

# The *Abendland* and After — Religious Borders in the Construction of the European Union

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## Abstract

The vision of the Europe promoted by Catholic politicians at the beginning of the process of integration in the 1950s was rooted in German-Catholic ideas about the West, *Das Abendland*, understood as a supranational space similar to medieval Christian Europe or the pre-modern Catholic West, the realm of Charlemagne, a spiritual and cultural community or—as Robert Schumann repeated time and again—a common destiny

This paper argues that the religious-cultural borders evoked and resurrected by the Catholic founding fathers of Europe at the start of the project of integration through the trope of *Abendland* still slumbers at the bottom of European self-understanding. Thus, these religious-cultural borders remain alive in discursive patterns, representations, political language, and in the EU-policies—including those towards refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. In other words, the *Abendland* has survived Christian Democracy and the secularization process and still functions as a condition of possibility for the definition of Europe through an *Other*. In times of crisis—such as a flood of primarily Muslim refugees and illegal immigrants—the *Abendland* arises from its slumber.

At the theoretical level, following insights from interpretative social sciences, the proposition defended here is that history (the past) shapes current political affairs (the present) through *habitus*—the invisible hand of socially-culturally inherited disposition. *Habitus* is not easily changed or reformed by rational public debate.