



“My Europe” Lisbon 2014



ROSIE'S INVERTED PYRAMID

The symbol was everywhere, as if watching me, whispering in my ear repeatedly "You're old, Rosie." The inverted pyramid that was suppose to remind the nation of our past failure at demographics, it was there to remind us that people like me were the reason things were the way they were.

I was old; there was no way of denying it. All the signs were there, the grey hair conformed it, the wrinkles in my face, the way I went to bed early. I never used to go to bed early. But then again, I went to bed alone now.

Europe had been a dream once, something that moved people and gave them hope of a new future; the dream was now making sure there would be someone in twenty years, that there would be a future to be taken care of. All over the 28 nations you could see the dark blue inverted pyramid over yellow posters, requesting breeders to help the union.

A breeder was someone whose only purpose was to have children, and young women were needed more than anyone else.

They all would go and live in a special neighbourhood the people had nicknamed 'the nursery', and they had all the cares someone could have: twenty-four hour medical assistance, a good house, food, entertainment, etc. All they had to do in return was stay healthy and in shape and go to the clinic once a month to try and get pregnant.

These would be their lives until they were 45 years old, around that time they were dispensed and would live in a house paid by the government with all the other breeders, so that they could grow old and die in comfort. It was not a glamorous life, but it was necessary to save the nation, not to mention Europe itself.

For years people had focused so much on career and working on a better life for themselves that they had forgotten to have children, and the result was catastrophic. It was the Europe we have now.

A Europe where 75 year olds, like myself, were not considered that old, in fact were in very good shape to work, and we had to because there were no retirement plans anymore. You either sustained yourself or the state certainly would not do it, they did not need to anyway, the less old people the better.

But I had known a different Europe. A Europe with some, not to say a lot, of problems, but a Europe that took care of its citizens. I guess now I knew a Europe trying to survive.

I could feel a headache coming so I popped another vitalin, a special pill that contained a certain combination of vitamins that allowed old people to stay healthier and work longer. All I wanted to do was go home to my dog and sit on the sofa watching movies until I fell asleep, but there was no way the damn bus would arrive.

I lived in an old neighbourhood with lots of old people that had somehow managed to stay all this long. I could not help but notice all the houses that were becoming empty, ready for the first generation of breeder children to take. It would still be a while until then, they had to go grow up and one thing they had not been able to do yet was speed human growth, but I wouldn't bet my buttons they would not try it sometime soon, there is even talk of cloning whole human beings around.

The moral value of human life seems to have gone into crisis, when human life itself was not renewing very much. I guess it was somewhat of a vicious cycle; the more scarce human life was the more ruthless would be the processes to obtain it. The bringing of new humans to the world had already been dehumanized and lost all its beauty. So why stop now?

I was the daughter of a woman and a man that loved each other so much they had wanted to create a new life together, that was more than the entire breeder children could say for themselves. And so I cannot help but wonder, how will they feel in a few years?

Will they be okay with being the product of the survival necessities of our species? Will they care that they weren't brought to earth with love?

How will this affect them? Will it affect them at all?

All the consequences of bad politics, bad decisions and egocentrism natural to the human species are now falling upon us. Question is: Are we handling them well?

Finally I could see the bus, coming through the fog, to take me home, and the posters did not bother me anymore. I just need a good night sleep. I have work tomorrow.

THE COMING STORM

Autumn 2030.

Anna Graham rowed on in her daily commute from her Greenpeace office, through old Upper Street.

High above, in the grey sky, three hover-cars dashed through the heavy fog. Whizzing and turning on his way to another party, one of the revelling drivers knocked down a row of champagne bottles, which fell down below.

'Bugger', he said, as he opened a new one.

The oak-aged litter rushed downwards into the affectionately named 'Greater Thames Swamp', also known as London. There, in the many brackish waterways that now separate the Victorian buildings, the traders peddled their wares, atop their gondolas and coracles, in the lively floating bazaar. Thick brown leaves floated lazily in the stagnant waters. In one of the dinghies, a newspaper boy cried out about the Chinese Revolution. Unannounced, one of the bottles crashed on his head. The whole street dropped dead silent. He got up again, unfazed, and the chattering resumed.

Anna caught one of the sinking bottles and shoved it in her old bag. Later that evening, her team was having a celebration, having managed to put a revolutionary environmental policy up for consideration before the European Parliament. Her trip to New Strasbourg had been scheduled for next year, due to the ongoing acid storms on the Channel.

As the rowboat turned to Pentonville Road, she looked with melancholy at the lost streets of her childhood.

Winter 2031.

Anna and Jamaal walked back to their hotel in the outskirts of New Strasbourg under heavy snowfall. They passed a statue of Europa, reduced by the acid rains to a blackened stump. Their eyes were firmly looking at the soft white ground.

Their proposal had been defeated. Despite their efforts and the clearly worsening climate, nothing seemed to goad Parliament into a decisive position. They were chased off as radicals.

That winter, like the one before, was being particularly harsh. The erratic weather led Europe to introduce rationing for the first time since World

War II. Disillusionment was at an all-time high, and whispers of riots hung in the air.

As she often did when she was sad or disappointed, Anna tugged at her coat's left breast-pocket. On it hung a bronze tulip-pin, a gift from her mother and the remains of the family's once thriving tulip plantations. Like so much else, the 2021 North Sea Storms had annihilated their farms, turning the colourful fields into brown nothingness.

Neither of the two Greenpeace delegates knew what to do next. Perhaps it was too late anyway. They arrived at the hotel, made a few phone calls, and slept. The next day they took passage to London.

Spring 2043.

Twelve years passed. Twelve years of unheeded calls. Twelve years of fire and storms and bread-riots.

As the Long Winter of 2031 showed no sign of abating, peaceful protests turned to confrontations. All-out carnage had been mostly avoided, but the world was still reeling from the shock.

Like many others, Anna and her family now lived in a small agricultural community. The extreme weather of earlier years had softened, thankfully, and the nascent settlement grew mainly rice, figs and corn in the wetland soil. Life was hard and unforgiving, but few went hungry.

The new towns and villages that dotted the landscape were by no means isolated, but the turbulent political situation made them naturally mistrustful. Raids by marauders were a reasonably common feature of life, something no one could have foreseen thirty years before.

With the afternoon sun slowly setting, Anna looked out from her porch at the growing fields. Although they had vindicated her fearful predictions, the tribulations of the past few years had been everything but joyous to her. The idealism of her youth had died, leaving, in its wake, only the harsh realities of surviving.

She fell asleep, a row of red tulips on her lap.

Summer 2072

She was frail and dying.

Anna dragged her old rocking chair as she waded through the house where she raised her children. Her long life, though ravaged by hardship, had been mostly content, seeing her community grow as the land pulled itself out from the dark abyss.

Still, in her last moments, she wondered what Humanity could have done to avoid its mistakes, its losses, its fall. As her eyes closed, a new day dawned on the fields.

6:35:00 AM, September 19th, 2015.

'BOOM-TACA-TACA-RRRRRRRRRRRRR'

(Anna's alarm rang with the subtlety of a thermonuclear bomb)

Anna was catapulted from her bed as from a long, dark nightmare. Her interview for an internship at Greenpeace was in two hours.

Though she had been doubtful of her resolve to work at Greenpeace, she woke up with an almost renewed purpose. Perhaps Humanity still had a chance at a future. Perhaps.

She got dressed, ate, and left.

X = Y: IT'S ALL ABOUT EQUALITY

There was a time, I told my daughter, when you were no more than a microscopic egg. It was with love and a little bit of luck that one of your father's cells managed to find mine and then there was life. Some call it science, others call it nature. I say it is a miracle

Scientists claim there are 50 % chances for this fusion to generate a boy or a girl. They also say it is the father who decides this, depending on the genes he conveys to the next generation. So you can blame your father for all the female drama, blame your father for the great amount of headaches attached to being a girl. But you must thank him for being part of the strongest and most influential sex.

I wish I could tell you that women have always been equal to men and that their role in society was valued and dignified. If I said so I would be lying. What I can say is that many fought hard and dedicated their lives so that their voice would be heard. And you know what? They were!

In order to prove the world they could manage simultaneously a professional and family life, many women had to juggle both parental and carer responsibilities. This was not easy as they were under a great amount of stress and pressure by men, employers and the media. Despite all these, they were able to use their skills and knowledge to perform tasks successfully. Gradually, they started to be accepted as dignified and fully capable workers and so they emerged into the workforce.

Because of their effort you can expect to earn as much as men do for the same job. Actually, chances are you will have a faster career progression. Furthermore, you are much more likely to find a leadership position and have a say in decision-making than fifteen years ago. What's more? You do not have to give up working in order to have a family. Now responsibilities are equally shared by both parents resulting in a much better father-child relationship. Likewise, women do not expect to rely on men's earnings after marriage. They are far more independent both economically and socially. This was essential for them to exercise control over their lives and make genuine choices.

I guess it must be hard for you to picture such a different reality, but you must understand these were great achievements. Some years ago, although they represented 60 % of university gra-

duates, women had a hard time trying to impose their opinion on crucial decisions. Their skills were not valued like they are now and that is the main reason why companies are becoming more and more successful. It was a matter of time until they realised they needed the best well trained workers, the majority of whom were women. As a matter of fact statistics have repeatedly shown gender equality pays off. Getting more women into the labour market and in top jobs has benefited both economy and business fields. This is also related to the fact that diversity of gender, opinions and views results in sustainable company development and higher profits.

You must be wondering the reason why it took so long for these conclusions to come out. I have asked myself the same question over and over again. I guess there are no right answers. Throughout the years many terrible mistakes have been made and gender inequality is one of them. The one thing I know is that women have always had ambitions to reach top positions and now that they have, nothing can stop them.

Despite being very enthusiastic about women empowerment I by no means support the idea that women should reverse positions with men. This would be neither fair nor healthy. In the end women and men are not similar; they have different goals in life. They must however have equal rights and opportunities in what concerns careers and work.

I am telling you all this for you to know that there is nothing you dream of that is impossible. If you work hard and put your heart in everything you do, I am sure you will accomplish great things. Just be aware that we live in a world that changes every day, so do not ever take gender equality for granted. And most important of all, don't forget that women and men benefit from working side by side so differences should never represent a barrier between both genders.

MY EUROPE – WHAT WILL BECOME OF IT?

Today, the 1st of January of 2030, Turkey has officially joined the European Union. After 25 years of endless negotiations, both the European Commission and the member states gave their endorsement to this much debated entrance. This accession is being celebrated through all of Europe. Nevertheless, not everyone is celebrating this historical moment. While some rejoice with happiness, others show deep concern upon their faces, worried about where this road of constant enlargement will lead us to.

Since the beginning, the prime goal of the European Union was to create a political, economic and social union among the countries of the European continent. However, the entry of Turkey into the European Union confronted us with a new reality. From now on, a country which is mostly situated in Asia is part of the European Union. This relocation of the economic and geographic center of the European Union raises serious concerns in many European citizens.

These citizens, out on the street today, demand answers to their several questions directed to their representatives. "What will become of Europe now?", "Will the European Union become an Euro-Asian Union?", "Will the European Union stop its continuous enlargement or will it keep this unrestricted accession of countries until it is no longer possible to sustain itself?"

Indeed, since the founding six countries back in 1957, the European Union has not stopped growing. Until 1995, nine countries entered the European Union. In 2004, and in one go, ten other countries joined the European Union. In 2014, twenty-eight countries were part of this grouping, and the number of countries has been growing steadily growing since then.

However, from 1986, for obvious geographical reasons, it was no longer possible for the European Union to keep growing west, which means that it has been growing east, towards Asia. And Asia, being a totally different continent, has a completely different culture and way of thinking when comparing with Europe. Therefore, now that the European Union has set foot on Asian territory, it is being asked how the European Union governance plans to conciliate two cultures that are so apart from each other as the European and the Asian cultures are. For this question, there are no answers. What we know, however, is that this enlargement will put in confrontation two very different cultures

and ways of life, in many subjects incompatible, as in the matter of Women's Rights, for instance. Anyhow, as I said before, there are no specific answers to this question yet.

Another question ("Will this enlargement ever come to an end?"), has different answers, but these answers and corresponding interests are divergent. Some say that the European Union should simply stop growing. While others claim that, if this happens, the Inclusion Principle, one of the basic principles of the European Union, will be questioned. Ideally, this principle, in absolute terms, would mean that everyone would be welcomed to join. The doubt is whether this principle should be followed without exceptions, recognizing diversity as an asset for the Union or rather if it will mean the end of that same Union.

Evidently, from an Economy stand point, this enlargement brings mostly advantages. The adding of countries to the European Union ranks increases its internal market, making it grow in economic size and scale, allowing it to compete externally with the biggest economic giants in the world, such as the USA and China. Considering this, the doubts that the European Union has to face seem a small price to pay for the improvement of all European citizens' well-being.

Despite all this, the question that really concerns most of the population is the cultural one, the changes that the European Union will have to face with the entrance of a new way of thinking and a completely different philosophy of life than the one we are used to in it, without mentioning the enlargement itself (keeping the accession rate like it is will eventually lead to the end of the European Union and the birth of an Euro-Asian Union). Briefly, on this historical day, while some celebrate with strawberries and champagne, others worry about the possibility of a dark future for the European Union.

However, most people (myself included) still believe that the European Union will keep safeguarding the interests of its citizens, in favor of the peace and harmony between the different nations of the continent, founding ideal, as valid in 1957 as it is today. And this will only be possible with tolerance and respect between us all.

A BIGGER EUROPE, OPEN TO EVERYBODY

I – Ahmed Ebrahim

Ahmed is 15 years old and he was already born in France, thus belonging to the second generation of immigrants.

My name is Ahmed Ebrahim, I live with my parents and brothers in Paris, Île-de-France. I am French, more than Moroccan, but I still practise some of our traditions - I go to the mosque and I do not eat pork. I have a lot of friends from different nationalities, and we all respect each others' cultures. I love my life, here in Paris! However, my parents had a difficult life in the past. They were born in Casablanca, but my dad abandoned the country in 2012, for he could not find work nor feed our family. He belonged to the group of 1.7 million of immigrants that arrived in Europe in 2012. He travelled in those dangerous boats that cross the Mediterranean Sea, and some of his mates died, swallowed by the sea. In the first year, my dad worked illegally in the construction industry, and he lived in a room with five other people, also immigrants. One year later he finally got his license and citizenship, and my mother and elder brothers joined him. Today my parents own a shop, and all my family has the French citizenship. And I can see, through my parent's friends that have arrived this year, that all the conditions are better, and the process of acquiring citizenship is easier. I want to thank this country, because it has opened its doors to those who are looking for new opportunities!

II – Olia Shadrova

Olia was a primary teacher in Ukraine but she had to leave the country in 2014.

My name is Olia Shadrova and I am 50 years old. I ran away from Ukraine in 2014 because of the war against Russia, and I arrived in Poland with my two daughters and only one bag and the clothes we were wearing that day. It was very hard to start a new life out of the blue, but now I am really happy with all we have built. I still work as a secretary, and I feel really comfortable here.

III – Dalva dos Santos

Dalva, aged 23, is a writer and musician. She has been living in Portugal since 2028.

My name is Dalva dos Santos, and I was born in S. Paulo, Brazil, but I moved to Rio de Janeiro at the age of 10. Literature has always been a crucial ele-

ment in my life, and so I went to Rio de Janeiro University, where I majored in Portuguese Literature. I completed the first 3 years in Brazil, but I won a scholarship and I continued my studies in Portugal. Here I fell in love with the Portuguese culture, the city of Lisbon, and a Portuguese man too, who is now my boyfriend! We live at a comfortable small apartment in Alfama, and our neighbours are very nice. At first it took me some time to adjust to the Portuguese culture, but now I am totally in it. Music is also very important to me, and I love listening to Fado and the Portuguese Guitar. Sometimes, the Brazilian community here in Alfama also organizes some parties, and there is a lot of Samba and Bossa Nova, and such cultural exchange is extremely enriching. I am also very glad because, since Brazil is a fast-growing country, the new Brazilians that arrive to Portugal are here mainly to continue their studies, and not only due to the country's financial crisis.

IV – Barlas Solak

Barlas Solak is 41 years old. He was born in Turkey but he has been living in Berlin since 2015.

I am Barlas Solak, and I was born in Ankara. In their youth my parents have been in Germany, working in a restaurant. However, they had some problems learning the language and with the residence license; moreover, people in Germany were prejudiced against immigrants, especially those coming from non EU member states. And so, after one year, they left the country and returned to Turkey, now a EU member state, where I and my sister were born. I studied at Middle East Technical University and worked there as a journalist and translator. I have always kept a proximity to Germany, in part because of my parents' story; but it was a surprise when, in 2014, I received a proposal to work as a translator and professor at a language school in Berlin. Because of the huge Turkish community in Germany, I can always recall my culture, but I have to admit that I miss my city. Despite this, I feel really integrated and I think that the immigration laws are much more tolerant and flexible nowadays.



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