

TRUDEAU AND THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES ON DEFENCE POLICY (1969–1970)

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The policy pursued by the Canadian government in the late 1960s as regards nuclear weapons, Europe and NATO was ambiguous¹. One section of the Canadian administration supported the theory of *détente* and feared the possibility of Canada finding itself isolated in the event of attack by the Soviet bloc. The figures involved included liberals like Mitchell Sharp² and Paul Martin³ as well as bureaucrats concerned with external affairs such as Léo Cadieux⁴. They represented the wing of the Liberal party supporting the former prime minister Lester Pearson and the “quiet diplomacy” approach to foreign policy.⁵

The other section regarded the Soviet threat as overstated and was very critical of United States policy, which they saw as dragging

¹ B. McDougall, *Canada and NATO : the forgotten ally ?*, Washington, Toronto, Brassey's, 1992 ; A. Morrison, K. Ikavalko, S. McNish, *A continuing commitment : Canada and North Atlantic security*, Toronto, Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1992 ; F. Fournier, *Le Canada dans les stratégies américaines : la défense de l'espace nord-américain : (1957-1963)*, Montréal, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1998 ; P. C. Newman, *The distemper of our times*, Toronto, Carleton Library, 1978 ; M. Conant, *The Long polar watch, Canada and the defence of North America*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1962 ; L. Hertzman, J. W. Warnock, T. A. Hockin, *Alliances and illusions : Canada and the Nato – Norad question*, Edmonton, Hurtig, 1969 ; P. Letourneau, *Le Canada et l'OTAN après 40 ans : 1949-1989*, Québec, Université Laval, Centre québécois de relations internationales, 1992.

² Mitchell Sharp – Secretary of State for External Affairs.

³ Paul Joseph James Martin – minister and Liberal leader in Senate.

⁴ Léo-Alphonse Joseph Cadieux – National Defence Minister.

⁵ L.-B. Pearson, *Mike : the Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1975 ; A. Munro, A. I. Inglis, *Mike. The memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson, 1948-1957*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1973 ; R. Bothwell, *The big chill : Canada and the Cold War*, Toronto, Canadian Institute of International Affairs, Irwinc, 1998 ; G. Donaghy, *Canada and the early cold war : 1943-1957*, Ottawa, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1998 ; J. L. Granatstein, *Canadian Foreign Policy since 1945 : Middle Power or Satellite ?*, Copp Clark, Toronto, 1973.

Canada into war. The “critics”, including young Liberals such as Walter Gordon¹, Eric Kierans² and Ivan Head, maintained that Canadian foreign policy was in need of substantial revision in order to address the new international scene effectively³. These new “mandarins” were close collaborators of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the new leader of the Liberal party⁴.

As a candidate for the position of prime minister, Trudeau never hesitated to express his misgivings about the Canadian defence system, which he described as both ineffective and costly in his very first speech of the 1968 electoral campaign, going so far as to call for Canada’s withdrawal from NATO⁵.

He drew attention on 28 May 1968 to the need for thorough reappraisal “because of the changing nature of Canada and the world

¹ Walter Gordon, the Minister of Finance from 1963 to 1965, drafted a paper for the discussion of NATO and NORAD in July 1967: “However, we should plan to reduce these forces (preferably at a faster rate than is presently contemplated), and should think very carefully before we agree to the replacement of existing equipment, etc., when it becomes obsolete.” Quoted in J. L. Granatstein and Robert Bothwell, *Pirouette. Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1990, p. 10.

² Eric Williams Kierans –Communications Minister.

³ J. W. Holmes, *Life with Uncle. The canadian-american relationship*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1981 ; T. Keating, *Canada and World order. The Multilateralist tradition in Canadian Foreign Policy*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1993 ; M. Eustace, *Canada’s Commitment to Europe : the European Force 1964-1971*, Kingston, Centre for International Relations, Queen’s University, 1982 ; M. Eustace, *Canada’s participation in political NATO*, (National security series), Kingston, Centre for International Relations, Queen’s University, 1976.

⁴ Pierre Elliott Trudeau was born in Montreal in 1919. His father was a French-Canadian and his mother of Scottish descent. He studied law and become a lawyer in 1943. After taking a Master’s at Harvard, he went to Europe to study at the Ecole des Sciences Politiques in Paris and the London School of Economics. He was one of the founders of the journal *Cité Libre*. He embarked on a political carrier in 1965 and was appointed Parliamentary Secretary and Minister of Justice under the Prime Minister Lester Pearson in 1966. After Pearson’s retirement, Trudeau was the Liberal candidate at the federal elections and became Prime Minister after the victory in 1968.

⁵ S. Clarkson, *Trudeau and our times*, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1990 ; A. Cohen, J. L. Granatstein, *Trudeau’s shadow : the life and legacy of Pierre Elliott Trudeau*, Toronto, Vintage Canada, 1999 ; J. D. Harbron, *This is Trudeau*, Toronto, Longmans, 1968 ; G. Laforest, *Trudeau and the end of a Canadian dream*, Montreal, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995 ; K. McDonald, *His pride, our fall : recovering from the Trudeau revolution*, Toronto, Key Porter Books, 1995 ; G. Radwanski, *Trudeau*, Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1978 ; M. Vastel, *The outsider : the life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau*, Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1990.

around us” and for a new approach that would be “pragmatic and realistic¹”. Trudeau considered it necessary to revise some traditional views, return to fundamental principles, and make no assumptions about the validity of the policies previously pursued. These changes were deemed necessary because of deeper technological, demographic and economic changes affecting complex problems at the world level and also because of the new role being assumed by postcolonial countries as regards the international equilibrium.

Once in power, Trudeau and his staff examined the basis for a new approach to defence policy taking into account the traumatic impact on the North American security system of factors such as the tragic Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations, black unrest, and French-Canadian separatism. Apart from internal motivations, Trudeau maintained that it was pointless to maintain conventional weapons and troops in Europe as a deterrent to hypothetical Soviet attack. The new government had three ways to act in 1969, namely cutting the armed forces, reducing nuclear armaments and the Canadian role in NATO, and freezing Canada’s military budget.

Trudeau was soon forced to moderate his tone and his requests, not least because his own defence establishment appeared incapable of understanding his views when asked to draw up a paper on policy review. Trudeau and the cabinet thus rejected a defence review paper in August as “nothing more than a reaffirmation of current policy”. The delays caused frustration and suspicion in the House of Commons, also because they increased with each review. Trudeau was often forced to defend his cabinet during Question Time against accusations of intellectual sterility².

¹ Quoted in J. L. Granatstein and Robert Bothwell, *Pirouette*, p. 13.

² Mr. MacLean : “(...) since this statement has been promised by Prime Minister on several occasions, he might like to make some reply.” Mr. Trudeau : “It is not envisaged that in the immediate future we will have any announcements to make.” October 18, 1968, House of Commons, *Debates*, 28th Parl. 1st Session, Vol. 2, 1968, p. 1528.

Mr. Lewis : “(...) can the Prime Minister indicate when the review of foreign policy is likely to be concluded ?” Mr. Trudeau : “Mr. Speaker, I share the hon. Member’s impatience. As this time I cannot say when the review will be concluded.” November 12, 1968, House of Commons, *Debates*, 28th Parl. 1st Session, Vol. 3, 1968, p. 2627.

Mr. Diefenbaker : “(...) does not the Prime Minister think the time has come to give them [Canadian people] the facts ?” Mr. Trudeau : “Yes, I think the Canadian people have the right to full information. The trouble is that we are in the process of reviewing our policy, and if we were to tell them our policy before reviewing it,

The Prime Minister's optimism was dented by two factors. Firstly, the NATO Defence Planning Committee was scheduled to meet in May 1969, on the 20th anniversary of the treaty, and Canada had not yet prepared a plan to present to its allies. Secondly, he had realised during his European visit in January that Europe saw the East-West question as the crucial point, the primary candidate for financial and human resources, and thus felt that the European countries could not understand Canada's desire to shift the focus of foreign policy to postcolonial and underdeveloped countries¹.

The defence review had arrived at a critical stage in February. The departments of External Affairs and Defence and the STAFEUR² submitted a report to the Cabinet Committee that covered all the options from neutrality to maintenance of the status quo but argued strongly in favour of Canada continuing its membership of NATO and military contribution to Europe defence. While the paper was unquestionably influenced by the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, it was still very far from what Trudeau had expected. In his view, the new government could not endorse the old policies after a year of public debate and promises without disappointing the Canadian electorate.

At this point, Trudeau played his last card and asked to Ivan Head, a young law professor and diplomat, to find a solution. Head assembled a team, called the Non-Group³, which drew up another

there would be little purpose in reviewing it." November 19, 1968, House of Commons, *Debates*, 28th Parl. 1st Session, Vol. 3, 1968, p. 2904.

¹ A. Andrew, *The rise and fall of a middle power : Canadian diplomacy from King to Mulroney*, Toronto, J. Lorimer, 1993 ; A. E. Blanchette, *Canadian foreign policy : 1945-2000. Major documents and speeches*, Kemptonville, Ont., Golden Dog Press, 2000 ; D. Creighton, *Canada first's century*, Toronto, MacMillan company, 1970 ; J. W. Holmes, *The better part of valour : essays on Canadian diplomacy*, McClelland and Stewart Inc., Toronto, 1981 ; T. Keating, *Canada and World order. The Multilateralist tradition in Canadian Foreign Policy*, McClelland and Stewart Inc., Toronto, 1993 ; J. L. Granatstein, *Twentieth Century Canada*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1983 ; P. Painchaud, *De Mackenzie King à Pierre Trudeau : quarante ans de diplomatie canadienne (1945-1985)*, Sainte-Foy, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1989 ; D.C. Thomson, *Canadian foreign policy : options and perspectives*, Montreal, McGraw-Hill, 1971.

² The External Affairs task force studying Canadian interests in Europe.

³ The Non-Group was composed of the following : Hume Wright, External Affairs officer responsible for military affairs and at that time assistant secretary to the Privy Council cabinet on foreign and defence policy ; Fred Carpenter, retired major-general with a long history of NATO commands in Europe ; Henri de Puyjalon,

paper proposing both a reduction of the armed forces over the space of ten years to 50,000, strictly limited to domestic duties apart from 1,800 based in Canada but assigned to NATO's Allied Command Europe mobile force, and the rejection of any nuclear-strike role for the Air Force's CF-104s in Europe and of Honest John surface-to-surface missiles with nuclear warheads.

After initially adverse reactions on the part of the ministers Mitchell Sharp and Léo Cadieux, who interpreted the Head paper as encroaching on their areas of responsibility, the Cabinet accepted the paper. Trudeau made the following statement in a press conference on 3 April 1969 : "The government has rejected any suggestion that Canada assume a non-aligned or neutral role in world affairs. The Canadian government intends, in consultation with Canada's allies, to take early steps to bring about a planned and phased reduction of the size of the Canadian forces in Europe".

This announcement led to irritated reactions on the part of European allies and the United States but also to internal opposition. There was, of course, no criticism from Paris. The German Foreign Minister Willy Brant protested, but not so "strongly [as] to force any change". "I did not enjoy the 20th anniversary meeting in Washington" was the comment made by the British Defence Minister Denis Healey¹.

Trudeau was nevertheless able to consider the defence review a success. His perseverance had established a new principle in government organisation, namely the primacy of ministerial decisions over the civil service machinery, as well as the new government's ability to abandon old policies without losing ministers and support.

The Prime Minister tabled a motion in the House of Commons on 21 April 1969 for approval of government policy as regards NATO² and the debate commenced on 23 April. The text outlining the new defence policy was necessarily vague as regards concrete action and dates as no decisions could be taken prior to discussion with the NATO allies.

Trudeau's statement to the House started from the need to establish priorities : "We are attempting to learn whether Canada, by

assistant secretary to the Treasury Board responsible for the financial requirements of the Canadian Armed Forces.

¹ Quoted in J. L. Granatstein and Robert Bothwell, *Pirouette*, p. 26.

² Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister), April 21, 1969, House of Commons, *Debates*, 28th Parl. 1st Session, Vol. 7, 1969, p. 7867.

reassessing in a systematic fashion its own and the world situation, may play a more effective role in pursuing its objectives. We want to be sure that we are doing, so far as we are able, the right things in the right places. Canada's resources, both human and physical, are immense, but they are not limitless. We must establish priorities which will permit us to expend our energies in a fashion that will best further the values that we cherish¹". These priorities had to consider a new world "as interdependent as that of today, with instant world-wide communications systems and pre-targeted nuclear armed rockets²".

Trudeau outlined five fundamental conditions that he saw as offering hope for lasting security :

1. Prevention of deterioration or serious imbalance of the *status quo* as regards nuclear weapons
2. Co-operation in preventing conflicts that might escalate into nuclear war
3. Participation in international peacekeeping forces and non-military initiatives
4. Allocation of adequate resources to the examination and negotiation of arms limitation and disarmament agreements
5. Allocation of an increasing percentage of national resources to activities designed to relieve or remove causes of unrest such as economic insecurity.

The Prime Minister also underlined how defence policy and foreign policy influenced one another : "it becomes apparent that Canada's NATO relationship was not a military decision. It was a political decision³". He recalled Canada's sustained military contribution to NATO in the twenty years since its creation and suggested at Europe was now better able to defend itself and assume its responsibilities. He also envisaged a new important and political role for NATO in "accommodation with the Warsaw Pact countries of the outstanding differences between the two alliances and agreement on arms controls and arms limitation⁴".

¹ Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister), April 23, 1969, House of Commons, *Debates*, 28th Parl. 1st Session, Vol. 7, 1969, p. 7867.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7868.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7869.

Robert L. Stenfield, leader of the opposition, replied to the Prime Minister's address by accusing the government of having no clear policy on NATO. In particular, he accused Mr. Cadieux, the Minister of National Defence, and Mr. Sharp, Secretary of State for External Affairs, of being "as docile a bunch of kittens as one could find anywhere"¹. Stenfield underlined the contradictions emerging from the Prime Minister's statement and the danger that redeploying troops from Europe to North America would strengthen integration with the United States².

Stenfield ended by asserting that even though the Prime Minister had rightly rejected neutrality as a policy for Canada, he still adopted a "fortress America" philosophy containing "two ideas which most Canadians long ago rejected – isolationism and continentalism"³. For these reasons Stenfield moved that the motion be amended by deleting the words "the Government's policy of" together with everything after the word "and" and adding the following: "Parliament strongly condemns the retreat from internationalism to isolationism contained in the Prime Minister's statement of April 3 and his speech of April 12".

The debate continued with an address by Mr. Douglas of the New Democratic Party, MP for Nanaïmo-Cowichan-Les Îles⁴, who started by attacking the government for having not consulted parliament before the statement on 3 April and accused the Prime Minister of hypocrisy: "He reminded me of the late William Lyon Mackenzie King, who once conducted a referendum in this country on the question, 'conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription'. The Prime Minister's policy now is 'reduction if necessary, but not necessarily reduction' – referring, of course, to our forces in NATO"⁵.

Targeting the problem inside the Cabinet as well as the reasons for the Prime Minister's uncertainty, Mr. Douglas pointed out that

¹ "And when the Prime Minister put his tongue in his cheek at his press conference and told how 'strong men have strong opinions', you could have heard them purr". *Ibid.*, p. 7871.

² "The Prime Minister spoke in Washington of what it is like to sleep with an elephant. It is clear he would not enjoy sleeping with an elephant. (...) I cannot imagine why he would want to marry the elephant." *Ibid.*, p. 7874.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7875.

⁴ T. C. Douglas - Nanaïmo-Cowichan-Les Îles - New Democratic Party

⁵ April 23, 1969, House of Commons, *Debates*, 28th Parl. 1st Session, Vol. 7, 1969, p. 7876.

although the government called it a “false perspective to have a military alliance determine your foreign policy”, that was exactly what it was doing with its new foreign policy based on a new defence policy and reduced NATO commitment. The inconsistency derived from Trudeau’s problem with the Foreign Policy and Defence Policy departments as well as the need for discussion with Canada’s NATO allies. The New Democratic Party, represented by Mr. Douglas, shared the government’s views as regards the need for a change in foreign policy with a view to a new Canadian role in the world, but considered the Prime Minister’s statement too vague and pedestrian.

For this reason, Mr. Douglas moved a sub-amendment to delete everything after the word “condemns” and replace it with “the failure of the government to announce the withdrawal of the Canadian forces from Europe, its failure to demand as a condition of Canada’s continuing membership in the Alliance, that NATO change its role from concentration on military measures to one of energetic pursuit of détente in Europe, and also its failure to propose substantial reduction in defence expenditures and a large increase in assistance to developing nations¹”.

The criticism and the resolution were controversial and vigorous debate took place on 23 and 24 April. In addition to the two primary objections, many other members of parliament expressed reservations. Mr. Réal Caouette accused the Prime Minister of using foreign policy to divert attention from Canada’s real needs and internal problems. Mr Nesbitt argued that Canada was the “ham in the sandwich” between the two major powers and that the first priority in foreign policy should therefore be the prevention of nuclear war.

The debate was resumed the day after with Mitchell Sharp, Secretary of State for External Affairs, required to respond to an opposition request for information. The discussion then continued for another six hours until 9 pm, when parliament voted against the opposition’s amendments² and in favour of Prime Minister’s motion by a majority of 116 to 67³.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7880.

² Mr. Douglas’s sub-amendment : 15 for and 165 against; M. Stanfield’s amendment : 47 for and 137 against. April 24, 1969, House of Commons, Debates, 28th Parl. 1st Session, Vol. 7, 1969, p. 7947- 7948.

³ The voting on the Prime Minister’s motion was 116 for and 67 against. *Ibid.*, p. 7949.

Contradictory claims were put forward by the opposition. While Mr. Stenstead stated that the government was making a substantial change in Canadian foreign and defence policies that would isolate the country, the leader of the New Democratic Party argued that it was making no change at all. The primary issues characterising Canadian foreign policy in the 1960s emerged during the long parliamentary debate : fear both of being too closely linked with the United States and, at the same time, of being left to face the Soviet bloc alone ; desire both for recognition as a playing an active part in world development and for isolation enabling the to concentrate on its own problems.

Even though Pierre Trudeau had stated repeatedly that with the new government it would be foreign policy that influenced defence policy, the first step he took was a review of defence policy. There are two reasons for this, namely the strength of the NATO connection and the fact that all postwar Canadian governments had based their foreign policy on NATO and European defence. The new policy was neither the result of reflection within the political parties nor influenced by parliamentary discussion but instead the result of long and bitter conflict between civil servants in the ministries of Defence and External Affairs and a new generation of young politicians.

The result of the parliamentary debate was ultimately satisfactory for Trudeau. He had stated that NATO involvement was a political decision to be taken in Canada and by the Canadian government, but could not decide when and how the reduction was to place without first discussing it with the NATO allies in Washington. He was thus obliged to be vague during the debate and obtained approval for the principle of phased reduction, not for its planning.

This decision was one of the most significant for Canada during the Cold War period. Trudeau reduced the standing commitment in Europe but maintained forces in Canada for dispatch to Europe in the event of emergencies. The purpose of this decision was not only symbolic but also to give “visible evidence of Canada’s continuing commitment to the alliance”.

The Trudeau administration pursued two apparently contradictory policies with regard to Europe over the space of a decade, reducing military involvement while at the same time stepping up economic and commercial relations. The reasons for this lay in the

deterioration of the special relationship with Britain¹, Canada's major point of reference across the Atlantic², and the efforts of the new Nixon policy to bring about a change in Canada's attitude toward Europe.

In 1970 Trudeau published six booklets entitled *Foreign Policy For Canadians* aimed at increasing popular involvement in foreign policy decisions regarding Europe, the Pacific, the United Nations, Latin America and international development. These pamphlets targeted economic growth, social justice and quality of life as the primary points of national interest for the future.

A key section of the pamphlet on Europe pointed out the need to maintain an adequate measure of economic and political independence in the face of American power. Describing this as a "problem Canada shares with European nations", it identified an "identity of interest and an opportunity for fruitful cooperation" in dealing with it³. The Canadian government accordingly endeavoured to strengthen its ties with Europe without adopting anti-American measures but instead establishing a new balance in North America and reinforcing Canadian independence.

It was soon realised, however, that the real problem was to convince Europeans that Canadian interests were not identical to those of the USA. As Henry Kissinger wrote in a memorandum dated 29 September 1969, despite Trudeau's efforts, Europeans still thought Canada unable to take any kind of decision "without the more or less tacit consensus of Washington".

Mitchell Sharp, the Minister for External Affairs, also endeavoured to illustrate the new approach in 1972 with a publication entitled *Canada-US Relations : options for the future*⁴. The following

¹ P. Lyon, *Britain and Canada : survey of changing relationship*, London, F. Cass, 1976.

² The historical ties between Canada and Great Britain became weaker with the Diefenbaker government and Britain's first attempt to enter the Common Market. Trade with Britain accounted for 11 % of Canada's total balance in 1964 but only 7 % in 1968.

³ *Foreign Policy For Canadians*, Europe, Published by the Queen's Printer, 1970, vol. 5, p. 14.

⁴ M. Holland, *Common foreign and security policy : the record and reforms*, Washington, Pinter London, 1997 ; E. E. Mahant, G. S. Mount, *Invisible and inaudible in Washington : American policies toward Canada*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, Michigan State University Press, 1999 ; K. McNaught, *From colony to satellite* in R. D. Francis, D. B. Smith, *Readings in Canadian history. Post-Confederation*, Holt, Rinehart and Wiston of Canada

questions were addressed : Does the interdependence with United States impair the reality of Canada's independence ? How strong has the continental pull become ? Can it be resisted and controlled and, if so, at what price ?

Trudeau's government had three answers to these questions and outlined three feasible options for the future of Canada's relationship with the United States. The first two were continuation along the same path and even closer connections with the United States. The government decided on the third: "Canada can pursue a comprehensive long-term strategy to develop and strengthen the Canadian economy and other aspects of its national life, and in the process to reduce the present Canadian vulnerability¹". One way of putting this into practice was by strengthening Canadian relations with Europe and Japan².

With Trudeau's third option, Canada embarked on a new international policy that has characterized its foreign policy ever since, enabling it to pursue its traditional policy toward US-USSR relations and keep its seat at the table.

Limited, 1986 ; J. H. Thompson, S. J. Randall, *Canada and the United States : ambivalent allies*, Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1997 ; L. Martin, *The Presidents and the Prime Ministers : Washington and Ottawa face to face. The myth of bilateral bliss 1867-1982*, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1982.

¹ "Canada-US relations : options for the future", *International Perspectives*, quoted in J. L. Granatstein and R. Bothwell, *Pirouette*, p. 160.

² L. Daniele, *Le relazioni esterne dell'Unione Europea nel nuovo millennio*, Milano, Giuffrè, 2001 ; A. Donneur, *Le Canada et la sécurité européenne*, Montréal, Université du Québec à Montréal, Département de science politique, 1978 ; I. MacLeod, I. Hendry, *The external relations of the European Communities : a manual of law and practice*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996 ; C. Pianning, *Global Europe : the EU in the world affairs*, London, Rienner Boulder, 1997 ; G. W. Rees, *The Western-European Union and the crossroads : between transatlantic solidarity and European integration*, Oxford, Westview press Boulder, 1998 ; C. Rhodes, *The European Union in the world community*, London, Rienner Publisher, 1998 ; M. Telo', *European Union and new regionalism : regional actors and global governance in a post hegemonic era*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001 ; L. Tosi, *Europe its borders and the others*, Perugia, Università degli Studi di Perugia, 2000.