

Preface

As is typical for someone of my generation, the gradual dissolution of communism in the 1980s and its sudden collapse in 1989–91 changed my outlook in that I began to recognise the importance of issues related to Europe, nations and nationalism, in both the past and present. This was not least because the threat of oppression and violence was lurking beneath Europe's national revivals, reminding us of nationalism's troubling history. Following the completion of my thesis on the history of ideas at the University of Gothenburg in 1990, I engaged as a teacher and researcher in the emerging field of European studies, enthralled by the entanglements of Europe and its internal borders. At the Centre for European Studies at Gothenburg University (CERGU), we began to explore the issue of cultural borders more deeply, observing the paradox of the increasing impact of cultural borders that developed despite ongoing economic, legal and political integration. We hosted a conference in 2007 and published the proceedings in *Cultural Identities and National Borders* (2009). In the period 2009–13, our international network held some remarkable workshops, which resulted in the Berghahn anthology *Cultural Borders of Europe*. In the wake of these experiences, I saw the possibility of writing a book on the subject.

In addition, inspiration for this book came from travelling in Europe. I have always loved visiting bookshops when abroad, as they reveal something about their cities, and offer a glimpse into the national mind. Starting in the early 2010s, I began to observe a growing number of books about European crises, conveying warnings and predictions of the imminent collapse of the European Union. No matter whether I was in Oslo or Porto, in Florence, Munich or Cambridge, they were always on the bookstore shelves. Local authors – Austrian, Czech, Dutch, Irish, Spanish, etc. – wrote about the topic. I asked myself whether this growing interest might be indicating

the end of European integration or, conversely, stronger Europeanisation. Moreover, I observed that the literature was unconsciously reiterating themes from the intellectual history of Europe.

Work on this book began with a short draft written in the final weeks of 2013 when public attention was largely directed towards the Euro crisis, which was threatening to destroy the European Union. As I continued writing drafts of short chapters of what I believed would be a quickly written, minor book, 2014 and 2015 brought the migration and refugee crisis, and a worrisome rise in nationalistic mindsets, extending far beyond the traditional nationalist groups and parties. I arrived in Cambridge in 2016 on the day after the Brexiteers had won the referendum. Clearly, nationalist sentiments were strong. From 2017 onwards, I have been fortunate to be able to dedicate a substantial amount of time to the research and writing of this book. Since then, additional events regarding Europe and its borders have occurred, including the Covid-19 pandemic that started in 2020 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. One blessing of writing an intellectual history of the idea of Europe is its contemporary relevance, bringing energy to my work and offering new conundrums on which to reflect.