

TOWARDS A VALUE-DRIVEN EUROPEAN POLICY

For me, Europe is more than just a single market. More than money, more than the euro. It was always about values. – excerpt from President Jean-Claude Juncker's 2017 State of the Union Address

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

1. **The current value crisis in the European Union is largely associated with the growing nationalist and populist sentiment. Both new and old EU Member States face this problem.** One of the root causes is the lingering negative attitude towards the very concept of the EU among a large number of Europeans.

- 42% of Polish and French people and 45% of Italians aged 16-26 do not believe that democracy is the best form of government;
- 45% of EU citizens believe that democracy is not working well in the EU;
- Only 36% of EU citizens declare they trust the EU and the same percentage have positive associations with the EU;
- 59% of EU citizens perceive a growing popularity of 'anti-establishment' parties as a threat;
- 80% of EU citizens believe that more engagement is needed from policy makers at the EU level in order to promote democracy more effectively.

Sources:

1. <https://www.tui-stiftung.de/en/media/young-europe-2017-the-youth-study-of-tui-foundation/>
2. Special Eurobarometer 451 (2016) – Future of Europe
3. Standard Eurobarometer 86 (2016) – Public opinion in the European Union

2. **Political manifestos that contradict the core EU values are attracting more and more followers. They are being amplified by xenophobic attitudes towards the growing number of refugees and a tendency to blame them for terrorist attacks.** While Eurosceptic parties and candidates have not won the majority vote they have gained a long unseen support in elections in Austria, the Netherlands, Germany and in France. In Hungary and in Poland, governments openly contest European values and violate community legislation and policy. The outcome of the UK referendum is an extreme example of how harmful the activity of anti-European movements and social campaigns may be. The UK leave vote has caused a major crisis in the whole Community.
3. **A further erosion of European values has been observed in places where new governments question Article 2 of TFEU. This results in the actual weakening or even destruction of the core democratic institutions** in these countries: independent judiciary, public media and to the compromising or limiting the civil rights such the freedom of assembly or the right to privacy.
4. **The contestation of the core EU values and the attack against institutions that are stewards of these values are closely followed by campaigns against civil society organisations that promote the European concepts.** This is manifested by legislative and administrative decisions to the detriment of such organisations in Hungary and in Poland.

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DISMANTLING OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN POLAND AND HUNGARY:

- **Politicisation of the judiciary**
 - o <http://citizensobservatory.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Brief-on-Supreme-court-legal-opinion.pdf>
 - o <http://citizensobservatory.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/RESOLUTION.pdf>
 - o <http://njb.nl/Uploads/2017/6/encj-report-ia-2017-adopted-ga.pdf>
 - o <http://verfassungsblog.de/the-hungarian-constitutional-court-and-constitutional-identity/>
- **Deteriorating status of civil society organisations**
 - o <http://www.hfhr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/HRD-report-30112016-FIN.pdf>
 - o <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/blog/ngos-under-attack-hungary-poland-continue-adapt>
 - o <http://dafne-online.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Rule-of-law-in-Poland-March-2017-update.pdf>
 - o <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265672.pdf>
 - o https://www.ceu.edu/sites/default/files/attachment/basic_page/17842/ceubrief1.pdf

WHERE SHOULD WE BE GOING?

5. **More and more EU Member States have seen the need for an increased focus on fostering such values as freedom, equality and the rule of law. This was explicitly raised by the President of the European Commission in his annual state of the union address in August 2017. The European Union needs a common policy of strengthening of its fundamental values.** This policy must not solely rely on statutory sanctions under EU treaties or threats to reduce payments from the cohesion funds. And it must be not remain solely declarative.
6. **A co-ordinated value-driven policy must predict a realistic financial support for pro-active citizens in civil society organisations that share and promote European ideals.**
7. **We urge the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council to launch a debate on the specific support instruments and we are presenting one of them which we have called the European Values Instrument (EVI).** This instrument could be construed based on existing initiatives that are designed to strengthen democracy outside the EU such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (with a budget of EUR 1.4 billion for 2014-2020) or the US Endowment of Democracy. **The main goal of EVI would be to strengthen pro-democratic and pro-European attitudes in Member States' societies and to improve the awareness and knowledge of democratic institutions and mechanisms.**
8. The financial instrument supporting European values policy should focus on the following objectives:
 - **promoting and raising awareness** of human rights and the principles of the rule of law;
 - **promoting dialogue and cooperation** to counter divisive and polarising discourses in relation to political, cultural, and religious differences;
 - **promoting respect for minority rights and countering discrimination;**
 - **countering extremism and radicalism;**
 - **countering disinformation**, fake news and increasing the access EU citizens to reliable information on EU policies and societal challenges
 - **countering abuse of power** in particular by supporting watchdog organizations.

EVI and / or other funds aimed at promoting European values should be managed by entities independent of governments. Beneficiaries should include primarily civic organisations in individual countries. Transnational networks operating across many Member States could play a supportive role but should not be main recipients. The priorities of the instrument should be the subject of extensive consultations involving diverse groups and interests.

The creation of new European financial instruments or the strengthening of those already in place would enable citizens to act effectively in their own countries to promote and defend the values laid out in Article 2 of the TFEU. It would be a clear and positive signal that the Union and its institutions are determined to support citizens who share the basic common European values. It would help to work "on the ground" to tame the spill-over effect of the anti-democratic developments and be complementary to the rule of law mechanism based on Article 7 of the TFEU.

The organisations signed under this statement support the idea of a common European policy to strengthen fundamental democratic values and support it with specific financial instruments. We urge European decision-makers to start work on these solutions and to be able to implement them fully within the new EU financial perspective for 2021-2027.