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# Walking Europe to rediscover what connects us

## Executive Summary

On August 1st, 2025, Ruud Hopstaken (65) will leave his apartment in Berlin with nothing but a backpack and begin an extraordinary journey (mostly) on foot to Brussels. This 8-month walk across Europe is more than a personal adventure—it's a mission to rediscover the connections that bind 450 million Europeans together.

**The Central Question:** "What connects you to Europe?"

**Website:**

[berlin-to-brussels.com](https://berlin-to-brussels.com)

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## The Story

### A Personal Journey with Universal Relevance

Ruud Hopstaken is walking in his father's footsteps—literally. In 1945, his father was liberated from a forced labor camp near Berlin and walked home through a devastated Europe rebuilding itself. He walked toward freedom. Now, 80 years later, Ruud walks for freedom.

What drives a 65-year-old former executive to give up his comfortable "Ruhestand" (German retirement) and undertake this journey? The answer lies in a profound realization that we often only appreciate what we have when we're about to lose it.

### From Boardroom to Backpack

For years, Ruud made decisions at the top of organizations, often without knowing everyone they affected. Now he's seeking them out—listening, collecting stories, and sharing them with tomorrow's leaders. It's a different form of leadership: not directing from above, but moving forward when standing still is no longer an option.

In 2019, cancer forced him to confront what truly matters. While planning his own funeral, he discovered that we often only value what we have when we risk losing it—whether it's our health or our European society.

## Why Now?

Living in Berlin, Ruud witnesses Europe's challenges firsthand: Trump pushing Europe to stand on its own, the war in Ukraine, rising populism. He feels an urgent need to pause and appreciate what we've built together as Europeans.

The European Union is one of the most ambitious projects ever undertaken—created to ensure we never experience another world war. Yet many take this achievement for granted.

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## The Mission

### Core Approach: Meet - Connect - Appreciate

#### Get Moving

- Literally leaving the comfort zone
- Creating space for genuine encounters

#### Starting Conversations

- Listening to stories along the way
- Talking with everyone: young, old, all backgrounds
- Asking: "What connects you to Europe?"

#### Keeping Conversations Going

- Sharing stories and insights online
- Developing ways to continue the dialogue
- Building a movement from the ground up

## The Goal

#### To start a movement where people:

- Reflect on what connects them to Europe
  - Become aware of what they value
  - Transform from spectators to participants
  - Shape the future together
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## Who is Ruud Hopstaken?

#### Professional Background

- Former C-level executive with decades of leadership experience
  - Currently runs a coaching practice focused on authentic leadership
  - Lives in Berlin, Germany
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### Personal Journey

- Cancer survivor (2019) who learned to prioritize human connection over status
- Father committed to leaving a better world for future generations
- Not a perfect ambassador, but authentic precisely because of his imperfections

**Core Philosophy:** "Discovering who you are and what you stand for" — this mission drives both his European walk and his individual coaching work.

### Why He's Credible

- Has skin in the game: giving up everything for his conviction
- Speaks from experience of personal transformation
- Understands leadership challenges and the cost of difficult decisions

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## Project Details

### Timeline

- Preparation Phase: May-July 2025
- Journey Begins: August 1, 2025 (his father's birthday)
- Estimated Arrival: April 2026
- Duration: 8+ months

### Route

- Start: Berlin, Germany
- Destination: Brussels, Belgium
- Path: Flexible route through European countries
- Approach: Open to spontaneous encounters and discoveries

### Content Strategy

#### Daily Content

- Instagram posts and stories (photos, short video updates)
- Real-time route tracking via Polar Steps

#### Weekly Reflections

- In-depth articles on Substack
- Deeper insights and experiences

#### Conversations & Interviews

- Podcast conversations with interesting people met along the way
- Video content showcasing encounters

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## Professional Integration

- LinkedIn updates connecting European insights with leadership lessons
- Bridging individual and collective transformation

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# Media Opportunities

## Story Angles

### Human Interest

- 65-year-old gives up everything for 8-month European walk
- Son follows in his father's footsteps 80 years later
- Cancer survivor's second chance at meaningful life

### Social/Political

- Grassroots approach to European unity
- Alternative narrative to institutional EU discourse
- Intergenerational dialogue about Europe's future

### Travel/Adventure

- Unique perspective on European cities and countryside
- Spontaneous encounters and cultural discoveries
- Digital nomad meets analog journey

## Interview Availability

- Pre-departure: June-July 2025 (Berlin)
- During journey: Daily via video call (evening CET)
- On-location: Arrange meetings along the route

## Unique Access

- Exclusive behind-the-scenes content
- First-person stories from the road
- Access to conversations with people met along the way

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# Quotes & Soundbites

"We often only appreciate what we have when we're about to lose it—whether it's our health or our European society."

"Europe isn't an abstract concept in Brussels—it lives in your daily reality."

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"I'm not a perfect ambassador, but that's exactly why I'm credible."

"This isn't about politics or nostalgia—it's about connection and conversation."

"Are we going to determine our own fate, or let others determine it for us?"

"Walk with me? Not literally, but by reflecting on what connects us as Europeans."

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## Media Contact

### Primary Contact

Myrthe Wortman

Brand & Communication Strategist

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For interview requests, high-resolution images, or additional information

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## Digital Presence

**Website:** [www.berlin-to-brussels.com](http://www.berlin-to-brussels.com)

**Instagram:** [@berlintobrussels](https://www.instagram.com/berlintobrussels)

**Substack:** [Weekly reflections and stories](#)

**LinkedIn:** Professional insights and leadership content

**Podcast:** Conversations from the road

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## High-Resolution Assets

[Note: Professional photos, route maps, and additional visual assets available upon request]

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## Background Facts

- **Population affected:** 450 million Europeans
- **Historical parallel:** Father's 1945 journey from forced labor camp
- **Professional pivot:** From corporate boardroom to walking boots
- **Health journey:** Cancer diagnosis in 2019 as life-changing moment
- **Current residence:** Berlin, Germany
- **Languages:** Dutch, German, English
- **Age at departure:** 65 years old

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This media kit provides comprehensive information for journalists, podcasters, and content creators interested in covering Ruud's journey. For additional materials, interview scheduling, or specific story angles, please contact [Myrthe Wortman](#).