

**André Wilkens**

**The Discrete Charm of Bureaucracy**

**Good News from Europe**

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**Learn to love Europe again – confessions of a passionate European.**

We have a lot to thank Europe for: liberty, positive visions of utopia, border-free travel. André Wilkens tells its stories: stories about Europe, about people in Europe and about himself. Not abstract ideas, but personal experiences. About football, music, architecture and much more – even Habermas and Angelina Jolie manage to get a word in. Because Europe needs a new narrative, one which is better, more exciting, more modern, more personal, one which includes both the good and the bad, the highs and the lows. With all the ingredients that make a good story.

*“Right now we need to understand what a miracle we have achieved with Europe. Only those who know its history can shape the future with confidence.”*

*The Discreet Charm of Bureaucracy, 2017*

**André Wilkens** graduated in Political Sciences and spent many years living in Brussels, London, Turin and Geneva, working for the EU, the United Nations and various foundations. He initiated and is a founding member of the European Council for Foreign Relations. He is also member of the initiative “The Open Society.” He is best known as the author of the book ‘Analogue is the New Organic’ (FTV). He lives with his German-English family in Berlin.

## **The Discrete Charm of Bureaucracy Good News from Europe**

Translated by David Tushingham

### **Foreword To Europe by Lada**

The drive from Prenzlauer Berg to Brussels is roughly 767 kilometres. It's a journey I made for the first time on 1st March 1991. I remember it was a beautiful, sunny day: very cold but otherwise ideal for a long car journey.

I was 27 and had managed to secure an internship with the European Commission – and my father insisted on taking me to Brussels by car. His son at the European Commission – that sounded impressive. It might only have been for five months to begin with, but my father could already see me as the first East German European President or at least Foreign Minister. He wanted to be there. And he'd never been to Brussels.

I pointed out there was an excellent train service but he'd already organized everything. And because he was the one who'd seen the ad for the internship in Brussels and wouldn't stop nagging until I finally sent off my application, I didn't have much of a case to turn down his offer. I was also impressed by the enthusiasm with which he was planning our joint father-son trip to the West. My father had just got rid of his car. He had sold what was by GDR standards a rather smart Lada, a Soviet Fiat copy, to buy an average Western Renault. This Renault was still being bolted together in France so he needed a temporary solution. Some resourceful person in Lichtenberg, just round the corner from my parents, had started up a car hire business using old Ladass that was a lot cheaper than the shiny car rental companies from the West. My father hired his Lada back for a couple of days to deliver me to the Belgian capital in customary Eastern style. We set off incredibly early. My mother had made tea and sandwiches that I handed out from the passenger seat and once we'd left the bad roads of the East behind us I poured out sweet black tea from the thermos that kept us awake and in good spirits. It was a beautiful journey right across Germany. Through Magdeburg and what had been the German-German border the route took us past Wolfsburg and Hanover into the full-on Ruhr. The Lada rolled reliably on to the Belgian border where we had to present our brand new Federal German passports. The guards gave our car amused looks. They obviously didn't see many East Germans.

Then we were in Belgium. It didn't look particularly tidy: a lot of the buildings were in need of repair and dated from the 1970s. This far West suddenly reminded me of the East again. To me the place seemed like an anarchic mixture of the GDR and West Germany. Strange and familiar at the same time and rather likeable.

I was one of the first East Germans to take up an internship with the European Commission in Brussels. It was a dream come true. Just a year before it would have sounded like taking part in an expedition to Mars. Now the Berlin Wall had gone but I

still felt a little bit like I was suddenly in a glider heading for the International Space Station. I was in a European heaven floating towards the future.

That journey to Brussels was a decisive moment in my own modest European history, one that began in the Cold War, witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall and after periods in Brussels, London, Turin and Geneva, saw me return to Berlin twenty years later. I left an East Berliner from a still divided Europe and returned to my home town a European with a British-German multicultural family and still speaking with a Berlin accent.

I have a European history, like more and more of us. Personally I have a lot to thank Europe for: freedom and a utopia after the wall came down, border-free travel, studying in London, an international career, a good life in five different European countries, an English wife. I have experienced and seen all sorts of things. I've been around. There were problems and crises, detours and scars, but: *Such is life!* Not everything can go smoothly but on balance it was wonderful. I feel good, I love Europe.

And the same is true of Europe's post-war history: it's actually a wonderful story, though the way it happened was by no means linear or unproblematic. For centuries Europe was governed by war and violence. This was followed by its division and the Cold War. Now, however, Europe is a more peaceful, richer and happier continent. This history is one we can be proud of. It is a great story, but we lose heart because there are problems and begin to question the key to our prosperity, our view of life and our peaceful co-existence, the European ideal, that took shape after the war and is now threatened with lasting damage. I believe we mustn't let this happen.

And that's why the European story needs to be re-told. And with a certain degree of pathos and pride. Particularly in times when, I admit, one can easily lose faith in the big European picture. Because we need a historical perspective to assess and then resolve everyday political problems and crises. Without that perspective we'll just keep running on a treadmill of continual crisis management and eventually wonder why we bother, whether Europe hasn't already been superseded and therefore served its purpose. But then we would be confusing cause and effect. Europe is not abolishing itself because its ideas have become obsolete. We are putting Europe at risk because we are no longer investing enough, no longer bringing good ideas to life – and short-sighted thinking, the illusion of simple solutions and national egotism are taking the place of Europeans working together to create a better world. Slogans from the dustbin of history are regaining popularity, along with resentment and fantasies of being marginalized. Even the separation of powers is suddenly being called into question again right in the middle of Europe. Can history repeat itself, even in Europe?

Everything is possible. Even what seemed entirely impossible yesterday. This is something I've known since the wall came down and it has burnt itself into me. But what that means to me above all is that one shouldn't abandon grand ideas. One has to stick with them if they are important. One has to remember one's strengths, particularly when times are hard and everyone else seems to be turning away in a different direction. Everything is possible, even Europe going from being a basket case to becoming a global superstar. Just as within 15 years, thanks to the "summer fairy tale",

Germany has gone from being the “sick man of Europe” to the economic and political “powerhouse of Europe”, even “the best country in the world”. Who would have thought that possible 15 years ago? And 10 years ago did anyone predict that Angela Merkel would rise to become the most powerful woman in the world? Certainly not Gerhard Schröder, that much is well documented.

In 15 years’ time I don’t want to be seen as one of the world’s Schröders. But as one of those who believed in the power of the European idea. Who contributed to it. And infected others with their European optimism. Because experience proves that one travels better in optimism. And it’s usually more fun. So with that in mind...

## Chapter 3

### A case for Freud

When I was a student in London I lived in Hampstead, two houses along from where Sigmund Freud had previously lived. Now I ask myself: what would Freud do about Europe's identity crisis now that it has grown into a genuine depression? Prescribe pills? Talk about Europe's relationship with its father and mother? Investigate its childhood? So I acted it out – Europe on the couch.

Sigmund Freud moved from Vienna to London in June 1938. Or, to be more precise, he escaped. He was a typical European refugee of the 1930s, a Jew who had to find safety from the Nazis who had occupied his country through the so-called *Anschluss*, making it part of the Reich. Current estimates of the numbers of those who fled German-controlled territory between 1933 and 1939 are around 500,000 people: 360,000 of them from Germany, and some 140,000 from Austria. As well as Jews, these emigrants were social democrats, middle class liberal politicians, communists and representatives of the cultural avant-garde including writers, artists and a large number of scientists.

At that time Freud was already a star. He had founded psychoanalysis and made it famous around the world. He was lucky. He had good friends and was able to move with all his belongings including his consulting room sofa from Vienna to London. In this respect he was much better off than the vast majority of European refugees.

Freud moved to North London, NW3, to 20 Maresfield Gardens in Hampstead. A street of handsome red brick houses and a lot of greenery, which runs from Swiss Cottage in the direction of Hampstead Heath, one of London's prettiest parks.

Freud would live in Hampstead for barely a year. He died in September 1939, after his family doctor – Freud was suffering from incurable cancer – gave him an overdose of morphine at his own request. His daughter, Anna Freud, herself a renowned child psychologist, stayed living in the house until her death in 1982. And afterwards, in accordance with her last wishes, it became The Freud Museum as we know it today.

The Freuds are one example of how a refugee family can successfully integrate itself into a new homeland and in this case even become a pillar of the British establishment. Sigmund's grandson, Lucian Freud, became one of the leading contemporary British painters. Another grandson became a Member of Parliament and later Sir Clement Freud. His great granddaughter, Bella Freud, is a successful fashion designer whose fans include Kate Moss. Great grandson Matthew Freud founded one of the country's most influential PR agencies which, amongst other things, brought the Olympic Games to London in 2012. Matthew is a good friend of former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair and at the same time very friendly with conservative ex-premier David Cameron, something which only appears unusual at first sight. Until recently Matthew Freud was also the son-in-law of the media mogul Rupert Murdoch, of whom it is said that his presence is felt around the cabinet table of every British government. The only people more British than the Freuds are the royal family.

I moved to London in 1992, to 16 Maresfield Gardens, Hampstead, NW3, two doors down from Sigmund Freud's house. Until then I had only encountered Sigmund Freud as a ghostly presence in Woody Allen films. Freud had not been popular with officialdom in the GDR: it was one thing the Communists and the Nazis could agree on.

But now that we were practically neighbours, I often went over to Freud's. It was a beautiful house, on two floors, with a lot of light coming through beautiful large windows and a nice garden: beautiful without being pompous.

Even though Freud's London house is not the birthplace of psychoanalysis, it manages to have the aura of being so. After he escaped from Vienna, Freud's study was faithfully reconstructed in London and has been preserved intact ever since, becoming a modern shrine to psychoanalysis. The sofa has all the hallmarks of an ancient relic and visitors are not allowed to touch it, never mind hog it by sitting or lying down on it. Sometime soon it is likely to be packed up inside a glass case.

Because of course everyone wants to see The Couch. It is the ultimate symbol of Freudian psychoanalysis and the one in London can be regarded as the prototype of all the furniture used for this purpose.<sup>1</sup> Freud's analyst's couch is not some spartan day bed, however, but an extremely battered Victorian chaise longue elevated at the head end. The couch is covered with oriental rugs, blankets and cushions. Freud called it his ottoman. He was given the first of these rugs as an engagement present. There are theories about what this re-enactment of 'A Thousand and One Nights' might mean but coverings of this kind can be important purely from a functional point of view. Anyone lying down for an hour stumbling around in their own unconscious can easily start feeling chilly. What I find more interesting is the theory that these rugs helped Freud think. While his patients lay on the couch talking, Freud would lose himself in what he called "the figure in the rug". So Freud was a kind of rug-reader. Let's hope that the rug matched the patient he was analysing.

It was only in London that I read Freud. I started with classical psychoanalysis, the source from which modern psychotherapy developed. I read about the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego*, about patterns of childhood, about the Wolf Man and about the Oedipus Complex, drives of all kinds, guilt and fear. Central to everything, in Freud's view, was the sex drive. If this was disturbed during early childhood development, it would lead to lifelong problems without the individual being aware of it. Until Freud discovered it, of course.

What his psychoanalysis aimed to do was to make these unprocessed childhood conflicts conscious. In therapy sessions with Freud the patient would talk in "free association" about everything s/he was feeling or thinking at that time. Freud assumed that during these sessions the patient would repeat a "pattern" which would reveal the central conflict which had been concealed from the therapist until that time.

To put it briefly: as the patient re-experiences early childhood emotions especially towards her/his parents and siblings together with the therapist, s/he transfers those

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<sup>1</sup> Marina Warner, Freud's Couch. A Case History, *Lettre International* 096, Spring 2012

early childhood desires and emotions onto the psychoanalyst, who consequently has an opportunity to interpret these situations and experiences.

None of which seemed particularly new to me. I had seen almost all Woody Allen's films. Now I realised that Allen had actually just been filming different versions of Sigmund Freud's theories. The story of the libido in particular was 100% Woody Allen. By sheer force of will Allen had restyled himself from a gauche urban neurotic into a sex god with the power to seduce New York's most beautiful women. At some point he had then confused his film scripts with real life and married his adoptive daughter. I'd have liked to have been a fly on the wall when Allen's childhood was analysed. Or maybe not.

Though I moved away from London, the Freud Museum stayed, of course. A short time ago I was back in North London, sunbathed on Hampstead Heath, had a Ploughman's Lunch and a pint of lager in one of the pubs, saw a film at the Everyman Cinema and then went round to visit Freud. Everything was exactly as it was when we were still neighbours. Travelling back on the tube I read an article about yet another ineffectual EU summit. It was all about rows between different European countries, the rise of Euro-sceptics etc.: the now usual cacophony of bickering and blame. It all read like a troubled marriage, like the story of two people whose lives had drifted apart. And then suddenly I asked myself how Sigmund Freud might have analysed this European crisis. Is Europe sick? Is it mentally ill? Just slightly, or more seriously? Is Europe hysterical? Is it depressed? Or just going through a normal mid-life crisis? Might Freud's psychotherapy be able to help? Is it even possible to transpose it to a continent or a system like the EU?

You don't have to be Freud to see that Europe is in the middle of a full-blown identity crisis that has manifested itself for the last ten years in all kinds of symptoms and secondary crises. Europe no longer knows what it actually is, who and what belongs to it and where it wants to get to. It thinks it knows its own history, but does it really?

Europe is clearly a case for the couch. So let's hear what it has to say for itself.

Ms. Europa Union, called EU for short, arrives at 20 Maresfield Gardens for her first session of therapy. Freud's housekeeper, Paula Fichtl, opens the door and shows her into the study. The heavy curtains are drawn, the room is bathed in a comforting light, sounds of the world outside no more than a distant murmur. Immediately one has a sense of escaping from the hectic nature of everyday life and automatically slips into a much slower gear. Even during Freud's lifetime, his study already looks like a museum, one which is attempting to exhibit as much as possible in the smallest possible space. Every surface is taken up with small Egyptian, Greek and Roman figures and objects, especially Freud's desk. Is there any room left for him to write?

Sigmund Freud gets up out of the green armchair he uses for analysis and approaches Ms. Europa Union.

"Good afternoon, Ms. Union. Come in. Would you like a cup of tea?"

“Hello Mr Freud. Thank you for seeing me at such short notice. I know you’re very busy. Tea with milk and sugar please.”

Freud leads Ms. Europa to his famous couch.

“Make yourself comfortable. Lie down. And tell me. What brings you here? How can I help you? Just talk away.”

Sigmund Freud sits down in his armchair at the head end of the couch, listens to Ms. Europa, asks a couple of questions and thinks by drawing on the aid of the pattern on his rug. Madame says whatever comes to mind. This is disordered, unconsidered, impulsive, emotional: “free association,” as Freud is happy to note, because this is just what he needs for his analysis.

Sigmund Freud assumed that every person combines three entities in one: the *id* represents unconscious drives. The *ego* constructs a relationship with reality. The *superego* has the authority of a conscience, taking on moral values from the surrounding world such as one’s parents. So how is the European Union’s self-image? And what does this reveal about the other Freudian entities?

EU starts talking. “Purely in physical terms I’m actually quite well. My standard of living is higher than it’s ever been. I live in peace and for the most part in freedom. I travel a lot, have plenty of holidays, and this is good for my health. All in all, I’m really not badly off. But some parts of my *ego* are in a better state than others. I do have some problems, I notice that particularly when I’m moving around. But generally I’m physically ok, it’s my head I worry about. I’m confused, feel uncoordinated, can’t make decisions any more. I’ve taken pills and then stopped, gone on a diet, nothing helps.”

“Let’s come to that in a moment,” Freud interjects. After the *ego*, Freud now wants to investigate Europe’s *superego*. “Tell me about your childhood, your parents. What values did they give you?”

According to Freud the *superego* forms an authoritative conscience which takes on concepts of values from the world around one, such as one’s parents. Freud described the *superego* as a censor. It is formed during early childhood, in the course of the first six years, and contains the moral norms and internalised values of the cultural surroundings in which one grows up. The *superego* is created by comparing one’s own person with others with whom that person identifies. When someone starts thinking, they do so under the influence of the *superego* and the fundamental values it contains. This canon of values forms part of one’s own identity and the individual has very little scope to distance or emancipate her-/himself from them. The *superego* operates within the human mind as a control mechanism whose objective is to bring one’s own behaviour into line with that of the ideal through self-observation. As soon as one’s own conduct deviates from that ideal, the *superego* manifests itself in the form of feelings of guilt.

“My parents had a hard life. For a long time they didn’t understand each other at all. They argued, even warred with each other and I don’t just mean ‘wars of the roses’. They really did. My mother is the continent of Europe, the Mother Earth of Europe. She is fertile, beautiful, has made the most of herself and keeps herself in good shape. She

gave me my first name. My father was the authoritarian type who wanted to rule over and dominate my mother. The Fatherland. Or maybe I should say fatherlands? Because my father is multipolar, and that's always been his problem. His fatherlands fought each other. Not long before I was born my father had quite an existential multipolar crisis which almost killed both him and my mother. And then I was born, little EU, and since then things have been better between the Fatherland and Mother Europe. I seem to have helped my father keep his multiple personality under control.

"I had a wonderful childhood. Everyone had high hopes and took great care of me. We might not have been as wealthy as our American relatives but my parents worked hard and each year we were better off than before. Indeed, our American relatives were always an important reference point for my parents and me. Not just because they were richer but also because of rock 'n' roll, Hollywood, jeans, Silicon Valley and the moon landings. Though we got on well, there was always a bit of rivalry between us. Actually quite a lot of rivalry when I come to think about it.

"As well as our American relatives there were also the ones in the East we didn't like to talk about so much because they were poor, aggressive and hard-drinking. Whenever things weren't going so well at home Uncle America would always point to the East and use it as deterrent. And it worked. Until about 25 years ago – then the East wanted to be like us. My mother had never really given up on the uncles in the East. And as far as my father was concerned a couple of fatherlands more or less didn't make much difference. He had his multipolar disorder under control back then. So much so, that I'd almost forgotten it existed. We got on superbly, my father gave me more and more responsibility. And why not? I was already 34 by then and nowadays some people that age are already billionaires buying their parents a nice house to retire to. Back then I seriously thought it was time for my father and his fatherlands to retire. That's what it felt like, twenty years ago.

"The uncles from the East were actually very nice and wanted to belong as soon as possible. Perhaps it all happened too soon. If you've been apart for a long time, it's not easy to become close, especially when the rules are already fixed that whoever has the biggest wallet decides what's put on the table. After the initial euphoria, this soon made some people in the East defensive and aggressive, especially towards me. Some of them even seemed to be suffering from Stockholm syndrome and started loving their former captors again. That's just my suspicion, but I can tell you. What do you think, is there something in that?

"The values that my parents had given me at an early age were peace, freedom, justice and prosperity for all. Fairness and sustainability would become important later but they developed gradually. Before I was born my parents regarded most of these values more as distant ideals rather than being directly relevant to reality. There were always wars, the South of the Earth was ruthlessly exploited and I think the word sustainability had yet to be invented. Peace, freedom and prosperity were things my parents liked talking about when I was a child, and progress was clearly being made, certainly compared with our wicked uncles in the East, whom we eyed suspiciously from a distance. If I wanted to talk about fairness or our relationship with the South, they

would quickly change the subject. I think my parents still feel very guilty about that. And they have passed those feelings on to me.”

“Drink your tea, it’s going cold,” Freud takes advantage of EU pausing for breath. “How would you describe your identity? Do you actually have an identity of your own?”

“Hm. Do I have an identity, and if so, how many of them? Isn’t that what you asked?”

Freud is annoyed. “No I didn’t say that, it was some whippersnapper from Germany, called Specht, or something like that. But go on.”

“I’m sorry. But it does actually fit me quite well. Identity has always been a difficult question for me. I think I take more after my mother. Though of course there’s also a lot of my father in me. I suspect I’m not entirely free of his multipolar nature. I can certainly feel different identities inside myself. But I don’t regard myself as having multipolar disorder, at least not in the clinical sense.

“If I have one at all, then my identity is more Western in influence. That’s where I spent my childhood and adolescence. The East was foreign to me and a long way off and somehow it was also the opposite of what I wanted to be. My father also supported this Western identity. My mother was more liberal in that respect. She always made it clear that our relatives from the East were just going through a difficult phase.

“Have I liberated myself from my parents? Yes, I have. Though in some ways I haven’t. Particularly recently. I really don’t seem to be able to get anything done any more and my father keeps interfering. With all the stress, and he is getting on now, his multipolarity is increasingly coming to the surface, though not the positive aspects, unfortunately, but the ugly ones. And he keeps banging on about sovereignty, a word he hardly ever used when I was growing up. Suddenly he thinks it’s incredibly important. Whenever we’re having a discussion over dinner and things get complicated, sovereignty is always his clinching argument. The word doesn’t even need to be said out loud.”

“Thank you, that’s enough for now.” Freud tries to steer the conversation in a different direction. “Now let us turn to the *id*. You know what that is, don’t you? The *id* contains what is completely unconscious, impulsive, the source of all fundamental impulses and drives.”