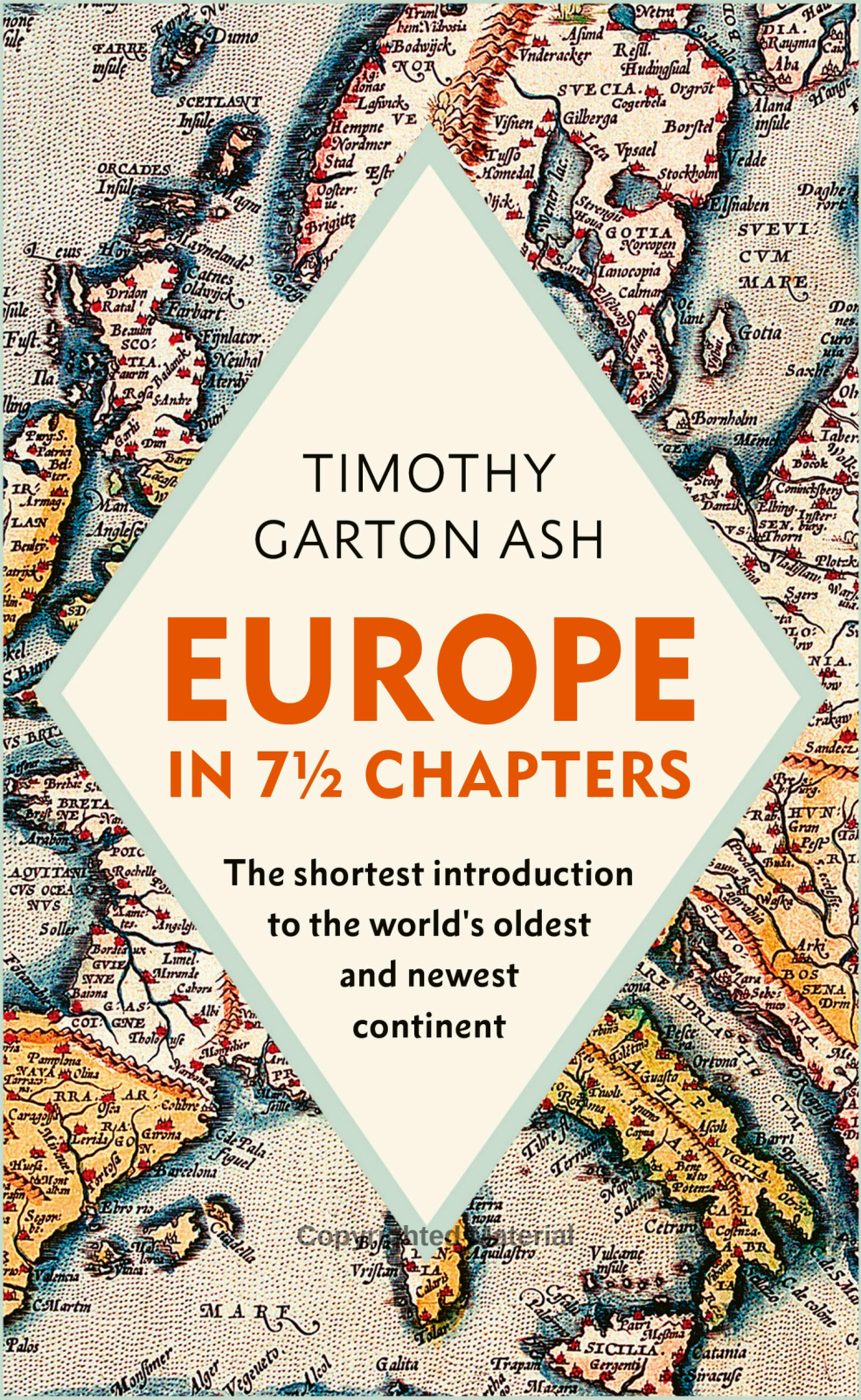


TIMOTHY GARTON ASH

EUROPE

IN 7½ CHAPTERS

The shortest introduction to the world's oldest and newest continent

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Europe in 7½ Chapters

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Europe in 7½ Chapters

The Shortest Introduction to the World's Oldest and Newest Continent

TIMOTHY GARTON ASH



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Contents

1	Lunchtime Europe	1
2	Geographical Europe	11
3	Historical Europe	27
4	Cultural Europe	83
5	Imagined Europe	101
6	Political Europe	115
7	Today's Europe	139
7½	Nightcap Europe	157
Maps		163
More		169

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CHAPTER 1

Lunchtime Europe

Shall we start with lunch? This looks a nice place. Dark wooden chairs and plain white tablecloths. 'Modern European', says my restaurant app.

A table by the window? Pizza Margherita and a Budweiser for you? I'll have the veal and a glass of red wine.

Did you know that Pizza Margherita supposedly got its name from a visit the Italian Queen Margherita paid to Naples in 1889? And I hope your Budweiser is the original from České Budějovice in today's Czech Republic, where they've been brewing beer for more than seven centuries. The modern American version is called Budweiser in tribute to that city's German name, Budweis, but I think you'll find the Czech beer is better.

Now: when I say 'Europe', what comes to mind? Don't think too hard. I'm after your first spontaneous association with the word. A sunny Mediterranean beach? The outline of the continent on a map? A city such as Paris, Berlin or Rome? Your favourite football team? Or perhaps the European Union?

Everyone has their own idea of Europe. Tell me your Europe and I'll tell you who you are.

You may think it's quite normal that, after this good

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lunch, you can take a bus to the airport and then a budget flight to the other end of the continent. Whether you're travelling from Lisbon in Portugal to Tallinn in Estonia or from Helsinki in Finland to Athens in Greece, you won't even have to change money, since the currency will still be the euro. On all those itineraries, you'll depart from and arrive in a liberal democratic country anchored in one big political community, the European Union. If you're lucky enough to be a European citizen – that is, a citizen of an EU member state – you'll even have the right to get a job and settle there for good.

That may seem normal to you, but if you look back across history, or travel around today's world, it's deeply *ab*normal. There's never been a Europe like this before. There's nothing like it on any other continent.

This is an achievement of which we Europeans can be proud. A couple of years ago, I helped design a global opinion poll which asked where people would most like to live if not in their own country. 'A country within the EU' was one of the top two favoured destinations for people in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, South Africa and Brazil. (The other was the United States.) The Europe we have built since the end of the Second World War is, with all its many faults, one of the more attractive places on earth to visit, study, work and live.

Yet before we get too cocky, let's remember a few things. This is not how Europeans treated each other for thousands of years. It's certainly not how we treated our fellow human beings across the globe throughout the long history of European colonialism. Europe has been responsible for some of the best in human history, but also some of the

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worst, such as the Holocaust in which six million Jews were murdered during the Second World War. There's still a whole lot wrong with the way Europe treats many people, including its own. According to official figures, one out of every four children in the EU lives at risk of poverty. What's more, everything we've built since 1945 is now existentially threatened, from without and from within.

Sorry, am I depressing you? Have another drink! Or perhaps some dessert?

Mmm, I can't resist that apple strudel. And for you, tiramisù?

I've spent my life studying Europe, travelling around Europe, enjoying its huge variety, participating in its debates, writing about it and worrying about it. I've never been more worried than I am now. That's why I've tried to distil into these few pages what Europe is, how it came to be as it is today, and why its future now hangs in the balance. I hope you'll find this little book interesting. It's a very short introduction to the world's smallest and largest, oldest and newest, most united and most divided continent.

Europe is so small that a geographer looking at the world today would not think of dignifying it with the name of continent. In an often-quoted quip, it is just 'a promontory of Asia'. If we take Europe's now conventionally accepted geographical boundaries, its total land area is about 10 million square kilometres – roughly the same size as the United States (9.8 million km^2) and Canada (10.0 million km^2), and smaller than the entirety of the Russian Federation (17.1 million km^2). Yet it's also the largest continent, in the sense that none has influenced all the others so much.

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What's the date today? Wherever in the world you come from, you will almost certainly use the system of twelve months in a year originally devised by Julius Caesar when he held the position known as 'dictator' in ancient Rome, in the first century BCE. The month of July is named after him. Over subsequent centuries, that 'Julian' calendar got increasingly out of sync with the movement of the seasons. To correct this growing distortion, our current calendar was introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 CE.* But the Russians stuck with the old calendar until they got rid of their emperor (the tsar, a Russianised version of 'Caesar') in a revolution in 1917, whereupon the newly communist state leapt forward thirteen days to catch up with modernity. So, the joke goes, why are 1–13 February 1918 the happiest days in Russian history? Because they never happened!

Next to dates there are places. Why is America called America? Because in 1507 one Martin Waldseemüller, a German map maker, decided to call the mysterious territory across the Atlantic after Amerigo Vespucci, an Italian explorer who a few years earlier had landed on the coast of what is now Brazil. One reason Amerigo walked off with this ultimate name-check is the publication soon after his return of sensationalist reports of what he supposedly saw in the 'New World', featuring sex and cannibalism. (This is an early illustration of the sad truth that tabloid journalism pays.)

* BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era) are secularised versions of BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, the 'Year of Our Lord'), the system of dating years back to the birth of Jesus Christ devised by a sixth-century Christian monk, Dionysius Exiguus. This, too, originally spread throughout the world from a Europe that for centuries closely identified itself with Christianity.

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Anyway, America is only America because one European decided to name it after another. According to an online gazetteer, there are nineteen Viennas in the world (including the Austrian original, where you get the best apple strudel), twenty-eight Londons, forty-eight Parises and seventy-one Berlins.

The waiter who just served us, Yahya, comes from Morocco. Today's Europe is home to people from everywhere, and their children and grandchildren. That's often because their places of origin in Asia, Africa or the Americas were once colonised by Europeans. As they sometimes helpfully chide resentful nativists, 'We're here because you were there.'

For the same reason, some 2.8 billion people around the world beyond Europe have English as one of their country's official languages, 416 million have Spanish and 377 million have French. But why do Brazilians speak Portuguese while almost everyone else in South America speaks Spanish? Because in 1494, at a town called Tordesillas, the monarchs of Portugal and Spain drew a straight north–south line 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands and said 'west of that, Spanish, east of it, Portuguese'. They didn't agree how long a league was or know how to measure one accurately, but this sufficed to give Portugal its claim to Brazil.

Find the Cape Verde Islands on your phone map, then search for Tordesillas in Spain. Now zoom out and contemplate a familiar picture of the world: the Americas, like two giant hip-swaying dancers just touching fingertips at Panama; an *enormous* empty white-iced Greenland; Europe pretty much in the middle; pendulous Africa below; sprawling Asia and Oceania to the east and south-east. Why does the world

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look like that? Because we still use the method that another European cartographer, Gerard Mercator, invented some 500 years ago to represent the globe on a flat surface. The Mercator projection is only slightly modified in most online maps across the world today.*

Another reason Europe gets away with this geographical chutzpah is that it's the oldest continent – not in the age of its geological formation but in the sense of thinking about itself as a single unit. Two thousand five hundred years ago, Herodotus, the Greek 'father of history', was already distinguishing 'Europe' from two other geographical areas, which he called 'Asia' and 'Libya' (meaning the then-known parts of Africa), and discussing where its boundaries lie.

Yet Europe is also the newest continent, in the way it organises itself politically. There's nothing like the European Union anywhere else on the planet. There's something called the African Union, which brings together fifty-five African countries, but its level of integration doesn't begin to compare. There's no such thing as an 'African citizen' who can travel without a passport or visa from one end of their continent to the other, as European citizens can.

Europe's newness is not, however, all about an unprecedented unity. Half the international frontiers in Europe are more recent than those in Africa, most of which date from the period of decolonisation in the middle of the last century.

* As a corrective, look at the version of the Hobo-Dyer projection which shows territory at its real size and puts the South Pole at the top and the Pacific Ocean in the middle. Europe is just a cluster of small countries near the bottom right-hand corner and Greenland an insignificant triangle at bottom left. (You can find this and much else at timothygarton-ash.com/shortest.)

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Just look at the eastern half of Europe. In the 1990s, Poland acquired new neighbours on every one of its land frontiers: to its west, instead of East Germany came the united Federal Republic of Germany; to its east, instead of one Soviet Union, came the Russian Federation, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine; to its south, in place of Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Thus, as well as being the smallest and largest, oldest and newest, Europe is also the most united and the most divided continent. The United States may have fifty federal states but Europe has fifty separate *countries*. Admittedly, that's only if we count all the micro-states such as Andorra, Monaco, Liechtenstein, San Marino and Vatican City, as well as Kosovo, Azerbaijan and the borderline giants, Turkey and Russia. But even without them, the tally of European states recognised by the United Nations is still over forty.

In his hilariously rude travelogue 'Among the Euro-Weenies', the American writer P. J. O'Rourke complains:

> Everything's too small. The cars are too small. The beds are too small. The elevators are the size of broom closets. Even the languages are itty-bitty. Sometimes you need two or three just to get you through till lunch.

He's right about the languages. If you leave the German city of Aachen after an early breakfast, make the 45-minute drive to the Dutch university town of Maastricht, have coffee with a friend there, and then take another 45-minute drive to the handsome Belgian city of Liège, you'll arrive easily in time for lunch. In one morning, you can practise your German, Dutch and French, while falling back on English if need be. That's *four* languages before lunch.

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The intricacy runs through everything, like the veins in French Roquefort, Italian Gorgonzola, Danish Blue and English Stilton cheese. Many of today's European regions think of themselves almost as countries. Several actually *were* separate states for long stretches of history and some, such as Scotland and Catalonia, exhibit a distinct hankering to be so again. Each old European town is an encyclopaedia. In the Italian city of Siena, for example, there are seventeen wards, called *contrade*, with colourful names like Civetta (Owl), Istrice (Porcupine) and Selva (Forest). Originally formed in the Middle Ages, the *contrade* annually race horses against each other around the main square, as they have done most years since 1656. They are still a real focus of community life.

Even an individual building can be a book in itself. Are you enjoying your stay at the luxurious Hôtel Lutetia in Paris, with its glorious Art Nouveau and Art Deco details? I don't want to make you uncomfortable but during Nazi Germany's Second World War occupation of France, this was the headquarters of German military intelligence. French resistance fighters were interrogated there. After the liberation of Paris in 1944, the Lutetia was requisitioned to receive survivors from the Nazi concentration camps. Photos show them sitting on elegant chairs, still in their striped camp uniforms. There are ghosts walking beside you down those plush hotel corridors.

Given this complexity, books about Europe tend to be long. One on my bookshelf has 2,396 pages. So obviously I've had to leave out many important things in this one.

Still time for a coffee? A cappuccino for you? Did you know cappuccino was probably named after the dark brown

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colour of Capuchin friars' robes? Oh, and you *must* try one of these delicious Portuguese custard tarts. I'll take a ristretto, the most intense, short form of espresso. (In a way, I suppose this whole book is a kind of ristretto.)

Ready?

Then off we go.

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