



EU Values: What Gives Meaning to Our Cooperation on the Territory

Léna Roche recalls the 6 fundamental values of the European Union:

- Human dignity
- Equality
- Democracy
- Rule of law
- Human rights
- Freedom

What is the place of European values, what resources are allocated, are they known to all or sometimes ignored? Do we need these European values and if so, why? Are they in danger, and how can they be embodied through different projects on the territories?

Summary of the exchanges between Valérie Drezet-Humez, Monica Martinat, Sophie Louargant, and Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, moderated by Léna Roche.

Léna Roche: What is the current place of European values?

Valérie Drezet-Humez points out that European values are a practical reality and not just a declaration in the treaties. The European Union allocates funds to support the values stated in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. The current geopolitical situation shows how important these values are; they have a powerful attraction for the populations of countries outside the Union. In case of violations of these values, the Commission can bring cases before the Court through the infringement procedure, which helps anchor EU values in reality.

Léna Roche: What about the defense of European values, especially in the case of Hungary and Poland?

Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, from the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament, is the rapporteur on the violation of EU values by Hungary. She highlights the paradox we are collectively experiencing. While respect for European Union values is enshrined in the Treaties, their defense has not been a priority for the institutions for years. The institutional and political response in Europe to Hungarian violations of EU values allowed illiberal policies to take hold. The European Commission, due to the economic application of the treaties, is perceived as an economic regulator rather than a defender of European values. As a result, launching infringement procedures in cases threatening European competition policy appeared more natural than in cases of violation of common EU values. Violations of EU values, as well as attacks on press freedom and the rights of minorities in many member states, require significant reactions. In this battle for European values, the European Parliament positions itself as their defender. The Commission is trying to catch up by launching infringement procedures, particularly against Poland and Hungary. The non-compliance with European values by some member states means that today, European citizens do not all have the same freedoms and fundamental rights depending on the member state they belong to.

Léna Roche: European values are currently perceived in a complex context, but they also seem more alive than ever. In universities, what do you see regarding these values in the topics studied or in the demands made by students?

Sophie Louargant, as a teacher-researcher, has an academic approach to the question of European values. According to her, the role of the university is to train the citizens of tomorrow in critical thinking so that they can uphold the values common to European democracies. Furthermore, the EU provides academics with the opportunity to carry out projects without imposing terminological judgment, for example, on gender issues. This allows for more freedom in academic work.

The younger generations confront society with its paradoxes, particularly regarding societal and environmental issues. In the context of the endangerment of peace in Europe, universities need to be able to transmit European values to future generations while supporting them in their questioning. All disciplines are subject to these questions and therefore have the potential to serve as platforms for these civic values.

Léna Roche: Do you think European values have a place in universities in Lyon?

Monica Martinat, as the director of the Minerve program, which focuses on higher education in non-English foreign languages, emphasizes the importance of establishing programs that highlight the common European heritage and languages

other than French and English, which tend to dominate at the European level. Master's programs in European and international studies help train future generations to take charge of Europe and its institutions through their in-depth knowledge of its internal workings. European issues have a place in universities, and they deserve to be studied so that Europe is not just seen as a political and technocratic entity. The way European values are approached in universities is also crucial: they should be seen not as given, but as an objective, a horizon to be reached. Moreover, the recognition of inequalities should not hinder the transmission of European values.

Within the EU, not everyone shares the same vision of the common foundations of the union. The question of religious values, in particular, is a subject of discussion, but this discussion is still necessary as part of that horizon.

Additionally, when we talk about Europe, we tend to focus on "European capitals," major urban centers, and pay little attention to rural areas, which are equally European.

Léna Roche: I appreciate the idea that values are not something pre-defined but something we strive towards, recognizing that there is still progress to be made. Often, when we talk about European values, we mention Brussels, Strasbourg, and European capitals. We tend to forget about rural areas.

Sophie Louargant redirects the conversation to rural areas by mentioning an Erasmus+ project implemented between 2017 and 2021 with Europe Direct Drôme Ardèche. Developed with Greek and Spanish cooperatives, this project focused on lifelong learning, specifically the situation of women in rural areas, their place, and their work. More than sixty women participated, learned, created media materials in four languages - English, French, Greek, Spanish - and were able to testify to the impact the European Union can have, at the grassroots level. Following this cooperation and the promotion of values, a rural center for women was established in Greece.

Léna Roche: When we talk about Erasmus, we often think about students, but it's possible throughout life. It seems like a memorable adventure. I liked the evolution of values: from feeling isolated at the beginning to being part of a community, whether from a city or a rural area. You mentioned Members of the European Parliament: do you feel that citizens are seeking interaction with the EU?

Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield highlights the importance of working with civil society in EU member states where European Union values are not respected. They highlight certain countries, such as the Czech Republic, Malta, Greece, Poland, and Hungary, where civil society associates European values of democracy, peace, pluralism, freedom of the press, etc., with EU institutions. She gives the example of Hungarian same-sex parent families, stating that without the EU, advocating for the

existence of these families in Hungary would be extremely difficult, if not impossible and dangerous.

The transposition of the directive on the protection of whistleblowers has been exploited by the Hungarian government. This law now encourages civilians to report same-sex parent families encountered during their professional activities or to denounce individuals criticizing the constitution or providing a different historical version from the official one. These concerns within the European Union are reminiscent of the current situation in France. The French police faces numerous controversies, as does the policy of funding associations. In this context, European associations that seek to be counterpowers seem to be at an impasse and need more than just support from EU institutions—they need truly effective infringement procedures that have a real impact on people's lives.

Léna Roche asks if the EU provides sufficient resources to take action in the face of these endangered values.

Valérie Drezet-Humez emphasizes the territorial anchoring of values through European programs. In case of value violations, it is possible to invoke Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union, which has been done against Poland and Hungary. Furthermore, under the conditionality mechanism, funds can be blocked in case of misuse or violation of fundamental values. Financial sanctions are currently being implemented, such as blocking funds against Hungary due, among other things, to the infringement of press freedom, and financial penalties against Poland for measures targeting judges. More recently, recommendations have been made to France regarding the transparency of press freedom.

Léna Roche asks about the role of universities in transmitting and embodying these values.

Monica Martinat points out that the difficulties encountered in different member states vary. However, throughout Europe, the concept of community is gaining importance, with a challenging articulation of values around this concept. European citizenship then becomes more of a passport that allows tourism in Europe and the pursuit of a better life elsewhere, rather than a bond among European populations. This bond is also strained by tensions surrounding the war in Ukraine: in the West, there is a growing sentiment that providing such military aid carries too many risks, while in the East, Western assistance seems insufficient given the danger. This complex debate is further complicated by the fact that European integration was built on the idea of peace. In this intricate discussion, the academic underscores the interdependence of European values and complements them with the idea of promoting and safeguarding peace.

Léna Roche: Each time, a primary value emerges, the one we defend the most in our daily lives, the one we work with the most. It's interesting that we don't just

focus on these six values, but also look at the connection between them and add a seventh one: peace. What do you see as the challenges in defending these values in the coming years?

Sophie Louaugrant believes that what exists around European values should be preserved while improving upon it. Moreover, the conditionality of various European funding is necessary in her view. The role of universities is crucial as they provide a space for discussions on European topics. The presentation of European programs should go beyond simply stating the availability of funding opportunities for going abroad. It should demonstrate that programs like Erasmus enable the implementation of academic research projects and training. Research projects contribute not only to European integration but also to the development of European identity. For this academic, citizen networks are at the heart of European integration. In some European countries, such as rural areas in France, women's rights are often challenged. Taking the example of a project involving Catalonia, France, and Greece, thanks to Europe, a rural center for women's rights will be established in Greece. European values should not be taken for granted; they require continuous attention and care.

Léna Roche: Values should not be taken for granted. They require daily attention and action at all levels—not only at the university level but also earlier on, through dynamic exchanges, Erasmus programs, and events.

In response to this question, **Monica Martinat** raises questions about exchanges and their significance. How can citizenship be articulated with civic service and address inequalities? There is a need for symbols through which people can recognize themselves, creating a common identity around European values. This also requires institutional presence.

Léna Roche: This may mean that a stronger symbol is needed. Are you facing a lack of appeal for European values among certain citizens?

Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield believes that the European Union remains abstract for many citizens based on her experience. This is particularly the case in France, where national level matters a lot, unlike the European level. European notions are also abstract in Poland, where the majority's definition of democracy aligns with the strength of the majority, while the Union emphasizes minority rights. In Hungary, there is a significant problem of disinformation orchestrated by the government for many years, which distorts the perception of the Union, its ideas, and its policies. It is necessary to educate people at an earlier stage about European democracy and the resulting rights. Anyone can take an interest if the right means are found. The MEP highlights an issue: the European Parliament does not represent the entire population but only those who vote, which is a distinct

difference. While this may be acceptable in economic terms, it is not the same when it comes to values.

Léna Roche: Many questions and major challenges. The first is education, which falls under national responsibility. Regarding that, would it be beneficial to evolve teaching and communication to combat misinformation about the EU and highlight what the EU does that may not be well-known?

According to **Valérie Drezet-Humez**, there is still much to be done in addressing these questions. The notion of belonging is central to promoting European values. She recalls the day the European Union received the Nobel Peace Prize, where going to work every day was not synonymous with going to the front lines to defend peace. This prize allowed for a certain mythification of the Union and its work. Therefore, finding a mythification of the Union and its values that could bring a sense of belonging to life is crucial. Erasmus can serve as a vector for this, as an educational program for everyone throughout their lives. Belonging to this collective is then fostered through encounters and opportunities.

Bringing life into European values also requires a vibrant democracy, regardless of citizens' political positions. A lively and vigilant democracy necessitates access to quality education, media literacy, and quality media. For example, the European Commission is currently providing training to journalists from France TV on European issues.