, notably the Berlin Conference (1884-1885) involving fourteen countries, and the *Entente cordiale* signed by France and the United Kingdom in 1904. Using its maritime assets, European geopolitics thus shaped the world with countless frontiers, symbolised notably by the language divide between Brazil and the rest of South America or the separation of two islands, Haiti and Timor, into two states, respectively the outcomes of Franco-Spanish and Dutch-Portuguese rivalries. In the second half of the 20th century European colonies gained independence, but the legacy of Europe's maritime expansion subsists on a large scale. On one hand, Europe is still culturally present in other continents through its languages — like Portuguese in Brazil and Angola — and in the form of international organisations, which, though malleable, fulfil a significant geopolitical role : more than a quarter of the world's nations are members of the Commonwealth, and a third are members of the French-speaking *Organisation internationale de la francophonie*, while eight nations are members of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries. More generally, 21st century European geopolitics holds on to overseas territories that are the legacy of the colonial era and owe so much to the maritime geography of Europe.

### **Europe's geopolitical outposts around the world**

Still today, European countries continue to exert their sovereignty over territories all over the world, in ways that are unequal in impact and are sometimes disputed. This scattering of European presence does not form a geographical ensemble.

All the overseas territories that are dependent on European countries are of great geopolitical importance as they give Europe greater global presence, offering interfaces with other regional powers. Many lie in or close to strategic points. Here are some examples : French sovereignty over Guiana, an overseas *département*, is essential, as the territory lies in the equatorial zone, thus optimising rocket launch capabilities and, in so doing, making a major contribution to the success of the European aerospace industry via the Ariane programme. A second, very different, example is Diego Garcia, one of sixty British-dependent atolls in the Indian Ocean. Diego Garcia has a British military base rented to the US Army, giving the United States a logistics foothold for their military operations in the countries around the Indian Ocean rim, where they have been involved in the 1991 Gulf War, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the Indian Ocean, France too has southern hemisphere territories that are a major asset for controlling the ocean and have strategic value for their current and future scientific interest.

Science is also at stake in the often vast Antarctic territories controlled by European nations ; these include Adélie Land, British Antarctic Territory, and the Norwegian dependencies Peter I Island and Queen Maud Land.

These territories, lying outside Europe but dependent on the latter, are of geopolitical importance as they are mostly islands or, like Guiana, have seaboard. They therefore have very vast Exclusive Economic Zones which, by international maritime law, can extend as far as 200 nautical miles from the coastal baseline, offering the countries occupying the latter enduring rights to the undersea natural resources.

These overseas dependencies consequently give Europe an essential role in the world. At the same time, the size of the land and the attendant offshore zones, as well as the importance of the international borders, such as that between French Guiana and Brazil, create obligations and can lead to a range of geopolitical tensions, in contexts such as the Falkland Islands or New Caledonia.

Such is the diversity of Europe's geopolitical presence worldwide that two types of territories have been identified : the eight territories that form an integral part of the European Union (EU), referred to as "Outermost Regions" (OMR), and the others. The former are French (Reunion Island, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guiana and Mayotte since January 1 2014), Spanish (the Canaries) or Portuguese (the Azores and Madeira) .

Overseas territories that are dependent on EU member countries are referred to as Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT). Though they are not part of European Union territory, their nationals have the nationality of a Union member state.

Thus the geography that is useful to the geopolitics of Europe is both global and highly diverse, in terms of both the location of the territories concerned and their institutional status.

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A geopolitical study of Europe reveals the existence of different geographical scales depending, for example, on whether or not we include Russia or the OMR. One is, at least, entitled to consider that the EU has delivered a clear answer to the question of its boundaries as the adjective "European" features in Article 49 (formerly Article 49 TUE) of the consolidated version of the Treaty on the EU : "Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 [respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, etc.] and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union." It is true that the underlying reason why the authors of the treaty added the adjective "European" was to preclude membership requests from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, or even Japan, South Korea or Taiwan. However, as the adjective is nowhere explicitly clarified, Europe, though a geographically identifiable object, is, for the EU, a geographically unidentified object.

This is why, in this book, to avoid all ambiguity, the word "Europe" covers geographical Europe as understood on the broadly used scale of the UN's statistical databases since the breakup of the Soviet Union, i.e. from the Atlantic to Russia inclusive. The term European Economic Community (EEC) applies to all the territories belonging to the member nations of this community from 1957 to 1992. In 1993, the EEC became the European Union (EU). Finally, the reference to the "European Community", namely the territories of the member States, can only be used for a period prior to December 1 2009, date after which this reference was abandoned by the Treaty of Lisbon.

Whatever the case, a geopolitical knowledge of Europe assumes an in-depth understanding of

the different episodes of post-World War II history.

## 2 - Europe from Division to Reunification (1947-2004). The Story and the Sub-text

*Manuscrit clos en 2015.*

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### **P.-S.**

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