An amazing Belgian story...
from Brussels to Grand Brussel (in a nutshell)

1) An amazing Belgian story

Let's start with "an amazing Belgian story" illustrating the points made in this book.

1.1) The end of a despotic regime

The history of modern Belgium begins in the early 19th century...

The European continent was going through a period of instability following the devastating invasions of Napoleonic France. These incessant wars ended with the defeat of French troops by an Anglo-Dutch-Prussian coalition on the plains of Waterloo in 1815.
The major powers of Europe then came together at the Congress of Vienna to restore order and redefine the borders.

It was at this time that the decision was taken to create a larger intermediate territory between the three rivals in the north-western part of the continent: Germany (of that time), the United Kingdom and France. This neutral country was expected to reduce tensions by limiting the borders shared between these neighbours. It also had to be able to put up some resistance in the event of an attack in order to give the other parties more time to prepare.

This new country was known as the "United Kingdom of the Netherlands", *"Verenigd Koninkrijk der Nederlanden"*. It consisted mainly of the current territories of the Netherlands in the North and Belgium in the South. Its capital was Amsterdam, where the first king had set up court.
Its state language was Dutch, more specifically the Germanic dialect of the capital (which was quite different from the other variants spoken in the south).

Faced with a despotic king who imposed his power and dialect in an authoritarian manner, an independence-seeking elite was formed in the south. A few years later, in 1830, this elite unilaterally declared the independence of this region. It gradually set up a new state, in the form of a parliamentary monarchy: "the Kingdom of Belgium".

The northern part of the short-lived United Kingdom of the Netherlands was then simply renamed the "Kingdom of the Netherlands". Its first sovereign finally abdicated in 1840 after a series of scandals, political setbacks and military failures. As a result of this disaster, the powers of his successors were drastically curbed by a revision of the Dutch constitution, which in turn laid the foundations for a parliamentary monarchy.

[1.1] The Belgian Monarchy. "History of the Belgian Monarchy".
https://www.monarchie.be/fr/famille-royale/histoire-de-la-monarchie (text, in English and French)
[1.2] The Senate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. "History of the Senate".
https://www.eerstekamer.nl/begrip/geschiedenis_eerste_kamer (text, in English and Dutch)
[1.3] Parlementair Documentatie Centrum van de Universiteit Leiden. "Period 1815-1840: William I".
https://www.parlement.com/id/vh8lnhrpfxto/periode_1815_1840_onder_koning_willem_i (text, in Dutch)

1.2) The formation of a new country

It should be noted that throughout history and across continents, unrepresentative elites of civil society have sought to impose their partial vision, while falsely claiming to defend the interests of the greatest number of people...

After Belgium's unilateral declaration of independence, the elite, led by a rather well-educated and francised bourgeoisie, was not interested in the concerns of the people, who were generally rural, poorly educated, and spoke various regional patois:
– In the South, patois of Latin origin referred to as "Walloon".
– In the North, patois of Germanic origin referred to as "Flemish". The latter term refers specifically to the Germanic patois of northern Belgium, which nowadays are closer to standard Dutch (defined by the Dutch Language Union, *de Nederlandse Taalunie*). However, they still have certain peculiarities, for example in terms of pronunciation.

The new pro-independence elite sought above all to protect various short-term interests, and had only a vague idea of what the country should become. Their main concern was the quest for international recognition in an unstable Europe just emerging from yet another conflict. The rest of the continent was sceptical of this situation, which did not correspond to what had been agreed at the Vienna Congress.
The elite, not representing the interests of the population, managed to confirm the independence of the territory and its neutrality *vis-à-vis* neighbouring states by, among others:
1. Proposing an Anglo-German dignitary as king;
2. Choosing French as the state language;
3. Agreeing to take over a part of the public debt that weighed on the still reluctant Amsterdam authorities.

When a name had to be found for the country, the name of the first known settled tribes in the region was chosen. They were Celtic and were referred to as *"Bhelgh"*, or *"Belgae"* in Latin.

These "first Belgians" had settled here more than two thousand years ago. They had their own language of Celtic origin, their religious beliefs, their customs, and perhaps special physical

features, about which little is known. The only certainty is that they did not speak Walloon, Dutch, French or German, idioms that only developed centuries later.

As far as the settlement of the region is concerned, it is also important to note that hunter-gatherer tribes were already present on this territory thousands of years before the arrival of the Celts.

1.3) The origin of the three national languages

Let us now turn our attention to the linguistic peculiarities of Belgium, and its three national languages: Dutch, French and German.

This situation is the result of a complex history marked by several invasions, conflicts and foreign influences. The following points will give you a better idea.

1. In the centuries before our era, incursions by Germanic tribes regularly threatened the Celtic peoples settled in this part of the continent.

It was, however, the Roman Empire that managed to take control of the area. The Roman culture and the Latin language became established in the region, including in what is now Belgium. This presence eventually erased almost all traces of the original Belgian culture.

It left a local variant of Latin, which gave rise to the Walloon patois, still spoken by a minority of the population.

2. A few centuries later, the neighbouring Germanic tribes took advantage of the weakening of the Roman Empire to invade this territory. They in turn brought their own languages, ancestors of the patois that gave rise to Dutch.

3. In the 19th century, the great migration from the countryside to the cities and the pro-francophone discriminatory measures pushed a significant part of the population to abandon Latin and Germanic patois for French. At that time, marked by the industrial revolution, the country's economy was focused on the extraction and transformation of natural resources in the south of the territory. This was one of the reasons why this part of the country developed more rapidly and began to become French-speaking. It was also during this particular period that the capital, Brussels, became French-speaking despite its physical anchorage in the Dutch-speaking region.

During this period, the north of the country was poorly developed, mainly agricultural, and relatively neglected by the national authorities in terms of education and employment. This situation favoured the formation of separatist movements concentrated on belonging to the Dutch-speaking language group, which was then denigrated by high society. Poverty, discrimination, negligence on the part of the government, and the disasters caused by the two World Wars strengthened these community movements which opposed certain contemptuous public authorities. They went so far as to demand regional independence (see in particular research of the historian Bruno De Wever from Antwerp).

[1.4] NTGent. "Bruno De Wever about the Flemish nationalism".
https://www.ntgent.be/nl/nieuws/bruno-de-wever-over-het-vlaamse-nationalisme-1 (video, duration 2:08:23, in Dutch)

It was only with the technological revolution of the 1960s and 1970s that the local assets of the still Dutch-speaking north of the country enabled its economy to take off. At the same time, the situation in the south of the country deteriorated due to its dependence on declining industries, coal and steel, and difficulties in adapting to global economic changes.

Moreover, it is in this particular context that three administrative regions were created in the early 1960s:
– Dutch-speaking Flanders, in the North, where Dutch is the official language, used by the administration, the education sector, and the public media.
– French-speaking Wallonia, in the South, where French is the official language (except for the German-speaking minority in the east, which enjoys some autonomy).
– The Brussels-Capital Region, where Dutch and French are recognised as official languages. This city-region is special because it was Dutch-speaking at the time of Belgium's independence and has since become predominantly French-speaking. In this administrative region, citizens can address public authorities in both French and Dutch, and education can be organised in either language.

4. The main German-speaking territories in the east of the country were formerly a part of Germany. They were annexed by Belgium following the First World War, as war damages (determined in the Treaty of Versailles of 28 June 1919), and after a "false" popular consultation had been held; "false" because opponents of this annexation had been openly intimidated and hunted down by the Belgian authorities, which in fact aggravated Belgian-German relations during the inter-war period.
[1.5] Association pour les études et la recherche en relations internationales. "Treaty of Versailles, 1919". https://documentsdedroitinternational.fr/versailles_1919/ (text, in French)

5. With regard to the last hundred years, it is important to add that periods of full employment and post-war reconstruction have led public authorities and private companies to call upon a significant number of immigrants from Southern Europe, North Africa, and Anatolia. The immigrants concerned were encouraged to settle permanently, mainly to encourage them to consume and invest their wages in the local economy (e.g. in real estate), as well as to meet future labour market demands.
Additional migratory flows have also taken place from former Belgian colonial territories, and from EU member or partner countries.
[1.6] MYRIA. "70 years of Italian immigration... and more!". https://www.myria.be/files/MYRIATRICS_5_FR.pdf (text, in French)

1.4) Absurd generalisations and tensions maintained by certain mass media

Here, it seems useful to demystify "the alleged tensions between Dutch and French speakers" in Belgium. In discussions with many people who are in favour of the independence of the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders, one can see that they do not hate French speakers as many people believe because of prejudices (especially those conjured up by pseudo-journalists eager to generalise).
Apart from certain temporary economic aspects, what seems to be at the root of many tensions, is above all the fact that in Belgium a large part of the population is still unaware of the recent history of the Dutch-speaking community. In particular, the injustices and other forms of "pressure" that were common just after Belgium's independence in 1830.

This situation was encouraged by an independence-seeking elite that wanted to francise the upper classes. At that time, the Belgian population was mostly rural, and spoke mainly regional patois. It was following the rural exodus at the start of the industrial revolution and various forms of pressure from the pro-francophone elite of the time that part of the

population began to become French-speaking; the administrative capital, Brussels, and the south of the country thus became predominantly French-speaking.
Among the pro-francophone pressures were discriminatory measures that reserved important positions in the public administration and in private companies for people fluent in French. At the same time, patois, both Latin and Germanic, were devalued or even rejected by the government and the upper classes.

Today, a new technological revolution is underway. It creates both difficulties and opportunities for all citizens. In this situation, what weakens us, and what represents the greatest threat today, does not seem to be any country or criminal organisation, but rather all the discrimination and community tensions that tend to divide us. This concerns reductive, sometimes hateful speech, anti-French speaker and anti-Dutch speaker, anti-African and anti-Eastern European, anti-religious and anti-atheistic, anti-right and anti-left, "anti..." everything that does not correspond to certain ideals or individual characteristics.

1.5) The effective defence of human dignity, our universal reference point

History has shown on too many occasions that no language, no geographical boundaries, no skin colour, no religious or philosophical conviction, no economic model, and no temporary interests (financial or in the field of security) have been capable of bringing people together in a coherent and sustainable way...

Centuries of war between neighbouring European countries with a Christian majority, with shared linguistic features, and with a common economic model confirm this evidence; the same is true for territories with Muslim or Hindu majorities, in Asia and Africa.

Another example of illusory or misleading affiliation in the 20th century is "the double betrayal of the Swedish security services". The latter were in favour of the military expansion of Nazi Germany in Europe. Their "falsely neutral" support took the form of aid for the transport of German troops for the invasion of Norway in 1940, as well as the privileged delivery of essential raw materials for the military industry. Once the Nazis were in trouble, Sweden did not hesitate to renounce its pro-fascist commitments, and to change sides again.

In the past, only the unconditional defence of the various aspects of human rights seems to have brought people together in a sustainable way, irrespective of the situation.

The construction of the European Union, which began with the adoption of the European Convention on Human Rights in 1950, is a good example of this. This ambitious peace project finally brought the people of North-Western Europe closer together, after more than two millennia of regional conflicts and in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The mutual commitment to respect citizens' rights has helped gradually to stabilise the continent, to foster dialogue in resolving border tensions, to provide new economic opportunities, and to improve people's living conditions.
When the government or security services of one country commit injustices against its people or sections of society (women, a religious or linguistic community, etc.), they encourage other countries to do the same. They fuel a vicious circle that can lead to the worst situations, nationally and internationally.

Whereas when they defend the rights of their citizens, they seem to encourage neighbouring countries and their partners to do so, strengthen security and economic stability, and create the conditions for sustainable progress.

[1.7] European Court of Human Rights. "European Convention on Human Rights".
https://www.echr.coe.int/Pages/home.aspx?p=basictexts/convention (text, in English)

The effective defence of human dignity, in a transparent manner, seems to be a universal reference point capable of uniting people, whatever the difficulties and opportunities present. This is the case in times of great change such as those we are going through.

Human dignity covers in particular the physical and psychological integrity of all, regardless of gender, age, mother tongue, origins, religious and philosophical convictions... as well as freedom of expression, as long as it does not incite hatred and discrimination.

Darkness makes it possible to become aware of the benefits of light. The same applies to ignorance and knowledge, war and peace, antipathy and empathy, rejection and respect.

Looking at interest in the biological aspect of certain human behaviours and in the history of previous generations enables us to gain a better understanding of the past and the present, and to shape a better future for the benefit of all, as this book will show.

1.6) From Brussels to Grand Brussel…

The word "Grand" (in French) symbolises <u>elevation and surpassing</u>; the proper noun "Brussel" (Brussels in Dutch), <u>the mutual respect and understanding necessary to go beyond differences</u>, misunderstandings, fears, tensions of linguistic, religious, philosophical, political, etc. origins in order to be able to respond to change.

"Grand Brussel", a bilingual expression, sums up in two words this need to respect each other, to try to understand each other better, to take an interest in the real causes of the problems encountered, and to support each other in order to finally rise up and overcome them together.

It seems that no individual, or group of individuals, is perfect and capable of moving forward independently of others. On the other hand, an effort in respect of human dignity seems to be able to bring people together to respond to current difficulties, as well as to all those to come.

When learning to ride a bicycle or even to drive, one quickly realises that one should avoid concentrating on potential obstacles. The stress caused diverts our attention from the route we would like to take, and unconsciously leads us to make decisions that bring us closer to what we would like to avoid... This encourages us to focus our attention on the road we need to take in order to move forward. The same applies to all kinds of situations in everyday life.

The world is neither black nor white... Rather, it seems to move continuously between these two extremes, and it is up to humanity to choose the direction of this movement through decisions and commitments, both individual and collective, made on a daily basis.

2) Strengthening critical thinking

2.1) A tsunami of information and disinformation

In order to meet all kinds of societal challenges that we face, it seems essential to strengthen our ability to question ourselves, and to verify the reliability of the information we are confronted with on a daily basis.

Sharpening our critical thinking is indeed essential and should be encouraged in all contexts, like the media literacy courses already given in some schools. These courses aim in particular at:
– Assessing the credibility of various sources of information, such as websites, television programmes, lobbies, bloggers, writers, journalists and researchers;
– Assessing and comparing the degree of reliability of information found on the internet, in print media, in magazines and books, etc.;
– Analysing differences of opinion on a given subject in order to determine its relevance and to understand its possible origins and objectives (e.g. defending private interests, building audience, building loyalty, informing impartially...).
[22] Christophe Michel. "Disinformation and media education".
https://youtu.be/ppU_XuaDUaQ (video, duration 14:04, in French)

Interesting case studies include the following:
1. False scientific research funded by cigarette manufacturers in the past to mask the toxicity of their products;
2. Misinformation campaigns produced by some mining and industrial groups to minimise the harmful impact of their activities on the environment and public health;
3. War propaganda (as will be detailed below);
4. And recently, in some of the media of our French neighbours, the demonisation of the mobilisation of the "Yellow vests" (*"Gilets jaunes"*), which focuses on the misdeeds of a few disruptive people to gain an audience and denigrate a movement with understandable social demands.

In addition, many professionals already teaching critical thinking have developed detailed educational programmes (often available free of charge); among these avant-gardists is Yaël Nazé, an astrophysicist and professor at the University of Liège.

2.2) Surprising cognitive biases

In order to understand the environment in which we evolve better, it is becoming essential to develop critical thinking skills. This is especially the case today in the face of the various pieces of information, more or less reliable and useful, to which we are exposed. For example, this means being more interested in work which has led to the discovery of cognitive biases, also known as "cognitive weaknesses". It is more than interesting to become aware of this in order to understand better the errors of the past, and to make better decisions in line with personal values.

They are a kind of intellectual shortcut that we use unconsciously. They enable us to limit the time for reflection, so that we can make decisions that seem urgent or simple more quickly. They can sometimes lead to dead ends or aberrations. They are for example exploited by abusive marketing practices that push people to (over)consume anything and everything; such as tobacco, digital social networks, or misinformation for commercial purposes or political and military propaganda.

[23] Olivier Sibony. "How to avoid cognitive bias?".
https://youtu.be/FZJwRRsmeyY (video, duration 14:48, in French)
[24] Practical psychology - YouTube channel. "How to think more logically, avoiding cognitive bias?".
https://youtu.be/wEwGBIr_RIw (video, duration 10:08, in English)

Examples include anchoring, confirmation bias, cognitive dissonance, group thinking, overconfidence, and blind obedience to any form of authority, real or assumed, which are briefly explained below.

1. "Anchoring" is the tendency to be decisively influenced by the first information received on a subject, even if this information is exaggerated or aberrant.

2. "Confirmation bias" is the unconscious tendency to take into account any information that may support initial opinions, while deliberately avoiding assessing their relevance.

3. "Cognitive dissonance" is that which leads one to convince oneself of aberrations in order to circumvent a certain moral or intellectual embarrassment.

4. "Group thinking" (which should rather be called "group non-thinking") is an interpersonal phenomenon that produces irrational false consensus. It leads to erroneous assumptions that lead individuals in a group to ignore their own opinions and make decisions that are contrary to their values, interests, and individual and collective goals.

5. "Overconfidence" is what can lead to a chain of disastrous decisions for fear of accepting that the original assumptions were absurd. This is what has, for example, led some security officials in developed countries to continue the chaotic interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq for fear of accountability, and to arm unstable dictatorships at the gates of Europe in an attempt to preserve some precarious interests; even if these actions have only worsened the international economic and security context, and encouraged the formation of criminal organisations.

6. "Blind obedience to authority" is what can lead to the mistaken belief that a person is not responsible for the physical or psychological damage resulting from what has been asked, or has been authorised, by a real or supposed authority figure. This blind obedience may occur in

the coercive framework of a company or security service, as the work of researchers Stanley Milgram (criticised by certain psychologists like Alex Haslam) and Philip Zimbardo has highlighted.

It is not necessary to insist at length that everyone is morally and legally responsible for their actions, in all cases, even if a company manager or an authority figure of some kind pushes, encourages or authorises abuses.

In a context of great societal stress – caused for example by economic instability and widespread poverty that lasts for many years – blind obedience can lead ordinary citizens to commit large-scale atrocities, such as the human disasters that occurred in Europe and Africa during the 20th century.

Former authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union had also used blind obedience to encourage the denunciation of any "potentially disturbing" activity or idea, and to get civilians to spy on their neighbours, colleagues or strangers in public spaces.

In Belgium, alarmingly, fascist traitors in our security services developed similar practices. Notably, they manipulate civilians, cynical or naive, to intrusively monitor and harass harmless fellow citizens.

They also abuse new immature and notoriously flawed technologies to destructively spy on and terrorise ordinary citizens.

Under the pretext of responding to a complex security threat, which they are actually fuelling through their wrongdoings and crimes, these individuals are attempting to establish a form of "unstable digital *Gestapo*", based on opaque practices that have already proven devastating and completely useless in the past in terms of security (not to mention their illegality and dangerousness to society as a whole).

Manipulation and invasive surveillance of the population have not prevented the collapse of former oppressive regimes and security services on our continent. These abject methods have only exacerbated their inconsistencies. Moreover, they lead to psychological disorders with tragic consequences. In particular, they can cause unpredictable violent behaviour towards law enforcement officials and ordinary citizens.

More generally, it seems indisputable that opaque practices which undermine national security and the integrity of the Rule of Law can bring nothing to our society, except more instability and insecurity; hence the need to shed light on these totalitarian abuses, to condemn the traitors responsible for them, and to put an end to them as soon as possible.

[25] OTB Outside the box - Youtube channel. "The top 5 social psychology studies that will make you wonder about things".
https://youtu.be/pkM9MYiARM8 (video, duration 12:39, in French)

2.3) Challenging prejudices

Examples related to anchoring and confirmation bias include prejudices based on the national language spoken.

Reductive clichés and discourses about French and Dutch speakers are common in Belgium. They are reinforced by pseudo-journalists on both sides, who sometimes take advantage of them to throw fuel on the fire and thus appeal to a certain audience. It seems obvious that speaking a given language does not influence, negatively or positively, personal characteristics such as open-mindedness, intellectual capacity, entrepreneurial spirit, individual talents, generosity, and seriousness.

What is surprising about these prejudices based on language is that some fifty years ago, when the French-speaking region was more prosperous than the Dutch-speaking region, most of them were the opposite!

It is clear that if one region is temporarily experiencing more difficulties than another, it is not because a certain language is spoken or because of cultural specificities, but because it has at one time had more difficulty adapting to global economic changes. This was the case of the French-speaking region in the 1960s and 1970s, in particular because of a strong dependence on declining industries, coal and steel.

Another example related to these same cognitive biases is the prejudice that women perform less well in intellectual domains than men. Less than a hundred years ago, these absurdities were still perceived as unquestionable truths; which were furthermore exploited to deprive women of fundamental rights. Today, there are enough women graduates in the most advanced scientific fields to demonstrate that it is above all the learning environment, supervision, and opportunities for intellectual development that make an individual excel in a particular field; regardless of gender, mother tongue, skin, hair and eye colour.

It would be useful to challenge all prejudices that encourage provocative speech and discriminatory behaviour. This questioning concerns prejudices which one may have grown up with, whether they are based on linguistic, ethnic, religious, philosophical or political differences... or whether they are aimed at public officials, such as elected politicians or members of the security services.

Today, major changes are underway with accelerated globalisation and the arrival of disruptive technologies such as:
– New clean energy sources;
– "Dynamic statistical model" (wrongly called "artificial intelligence" or "machine learning");
– Three-dimensional printing;
– Nanotechnologies.

One of the current priorities seems to be seeking to overcome the barriers created by certain prejudices in order to be able to move forward, and to prepare for societal changes as well as possible.

Any human being can fall into the trap of cognitive bias. This affects young children as well as security service managers and government officials.

It is interesting to note that these biases are reinforced in a situation of fatigue or stress.

It also seems that they are linked to "primary" intellectual functions that have developed by accumulating automatisms of a biological nature over thousands of years of survival in a hostile environment. In such an environment, daily survival depends on the ability to make simple decisions on the basis of past experiences, transmitted or lived in comparable

conditions; the colour, shape and smell of plants give clues to their dangerousness or quality, the same applies to offensive or harmless animal behaviour, and hostile or friendly human interactions.

Most decisions taken today are more complex and require a better understanding of the weaknesses of cognitive mechanisms in order to avoid all kinds of illogicality and erroneous judgements with disastrous consequences.

Whatever the origin of cognitive biases, it seems essential to address them in order to improve decision-making. In particular, an interest in their causes and consequences would enable a better understanding of the difficulties encountered, and for better personal, professional and societal decisions.

The human brain tends to simplify reality, for example by using intellectual shortcuts, but it also possesses advanced faculties that enable it to become aware of irrational reasoning and to rectify it.

2.4) An evolving knowledge of the world

To conclude this passage on the development of critical thinking, it would be appropriate to focus our attention on the fundamental question: "What can one really know about the world?".
Since time immemorial, thinkers from a variety of backgrounds have addressed this question. It is not possible to summarise here the encyclopaedias that deal with this subject, which is as mysterious as it is fascinating. It is nevertheless relevant to illustrate one of the beginnings of an answer to this epistemological question, by looking at the different categories of knowledge of the world that human intelligence can produce.

The following points are mainly inspired by concepts taken up again:
1. By the Austrian epistemologist and philosopher Karl Raimund Popper in his essay "The Open Society and Its Enemies" (published in London in 1945);
2. By the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant in his monumental work "Critique of Practical Reason" (*"Kritik der praktischen Vernunft"*, published in Riga in 1788).

Human knowledge could be classified into three categories.

1. Let us begin with "sensory knowledge", which is based on a superficial perception of the world, with the help of the senses:
In this first category we find the observations of our senses (the colours and shapes we perceive through our sight, the smells we smell through our sense of smell, the sounds we hear through our hearing...), but also the other sensations, both unpleasant and pleasant, that our biological body perceives (such as hunger and satiety).
It is important to note that our sensory perceptions can be distorted, including in the case of fatigue, or in the case of optical illusions. We have the well-known example of an oar that is partially submerged in water and that wrongly appears to be broken; this illusion is caused by the refraction of light (at the surface of an aquatic environment that is denser than the air).

This kind of drawback also concerns technical devices – such as microscopes, telescopes, and computers – which allow us to go further in the observation of the world. These devices are also imperfect, due to design and operating faults.

2. Then there is "empirical knowledge", which is based on a rational perception of the world, with the help of understanding:
On the one hand, this knowledge arises from the development of concepts from repeated observations or experiments of phenomena.
On the other hand, it can evolve thanks to a free, open and permanent criticism of both its foundations and its conclusions. This criticism makes it possible to improve them and to move towards a better understanding of the world.
It is at this second level of knowledge that we name the material and immaterial entities perceived with the help of our senses, that we assemble them, that we classify them, and that we attribute properties to them (colours, shapes, tastes, textures, organisations... but also the sensations that they inspire in us according to our experiences).
In addition, in this category we find knowledge derived from the scientific method, which takes the form of "scientific theories" in fields such as physics, biology and psychology. They enable us to grasp certain complex aspects of reality, and to discover concrete applications. This knowledge is also continually tested by open questioning in order to be supplemented or even replaced. This is notably the case of the theory of gravitation conceived by Isaac Newton in the 17th century, which gave way to the more accomplished theory of general relativity, developed by Albert Einstein in the 20th century.

3. In addition to the above knowledge, there is also "dogmatic knowledge", which is based on a transcendent perception of the world, using abstract or idealistic representations:
They result from our tendency to look for a direction to follow in order to give meaning to our life, but also to the world around us, to what is beyond us, to what goes beyond the available sensory and empirical knowledge:
This third category includes superstitious rites, prejudices of all kinds, as well as "ideologies" (political, religious or philosophical). The latter are based on more or less abstract concepts. Their principles are generally defined in theory, and they leave room for an infinite number of variations and combinations in practice; like some representatives who put forward vague "political beliefs" during elections, and take sometimes illegible and contradictory measures when they try to put them into practice.
Dogmatic knowledge opens the door to a wide range of interpretations. They can be exploited, for better or worse, depending on the experiences, the situation, and the intentions of the individuals who interpret them.

As a first example, let us take the egalitarian and communist principles of the 19th century German philosopher Karl Marx. They were based on the denunciation, rightly, of the excesses of the beginnings of the industrial revolution, and of the abject exploitation of the first working classes. Starting from noble principles and real facts, he developed an almost prophetic ideology, justifying in some cases class violence to repair social injustice. However, this ideology was hijacked by criminals who set up completely corrupt dictatorships, and attacked their fellow citizens in order to cling to power.

As a second example, let us take the principles of human dignity, democracy and freedom for all citizens (men and women, from modest to affluent conditions). They have been ardently defended by humanist thinkers, such as the English philosopher John Stuart Mill in his book "On Liberty" (published in London in 1858).

On the one hand, these honourable principles encouraged respect for individual freedoms, critical thinking in relation to public authorities, and the establishment of democratic governments representative of the interests of the people. These humanist principles have fostered the emergence of new constructive solutions to societal challenges. They have also led to considerable progress; such as free access to education since 1914 in Belgium, and the right to vote for women in the mid-twentieth century.

On the other hand, they were misused to justify chaotic military interventions by developed countries in less prosperous countries.

The most ridiculous lies, such as the search for imaginary weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, as well as war propaganda based on the most heinous religious prejudices, illustrate this point. Such absurdities are still being spread in our media by traitors and "pseudo-democratic terrorists" in our own intelligence services and military.

Moreover, these unscrupulous individuals take advantage of the lack of transparent control over their activities to embezzle ever more public funds to finance their sickening addiction to manipulation, crime, and arming unstable dictatorships (see in particular the official investigations of the *"Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction – Lessons Learned Program"*, the *"Afghanistan Papers"*, and the reports about the former military prison of *Abou Ghraib*).

Like the Nazis in the 1930s, it is through incompetence and criminal malice that these traitors launch new endless wars and lose them all. Their disinformation campaign only serves to spread confusion and hatred so that they can continue their lost conflicts and provoke new ones, at the expense of all. The hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties and the tens of millions of refugees do not seem to affect their addiction to senseless wars.

These new *fascist losers* go so far as to claim to "export prosperity, security and human rights" as they multiply the massacres of civilians and arm criminals in foreign countries. Thus, they vainly try to install despotic regimes there, and create a disaster that turns against our security, our values, and our interests; as is the case with the unstable dictatorships set up in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya in recent years.

The two examples of ideologies cited show us in particular that we should never rely on manipulative flattery, dogmatic rhetoric, and even less on the "ideological label" that some individuals put on their foreheads in an attempt to justify abuses and crimes. Rather, one should rely on "true intentions", on "facts", and on "the transparency offered" to make judgements about any actions.

Returning to knowledge in general: it is obvious that, irrespective of the name given to it, its nature, and its theoretical classification (such as the one briefly described above), it derives from limited perceptions that offer us a fragment of the image of reality.

Knowledge is thus a set of immaterial tools.

In particular, these tools form reading grids, more or less reliable, which enable us to interpret the various pieces of information captured by our senses in order to "navigate" in this world.

They can have both a negative and positive impact on our daily lives, depending on how they are used. They generally do not carry evil or good within them. They depend above all on the real motivations of the people who use them, the context, and the degree of transparency offered.

Furthermore, these tools are not immutable, but changeable. Moreover, they can be continuously improved through free, open and permanent criticism...

In this sense, the eminent philosopher Immanuel Kant seems to have summed up the essential in the following enlightenment motto:

"*Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your own understanding!"

[8] Immanuel Kant, Berlinische Monatsschrift (December 1784). "Article – Answer to the question: What is Enlightenment?".

3) "Useful curiosity"

3.1) Lifelong learning

Another current priority is the training of citizens who question the world, who have the knowledge and skills to adapt more easily to new situations throughout life, who understand the main aspects of the evolution of human societies (language, consumption, organisation, public services, private companies, etc.), who are capable of questioning certain inconsistencies in our society and, possibly, of proposing positive solutions and participating in their elaboration.

Nowadays, many children are still surprised:
– To discover the origin of the food they eat every day;
– To learn that if we breathe, drink and eat, it is above all to provide the body with the particles it needs to "function";
– Or, to touch briefly on a few astronomical notions, to realise that everything seems to be part of a larger dynamic whole. Thus, even comfortably seated on a sofa, we travel at more than one hundred thousand kilometres per hour accompanying our planet (our natural spaceship), "the Earth", which rotates on itself in one day, and completes one revolution around our star, "the Sun", in one year. This star orbits, along with billions of other stars, around the centre of our galaxy, "the Milky Way", which in turn moves towards the heart of our galaxy supercluster, "Laniakea", and is just one part of a larger moving network...
[26] Futura Sciences. "How fast is the Earth moving in space?".
https://www.futura-sciences.com/sciences/questions-reponses/astronomie-vitesse-deplace-terre-espace-8624/
(text, in French)

We should be more interested in stimulating useful curiosity, for example, by becoming aware that nothing in this world seems to be without a cause, which can be multiple and complex. The Sun, for example, would have formed by accumulating surrounding atoms under the effect of gravity, before igniting as a result of increasing pressure.
Another example, more down-to-earth this time, is the organisation of work into five days a week and eight hours a day. This organisation was popularised by the industrialist Henry Ford at the beginning of the 20th century. It aimed to offer more leisure time to workers in order to increase consumption, and to stimulate the economy.
As a final example of daily life, let's take a look at the layout of the letters on the *azerty* keyboards adapted to the French language (and on the *qwerty* keyboards adapted to the English language). This particular layout, different from that of the alphabet, was developed towards the end of the 19th century for typewriters. It made it possible to limit the risk of jamming between metal rods of neighbouring keys. Today, the technical constraints linked to the use of typewriters are no longer relevant. Other more practical arrangements, such as the *Bépo* keyboard, offer notable improvements in writing speed and ergonomics.

Also, to enable students to gain a better understanding of the society they will inherit, it would be useful to encourage educational institutions to invite actors from public life to address students more regularly; this includes elected politicians, non-profit associations, and private companies. Optional information sessions, organised once a week at lunchtime for example, would facilitate such interactions and encourage learners to take a greater interest in different aspects of the organisation of society.

Speakers could also take advantage of these interactions to offer internships, from a few days to several months, during weekends and school holidays in order to introduce students to their jobs and share their experiences.

4) Prejudices linked to linguistic differences

4.1) Personal pathways make individuals

Now let's look at some of the unlikely prejudices that still exist today, such as those concerning language differences.

It is obvious that personal backgrounds shape individuals and determine their linguistic, behavioural, intellectual characteristics... It is sometimes wrongly assumed that it is the mother tongue that shapes all this. In this age of globalisation, there is no doubt that an idiom in itself, or what is even more absurd, nationality, or a colour of skin or hair, plays only a minor role in individual characteristics.

Several languages and geographical locations in our neighbourhood can be observed to illustrate this reality.

One only has to look around Flanders to realise that the Dutch-speaking population is very diverse in terms of talents, personalities and ideas. Among Dutch-speakers there are violent separatists who are still trapped by the wounds of the past... as well as world citizens and idealistic anti-globalists.
Our German-speaking neighbours are another example of this diversity. Among them are the neo-Nazis who are misled by racial theories and complex recent history... as well as pacifists, philosophers and scientists who work daily for a better world.
Similarly, as far as French speakers in France are concerned, there are also former traitors and Nazi collaborators, and nationalists who glorify the disastrous colonial period (considering the massacres and looting committed on all continents as unimportant details)... as well as philanthropists who are involved in socio-economic development projects around the world, as well as world-renowned humanist intellectuals, such as the very popular Matthieu Ricard, doctor in cellular genetics, Buddhist monk, translator and writer.

As a more general example, we can mention two entrepreneurs with a passion for travel and new technologies. They live at the centre of two dynamic international metropolises, thousands of kilometres away from each other. They will certainly have more in common and shared interests than a close relative who is more interested in agriculture and a rural lifestyle, who would not see the value in temporarily fashionable gadgets. The opposite situation also seems obvious.

The mother tongue is of some importance, but it seems clear that it is above all human values and accumulated personal experience that, at a given time, shape individuals and determine their characteristics.

4.2) The astonishing evolution of idioms

It is important to point out that the thousands of idioms used in the world are not immutable rocks that fell from the sky in ancient times. To give a simplified picture, we could speak of sets of sounds, and signs in some cases, that have evolved over time and are exchanged to communicate thoughts (it is useful to add that this communication is not perfect, and that it can lead to misunderstandings).

These sets of sounds are mainly based on:
1. A vocabulary made up of "words" that are associated with people, actions, material or immaterial elements, etc.;
2. A grammar made up of "rules for assembling words", such as their place in a sentence or their declensions, which make it possible to offer more clarity and to formulate more complex ideas;
3. Local variants and accents, expressions, cultural references and, sometimes, particular descriptive nuances that enrich the whole.

Additionally, the idioms are not fixed. They are born and continue to evolve. Some words are regularly abandoned, while others are invented, imported, or modified in terms of pronunciation or meaning. The following three terms are examples that have crossed the centuries and continents.

1. The word "barbarian":
This term comes from the word *barbaros* "βάρβαρος" which was used by ancient Greek speakers to designate peoples whose language was incomprehensible and resembled the babble *barbarbar*; equivalent to *blablabla* in French.
The Romans imported this term into the Latin language by adding a connotation of inferiority. Among other things, they used it to refer to and denigrate the populations settled around the Roman Empire, such as the underprivileged Germanic peoples who occupied the territory of present-day Germany and its surroundings. It should be pointed out that the inhabitants of this region now possess one of the best levels of education and prosperity on the continent; this is due in particular to their central location, at the crossroads of commercial and intellectual exchanges (the first, the Romans, ended up becoming last... while the last, the Germanic peoples, became first...).
Nowadays, the term "barbarian" is used to refer to brutality, incivility or rudeness.

2. The word "guru":
The Sanskrit word *guru* "गुरु" is composed of the word *gu* which is associated with "darkness", and the word *ru* which can be translated as "light" or "remove". It was used to refer to a spiritual guide or teacher.
In French, this word was borrowed to refer to the leader of a sect, a master of thought, or an expert in a particular field such as computer science.

3. The word "algorithm":
This term is derived from the name of the Baghdadian mathematician and astronomer *Al Khwarizmi* "الخوارزمي", from the 9th century, known for his work on algorithmics.
The word "algorithm" refers to a sequence of instructions (in mathematics, programming...) that enables a problem to be solved or a function to be fulfilled.

Idioms adapt across time and regions, and according to the speakers. This point explains the different accents and patois that have been influenced by local input. They can evolve independently of each other over several centuries until they develop their own pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. This is the case, for example, in the regional variants of ancient Latin, *"latinum vulgare"* or Latin of the people, which gave rise to contemporary Romance languages such as Italian, Romanian, Corsican, Catalan, Spanish, Portuguese, Walloon and French.

Alongside the spoken language, there is also writing, which is based on a set of symbols (such as letters, punctuation marks, pictograms in some cases, etc.), and on rules of assembly such as the direction of the writing and spelling. Written language evolves, and not always in the same way as spoken language, which explains most of the differences between them. For example, in French, we find "silent letters" and sounds that are written in different ways in certain words; that were pronounced in a different way in the past, or that have been borrowed from other idioms.

Differences between spoken and written languages are common throughout the world. Reforms are regularly proposed to bring them closer together, to simplify them, and to revise pronunciation, vocabulary, and "standard" grammar and writing rules, taking into account new usage. Education and the media then relay these reforms to the population.

It is possible to briefly illustrate this linguistic development with the following few examples.

1. French:
Contrary to some beliefs, the Celtic-Gallic tribes, who settled in part of what is now France more than two thousand years ago, had only a minor influence on the French language. One of the reasons for this is that writing was not common among these peoples.
Then, the conquests of this region by Rome, during the first century BC, and by the Germanic tribes a few hundred years later, erased almost all traces of Celtic presence. The French language therefore does not appear to be of Celtic origin, but has a Latin foundation enriched with words imported from Greek, particularly in scientific fields. French was also influenced by Germanic languages and Arabic in the Middle Ages, and by English during the 20th century; it is interesting to add here that these idioms were also influenced by contributions from other linguistic communities, and that their use spread as a result of conquests, alliances and exchanges.
The words "French" and "France" have a Germanic root. They are derived from the names of tribes that lived in what is now Germany and took control of part of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, the Franks. The name "France" has moreover kept its origin in the Germanic languages where it can be translated literally by *the State or the domain of the Franks* (*Frankreich* in German, *Frànkrich* in Alsatian, *Frankrijk* in Dutch, *Frankrike* in Swedish...).
For writing, the French language uses a variant of the Latin alphabet, which is descended from the Greek alphabet, in turn descended from the Phoenician alphabet developed in the Middle East more than three thousand years ago.

2. English:
Around the first century AD, the Roman Empire managed to integrate the territory of England which was occupied by Celtic tribes. Among these local peoples were the "Britons"; whose name was used to name Britain (and part of whom later took refuge across the English

Channel in what was to become French Brittany). It was at this time that Latin was first introduced into the upper classes.

During the 5th century, the collapse of the Roman Empire was followed by incursions of Germanic peoples from the present-day territories of Denmark and northern Germany. The main tribes that took part in these offensives were the Jutes, the Saxons, and the Angles; the latter gave their name to the English language and to England, which could be interpreted as the *Land of Angles*. These peoples settled in the region and a mixture of their languages became established among the population.

In the 11th century, France in turn invaded this territory and imported variants of Latin, then used by the elite.

A few centuries later, the growing interest in science and art led English intellectuals to import new words from Greek, Latin and Arabic.

This complex mix, based on Germanic idioms with Latin and Greek influences – as well as Celtic and Arabic to a lesser extent – evolved over several centuries into contemporary English.

3. Spanish and Portuguese:

Spanish and Portuguese are two variants of Latin that developed in distinct regions of the Iberian Peninsula (Spanish is also called "Castilian" in Spain, referring to the region of Castile from which it originates). These variants were particularly influenced by the Germanic conquests and by several centuries of Arab-Muslim presence.

Many places, rivers and towns on this peninsula bear names of Arabic origin, such as the Rock of Gibraltar, the River Guadalquivir, and the city of Almeria.

4. Maltese:

Maltese is a regional variant of Arabic spoken in the Maltese islands. It was mainly enriched with words from Italian, due to its proximity to Italy, and from English, during the period of British rule.

More generally, there are language groups that are derived from older common languages. Regional variants have differed from each other over the centuries, partly because of the distances between speakers, and partly because of the influence of local idioms. Even though they have undergone distinct developments, especially in terms of pronunciation and writing, they still have hundreds of everyday words in common, as well as certain specificities in terms of grammar:

1. Romance languages; French, Romanian and Spanish are among the languages that originated from Latin spoken throughout the Roman Empire in antiquity, as mentioned above.

2. Germanic languages; Flemish, Dutch, Luxembourgish, Alsatian, German, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and Icelandic are derived from the same language which was spoken in Northern and Central Europe several centuries before our era.

3. Semitic languages; Aramaic, Arabic and Hebrew originated from a language used in the Middle East more than two thousand five hundred years ago.

[52] Paul Jorgensen. "How similar are the Hebrew and Arabic languages?".
https://youtu.be/9YjRuTp-nD0 (video, duration 10:37, in English)

These few examples highlight the fact that languages are not fixed and are not written in DNA. This is even less the case for the clichés that some people associate with their speakers.

To sum up, the languages used throughout the world seem to be above all:
– Knowledge, or immaterial tools, that help to communicate orally or in writing;
– Generally based on sounds;
– Resulting from an often-surprising evolution;
– And constantly changing.

5) Prejudices linked to origins and convictions

5.1) Deconstruction of war propaganda

In order to gain a better understanding of certain current events, it also seems crucial to deconstruct several completely absurd generalisations.

Alongside the stereotypes about linguistic differences (such as those about French and Dutch speakers), there are others which imprison a great potential for socio-economic development, and which distract us from real difficulties.

These are, for example, preconceptions based on gender, age, personal situation and origins, especially for citizens from Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa.
As regards the latter region, prejudices are often linked to religious convictions sullied by the extremely negative image given in the mass media, as well as by the war propaganda.

It seems essential to deconstruct Nazi war propaganda, "crudely recycled" by adding "Muslim" instead of "Jew".

Let us start by mentioning the investigations by the government of the United States of America. In particular, these investigations have extensively detailed the absurd lies still propagated by some military officials; individuals who seek only to embellish their war crimes and continue their two decades of military failures.
These include:
– The official reports of the *"Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction - Lessons Learned Program"*;
– The *"Afghanistan Papers"* published by *The Washington Post*.
[91] SIGAR. "SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program and Lessons from the Long War, Remarks of John F. Sopko". https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/speeches/SIGAR_POGO_Speech_2020-11-31.pdf (text, in English)
[92] The Washington Post. "Afghanistan Papers, Record of Meeting with LTG Michael T. Flynn". https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/documents-database/?document=flynn_michael_ll_11102015 (text, in English)

While millions of American and European citizens fall into poverty every year, these "pseudo-democratic terrorists" still seek to embezzle thousands of billions of euros of public funds in order to:
– Stuff the military industrial complex to the point of indigestion;
– Entertain themselves by manipulating, terrorising and massacring increasing numbers of innocent civilians in ever larger territories... until they turn against the interests and security of their own citizens.

Their official disinformation campaign also aims at diverting more and more public funds and indoctrinating new naive recruits to launch their lost wars with no real end and no coherent objective, among them:

1. The bombing of Iraq in search of imaginary weapons of mass destruction, and operations targeting the various opposition movements that have emerged from the ruins;

2. The two decades of occupation of Afghanistan for the establishment of a completely corrupt dictatorship that did not hold, and which costed hundreds of billions of euros to the taxpayers of the countries involved (in particular, a chaotic situation documented in the *"Afghanistan Papers"*, published by *The Washington Post*); some military officials have justified this senseless war by demonising the local population, that is largely illiterate and had been living for centuries in remote mountain villages, west of Himalaya – it is clear that illiteracy and ignorance are not fought with bombers and bloodshed, but rather by investing in education, patience, respect and understanding.

It is indispensable to rectify an image tainted by the worst generalisations and hateful lies spread by the mass media.

First of all, Arabs should not be confused with Muslims. Indeed, Arabs, or Arabic speakers, represent only a minority (less than a quarter) of the Muslims in the world. It may also be added that until the 6th century, the term "Arab" was used to refer to a few Semitic and predominantly polytheistic populations, present in part of the Middle East. Nowadays, the term is used more generally to refer to those populations in the Middle East and North Africa who partially adopted variants of Arabic over the following centuries; older local idioms are also used in several regions, for example the *Tamazight* languages "ⵜⵓⵎⵣⴰⵖⵜ" in the Maghreb.

Further, it is worth noting that there are approximately one and a half billion people of Muslim culture or belief around the world. These people live mainly in a territory stretching from North-West Africa to South-East Asia. If there were even one hundredth of a percent of this billion and a half people, an insignificant part, which corresponds to the prejudices of extremism and fanatical terrorism that are omnipresent in the media, it would make the Earth look like a giant crater for centuries.

It is obvious that criminals, whoever they are, seem to be above all traumatised or psychologically destroyed people. They may seek to justify violent acts by interpreting, in their own way, aspects of the first ideology that pops into their heads.
However, we still find ourselves in a situation where the media often explain the facts in an extremely simplified way by referring to prejudices that are widespread in some cases, or they do so in a more responsible way on the basis of socio-economic causes. The degree of seriousness of the explanations given depends mainly, not on the situation, but rather on the origins, and the real or supposed convictions of the individuals concerned.
On the one hand, when misdeeds are committed in Muslim-majority countries at the hands of corrupt dictatorships or in situations of protracted conflict, these actions are directly related to religion. The same is true for individuals with "Muslim backgrounds", and this absurd linkage is made even if these individuals are not particularly religious and have not grown up in a religious context.
By referring to religion, the media concerned indirectly link crimes committed to all persons who have a connection with the religion in question. In this case, more than one and a half billion people are associated with these situations even though they do not feel more concerned than others, they obviously do not support them, most of them live in peace, and they have enough concerns and difficulties in their daily lives, like most human beings.

On the other hand, when an atrocity is committed by a person who has "origins" other than Muslim, more objective and detailed explanations are provided to try to understand the causes.

For example, have we ever heard that the Norwegian murderer who took the lives of dozens of people a few years ago did so for the sake of Christianity or a skin colour, even though he claimed it and repeated it?

That the attacks perpetrated by former nationalist organisations of "Catholic culture" in regions such as Quebec and Northern Ireland were linked to certain Christian beliefs, or were due to physical specificities?

That the atrocities committed by Buddhist monks against minority populations in Burma were dogmatic?

No, certainly not. Even if the criminals concerned had claimed this repeatedly, it would have been completely absurd to think that their actions were linked to an origin or a religious current.

In parallel to the previous points, it also seems interesting to underline the importance of the knowledge gathered, discovered and enriched that has been transmitted by the so-called "Arab-Muslim" societies, more precisely by societies composed mainly of Arabic-speaking Muslims, but also speaking other local languages and including Christian and Jewish minorities.

This knowledge is very diverse and ranges from mathematics, with the works on algebra (*"al jabr"* in Arabic) and algorithmics by the mathematician Al Khwarizmi, to the works in philosophy by scholars such as Al Kindi, Avicenna (*Ibn Sina*), and Averroes (*Ibn Rochd*) who participated in the translation, enrichment and transmission of the heritage of ancient Greece; present in part in territories that converted to Islam.

Several masterpieces by Greek philosophers, such as Ptolemy's *Almagest*, had in fact disappeared from Europe in the early Middle Ages (due to intellectual censorship imposed by authoritarian regimes and the Church), until their Arabic translations appeared on the continent through Arab-Muslim Andalusia and Sicily.

Among the knowledge disseminated are the so-called Arabic numerals, which are based on an Indian decimal numbering system. They were refined by Arabic-speaking mathematicians in the Middle East before being transmitted to other regions of the world through commercial and intellectual exchanges.

Many words from the Arabic language, sometimes themselves imported from other idioms, were also transmitted with this knowledge. These are words that we regularly use such as *cipher*, *algebra*, *algorithm*, *alchemy*, *azure*, *syrup*, *coffee*, *carafe*, *sugar*, *apricot*, *jasmine*, *cotton*, *giraffe*, *gazelle*, *guitar* or even *elixir*.

Unlike Christianity in the Middle Ages, Islam in itself is not opposed to secular science. Quite the contrary, the Muslim religion encourages believers to question themselves about human nature and the complexity of the world. The quest for knowledge and the development of knowledge beneficial to human beings are even considered as acts of worship.

Arabic-speaking scholars also collected, studied and developed Greek and Indian knowledge during the difficult centuries that a large part of the European continent experienced from the fall of the Roman Empire to the Renaissance.

[53] Mahmoud Hussein, Philippe Calderon. "When the World Spoke Arabic".
https://youtu.be/ZGHA0FXyvHg (video, duration 3:15:34, in French)

The predominantly Arabic-speaking territories on the other side of the Mediterranean excelled in the scientific and economic fields, particularly between the 8th and 12th centuries, before entering a long period of decline due to various factors such as:

1. Conflicts between regional dynasties and between different branches and sub-branches of the Muslim religion, such as for Christianity in Europe with the Inquisition and the wars between Catholics and Protestants, and for Hinduism in Asia with conflicts between some of its currents (any religious or non-religious ideology – including "democracy" – can be manipulated by traitors seeking power or entertainment, and by violent people who claim to hold the absolute truth).

2. The invasions at the beginning of the second millennium, including waves of European crusades and Mongolian conquests, which put an end to centuries of prosperity and intellectual growth.

3. The low population density, the aridity of these regions, and the poverty in natural resources (with the exception of fossil resources discovered a few decades ago).

4. The unstable situations left by the colonising countries (France, United Kingdom, Italy and Spain). The latter emerged weakened from the Second World War, and eventually lost control of the colonies they exploited. These colonisers withdrew hastily, leaving behind them fragmented and falsely independent territories, without taking into account the populations concerned.
Several of these fake countries, often with "straight" borders, also have names of colonial origin; such as Tunisia, which has a name derived from its administrative capital Tunis; Algeria, which also has a name derived from its capital Algiers; Morocco, which has a name derived from the city of Marrakech and which, in Arabic, is commonly called the Maghreb, although it represents only a very small part of this region.

5. Most of the colonial dictatorships, corrupt and vacillating, which former invading countries armed in the 1950s and 1960s in order to maintain precarious economic interests. Some of these kleptocracies try to hide behind a façade of stability to conceal the uncontrollable misappropriation of public funds and permanent behind-the-scenes rivalries; such as the former Algerian "false president" in his eighties, who was "allegedly re-elected" several times with manipulated scores approaching one hundred percent of the vote (despite a serious illness preventing him from being active), and who was content to read a few speeches prepared by third parties, while the regime's leaders clashed behind the curtains.

6. The recent foreign military interventions that have destabilised parts of the Middle East and Central Asia. These falsely preventive interventions were supposed to bring more stability after a few months, but they have led to complex conflicts that are prolonged, spreading, and encouraging all extremes.

This list is not exhaustive, but it does help to understand that, even if the territories concerned were predominantly polytheistic or Christian, the current difficulties would be similar. The same would be true for the criminals, whom dictatorships and local conflicts have given rise to and who try to justify their atrocities by exploiting the first available ideology; an ideology

with sometimes a religious reference, but which could also be racial, political or economic, as was the case in Europe during the 20th century, among others.

5.2) Never rely on ideological "labels", be they religious or non-religious

It is important to be aware that any current of thought can be manipulated by a minority to justify abuse or even violent behaviour, particularly during periods of economic or security instability.

What seems to differentiate any ideology from a criminal trend is the area from which innocent individuals are gradually ostracised, discriminated against, or treated in a degrading way, because of prejudice and generalities. The bulwark against these threats seems to be the unconditional defence of the different aspects of human dignity.

Also, it seems obvious that the aberrant "ideological label" that criminals put on their foreheads should not be attacked. Rather, we should judge those individuals who are personally responsible for their actions.

Known examples include minority groups that have manipulated certain aspects of:

1. Christianity, including the Inquisition and conflicts between its branches, such as in Northern Ireland, where political movements fuelled a civil war that tore the Catholic and Protestant communities apart until the end of the twentieth century;

2. Islam with certain criminal movements seeking to deny the atrocities they commit in situations of devastating local conflicts, or in the face of dictatorships that cling to power only through indiscriminate violence and pervasive corruption;

3. Judaism with the stigma of the past, some current threats and the understandable fears that flow from them, but which are exploited by a minority to justify the military occupation of foreign territories and the resulting disaster;

4. Buddhism with the repeated attacks against part of the population in extremely deprived areas of Burma;

5. Marxist egalitarian and anti-religious principles that were used to justify brutal repression under the pseudo-communist totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union;

6. Ideals of racial or cultural superiority that are advanced to encourage injustice and violence, such as the genocides committed by Germany in Africa and Europe, as well as the – less publicised – mass massacres perpetrated by France in Algeria and Belgium in the Congo during the colonial period.

On the subject of Belgian colonisation in Central Africa, the best-seller "Congo: A History" by the Bruges writer David Van Reybrouck is a reference work that sheds light on such inescapable elements as:
– The regime of terror put in place by Leopold II, which was partly financed by the Belgian state;

– Public executions;

– Corporal punishment;

– Forced recruitment practices;

– The hundreds of thousands of civilian victims;

– The payment of a compulsory tax in the form of forced labour, for example to harvest rubber and palm oil;

– The massive and ill-considered displacement of people (from villages to slums near natural resources and important crossing points), as well as the appalling working conditions that have together caused, and amplified, several epidemics and inter-ethnic conflicts;

– The benefits of colonisation which were not used for the development of essential projects, such as the replacement of shantytowns by modern cities and the establishment of a sustainable economy, but which were monopolised by a few industrial and financial groups (a minor part of these benefits was used for the construction of infrastructure to facilitate the export of raw materials);

– Racial segregation between "whites" and "blacks" in urban centres;

– The fact that at most a few dozen academics had been trained, after seventy-five years of colonisation and despite the hundreds of thousands of indigenous people who had worked for the colonial administration and companies;

– The precipitated and sabotaged "pseudo-independence" of the Congo on 30 June 1960; it was decided within a few months under the pressure of popular revolts, it provided for leading positions in the army and in big business to remain in the hands of Belgian officials, and it was immediately followed by a Belgian military intervention and ambiguous support for the secessionist mining region of Katanga, not to mention the implicit support for the elimination of the then Congolese Prime Minister, Patrice Emery Lumumba.

These elements provide a better understanding of the ravages of the colonial period, and the continuing unstable situation in Central Africa.

It is essential to point out that a handful of Good Samaritans and colonials with noble intentions took part in this colonisation project, notably by developing education and organising vaccination campaigns. Nevertheless, these drops of hope were lost in a torrent of neglect, abuse and murder, fuelled by the savage exploitation of local natural resources.

Nowadays, the presence of raw materials from Congo in everyday electronic devices (computers, telephones, tablets...) is a reminder of Belgium's moral and financial debt towards the population of this territory. Raising consumer awareness of the impact of their purchasing decisions, and developing educational projects aimed directly at the population of this country, in a transparent manner, would help to improve the current situation.

5.3) The necessity to control all public power in a transparent manner

As far as large-scale human disasters are concerned, they can still be triggered today by free, prosperous and peaceful countries. This is the case, for example, with the chaos caused by foreign military operations in Iraq. These operations were initially launched to put an end to a regime suspected of producing weapons of mass destruction, but these suspicions proved to be unfounded. They were based on dubious sources, taken into account in a complex security context and under the influence of possible short-term economic interests.

[54] Vincent Jauvert, L'Obs. "The unbelievable story of the lie behind the war in Irak". https://www.nouvelobs.com/l-enquete-de-l-obs/20130308.OBS1260/l-incroyable-histoire-du-mensonge-qui-a-permis-la-guerre-en-irak.html (text, in French)

This situation shows how essential it seems that no decisions of any importance in terms of security should be taken by individuals who are under constant pressure, who have lived through traumatic experiences, or who may be influenced by political or economic interests. These three elements inevitably, consciously or unconsciously, impair the capacity for judgement, which can lead to the most ill-considered and catastrophic decisions; this fact also helps to understand the adage that power tends to corrupt even the most virtuous.

Without the discernment and reserve it requires, all power becomes toxic. It thus tends to destroy the individuals who hold it, but also those over whom it is exercised, and those who have conceded it.

The absence of counterbalances and reliable control mechanisms amplifies this ravaging potential. It is particularly from this observation that the following points were made:

1. The rejection of all forms of totalitarianism.

2. The democratic Rule of Law.
It allows the people to organise the management of the territory through representative institutions whose leaders are elected, in a transparent manner and for a fixed term. These officials exercise power within a constitutional framework that must protect the freedoms, rights and interests of citizens.

3. The establishment of three transparent and independent powers, which are mutually controlling each other:
– First, the "legislative power", which is held by the Parliament enacting laws.
– Second, the "executive power", which is held by the government ensuring the application of laws and managing the current policy of the state.
– And finally, the "judicial power", which is held by the courts and tribunals settling disputes.
These central powers oversee secondary powers, such as those of the public administration and the various security services.
The principles behind this power structure are the result of a long political evolution, inspired by great humanist thinkers such as the famous John Locke.
This English philosopher also defended, with as much ardour as clear arguments, the need to put an end to any opaque despotic power, by establishing a legitimate government that represents the interests of citizens and is clearly accountable to them. Among the publications of this exceptional genius is the reference work "Two Treatises of Government" (published in London in 1690).

Returning to the present context, it seems essential to realise that all power without transparent control tends towards chaos, and that chaos has no limits.
Today, the transparency and independence of the three main powers should be reinforced in order to shed light on the security problems, police violence and authoritarian abuses that are multiplying in our country. Indeed, this situation continues to deteriorate, especially since fascist traitors are pushing our armed forces into new colonial wars that are lost, inconsiderate, and without any real end in order to support the installation of miserable unstable dictatorships in foreign territories (especially in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and Mali in the last two decades).

Without exonerating those responsible for wrongdoing, it is essential to step back from the reductive rhetoric in order to focus on the context in which the facts can be understood.

It may also be added that the duty to remember is not limited to the victims and their descendants. Rather, it is a collective responsibility so that present and future generations understand the main reasons for them, do not commit similar acts again, and do not relive them. This duty requires a better understanding of the causes and consequences of these tragedies.

More generally, faced with the mystery of the biological before and after life, human beings tend to become attached to immaterial elements that were present before their birth and that could remain so after their departure. They may be linked to humanistic values, religious or philosophical convictions, a language, a dialect, a territory temporarily delimited by physical or administrative borders, racial theories...

With regard to this natural inclination, movements that promote hatred or violence are placed at an extreme level and seek to impose their views on others. In particular, they attract vulnerable individuals who are experiencing socio-economic difficulties, who need reassurance in times of major societal changes, or who have had traumatic experiences.

Ideas of superiority that are used to justify wrongdoing can be based on any ideology, cultural specificity, or physical characteristic.

The testimony of Christian Picciolini, former leader of a North American neo-Nazi group, gives an idea of the processes of radicalisation and de-radicalisation.

[55] Christian Picciolini. "My descent into the neo-Nazi movement in America and how I came out of it". https://www.ted.com/talks/christian_picciolini_my_descent_into_america_s_neo_nazi_movement_and_how_i_g ot_out (video, duration 20:18, in English)

Knowledge of history is of paramount importance, especially nowadays.

First of all because forgetting the past means taking the risk of repeating its mistakes.

Secondly, it makes us aware that sustainable development only seems possible through mutual respect and understanding, supported by socio-economic projects.

6) Development of the brain and intellectual capacities

6.1) A body adapting to its environment

We are now approaching the conclusion. But before that, it seems useful to pay a little more attention to cognitive development and its effects, especially on intellectual capacities and behaviour.

The human being is not an immutable object that appears at birth, but a living organism that builds and rebuilds itself throughout life:
1. On the *physical* level, in that the oxygen and nutrients it consumes are used to "form, maintain and regenerate" the billions of cells, bone structure and energy reserves that make up the bulk of its body;
2. On the *intellectual* level, in that he acquires various knowledge and skills (to learn to grasp objects, to walk upright, to communicate in one or more languages, to read, to write, to count, to calculate, to structure his thoughts, to analyse his context, to cook, to handle tools, etc.) according to his personal journey;
3. On the *psychological* level, in that his behaviour is strongly influenced by the sum of his interactions with his living environment.

The human body possesses different biological mechanisms which allow it, to a certain extent, to adapt constantly to its environment and daily activities.
The skin of an individual regularly exposed to the sun, for example, tends to turn brown to strengthen itself, thanks to the production of melanin.
Likewise, an individual with a physically demanding lifestyle or who regularly does sports will trigger biological mechanisms that will strengthen the muscles that are used.
Surprisingly enough, the brain also adapts to daily cognitive activities. Learning one or more "mother tongues" is a well-known example. It is the result of the unconscious development of cerebral faculties, linked to the acquisition of language skills, at an early age.
[14] YaleCourses - YouTube Channel, Yale University. "Introduction to Psychology - 6. How do we communicate?".
https://youtu.be/Uf9tlbMckS0 (video, duration 56:30, in English)

Recent technological advances in the field of functional MRIs and neuroscience research have highlighted the fact that the brain is not an immutable organ whose main characteristics are predetermined at birth. Rather, it possesses a certain plasticity, which offers possibilities for development throughout life, depending on interactions with the external environment. It is also this plasticity which allows the accumulation of knowledge, the development of skills, the adaptation to different lifestyles, or which can be the cause of burn-out or behavioural changes following exposure to an intense or prolonged stressful situation.

Just as muscle mass adapts, by atrophying or developing, according to physical habits, so the brain adapts in part according to intellectual activities. This capacity can be regressive or progressive.

6.2) Examples of regressive adaptation

We sometimes hear that stress can lead to foolish, irresponsible or violent actions. Or that it can cause "memory lapses". To be more precise, we could add that in a situation of potential danger or sudden misunderstanding, the body produces a set of hormones (notably adrenaline and cortisol). It acts instantaneously by weakening advanced intellectual faculties, such as reasoning, to be able to reinforce the primary functions more useful for survival, such as those related to attention and motor skills.

These mechanisms help to prepare oneself in the face of a possible threat. They are said to be part of the survival instinct, which enabled our ancestors to cope with the dangers that were omnipresent in nature for thousands of years.

In our contemporary society, which is characterised by numerous interactions, these unconscious automatisms are most often activated "by mistake". They can sometimes have disastrous consequences, which should encourage us to understand them in order to better control them and improve our daily lives.

Following a traumatic experience, in a context of high intensity or prolonged stress for example, an abnormal production of hormones attacks the brain, destroying a significant number of neurons and neuronal connections. This situation can cause a disturbance of brain faculties, and be at the origin of mental disorders such as anxiety attacks, prolonged depression, burn out, personality changes, and other disorders qualified as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In some cases, the brain even atrophies. This leads to harmful effects such as great difficulties in concentration and discernment, loss of reference points leading to irrational or violent behaviour, or a form of psychological suffering.

The case of people who have become less emotionally sensitive (who react weakly to abject situations) is an example of stress-related deterioration of cognitive functions. Indeed, most of the time, it is exposure to traumatic events that has led to the destruction of neurons, and a disruption of the cerebral amygdala and hypothalamus, both of which are responsible for managing emotions.

[15] Madhumita Murgia, Andrew Zimbelman. "How does stress affect the brain?".
https://youtu.be/WuyPuH9ojCE (video, duration 4:16, in English)
[16] American Psychological Association. "How does stress affect your health?".
https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-facts (text, in English)
[17] The Center for Studies on Human Stress. "Stress".
https://humanstress.ca/stress (text, in English and French)

More generally, when an individual or a group of individuals have great difficulty adapting to their environment or lifestyle, stress-related mechanisms are prolonged over time. They lead to a progressive limitation of the advanced cerebral faculties which are the most costly in terms of energy and time.

In a way, these self-destructive mechanisms seem to lead to regressive, uncontrolled adaptation, which seeks a new balance at a lower level of complexity in order to adapt to persistent conditions of instability. They can also be seen as a signal that should encourage additional efforts, especially intellectual ones, to surpass oneself and overcome the difficulties encountered.

In addition to the hormones produced by the body, external substances such as alcohol and drugs also temporarily affect the functioning of the brain. They can impair cognitive abilities, cause behavioural changes and, in certain contexts, create dependency which leads to a vicious circle.

6.3) Examples of progressive adaptation

Looking at history, it may be difficult to realise that the brain development capacities of human beings have been similar for thousands of years. It is above all the transmission and accumulation of knowledge over the centuries that have favoured its intellectual development, and which has led to remarkable advances such as the Phoenician alphabet, Chinese paper, Indian decimal numeration, algorithmics from Baghdad, typographic printing from Mainz, the steam engine, electronics, and space exploration.

An individual's intellectual abilities are developed through the acquisition of knowledge and skills, a healthy and varied diet, and intellectual exercises such as meditation, and physical exercises such as walking.
Learning a language, for example, helps to develop neural connections between different parts of the brain (those related to memory, attention, hearing, speech, etc.). These new connections then offer facilities for any other activity that calls on the same faculties.

The work in neuroscience conducted by internationally renowned expert Helen Neville, former director of the *Brain Development Lab* at the University of Oregon, has, among other things, highlighted the significant impact that the environment and accumulated personal experiences have on the development of the brain and cognitive functions.
[19] Helen Neville, Association for Psychological Science. "Brain Development and Neuroplasticity".
https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/brain-development-and-neuroplasticity (video, duration 50:13, in English)

Contrary to some popular beliefs, individual genetic factors play a generally minor role in the development of intellectual capacity and personality. In our modern society, these factors are usually insignificant compared to the importance of accumulated personal experiences and their influence on brain plasticity.
A well-known example of aberrations is the common belief that women's genetic characteristics make them less gifted in mathematics. These are of course absurdities, these specificities do not have a significant influence on the learning of mathematics. Rather, it is the clichés that some people convey that pose obstacles, represent a demotivating factor, and can thus have a negative impact on this.
It seems clear that what has a major influence on cognitive faculties is, on the one hand, the learning environment and, on the other hand, the way in which society discriminates or treats individuals differently according to certain physical, cultural or social characteristics.
For example, a teacher who claims that students with certain characteristics perform less well will end up creating a sense of inequity, and an additional source of stress and demotivation. This could indeed lead to poorer results, one can speak of self-fulfilling prophecy in this case.

As regards the biological aspect of so-called "emotions" (fear, anger, sadness, joy, etc.), we can add that they seem to be the result of responses triggered by the brain to anticipate or help cope with a situation. These responses would be specific to an individual based on past personal experiences. They would be responsible for these negative or positive "sensations", of varying intensity, which are emotions.
[20] C'est pas sorcier. "Joy, fear, sadness, anger... Emotions!".
https://youtu.be/pyeXvjCVfy8 (video, duration 26:14, in French)
[21] Alan Watkins. "Why you feel what you feel".
https://youtu.be/h-rRgpPbR5w (video, duration 20:18, in English with English subtitles)

The human being is born with the capacity to acquire and develop all kinds of skills, linguistic, scientific, artistic, etc.

We know, for example, that a child is capable of learning several languages – from French to Japanese – simply by exposing himself to an environment where they are spoken. In Belgium, for example, a child attending an English-speaking school, who speaks to his father in Dutch and to his mother in French, will naturally develop neural networks for learning the pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar of three idioms.

The passage of time gives the brain a more mature structure and gradually reduces this exceptional starting potential. In return, it allows the development of more advanced cognitive functions, such as the capacity for reasoning and synthesis.

Cumulative personal experiences also mean that, throughout life, learning capacities are permanently weakened or strengthened depending on the activities.

The potential for intellectual development appears to be undetermined at birth, and evolves according to the individual's life course. It can progressively reinforce one or the other extreme, from the harmful potential of an individual who has become insensitive and destructive because of an extremely neglectful environment or traumatic events... to the beneficial potential of a creative and humanistic individual who has had the opportunity to develop the best in human nature.

It is up to society as a whole to improve its environment so that each citizen can better cope with personal difficulties and have the opportunity to grow in a sustainable environment.

7) Conclusion

As far as Belgium is concerned, we can start by providing answers to certain regional difficulties by looking at this question, for example:

What would you think of the following situations, and what positive and constructive solutions could you propose?

A. Imagine yourself in the situation of a Dutch-speaking person in the municipality of Kraainem (located in Flanders, a Dutch-speaking region). You have regularly heard communitarian speeches from people close to you who have experienced the francisation of Brussels; this francisation was due, among other things, to the discrimination against Dutch-speakers, on the labour market, for example.
You see more and more unilingual French-speakers settling in your neighbourhood, including the managers of the nearest shops who do not speak Dutch at all.

B. Imagine yourself in the situation of a French-speaking person in the municipality of Ixelles, in the Brussels region. You were educated in a school where you were regularly targeted by jokes that associated you with terrorism, poverty and all kinds of crimes. These associations were directly linked to your name or your religious beliefs, with a cultural reference smeared by the army's war propaganda and exploited by the media in the worst contexts.
You find it difficult to find work in a developed city, but where the labour market is saturated and discrimination on the basis of the national language spoken and origins is common.

C. Imagine yourself in the situation of a resident of Liège. You worked in the steel industry for about ten years before you lost your job in this declining local industry.
After months of searching, you no longer know in which field it is still possible to invest and train yourself to improve your chances of finding a stable job.

You can share your answers and comments via the following links:

– Via the website: www.GrandBrussel.eu
– Via the email address: contact@GrandBrussel.eu

Let us now close this essay by reviewing certain fundamental aspects of the evolution of human societies.

The complexity of human societies tends to increase over time. It is the result of population growth, the adoption of new technologies, the development of public services (administration, education, public transport…), etc.

When a society's capacities are no longer able to manage this complexity, the "jolts" multiply and intensify. They may be caused by an impoverishment of the population following upheavals in the labour market, by the aggravation of security problems due to a lack of transparent control of military and civilian security services, and by various dysfunctions in the state apparatus.

This situation is prompting a growing number of citizens to question the reasons for this deterioration, and to mobilise.

Some of them are satisfied with reductive speeches, accompanied by provocations, such as:
– "It's because of" the Jews, the Muslims, the Protestants...;
– "It's the fault" of the French speakers, the Dutch speakers, the English speakers...;
– Or again, it is the most deprived or the most fortunate who would be responsible for all the evils.

Others rather take a step back from the stereotypes that led to the worst disasters of the past. They focus on understanding and improving the societal model by, for example, going through the following points.

1. A contextualisation of the difficulties encountered, avoiding prejudices (both those with negative and those with positive connotations) and integrating differences in points of view, along the lines of the preface and the introductory chapter of the complete book *"Une histoire belge... de Bruxelles à Grand Brussel"* ("A Belgian story... from Brussels to Grand Brussel").

2. An adaptation of teaching and continuing education to enhance the intellectual development of citizens (with regard to critical thinking, language skills, stress and emotion management, use of innovations, etc.), so that they can respond to the needs of a modern, multilingual and plural society.
This point is supported in the second chapter "Individual, Learning and Critical Thinking".

3. Raising awareness among the population of the importance of adopting more responsible consumption behaviour, combating discrimination, and responding effectively to socio-economic change.
These elements are taken up in the third chapter "Society, Lack of Dialogue and Community Tensions", and the fourth chapter "Security, Measures that threaten Human Rights and the Rule of Law".

4. An expansion of positive international partnerships, built on the universal foundation of human rights, to address global challenges.
The fifth chapter "International Partnerships, Defending Human Dignity" addresses this need.

5. <u>The development of adequate solutions to address any difficulties, with respect, transparency and intelligence.</u>

It seems essential to overcome the tensions that weaken us all in order to move forward and build a better future, in the interest of present and future generations.

Humanity has the choice to continue its adventure, by rushing down a downward slope marked by regression, opacity and fatalism... or by reorienting itself towards an upward slope characterised by progress, transparency and responsibility.

<div align="center">

Unity in respect is strength
Eendracht met respect maakt macht
L'Union dans le respect fait la force
Einigkeit mit Respekt macht stark

</div>

Appendixes

Appendix I: Humanistic, transparent and progressist resilience

In particular, it seems essential to establish **"a humanistic, transparent and progressist resilience plan"** during this decade in order to address major societal challenges.

This would allow us to be better prepared for the current escalation of global crises, which are multiplying in particular in the following areas:
1. economy;
2. security;
3. health;
4. technology;
5. climate.

The following points illustrate key elements of such a humanistic, transparent and progressive resilience plan.

A) Education

1. Strengthen critical thinking by demystifying 'cognitive biases' (such as confirmation bias, cognitive dissonance, and overconfidence), encouraging the understanding of differing points of view, and learning to better manage stress and emotions.

2. Include more practical hands-on activities in the school curriculum, for example by organising a half-day workshop per week (in science, economics or IT). This could include vegetable garden management, styling activities, or the virtual design of a passive and autonomous house.

3. Encourage the emergence of a plurilingual society through partial language immersion at an early age, including at least 6 hours per week (approximately 20%) in a second national language, starting in primary education, as language learning is "natural" at a young age.
The main public media could also be involved in this process. They could, for example, offer a variety of content including translations into national languages (notably, international documentaries, series and films for which subtitles and dubbing are available).

4. Set up a federal platform for plurilingual education in order to promote dialogue and facilitate the development of educational projects between schools of the three national language communities, such as:
– Twinning;
– Partnerships;
– Information exchanges.

5. Invite more frequently actors in public life to present their activities via information sessions, possibly optional (once a week during the lunch break for example). These interventions could be planned with:
– Local politicians;
– Non-profit organisations (such as *the Red Cross*, *Amnesty*, *Oxfam*, community centres, etc.);

– Private companies.

B) Economy

1. Encourage a local and sustainable consumption – and therefore production – of goods and services by means of transparent "ethical labels".
The addition of a colour marker on goods sold (clothing, electronic devices and others), and on the service provision form (banking services, internet access provision, etc.) is an example that would go in this direction. This colour marker could be:
– **Red**, if respect for workers' rights is uncertain;
– **Yellow**, if basic workers' rights are respected (i.e. less than 50 hours work per week, in decent conditions, etc.);
– **Green**, if workers' rights and high environmental standards are respected.

2. Redevelop "the industries that are essential to our society" in order to maintain know-how essential to our primary needs, and to maintain a strategic production capacity to face potential acute crises.
This objective could be achieved in partnership with our European neighbours, and would include areas such as:
– Agriculture, including the use of new methods such as hydroponics and bioponics, and focusing on the production of fruit and vegetables for local consumption (instead of continuing to produce and export thousands of tonnes of pears and potatoes, as is the case today);
– Essential medical equipment, especially masks, disinfectant, and common medicines;
– Sustainable construction, including passive and autonomous houses, three-dimensional building printing, etc;
– Digital with the manufacture of electronic components, as well as hosting and support for the servers of our most sensitive companies (infrastructures, power stations, banks, etc.);
– The textile industry.

The Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic has highlighted:
– On the one hand, the deficiencies resulting from the thoughtless deindustrialisation of our economy over the last 50 years;
– On the other hand, the need to remedy this situation rapidly by starting to revive and strengthen the industries that are essential to our daily lives.

3. Promote continuing education, for example, by making the public offer more accessible to employed workers, also by means of:
– One day of training per month, in freely chosen areas;
– Extending the current possibilities by organising optional short training courses within companies during lunchtime (in particular, for language courses)

4. Transparent and strict control of the development and use of disruptive technologies
characterised by a degree of danger unique in the known history of humanity, such as:
– Dynamic statistical models generally called "artificial intelligence";
– Wireless networks harmful to organisms, such as 5G networks;
– Autonomous robots;
– Nanotechnology;
– Three-dimensional printing (including bioprinting).

5. Align most tax incentives with "long-term and sustainable" investment objectives, especially with regard to:
– Water and energy saving, both for households and businesses;
– Passive housing construction, with a high degree of autonomy;
– The development of new ecological neighbourhoods and villages in the vicinity of existing roads and railways.

C) Security

1. Rid our media of the hateful lies of the fascist "pseudo-democratic" war propaganda.

2. Immediately repatriate the soldiers who take part in crimes against humanity, and who devastate foreign territories by arming criminals, in order to install miserable and unstable dictatorships; dictatorships that send back to us the socio-economic and security problems thus created. This applies in particular to the ill-considered interventions of the last two decades in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya and Mali.

3. Publicly investigate the current shortcomings in the lack of transparent oversight and training in the military and civilian security services in order to:
– Put an end to the worst totalitarian excesses that are on the rise;
– Shed light on the abuses and crimes committed in recent years.

4. Condemn the fascist traitors who entertain themselves:
– By spreading hateful lies, especially based on religious differences (like the devious nonsense of the chaotic Nazi army, such as "They are evil because they give God another name", in order to encourage mistrust and mischief targeting innocent civilians);
– By participating in new, lost colonial wars with no real end and no coherent objective, such as participating in the "search for imaginary weapons of mass destruction in Iraq", and their alleged export of democracy by bombing civilian populations while arming unstable dictatorships.

It seems essential to deconstruct Nazi war propaganda, "crudely recycled" by adding "Muslim" instead of "Jew".
Let us start by mentioning the investigations by the government of the United States of America. In particular, these investigations have extensively detailed the absurd lies still propagated by some military officials; individuals who seek only to embellish their war crimes and continue their two decades of military failures.
These include:
– The official reports of the *"Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction - Lessons Learned Program"*;
– The *"Afghanistan Papers"* published by *The Washington Post*.

[91] SIGAR. "SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program and Lessons from the Long War, Remarks of John F. Sopko". https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/speeches/SIGAR_POGO_Speech_2020-11-31.pdf (text, in English)
[92] The Washington Post. "Afghanistan Papers, Record of Meeting with LTG Michael T. Flynn". https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/documents-database/?document=flynn_michael_ll_11102015 (text, in English)

While millions of American and European citizens fall into poverty every year, these "pseudo-democratic terrorists" still seek to embezzle thousands of billions of euros of public funds in order to:

– Stuff the military industry to the point of indigestion;

– Entertain themselves by manipulating, terrorising and massacring increasing numbers of innocent civilians in ever larger territories... until they turn against the interests and security of their own citizens.

Like the Nazis in the 1930s, it is through incompetence and criminal malice that these traitors launch new endless wars and lose them all. Their disinformation campaign only serves to spread confusion and hatred so that they can continue their lost conflicts and provoke new ones, at the expense of all. The hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties and the tens of millions of refugees do not seem to affect their sickening addiction to senseless and lost wars. Moreover, these new fascist losers in our military and civilian security services are now turning against our population. They are also testing new, invasive and flawed technologies to monitor, manipulate and harass ordinary citizens, so they need to be neutralised and severely condemned.

5. Complementary military training with useful knowledge of a more general nature, for example, in building self-sustaining villages away from conflict zones and in developing regional resources.

The skills acquired would be of considerable use, on the one hand, to participate more actively in the economic recovery of fragile regions and, on the other hand, to facilitate a return to civilian life after deployment.

These points are developed in detail in the complete book **"Une histoire belge... de Bruxelles à Grand Brussel".** *They are also explained (in French, Dutch, German and English) on the website:* **www.GrandBrussel.eu**.

Humanistic, transparent and progressist resilience

Education

1. Development of critical thinking skills

2. Inclusion of more concrete practical activities

3. Partial language immersion in a second national language

4. Dialogue between national language communities

5. Invitation of actors in public life

Economy

1. Responsible consumption

2. Industrial redevelopment in key areas

3. Revaluation of continuing education

4. Strict control of high-risk technologies

5. Aligning tax incentives with sustainable objectives

Security

1. Cleaning up our media

2. Repatriation of soldiers

3. Public enquiry

4. Conviction of those responsible for abuses and crimes

5. Complementary training

Chère Madame,
Cher Monsieur,

J'espère que vous vous portez bien en ces temps particuliers, et que vous n'avez pas été touché par les inondations récentes.

En ce qui me concerne, mon appartement se situait au rez-de-chaussée dans le centre de Pepinster, dans la rue Pepin (à une centaine de mètres de la Vesdre). Il a été entièrement inondé par deux mètres d'eau lors des inondations qui ont débuté le mercredi 14 juillet 2021.

1) Contexte

J'écris ces lignes, non pas pour ajouter un énième témoignage inhabituel, mais bien pour relayer quelques brèves observations qui me semblent pertinentes. Je les formule afin de mieux comprendre la situation vécue par certains résidents de Pepinster, tout en espérant encourager le développement de réponses plus adéquates pour faire face à ce genre de désastre dans le futur (et ainsi limiter le nombre de victimes, et le nombre d'opérations risquées pour les services de secours et les volontaires).

2) Observations concernant les inondations à Pepinster

Les résidents du centre de Pepinster ont singulièrement été surpris par cette catastrophe, comme vous le réaliserez en lisant les observations suivantes :

- **Mercredi 14/07/2021 (J), « La prise de conscience d'une catastrophe »**

<u>Au cours de la matinée</u>

1. À cause de précipitations abondantes depuis plusieurs jours, les rivières de la Vesdre et de la Hoëgne (qui se rejoignent à Pepinster) sortent de leurs lits.

2. Cependant, aucune alerte n'est émise, ni par les autorités locales ni par les principaux médias. Cela est d'autant plus étonnant que les bâtiments communaux et un commissariat de police sont situés dans le centre-ville. Il semble important d'insister sur le fait qu'aucune alarme, ni même sirène de voiture de police, n'a alerté la population du centre-ville alors qu'une catastrophe majeure avait déjà commencé ; cette catastrophe semblant pourtant prévisible au vu des précipitations abondantes de ces dernières semaines qui ont fait monter les cours d'eau à des niveaux exceptionnellement hauts, et qui ont quasiment saturé les barrages (de La Helle, d'Eupen et de La Gileppe) alimentant la Vesdre.

Vers midi

3. Une panne générale de courant touche Pepinster, et le réseau de téléphonie mobile est fortement perturbé ; les connexions à internet, les appels et l'envoi de message posent de plus en plus de problèmes.

4. Préoccupés par le remue-ménage qui se trame dans la rue, des résidents sortent de chez eux et sont surpris par une crue qui se rapproche inévitablement de leurs habitations.

5. À ce moment-là, aucune alerte n'est encore émise par les autorités locales. Certains résidents considèrent à tort que l'absence d'alerte officielle et de services de secours signifie que la situation n'est pas critique.

Au cours de l'après-midi

6. Le centre de Pepinster est entièrement inondé par la Vesdre et la Hoëgne. Surprenant tout le monde en quelques heures, l'eau monte à plus d'une cinquantaine de centimètres dans de nombreuses habitations du centre-ville.

7. Des résidents demandent (ou se voient offrir) l'hospitalité et l'aide de leurs voisins. Certains essayent de mettre à l'abri les objets de valeur présents au rez-de-chaussée de leurs bâtiments.

8. La distribution d'électricité et de gaz semble interrompue dans tout le quartier. L'eau du robinet est en revanche toujours disponible ; mais elle est peut-être non potable à cause de l'arrêt de dispositifs électriques ou d'une possible contamination par les inondations.
Des rumeurs d'une prochaine montée des eaux circulent de fenêtre en fenêtre ; la saturation du barrage d'Eupen ou de celui de La Gileppe en serait la cause.

9. Des sauveteurs en tracteur commencent à passer devant les habitations inondées, et proposent d'évacuer les résidents en difficulté. La plupart des résidents ne pouvant pas être évacués dans cette situation, ils doivent se réfugier aux étages supérieurs de leurs bâtiments.

Au cours de la soirée

10. Des voisins utilisent le reste de la batterie de leurs téléphones portables pour essayer de comprendre cette catastrophe qui touche aussi d'autres villes de la région. Certains tentent de passer des appels ou d'envoyer des messages (souvent en vain), tandis que d'autres écoutent les bulletins d'information à la radio ; à noter que « la grande majorité de ces prétendus bulletins d'information » débordent de verbiages souvent inutiles et sans aucune structure, mettant encore plus l'accent sur le superflu ou le sensationnel en ce moment de crise... au lieu de fournir les informations indispensables qui permettraient de saisir la situation actuelle ou de trouver des solutions pour les personnes en difficulté.

11. Les rumeurs sur une augmentation dangereuse du débit de l'un des barrages (probablement celui d'Eupen) se confirment.
Dans le brouhaha de la plupart des bulletins d'information, quelques rares éléments pertinents sont mentionnés, comme la saturation de barrages qui pourraient déborder si les précipitations se poursuivaient. En cas d'urgence, il est aussi conseillé aux résidents touchés d'appeler les services de secours pour être évacués, ou de monter aux étages supérieurs des bâtiments. La gravité de la situation se précise avec la destruction de plusieurs maisons le long de la Vesdre, la disparition de concitoyens, et la conduite d'opérations de sauvetage périlleuses.

- **Jeudi 15/07/2021 (J+1), « L'état d'alerte »**

Au cours de la nuit

1. Des résidents restent éveillés à proximité de leurs fenêtres. Éclairés par des bougies, une lampe de poche à la main, ils scrutent régulièrement la crue. Ils se préparent à monter aux derniers étages de leurs bâtiments ou à devoir évacuer les lieux à tout moment.

2. La crue se poursuit, et l'eau monte à environ deux mètres de hauteur dans les habitations du centre-ville.

3. Soudainement en pleine nuit, le bruit et le flash d'une explosion font sursauter de nombreuses personnes. Cela semble provenir du poste haute tension de Pepinster, qui est situé à proximité de la Vesdre et qui a probablement explosé à cause de la montée des eaux.

Au cours de la matinée

4. L'eau se stabilise à environ deux mètres, et les précipitations s'affaiblissent.
L'espoir est de mise, malgré les principales rues du centre-ville qui se sont transformées en rivières. Le courant de ces rivières (relativement faible dans la rue Pepin) emporte entre autres des branches, des meubles, des pneus et des produits du supermarché du centre-ville. Des odeurs d'égout et de mazout flottent dans l'air.

5. Les sauveteurs en tracteur et en bateau poursuivent l'évacuation de résidents. Plusieurs personnes en difficulté semblent cependant hésiter à partir, n'ayant qu'une vague idée de l'étendue du désastre et ne sachant pas où ils pourront (ou devront) aller une fois évacuées.

6. Les bulletins d'information à la radio annoncent la probable fin des intempéries, et une décrue. Il est néanmoins conseillé d'être vigilant, car une aggravation de la situation reste possible dans la journée.

Au cours de l'après-midi

7. La décrue attendue se confirme à Pepinster.

- **Vendredi 16/07/2021 (J+2), « Une sortie de crise marquée par un soutien inattendu »**

Au cours de la matinée

1. La décrue se poursuit. L'eau redescend à environ une vingtaine de centimètres dans le centre-ville.

2. La plupart des résidents restent chez eux. De petits débris sont encore emportés par le courant et des plaques d'égout ont probablement été déplacées, il semble donc plus approprié d'éviter de sortir pour le moment, si sortir n'est pas indispensable.

3. Le bâtiment de la gare de Pepinster (qui se trouve un peu plus en hauteur que le centre-ville) a été épargné par les intempéries. Une conseillère communale et d'autres bénévoles locaux y ont déjà improvisé une collecte de nourriture, et une distribution de repas chauds préparés sur place à l'aide d'une bonbonne de gaz. Bon nombre de résidents ne sont pas encore au courant de cette initiative personnelle louable qui aidera des centaines de personnes les jours suivants.

4. Quelques volontaires inattendus commencent à arriver prudemment à Pepinster. Ils passent devant les habitations et proposent leur aide, entre autres pour évacuer des résidents et apporter des vivres. De manière surprenante, les deux premiers volontaires non locaux à offrir leur aide dans la rue Pepin (encore inondée) étaient néerlandophones, et ils avaient traversé tout le pays à l'aube sans savoir quelles routes de la région étaient encore praticables pour se rendre à Pepinster.

Au cours de l'après-midi

5. L'eau continue de se retirer, il n'en reste plus que quelques centimètres dans le centre-ville.

6. Le réseau de téléphonie mobile est progressivement rétabli. Cela permet aux résidents de Pepinster de communiquer avec leurs proches, de s'informer, et de préparer leurs possibles évacuations vers « un lieu sûr connu ».

7. De plus en plus de résidents profitent de l'accalmie pour quitter leurs habitations devenues insalubres, et pour se mettre à l'abri le temps que la situation se clarifie.

8. Certains voisins conseillent de contacter les compagnies d'assurance afin d'être indemnisé rapidement pour les dégâts matériels et de trouver une solution temporaire pour se reloger. Cependant, à l'exception d'une compagnie, qui a temporairement installé une sorte de conteneur aménagé sur place, la plupart des compagnies d'assurance sont difficilement joignables en ce début de période de crise ; en effet, en appelant l'un des principaux assureurs du pays, l'on ne peut que constater que le temps d'attente est estimé à plus d'une heure (un temps d'attente irréaliste vu le réseau de téléphonie mobile encore instable, et l'absence d'électricité pour recharger les batteries de téléphone). Ici et là, on entend d'autres conseils plus ou moins avisés, comme prendre des photos des dégâts matériels avant tout nettoyage, envoyer un email à son assureur pour trouver un logement temporaire, sortir de la ville en passant par telle ou telle route pour pouvoir recharger les batteries de téléphone et avoir accès à un réseau de téléphonie mobile plus stable, etc.

9. Quant à la recherche d'un nouveau logement pour les résidents durement touchés, aucune information claire n'est malheureusement disponible. De nombreuses personnes bienveillantes postent diverses annonces sur des sites internet et des numéros de téléphone sont échangés… mais l'accès encore instable au réseau de téléphonie mobile, l'abondance d'informations incertaines, et surtout l'absence d'un centre d'information sur place rendent la recherche d'un logement particulièrement décourageante dans ces circonstances.

10. Des services de secours autrichiens sont en attente à l'extérieur du centre-ville, après avoir apporté leur soutien dans d'autres localités la veille. Ils repartiront quelques heures plus tard, l'urgence semblant être passée.

- **Samedi 17/07/2021 (J+3), « Le début d'un rétablissement difficile »**

1. L'eau se retire entièrement du centre-ville. Elle laisse derrière elle de la boue et toutes sortes de déchets un peu partout.

2. Avec le matériel approprié, des pompiers et des particuliers s'attellent à vider l'eau des caves inondées, tandis que d'innombrables déblayeurs commencent à récupérer les déchets qui jonchent les rues.

3. Les résidents s'entraident pour retirer la boue des habitations et sortir le mobilier endommagé. En une journée, des tonnes de boue et de déchets sont entreposées le long de plusieurs kilomètres de voies publiques.

4. Des centaines de volontaires des environs et du reste du pays continuent d'arriver pour la distribution de nourriture, et pour le nettoyage des bâtiments sinistrés.

5. Un stand improvisé et un foodtruck participent aussi à la distribution de nourriture, en offrant des sandwichs chauds sur la principale artère du centre-ville.

6. Quelques cortèges accompagnant des responsables politiques apparaissent de temps en temps. En outre, parmi les responsables politiques venus constater l'ampleur de la catastrophe se trouvent le Premier ministre, la ministre de l'Intérieur et la présidente de la Commission européenne. Les promesses d'aides à la reconstruction se multiplient, tandis que des enquêtes devraient être menées pour comprendre les dysfonctionnements qui ont aggravé la situation ; et ainsi, favoriser une possible amélioration des services publics concernés.

7. Des dégâts matériels importants sont visibles, tels que des murs et des bâtiments arrachés par le courant le long de la Vesdre, ainsi que des véhicules entassés contre des façades. Mais les précipitations se sont arrêtées, et le soleil devrait être de retour. La situation pourrait donc s'améliorer les jours suivants ; notamment grâce à l'aide et au soutien moral venant de tout le pays (et faisant fi de préjugés liés à une méconnaissance de certaines différences humaines superficielles, d'ordre linguistique ou autre).

8. Les dégâts psychologiques sont quant à eux plus difficiles à surmonter pour certains résidents, cela demande parfois des efforts surhumains sans un soutien personnel approprié.

- **Mercredi 28/07/2021 (J+14), « 2 semaines après les inondations »**

1. Les bâtiments situés à plus de deux mètres de hauteur par rapport aux berges de la Vesdre et de la Hoëgne sont restés intacts.

2. La plupart des rues et bâtiments inondés semblent avoir été vidés de la boue et du mobilier endommagé.

3. Des volontaires distribuent toujours des repas chauds aux résidents qui ont pu rester dans leurs logements et qui sont encore privés d'électricité et de gaz. Différentes langues sont parlées par ces volontaires, notamment le français, le néerlandais et l'anglais.

4. Concernant le retour graduel de l'électricité, le gestionnaire local du réseau est débordé depuis le début de cette crise qui a touché plusieurs villes. Ce sont finalement des équipes du gestionnaire de réseau électrique de Flandre « Fluvius » qui rétablissent le courant dans une partie de Pepinster, en outre dans la rue Pepin ce mercredi.

5. Le rétablissement du réseau de distribution de gaz prendra, lui, plusieurs mois, car des conduits ont été endommagés ou arrachés par les inondations.

6. La majorité des résidents évacués ont temporairement trouvé refuge chez des proches, chez des inconnus bienveillants ou encore dans des chambres d'hôtel. Certains ont pu trouver un nouveau logement rapidement malgré les circonstances particulières.

7. Les compagnies d'assurance ont déjà indemnisé en partie certains dommages matériels. Plusieurs résidents touchés par les inondations ont reçu des avances (par exemple, une avance de

2.500 € par défaut est mentionnée par des locataires d'appartement sinistré). D'autres ont déjà perçu l'entièreté des dédommagements (les dossiers de sinistre les plus simples ou complets probablement).

8. Au sujet des transports :
- Sur la route nationale en direction de Verviers, des policiers filtrent le trafic et laissent passer principalement les services de secours et de déblaiement, ainsi que les riverains et leurs proches. Quant à la route nationale en direction de Liège, elle reste impraticable à cause de ponts et de tronçons fortement endommagés.
- Certaines lignes de bus sont déjà rétablies, mais la circulation des trains restera interrompue pendant plusieurs semaines supplémentaires.

9. Divers débris, des voitures sinistrées et des façades détruites sont encore visibles en parcourant les rues du centre-ville. Des mois seront nécessaires pour se relever progressivement de ce désastre.

Remarque : Il est opportun d'ajouter que ces différentes observations ne devraient pas être considérées comme des descriptions parfaites. Bien que permettant de mieux appréhender certains éléments évoqués, elles résultent d'un angle de vue particulier malgré les efforts fournis pour les rendre davantage objectives et concises. Elles n'ont pour seul objet que d'aider à comprendre certaines difficultés et défaillances rencontrées, afin de favoriser une réponse plus appropriée à de possibles crises comparables.

3) Conclusion

Quelles leçons pourrait-on entre autres tirer de ces observations ?

En lisant ces passages, on peut vraisemblablement prendre conscience que <u>les trois points ci-dessous devraient être améliorés en priorité</u>, en se concentrant notamment sur la transparence et l'efficacité des services publics concernés. <u>La transparence et l'efficacité semblent en effet faire partie des principaux ingrédients indispensables à tout progrès durable</u>.

1. « Une communication limpide en cas de risque élevé de catastrophe », en passant par :
- Divers canaux locaux tels que des messages audios, et des avertissements sonores ou visuels (en fonction de la gravité de la situation) ;
- Des « bulletins d'information utiles » à travers différents médias (radio, télévision, internet, SMS, etc.) ;
- Des points de contact fixes et connus sur le terrain (éventuellement dans des bâtiments existants, aisément accessibles à pied, et à l'abri de la plupart des risques météorologiques) ;

Cette communication concernerait avant tout les informations pertinentes sur l'évolution de la situation, les possibilités d'évacuation, et la localisation des centres d'accueil les plus proches. Quant aux indicateurs de « risque élevé de catastrophe », ils pourraient évidemment inclure le niveau dangereux de cours d'eau ou de réservoir de barrage, les possibles intempéries exceptionnelles (tempête violente, pluie ou neige abondante, et sécheresse continue par exemple), ou les menaces critiques sur les divers réseaux de distribution (eau, électricité, gaz et télécommunication).

À côté de cela, en dehors de période de crise, des brochures explicatives pourraient être distribuées à la population. Ces brochures incluaient des conseils supplémentaires, comme la constitution de réserve d'eau, de denrées alimentaires non périssables, et de médicaments pour au moins trois jours en cas de catastrophe (climatique, sanitaire, technologique ou autre).

2. « L'organisation d'un soutien de base dans les zones sinistrées », en outre la présence de centres d'évacuation et d'accueil locaux, un service de relogement temporaire, la distribution organisée de vivres, l'apport de soins et d'un soutien psychosocial, des équipements mobiles pour rétablir en partie le réseau de télécommunication, et des explications élémentaires sur les déclarations de sinistres pour être rapidement soutenu ou indemnisé par les compagnies d'assurance.

3. « L'adaptation des normes urbanistiques, ainsi que des matériaux et techniques de construction » :
- En évitant autant que possible de construire dans des zones à haut risque (en ce qui concerne les inondations, les tempêtes, les glissements de terrain, les feux de forêt, etc.) ;
- En rénovant intelligemment les infrastructures et les habitations endommagées, de manière à faire face plus efficacement aux risques déjà présents et à ceux prévisibles dans les décennies à venir ;
- En investissant dans de nouvelles technologies pour la construction de bâtiments plus adaptés à ces risques, notamment à l'aide de matériaux appropriés et de techniques récentes, comme « l'impression de bâtiments » (une technique arrivant à maturité).

Ici, il semble intéressant d'ouvrir une parenthèse pour souligner que l'une des voies possibles pour trouver les fonds et le personnel nécessaires serait de cesser les nouveaux investissements – publics et privés – dans « des industries clairement nuisibles à notre société ». Comme exemple, prenons la production (directe et indirecte) d'armes physiques et numériques qui est destinée à d'alarmantes dictatures, encore présentes dans le voisinage de l'Europe. Les investissements concernés par leur armement sont indubitablement nuisibles, dans le sens où ils ne génèrent des revenus singuliers que pour une ridicule fraction de pour cent de notre population, tout en engendrant des coûts humains et économiques colossaux pour l'ensemble au vu des conséquences de plus en plus néfastes (notamment un nombre croissant de problèmes socio-économiques et sécuritaires provoqués à cause de ces armes, et qui nous est en partie renvoyé).
Quelques autres industries présentent des impacts similairement dommageables pour notre société. Fermeture de cette parenthèse.

De manière générale, au sujet des trois points d'amélioration cités (Communication, Organisation et Adaptation), il ne semble pas nécessaire d'insister longuement sur le fait que cela concerne l'ensemble de notre pays. Des inondations mineures ont d'ailleurs aussi frappé plusieurs villes de la côte belge durant le mois de juillet 2021, dont Knokke-Heist. De grandes zones urbaines densément peuplées ont aussi été touchées par des inondations à l'étranger, notamment une partie de Londres au Royaume-Uni.

La fonte continue des glaciers et la montée prévisible du niveau des océans dans les décennies à venir devraient en outre aggraver le problème... ce qui met en évidence la nécessité de faire preuve de plus de discernement (entre autres en ce qui concerne certains comportements de consommation autodestructeurs), et de s'atteler au développement transparent de solutions adéquates.

Pour finir, je souhaite beaucoup de courage aux victimes directes et indirectes de ces intempéries qui ont gravement touché notre pays, mais aussi des pays voisins comme l'Allemagne.

Je souhaite aussi remercier les personnes qui ont apporté leur précieux soutien. Cela inclut spécialement les services de secours nationaux et étrangers, les services de déblaiement, les coordinateurs sur le terrain, les travailleurs communaux, et bien sûr les nombreux volontaires et donateurs ainsi que les organisations de bénévoles ; parmi ces organisations figure notamment la Croix-Rouge qui est toujours active dans plusieurs zones sinistrées, et qui fournit des efforts considérables sur le terrain tout au long de l'année, indépendamment des circonstances (et ce, malgré certains commentaires non constructifs et inutilement surmédiatisés).

Merci pour leur soutien inestimable.

Une des évacuations en tracteur dans la rue Pepin, Pepinster, le jeudi 15/07/2021 à 14h26

L'eau se retire progressivement de la rue Pepin, Pepinster, le vendredi 16/07/2021 à 10h22

La Vesdre en décrue, Pepinster, le vendredi 16/07/2021 à 11h20

Toutes vos remarques sont bien sûr les bienvenues.

Je reste à votre disposition pour toute information complémentaire et vous souhaite une agréable journée.

Cordialement | Met vriendelijke groeten | Mit freundlichen Grüßen | Kind regards

Mahdi El Khattabi
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[Le 20 août 2021]

About the author

Mahdi EL KHATTABI

Professional Career

Active for about ten years in the field of IT consultancy, for private and public companies

Studies

Certificate of upper secondary education, *Institut de la Sainte-Famille d'Helmet* in Schaerbeek
Bachelor in IT, *École Supérieure d'Informatique* in Brussels
Bachelor in Business Administration, *Institut Catholique des Hautes Études Commerciales* in Woluwe-Saint-Pierre

Languages

Mother tongue: French
Current: English
Basic knowledge: Dutch, German, Spanish, Swedish
Special interest: Literary Arabic, Standard Mandarin

Presentation

Since his childhood, Mahdi has been questioning the multiple elements that shape an individual's heterogeneous identity throughout his life. This interest is not foreign to his personal journey, characterised by:
– His place of birth in Flanders, a Dutch-speaking region;
– The French-speaking district of the Brussels region where he grew up;
– His ancestors, originally from North Africa;
– The experts from the four corners of the world with whom he has had the opportunity to work in the IT field;
– His stays abroad, including in Germany, Canada and Sweden.

In Belgium, tensions linked to stereotypes about linguistic and ethnic differences led him to take an interest in the demographic evolution of the country, its history and that of the European continent and the Mediterranean region.
This research has enabled him to gain a better understanding of the causes and consequences of these tensions and to draw parallels with similar contexts in other parts of the world.
In this book, the author brings together the fruit of his reflections on plural identity, in the light of his own experience, both in Belgium and abroad, but also thanks to information gleaned through in-depth research over the years.

This essay is an invitation to take an interest in the complexity of our world in order to discover its richness, and to develop transparent solutions for moving forward.

Table of content of the essential points of the book

Remarks on these essential points

1. These essential points are extracted from the book *"Une histoire belge… de Bruxelles à Grand Brussel"*, "A Belgian story... from Brussels to Grand Brussel".
They are available free of charge (in French, Dutch, German and English) on the website: www.GrandBrussel.eu.

2. The complete book *"Une histoire belge... de Bruxelles à Grand Brussel"*, published by Éditions du Panthéon, is available both online, on the main e-commerce websites, and at your bookstore: ISBN 978-2-7547-4582-6.

3. Minor improvements are included in this "2021.09.01-en" version of the extracts from the book. These improvements are included in the second edition of the book which will be published shortly.

4. You can contact us via the following email address for any questions or additional information: contact@GrandBrussel.eu.

5. Profits related to this book are mainly intended for:
– Its promotion and translation;
– The development of educational projects.

Knowledge, Ability and Resource
should not only be seen as facilities
for a more entertaining or comfortable life but also as
a temporary responsibility towards present and future generations

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Eendracht met respect maakt macht
L'Union dans le respect fait la force
Einigkeit mit Respekt macht stark
Unity in respect is strength