



Susana del Río Villar

Twelve European Women Building the European Union

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Construyendo la Unión Europea.

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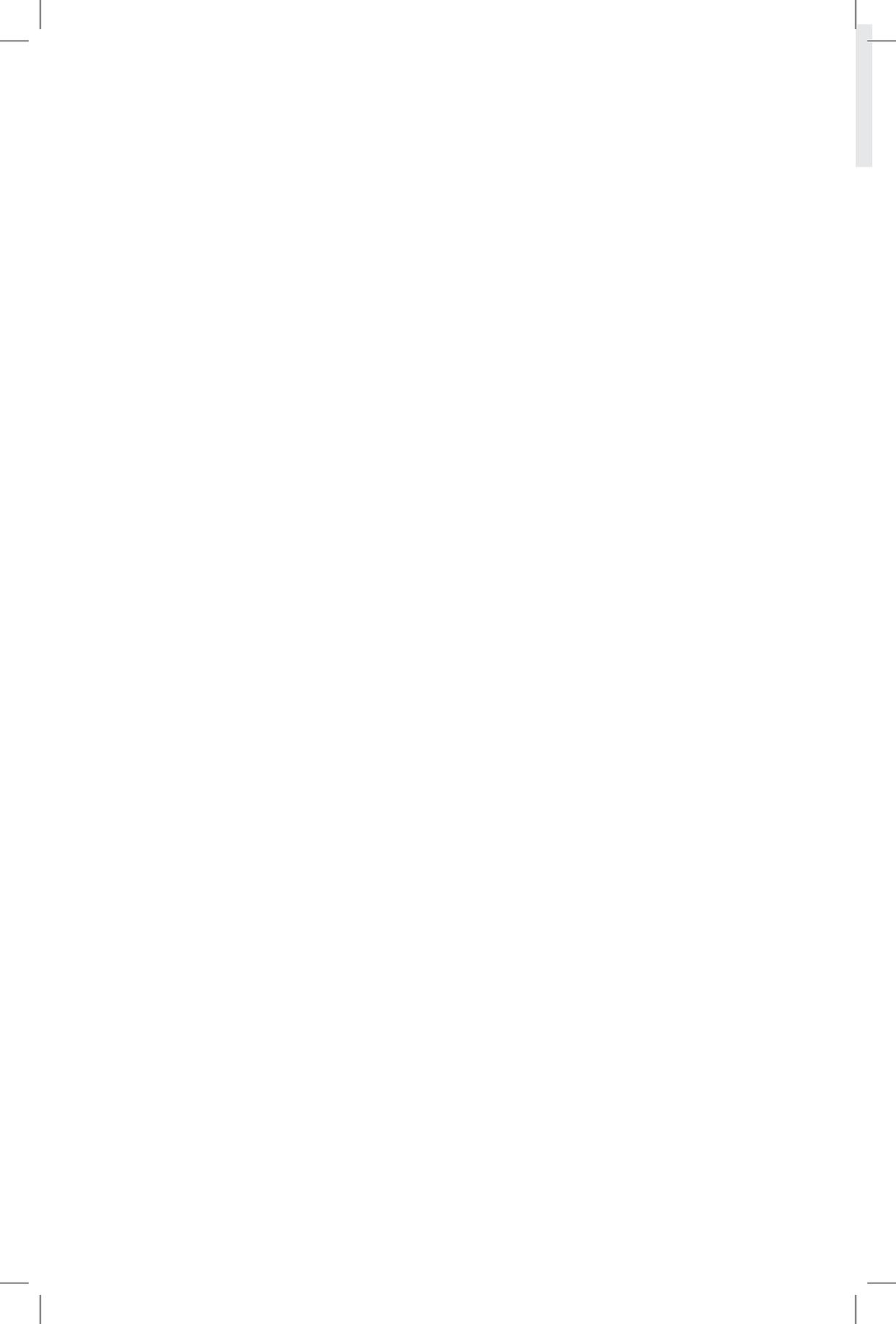
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To my mother
To my daughter



Acknowledgements

When an author begins to write the acknowledgements of a book, there are people who come like a fresh breeze of thought and memory. Some know, others perhaps don't, of their arrival at these lines.

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To my mother and daughter, to whom I dedicate this book. To my husband, Jon, for always giving me a different perspective. To my sisters, my godmother and all my family. To my grandparents, always in my memory. To my friends.

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Foreword

As Doctor Susana del Río Villar mentions in this book, we first met during the 1999-2004 legislature, when I was a Member of the European Parliament and also a holder of the Jean Monnet Chair of European Institutions at the Faculty of Law of the Complutense University of Madrid, where I had succeeded my teacher, Marcelino Oreja.

That term was crucial for the future of our continent. It saw the revision of the Treaties agreed at the Nice European Council, the drafting of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the Constitutional Treaty, the main provisions of which are now in force through the Treaty of Lisbon, and also the entry into force of the euro to replace the old national currencies and the largest and most ambitious enlargement in the history of the Union.

I saw in her a person with a solid academic background who, after obtaining a brilliant doctorate in political science and sociology, had devoted her professional career to issues related to the construction of Europe.

I remember that our first conversations revolved around the participation of Europeans in the elections to the Parliament and the most effective way of making the workings of the Brussels institutions more transparent and accessible.

I also discovered Susana del Río's pedagogical zeal, a concern I share, because it is of little value to know a lot about something if you are not able to pass it on.

This statement is particularly true with regard to the procedures governing relations between the Union's institutions, because they are difficult to fit into the classic typologies of the division of powers, which are specific to Member States. Susana del Río has carried out this pedagogical activity, which consists of explaining "the why of things", through various books, academic studies, press publications, seminars, and colloquia, to which she brings her knowledge and experience like a pilgrim with a staff, eager to spread the virtues of Europe.

Enthusiasm and optimism are two of her defining characteristics. Both are common to pro-Europeans, because they were needed in order to undertake the gigantic task of reconciling former enemies, barely five years after that terrible conflict.

Moreover, the book you are holding in your hands, beautifully published by the University of Granada, a city so closely linked to my family, comes at a highly opportune moment. Firstly, because of the date of its Spanish publication, which coincides with Europe Day, the date set by the institutions of the Union on 9 May to commemorate the historic speech delivered by Robert Schuman in the Clock Room of the Quai d'Orsay, in which he announced the pooling of Franco-German coal and steel production under a common authority.

As we recalled a few days ago at a tribute to Eugenio Nasarre, a great and beloved Europeanist who recently passed away, this 9 May speech, written by Jean Monnet, was so improvised that the photographers did not arrive in time and the photos that immortalise the moment, which we can still see today, were taken a few days later... with the help of photographers called in for the occasion.

After reading his now famous declaration, Schuman took no questions from the journalists present and hurried out of the room. One correspondent, more daring than the others, said to him on his way out: "But what you have just proposed... is a leap into the void...". "That's right", replied Schuman, who was rather reserved in his expressions.

I mention this anecdote to illustrate the courage of a compatriot of that revolutionary who called precisely for "De l'audace, toujours de l'audace, encore de l'audace", and how this act, which did not receive much media attention at the time, became the starting point for the most ambitious utopia of our age.

Secondly, the timeliness of the book is a consequence of the European Parliament elections scheduled for June 2024. The election campaign should be an opportunity to debate Europe's role in the world at a time of serious geostrategic tensions, and not to confront purely national interests. To this end, it is useful to remember where we have come from in order to set the right course for the ship of our destiny. This is all the more necessary when we look back to the signing of the Treaties of Rome in March 1957.

Chancellor Adenauer described that day as sombre and sad, comparing the signatories to a group of friends who had gone to the notary to register a bowling team. But apart from the majesty of the imposing hall of the Horatii and Curiatii, what really stands out is the fact that only one of the hundred faces in the official photograph belongs to a woman... The rest are the male members of the bowling team Adenauer was talking about!

Since then, the situation has changed slowly but surely. In the first elections to the European Parliament, when the body was elected by direct universal suffrage, the proportion of women stood at 15.2%. In the last elections, held in 2019, it rose to almost 40%, an all-time high.

I find Susana del Río's book, where she analyses and reflects on the contribution of women to the construction of Europe, highly relevant. Her choice of these twelve women is necessarily subjective, but I believe it has a great virtue: it demonstrates, through the lives and works of women who lived in very different centuries and circumstances, a fact that I believe to be undeniable. I am referring to the spread of their initiatives, ideas, and ambitions, which did not remain within the narrow confines of their respective national borders, but spread beyond them, becoming seeds that blossomed in other regions and climates of our continent.

I was particularly pleased to see the author's reference to an opusculum by Milan Kundera from the 1980s, in which the author of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* spoke out against those who gave more importance to the political wall than to the common cultural basis of Europeans, which is the mortar on which politicians have been building the common institutions of political Europe since the 1950s.

The lives of the Czech Bertha von Suttner and the Pole Marie Curie are the best examples of what I am saying, because both of them put Peace with a capital P at the centre of their political activism, and this

yearning for peace was and is the first and foremost goal of the political construction of our continent.

Susana del Río has a very strong affection for the first of her forgers of Europe. I am referring to Isabella of Portugal, Queen and Empress, whose role as protagonist, developed by the author, reveals a ruler with her own personality and remarkable diplomatic skills.

The author also recounts Louise Weiss's moving speech when, in 1979, she presided over the first directly elected European Parliament, which then elected the first woman to lead it. Simone Veil, who conserved the number with which she was branded in the Auschwitz concentration camp on her arm, was a courageous woman who exemplified the "Plus jamais ça" during the years she presided over this Parliament as it struggled to take its rightful place as the representative of European citizens.

If I mentioned earlier the absence of women's faces in the photograph of the signing of the Treaties of Rome, twenty years later the shot of the British Prime Minister surrounded by the members of her government, all men, also caught my attention. Margaret Thatcher perfectly represented the figure of *primus inter pares*, but what a *primus*!

She was a controversial figure, but in my opinion, she had one important virtue. She fought every battle to the last second, just like British football teams, and she was capable of scoring a goal in injury time. After the debate was over and the decision was made, Margaret Thatcher stuck to what had been agreed upon. Others who didn't fight the battle of ideas often suffered from amnesia when it came to implementing what had been established. However, like British footballers, Thatcher shook hands with her opponents when the referee blew the final whistle and moved on to either celebrate victory or mourn defeat.

Thanks to my good friend Tristan Garel-Jones, I came to know the Prime Minister's vicissitudes and sorrows after twelve years at the head of the British government. It was not until long after these events that I spoke to her. It was in 2008. I had attended a debate on Europe in London, and she had invited us to a reception. Norman Lamont had asked me not to engage her in conversation because of her ill health, and I was prepared to obey. But when I was introduced as an MEP and she replied, "How nice", I could not resist asking her to use her influence to stop the Conservatives leaving the European People's Party, as her successor David Cameron seemed to be advocating. "You are absolutely right", she replied.

When I relayed this conversation to my British colleagues, their response was unanimous: “If that’s how she answered you, it’s a sign that she’s in worse shape than we thought...”. Needless to say, the Conservatives left the European People’s Party in the first decision of a path that would culminate in Brexit, despite the wishes of their former Iron Lady.

Of the “forgers of Europe” chosen by Susana del R  o, it was Nicole Fontaine with whom I had the closest friendship. Jos   Mar  a Gil-Robles had defeated her in the People’s Party primaries to become President of the European Parliament, but the next time it was Nicole who won the vote in plenary.

This time the Socialist candidate was Mario Soares, who could not understand how a “housewife”, as he disparagingly called her, could be preferred to one of the heroes of the Carnation Revolution. Nicole, who had a well-deserved reputation among MEPs for her ability and skill in conducting debates, not only won by a landslide, but also managed to forge a solid alliance with the Liberals, which guaranteed them the presidency of Parliament during the second half of the legislature, to the detriment of the Socialists. Moral of the story: don’t despise housewives!

During her presidency, I had the honour of leading MEPs in the two conventions that produced the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the Constitutional Treaty. My contact with her was very close and she always gave me support and good advice, as I was able to acknowledge before the plenary of the House.

Another aspect of her presidency that I would like to highlight is her contribution to raising awareness of ETA terrorism. Nicole understood that the fight against this terrorist organisation was a fight of freedom against barbarism; she also conveyed from her privileged position that terrorism was not a scourge that affected only Spain, but a permanent attack on the principles and values of all Europeans. She contributed to this awareness by interrupting the plenary session whenever terrorists made an attempt on people’s lives and ask for a minute’s silence, which the House received by standing in respectful quiet. I believe that initiatives such as President Fontaine’s paved the way for the adoption of the European Arrest Warrant, or “EAW”, under the Spanish Presidency in 2002, which was the most effective instrument to put an end to the terrorist group.

I met Nicole again in 2016, when she asked to be my godmother at the ceremony to award me an honorary doctorate from the *École Supérieure de Commerce de Paris*, where she delivered a laudation that was as generous as it was exaggerated. At the end of the ceremony, we had the opportunity to talk at length about the exciting years we had spent together in the European Parliament. She passed away shortly after that meeting, and I will always remember her attachment to the European cause and her determination to defend its values and principles, as Susana del Río so carefully reflects in her portrait.

Shortly after I entered the European Parliament in 1992, a German MEP invited me to a meeting with a former minister of the former GDR, whom Chancellor Kohl had chosen to become the first Federal President after the reunification of Germany. According to my colleague, the purpose of Lothar de Maizière's visit to Strasbourg was to make him known in European circles. I suppose it was to encourage me to attend the planned breakfast meeting that my German friends had invited me to have with them and Maizière the day before.

After a rich and caloric dinner, well washed down with various alcoholic drinks, I retired to the hotel at a reasonable hour, while my hosts had one more round.

The next day I was punctual for the breakfast meeting, but it was the host who didn't turn up. Instead, his young press secretary confronted me: "What were you doing with Mr Maizières last night?" As I stammered something inappropriate, somewhere between apology and ignorance, she muttered what sounded to me like "Men are incorrigible" and stormed off. Twenty minutes later, she was carrying de Maizières by the arm, whom she must have put in the shower because his hair was still dripping, and he then spent the morning looking at me sullenly.

In the end, Lothar de Maizières was not the CDU's candidate for the German presidency, not because of his penchant for late-night drinking, but because his membership of the Stasi was discovered. Instead, the press officer fared better, and a decade later became Kohl's successor as head of the German government.

In this book, Susana del Río includes her among the architects of Europe, and gives her the term "work". Without underestimating it, for me the term "scolding" better reflected my first encounter with Angela.

But, as the saying goes, 'nothing lasts forever'. On the many occasions we met, whether at the European Parliament, where she was a regular visitor, at the College of Europe, where she gave the opening lecture of the 2010-2011 academic year when I was its President, at European Councils, or at bilateral meetings between Spain and Germany, she never mentioned de Maziers. Neither did I.

Angela Merkel had a very good relationship with President Rajoy and Vice-President Sáenz de Santamaría. She appreciated the seriousness of their political initiatives and the sincerity of their convictions. I know that she was of great help during the worst moments of the economic and monetary crisis, which were particularly difficult in our country. This was not only due to the very difficult economic situation left to us by the Zapatero government, but also because of the mistrust generated among our European partners by his erratic policies.

Angela Merkel was the undisputed protagonist of European politics during her term as Chancellor and, notwithstanding her unassuming and modest personality, will go down in history as one of the greats of Europe.

Susana del Río has also chosen to dedicate a chapter of her book to Hannah Arendt. Arendt was likely the most intellectual of the Twelve and endured the harshest consequences of her time. The author reflects on Arendt's tumultuous relationship with Heidegger and her bravery in exploring the thoughts and motivations of those who committed terrible crimes during the Nazi era.

Her contribution to shaping the European conscience is very important. I am thinking of her reflections on the banality of evil, which she described so well during the Eichmann trial. I was moved years ago when I read her poems, which, despite the pain of successive losses, call for the perseverance of love. Expressing feelings through poetry is a very European way of sharing joys and sorrows, and of knowing that one belongs to the same community of thought and affection.

Another woman chosen by Susana del Río is a very special case. Sofia Corradi was an official in the Italian Ministry of Education. She proposed the promotion of student exchanges between universities to the Assembly of European University Rectors in 1969. As Susana del Río explains, although it took decades for this initiative to take off, Corradi's idea eventually became the highly successful Erasmus programme, one of the most - if not the most - successful of the EU's programmes.

The Erasmus programme fulfills the main objective Corradi had in mind when she launched her proposal: that lack of financial means should not be an obstacle to university education. She was also pursuing a Monnetian leitmotif: lasting peace is only possible if people know each other and, on the basis of that knowledge and the esteem it engenders, cooperate rather than wage war. This idea underpinned the creation of the ECSC and the two other communities that followed the Treaties of Rome, and inspired Salvador de Madariaga to found the College of Europe. Learning is not the only important thing; understanding and appreciation are the basis of the knowledge that creates solidarity between people.

This is why Corradi's initiative, which met with a limited response at the time of its launch, has over the years become one of the hallmarks of the European Union.

It is thanks to a Spanish and European institution that Sofia Corradi has been rescued from oblivion. As the author recounts in this book, in 2016, the European Academy of Yuste awarded her the prestigious Carlos V Prize. Shortly afterwards, the government presented her with the Grand Cross of Alfonso X the Wise. I use the word "rescued" deliberately because, as I discovered after the award ceremony, some Italian colleagues were unaware of Corradi's role. In any case, it is a well-deserved recognition that lives up to the popular saying 'better late than never'.

The election of Ursula von der Leyen as President of the European Commission was unexpected. Let's take a step back. Until 2004, the European Council proposed its candidate for Commission President. Historically, this decision has seen varying degrees of success: a narrow majority, as in the case of Jacques Santer in 1994, or a large majority, as in the case of Romano Prodi in 1999.

Since then, the notion of connecting the European elections to the election of the Commission President has been gaining traction in the European Parliament. It appeared to us that, similar to the legislative elections in the Member States, which primarily serve to form governments, replicating this model at the European level would help to give significance to the electoral competition and address the declining voter turnout at that time.

In 2002, at the congress held in Estoril by the European People's Party, which held a majority in the European Parliament at the time, José María Gil-Robles and I formulated a proposal. This proposal was included in the

draft treaty to be drawn up by the Constitutional Convention in 2003. We argued that the European Council should propose a candidate for the European Parliament, taking into account the election results and after consulting the political groups.

After the 2004 European elections, there were rumours that the German Chancellor and the French President would support the Belgian Prime Minister as President of the Commission. Although the Constitutional Treaty had not yet entered into force, Guy Verhofstadt, who had been a candidate in those elections and came fifth, was being considered. However, his European parliamentary group, the Liberals, was outnumbered by the People's Party and the Socialists, which led to strong opposition to his candidacy. The end of the story was the appointment of José Manuel Durao Barroso as President of the Commission.

Following the political logic I have just described, the next step was for the European political parties to choose their candidate for Commission President and then seek the support of the voters. This procedure was followed in the 2014 and 2019 elections.

In practice, this perfectly democratic procedure had a drawback that its promoters had not taken into account. We thought, perhaps naively, that the parties would choose the best candidates for the presidency of the European Commission. However, the frontrunners were conspicuously absent, and the candidates, although very distinguished politicians, raised doubts about their ability to successfully take on such a complicated undertaking.

Chancellor Merkel broke the deadlock by proposing a female minister from her government, displacing the European People's Party candidate, also German like von der Leyen. As analysed by Professor del Río in the chapter dedicated to her, this unexpected candidate faced major challenges from 2019-2024. Her handling of the pandemic was very efficient. If we Europeans had reacted to the cry of "everyone for themselves" as we did to the first oil crisis in the 1970s, the outcome would have been disastrous.

She has also taken a firm and resolute stance against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, uniting Europeans on a highly controversial issue. To mitigate the negative consequences of both, she has secured the agreement of governments to launch an ambitious economic recovery plan that has broken taboos, such as not indebting the European institutions. Finally, her project of strategic autonomy has opened the debate on the direction

Europe should take if it does not want to become a theme park for tourists from around the world, as some analysts advocate. For all these reasons, Susana del Río's reflections in this book, timed to coincide with von der Leyen's candidacy for a second term in office, seem very timely to me.

And last but not least, the twelfth woman chosen by the author doesn't reveal any secrets of the past, and she is not old enough to have her own story. However, she represents something much more important for a country like Spain, with a recognised and undoubtedly European vocation. I am referring to hope. The Princess of Asturias symbolises the future of the unity and permanence embodied by the Crown. This is why I believe it's fitting for her to be included in this group of forgers of Europe, thus closing the circle with the first of them, her ancestor Isabella of Portugal.

A few years ago, a journalist writing an article on the Princess of Asturias asked me for my opinion on the studies she was going to undertake. I replied that it was up to parents to guide their children at such important moments and in such important decisions, and I stressed the education of her father, and that we should place our trust in the King and Queen. After reading Susana del Río's book, I was reminded of the image of a young Prince of Asturias in the old Strasbourg plenary hall, listening to the debate on the introduction of the euro. It also brought back to me the conversation, many years later, with a European Commissioner about the very positive effect that the Prince, now King of Spain, had on the members of the College of Commissioners because of his knowledge and competence in European affairs.

"We are in good hands", I thought as I finished the book. We must thank Susana del Río for reminding us of this in a way that is as entertaining as it is brilliant. "We are in good hands", I thought upon finishing the book. We owe Susana del Río gratitude for her engaging and insightful reminder.

Iñigo Méndez de Vigo y Montojo¹.

Madrid, 25 March 2024, on the sixty-seventh anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.

¹ Member of the European Parliament (1992-2011), Secretary of State for the European Union (2011-2015), Minister for Education, Culture and Sport (2015-2018) and Government Spokesman (2016-2018).

Opening

I begin to write with the conviction that this book is about the women and men who make Europe, who work every day to ensure the survival and progress of the European project, to consolidate the process of European integration as an ongoing, relevant, compelling task. It is also exciting. This book begins its journey by talking about a living European Union. At this crucial stage for the EU, when a new cycle opens with the holding of the European elections and the beginning of the 2024-2029 legislature, my aim is to analyse some milestones of European construction through the lives and work of twelve European women. The number twelve is linked to the symbol of the twelve stars of the EU flag. Symbols are important, they unite us, they make us feel and find where the common ground is and how common answers are structured. That is the European Union.

Today's milestones, combined with the challenges of our time, call for a vision of shared responsibility. Politics means work, transversality, vocation, mission, responsibility, representativeness, honour, answers, solutions and enthusiasm.

A series of decisive events are shaping current developments and even acting as catalysts for the European Union to look in the mirror and ask itself, in an act of catharsis: what can I do, what is my role and mission in responding to European citizens, where should I position myself in the current geopolitical framework, where do I fit in?

Brexit, the pandemic and coordinated European vaccination, the Next Generation EU of EU recovery funds, the European Green Pact, the double environmental and digital transition, the economy, the energy model, competitiveness, the promotion of reindustrialisation, artificial intelligence and its regulation require attention, work and a forward-looking approach. The debate on enlargement, the political deepening of the EU and the reform of the Treaties, the consolidation of the European constitutional model, the challenges we face with the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, mean we must look to the future from the present and also travel back in time to learn and draw lessons from other historical periods and how those who lived through them responded. If we look closely, we can see that all the priority issues find their first common response and solution in the root that comes from the European Union.

Travelling through the pages of this book means discovering that since the first European woman to whom I dedicate a chapter, Empress Isabella of Portugal, wife of Charles V, the Europe of our time has been forged by the vectors that the EU faces. The seeds of “open strategic autonomy” can be found by looking back through history, through the centuries, through the choices linked to the political geostrategy of each historical stage. The geopolitical awakening of the European Union that we are currently witnessing also bears the stamp of the events that guided and are guiding the twelve women who give their names to each chapter.

In the idea of writing this book, beautiful and important events came together in a few days to make a journey across Spain, from north to south and from south to north, with a stop in the centre, in Madrid, and with an ever-watchful, curious gaze that admires the sunrise that the east gives us and the sunset that the west offers us. From Bilbao I went to Madrid, and from Madrid to Granada, where I had the good fortune to visit the Alhambra, which was being prepared for the celebration of the European Summit on 5 October and the informal European Council on 6 October. I attended a conference at the University of Granada and then travelled to Oviedo and from there to Villaviciosa. In Asturias, my father's homeland, I gave a speech on the morning of Saturday 7th entitled “Women in the European construction”. It was there, in beautiful Villaviciosa, land of apple trees and a few kilometres from Tazones, where Emperor Charles V first set foot in Spain, that this book was born.

For some time now I have been thinking about it, conceiving it, imagining it. Writing it. I didn't know exactly what subject I would choose, although it was always clear it would be about the European Union again. And in Villaviciosa, at the end of my talk, that Maribel Cabrera, director of the Editorial Universidad de Granada, came to greet me. I told her I had just returned from the city, and she suggested I write a book of my own choice, based on the theme of the conference I had just given: Women in the Construction of Europe. A book with two editions, one in Spanish and one in English. I quickly replied, happy to say yes. Of course I did. With gratitude, first in my mind and then on paper, I began to write the book that you, dear readers, now hold in your hands: *Twelve European Women*.

For the cover I chose "Girl with a Pearl Earring", painted by Johannes Vermeer between 1665 and 1667, because of the powerful statement it conveys, combining several messages at once, the main one being that although it is one of the most important portraits in the history of art, we still do not know who the model was. The subject of the painting is anonymous. I am reminded of Virginia Woolf's phrase: "For most of history, Anonymous was a woman" (*A Room of One's Own*, 1929).

To be precise, I must explain that this is not specifically a portrait. It is a 'tronie', a genre typical of 17th century Holland, which means 'face' or 'expression'. And here we find the powerful message for the cover of the book we are holding in our hands: it is the representation of the face of an anonymous character. This is what I want to convey: a book dedicated to all European women. I have chosen twelve, but the power is in all the women who work in Europe every day. With their presence. With their lives. Vermeer dressed this mysterious young woman in a turban; in fact, the painting is also known as "Girl in a Turban", and he gave her the famous drop-shaped pearl that appears in several of his works. The portrait now hangs in the Mauritshuis Museum in The Hague and is the artist's most emblematic work. It was painted in oil during the Dutch Golden Age.

It is beautiful to see the different colours in his brushstrokes, especially the ultramarine blue, the most expensive pigment available, although it is known that Vermeer was not in a good financial situation at the time. On average, he painted only two paintings a year. He had eleven children and several servants in his household. It is possible that this young woman was one of them.

The face is a wonder, it seems to come alive on the screen. The young woman with the pearl tilts her face and looks directly at us. With her lips half open, she invites us to start a conversation. Her pale skin, together with her pale eyes and lips, stand out against the black background of the portrait. It is at this point I must explain the discovery of a green curtain in the background of Vermeer's painting. The passage of time has faded it, but it is there, the canvas and the green. Let us look again at the young woman. Her whole face shines before us with a focal point, the earring, the pearl. In "The Girl with the Pearl Earring" I see all women. This is a painting with a message, a light, of a young woman who looks at us from the front cover to converse with gaze that is even enigmatic, for she is enigmatic. I write thinking that she is saying to us, representing and inspiring all women: open the book.

Twelve European Women was born from the conviction that it is we women, together with men, who build the reality of everyday life and also dream to imagine the coming conquests. That is why, for me, equality has been fought for and built in a synchronisation and union of men and women. The foreword is by Íñigo Méndez de Vigo. I am honoured to have him with me because of his broad and deep knowledge of Spanish and European politics and history. This book is a declaration that the conquest of equality belongs to all those who believe in it and is a cross-cutting objective that transcends political parties. For this reason, the European framework and its past, present and future content are a treasure trove, as I would like to show in this work, through the eyes and experiences of women, to enter into the times and milestones of European construction.

I have chosen twelve women from more recent periods, with the exception of one from the 16th century, the age of the Renaissance. Together with them I will enter, I will open the door and also the windows of important stages of Europe and the EU. I have chosen twelve, the number of stars on our European flag, but in my mind, in my reason and in my heart there are many more. Some of the women I know, and there are many, many more who are not in the news, but are central to the daily life of every home, every village, every town, every city, every country, of Europe, of the world. To all of them I dedicate every thought, every letter, every word that has been used to weave this book.

Women

I have to say that, besides these twelve women, there are queens, courtesans, peasants, fisherwomen, craftswomen, weavers, teachers, housewives, politicians, writers, businesswomen, doctors, scientists, journalists, managers, sportswomen and workers from all walks of life. Mothers, daughters, sisters, grandmothers, aunts, friends. I dedicate this book to my mother, and I look at my daughter, the best thing about my life.

I have associated all of the women with a word I believe identifies them. I have also chosen a phrase that they spoke or wrote at some point in their solid and luminous lives.

I want to write to give clarity to an idea: with my love for history, here, as I write, the lives of other queens of Spain, of their court, of the kings of Spain and of Europe come to my mind. They are not chapters, but they are present. They are part of the history of Europe and of the creation of the European Union of our time. I always write with the deep-rooted conviction that everything is part of a whole and much more connected than we think. Even in what we may not be able to find to put the pieces together, there is a sometimes-hidden source that will allow us to stitch, or at least thread together, the tale, the narrative, the stories, and the history.

Furthermore, as we stitch, we can glimpse the trend, a force created from past events, those that are relevant and those that may seem less epic, but which also have their own capacity to drive the trend that continues to forge history.

European women such as Isabella of Portugal, wife of Emperor Charles V, Bertha von Suttner, Madame Curie, Louise Weiss, Hannah Arendt, Margaret Thatcher, Simone Veil, Sofia Corradi, Nicole Fontaine, Angela Merkel, Ursula von der Leyen and Princess Leonor await us. As does the young lady with the pearl earring. Let's get started...

