



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
FIRENZE

**JEAN
MONNET**
CENTRO DI ECCELLENZA

**THE EU AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES
28 IDEAS FROM THE ERASMUS GENERATION**

School of Political Science,
MA in International Relations and European Studies,
University of Florence
3 – 5 May 2017

**How shared values have helped in the creation of the European
identity and the evolution of the European Union**

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“We are not bringing together states, we are uniting people” said Jean Monnet in 1952. After more than sixty years since this statement, raising the feeling of a European identity and involving citizens in the EU public affairs are still great challenges for the European integration process. The European Union does not only grant EU citizens and companies an area in which they can freely circulate, but it also guarantees the respect of a common set of values proper to the European Union. We hear a lot about the importance of European values. History and culture is often tied strongly to national identity. But values are supposedly shared across the continent by all Europeans. But what are European values? Most Europeans still enjoy high degrees of social protection, education and health services that are free at point of use. It is normal that people are first going to think of their national identity and then of the European, this is not what needs to be changed, what is necessary is an understanding of the existence of the European identity, so that people can feel they can relate to it. The EU has managed to hold on to most of these, more or less. But it has failed to become a model for the world. It is not just the protection of values that matters, but also their global projection.

According to citizens’ rights guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights the main values of the EU are the following six: respect for human dignity and human rights (no executions, no torture, no slavery and no human trafficking), freedom (respect of home, family and personal communications, freedom of religion, thought and speech, right to education, work, refugees have the right to apply for asylum and may not be deported to a dangerous country), equality (everyone is equal before the law, no discrimination, respect of different cultures, religions and languages, protection of children, and dignity to the old people and respect to people with disabilities), solidarity (workers have the right to strike, free labour exchange, employees have the right to safe and healthy working conditions, maximum working hours are limited, receive pay for holidays, no child labour and medical care benefits), citizens’ rights (the right to vote in local and EU level, have the right to refer to Ombudsman, the right to live and move freely in the territory of the EU) and justice (have the right to be heard before a court of law, everyone is innocent unless legally proven guilty).

These values unite all the member states – no country that does not recognise these values can belong to the Union. These values enlighten, not only the internal market functioning of

the EU, but, also, its external actions, and contribute to European soft power. What are the fundamental values of the European Union? How does the EU seek to guarantee respect for its values, both within and beyond its borders? The mere promise of joining the EU has not only helped maintaining peace in Europe. It has also helped consolidating democracy, human rights and the rule of law, both within and beyond the EU. The main goal of the European Union is to defend these values in Europe and promote peace and the wellbeing of the citizens.

For its part, the European Parliament seeks to ensure that these values are realised in the EU legislation.

The larger the EU becomes, the more important it is for the people who live in it to realise that their union has been built on common values. Democracy, human rights, and solidarity are often cited as good examples of European values, and we cannot deny that all EU Member States are democracies. So what are the values that matter most to Europeans? What values do they attribute to the EU? Do they give precedence to equality or to freedom? How do the public see the contribution of immigrants to society? The fact that the EU strives to uphold and promote democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law should not come as a surprise. Indeed, according to the treaty of the European Union, the EU is said to be founded on these values.

A European identity is defined as a collective identity that unites the members of the European Union or the population of the member countries and excludes those outside of European Union's borders. Many Europeans will agree that within Europe we all have one thing in common; every single one of us is a European citizen that helps and gets benefited by the European idea. There is more that unites us than divides us. While the EU is diverse in many ways; with several official languages, diverse cultures and ethnicities, religious pluralism and different socioeconomic levels. European citizens as well as their leaders do not have to be scared of this diversity. On the contrary they need to embrace it and strengthen the shared values that unite us.

The enlargement of the EU has helped to spread democracy, stability, security and prosperity across most of the continent. Enlargement is not only good for the countries that have joined the union, but also for those already in it. Economically, enlargement creates a bigger market and allows more economic growth. Strategically, it gives the union more weight in the world. The EU has been built on the principles of the free movement of goods, services,

labour and capital; of equal rights for all citizens before European law; of equality among the member-states.

Primarily, the notion of the European identity is looked upon as a political entity, thus it lacks emotional connection, but still exists as an important part of the current socio-political status quo in Europe. The shared values the EU is based upon are a vital part of what we as European citizens are identified with. In order to maintain and improve that identity, we need to emphasise the need for solidarity for people that live within the borders of the EU as we are part of the same European family. Unfortunately we still lack the economic solidarity that is crucial within our multicultural European society, and some countries within the EU struggle due to bad finance. During the last couple of years solidarity has become of major importance within the EU. European solidarity has been buckling under intense pressure from austerity and the long-running European debt crisis. Also with the recent triggering of EU Article 50 by the United Kingdom, in two years' time the country will officially leave the EU, thus we need to stay stronger and support EU.

Rooted in a shared history, these values create a deep sense of community, thereby intensifying a sense of loyalty which is necessary for legitimizing. A shared culture also offers shared actions, thereby creating a common discourse space, and fosters a sense of history. These common values and memories are composing the ultimate foundations of all collective identities and thus are also at the core of a European identity. The EU member states are pluralistic. Nobody may be discriminated against; instead, people and government representatives must respect others and be tolerant. Everybody must be treated fairly. Minority rights must be respected. Equality between men and men is promoted. Responsibility must be shared. The European Union works for social equality. It develops social security and tries to protect the weakest. It seeks to prevent social exclusion and discrimination.

All these fundamental values are defined in the Treaty of Lisbon. The Treaty of Lisbon officially confirmed the universal citizens' rights as well as political, economic and social rights. The Charter of Fundamental Rights forbids discrimination because of gender, race or the colour of the skin. Also, discrimination based on religion or sexual orientation is forbidden. Additionally, the Charter of Fundamental Rights defines rights to data security, bioethics and good administration. It obligates employers to look after their employees. For example, employees have the right to access information, negotiate and go on strike.

On the contrary, the current refugee crisis is putting the tolerance of some to the test, while showing the generosity and openness of others. Most Europeans could probably get behind human rights as a value, but the refugee crisis has caused deep divisions over the universality of these supposedly universal rights. In order to continue with the European project and maintain our shared values, it is of the utmost importance that the European citizens become united in these values of tolerance and solidarity. Only then the ideal of an Ever Closer Union can be realized.

Historically speaking, the three most important values on which the EU was founded, in which the EU has tried to promote have been respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. From the point of view from the EU, democracy stands for representative democracy, a system of governance where elected officials draw their legitimacy and authority from free and regular elections. Regarding the rule of law, one may say that, from the point of view of the EU, it stands for a set of legal principles such as the principle of legality, legal certainty, or access to independent and impartial courts. Finally, but not least, by respect for human rights, the EU understands legal guarantees and remedies, with a view of insuring respect for individual civil and political rights, but also economic and social rights. Respect for human dignity and respect for the rights of persons belonging to minorities are new values, they were inserted into the text of this treaty provision by the Lisbon Treaty, which and entered into force in 2009.

Generally speaking, the enlargement of the EU, the process of expanding the EU for the accession of new countries is often cited, and rightly so, as one of the success stories. Of the countries that constitute the EU today indeed almost half were authoritarian regimes shortly before joining. And the EU can claim substantial credit for the transition to democracy. Potential EU membership has indeed worked in practice as a powerful incentive. Furthermore pre-accession when entering negotiations tend to lead to what is known as a process of Europeanization. By Europeanization, EU lawyers describe the process by which candidate countries come to adopt and internalize European values and norms.

We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. The European project, which has brought peace, prosperity and democracy, is being questioned. Global growth, mobility, and technological progress enable us to thrive, and allow ever more people to escape poverty and live longer and freer lives. Grounded in the values enshrined in

the Treaties and building on many strengths and historic achievements, Europeans will stand united in building a stronger Union, playing its collective role in the world. The fact that the European Union citizenship has helped to internalize a European identity in terms of values and rights, thereby causing the rights to become the status quo, illustrates the power of Union citizenship as an identity constructor.

In conclusion, to engage responsibly with the world, credibility is essential. The EU's credibility hinges on the unity, on the many achievements, the enduring power of attraction, the effectiveness and consistency of the policies, and adherence to the shared values. In many respects, the EU is a global super power. As a partner in trade, politics and development, the union and its member states are the preferred choice for a large number of countries in the world. The success the Union has achieved in building peace and promoting stability through its shared values for its members is admired worldwide. Its strong value foundation makes it a trustworthy, predictable and fair partner across the globe. The building of a European identity is a top to bottom process. The process of its construction is still in progress, but the patterns are similar to those of national identity construction.