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“Values will not save Europe”

interview with Abraham de Kruijf
by Peter Henk Steenhuis

Dutch version of the interview with the photo's mentioned below: <http://www.mijneu.eu/Afbeeldingen/Interview.pdf>

Abraham de Kruijf works as a process expert for IBM, Europol, Albert Heijn, and central and municipal governments. He is involved in development work in Chile and was cofounder of Habitat for Humanity Chile. His book on societal and business values was published in 1994 and his book 'Renewing business processes, organization and ICT' was published in 2000.

What exactly is the sound of Europe? This is what a number of eminent leaders will be discussing tomorrow in Austria. One of the participants is Abraham de Kruijf: *“Just try to express what you see, what you feel and what you hear in Europe. If you then carefully sift through what you have come up with, you will get to the core of what European values are all about.”*

(photo)

It was the Netherlands that initiated the debate on norms and values. What are they, what is the identity of the continent?

A Lutheran church in Berlin makes perfectly clear what values they champion with their emergency shelter for the homeless. At night it is 15 degrees below zero.

PHOTO AP

Prime Minister Balkenende and others on the sound of Europe

On Friday 27 and Saturday 28 January 2006 Prime Minister Balkenende will be in Salzburg to attend the international conference on 'The Sound of Europe'. The conference, which starts tomorrow, is being organized by the current President of the European Council, the Austrian chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel. The conference follows on from previous conferences on European values initiated during the Dutch presidency of the Union in 2004. Over 200 experts, scientists, opinion leaders, politicians and policymakers will be debating, among other things, the question of how values, ideas and culture contribute towards European identity and unity.

Abraham de Kruijf describes himself as a citizen on a journey, finding his way through a maze of institutions.

In the meantime Mikhail Gorbachov has written an article in one of Kruijf's books. He has discussed global issues with Nobel laureate Mohamed ElBaradei. He is acquainted with the sociologist Amitai Etzioni, who has had considerable influence on Balkenende. He spoke with the American Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal

Reserve, after he had given a presentation in the Federal Reserve, the central bank of the United States.

And Chancellor Schüssel of Austria personally invited him to attend 'The Sound of Europe' conference, which starts in Salzburg on 27 January, the 250th birthday of the composer Mozart. The conference theme encompasses music, the economy, and European values now that the EU is in a state of crisis.

De Kruijf: “Last week I read an article in Trouw about the American philosopher **John Dewey** (1859-1952). In the 1930s he wrote that we should not base what we do on high-minded ideals but on everyday life. **Dewey** says that it is not the theoretical norms and values that determine whether the practice is good, but it is the practice that indicates whether the norms and values are good enough to shape a desirable reality.”

“This idea of pragmatism really appeals to me. To survive the crisis in Europe, we must formulate values that are truly important to the citizen. This is why, following the referendum on the constitution, I wrote a proposal on how we should proceed in the future. Schüssel was the first to respond to my proposal.”

What are the values that will save Europe?

“It is not values that will save Europe.”

So what will save Europe then?

“What exactly do you mean by Europe? The area described in the draft constitution? Or do you just mean the various different societies of all European inhabitants?”

You choose.

“**Dewey** says that a pragmatic ethics does not work with fixed principles and that it is important for citizens to develop skills to help them analyse situations better. And what the analysis focuses on is to discover exactly what could be good *and* to determine how we could actually achieve that good. If we apply this to Europe, then we have to admit that the all-embracing European ideal does not have sufficient support from the citizens. So there's no real point in forcing this ideal.

If we are to save Europe, to use the word again, then it is up to us, the citizens, to do something about it. Values can help. Values that work make essential qualities tangible and influence how we as people, organizations, societies and governments want to deal with each other and with our living and working environment.”

Again: what values are they?

“Before we can formulate them, we must first establish what is good for European society. Once we know that, then it's possible, with a pragmatic approach, to develop the necessary structure, decision making processes, legislation and agreements. *This is part of my everyday work on business process innovation.*”

Tell me about the good.

“I can’t just conjure the good out of a hat. As soon as you go in search of what is good, you come up against a wide range of convictions. Do you want European administrators to emphasize administration 'top down', or should they focus on the quality of run-of-the mill everyday life, in other words, administration 'from the bottom up'. Do we want all countries to be as one, or not? Or would it be more useful to first organize what goes on day by day and then to take a look at how much unity that results in?”

Isn't this something that citizens should sort out for themselves?

“That’s of course not going to work. We can’t even decide that at country level. Of all the norms and values, we must try to arrive at a number of values that we in Europe share with each other. They could become our core values, and we could use them to clarify our role in contemporary world society.”

Right, I’m going in search of them. Where? On the street, in myself?

“The search for values works from the outside in. Just try to express what you see, what you feel and what you hear in Europe. If you then carefully sift through what you have come up with, you will get to the core of what European values are all about. I went to Schüssel’s staff in Vienna with a proposal for these kinds of values. Making values explicit is a second step that is often forgotten. On paper these values would seem to be obvious. The strange thing is that almost no-one takes them on board.”

How do I do that?

“Again, the search for values works from the outside in. Making values explicit goes from the inside out. An example. Citizens themselves are increasingly determining what is important to them. People became much more vocal after the wave of democratization in the 1960s. And government also encouraged the process. But in the meantime a problem has emerged: people no longer accept authority. Back to **Dewey**. If we in Europe consider that self-reliance has gone too far, and that we are slowly arriving at a situation of what I refer to as egocracy as opposed to democracy, then we must once again go in search of what is worth striving for. Respecting and involving literally everyone and every population group. In the south of the Netherlands they call this '**evenworthiness**', everyone has equal worth. This is not to be confused with equality or equivalence; people are not all equal. Evenworthiness can become an important value in helping to determine the society of the future. If we think that, then we must give substance to evenworthiness in everyday reality.

And do we consider evenworthiness to be an important new value?

“I’m going to Salzburg to find that out.”

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