INTRODUCTION

If the members of the European Union have a collective political theory and experience in the development of their institutions, then the European Parliament should in a way reflect this tradition. Imagine a European structure which threatens the roots of democracy — everyone would understand that something had gone wrong at the ‘Court of Brussels’, because such a degeneration would conflict with the optimistic ideals of Western democracy. It would conflict with our belief in a free Europe and in the Jewish, Christian and humanistic heritage. Western democracy, human rights and justice: they are what this ever-closing union of peoples should stand for. That is exactly the reason why the fathers of the Maastricht Treaty devoted so much attention to democracy and citizenship.

The ideal of founding fathers like Jean Monnet, and the history of European unity, are filled with tensions between community and state, co-operation and competition, solidarity and rivalry, centre and region, uniting and integrating forces, which in the 1990s place Europe somewhere between being a society of states and a federal state. It is not a state, because governments still primarily express the interests and the European Union still needs an Intergovernmental Conference to change its institutional structure (Article N of the Maastricht Treaty). The much-
discussed ‘democratic deficit’ is the result of negative integration without positive integration, the result of something as vague, dynamic, optimistic and dangerous as a stateless market. The fact that governments were prepared to make concessions to supranationalism, precisely when they had been reassured that it posed no threat to their sovereignty, makes the Maastricht Treaty unreadable. The creation of an ‘unidentified object’ in an atmosphere of European integration and frustration makes it difficult to compare this object with old standard political thought.

In the mainstreams of political philosophy, one can make a distinction between mediaeval and Reformation political thought. The 16th-century movement for religious reform, the reformation of true religion without Aristotelean papacy — especially Calvinistic political thought bringing back the Torah and the prophets and the Father of Israel into the discussions — influenced the concept of liberty, the doctrine of resistance to tyranny and also the idea of a Christian commonwealth. The Jewish and Christian tradition is intertwined with Western tradition, and Calvinism especially stimulated the animating spirit of our democratic institutions. If European citizens disdain this tradition, they disdain themselves.

This article argues that Calvinist political theory can still make a positive contribution to the debate on democracy in the European Union. Does the present-day balance of institutional structures and powers in the building of the Union, and especially the European Parliament, resemble the democratic ideals of Calvinism? What changes should be brought about at the ‘Court of Brussels’ to make the European Union really democratic, with more influence and guarantees for its citizens?

1 THE HOPE FOR WESTERN VALUES

Much of the great Western tradition of political thought, from John Locke to the Atlantic Revolution of the 18th century, was strongly influenced by the political consequences of the Reformation. Most modern political thinkers, whether or not they believe in a personal God, admit this. These Western political ideas, although nowadays taking the form of a sort of secularized covenant of shared values, principles and norms, still influence the contemporary world. That this is possible is because Calvinism played a decisive role in the practical and theoretical struggle against governments exercising power without constitutional restraints or representative and independent democratic institutions. And, with the enormous political, economic and philosophical help of the