

ValEUs: Looking Back, Moving Forward

The Jean Monnet Network “ValEUs. Research & Education Network on Contestations to EU Foreign Policy” combines the strong interdisciplinary expertise of twenty partner universities from five continents to scrutinise the European Union’s foreign policy and attacks on its foundational values. The three-year project (2024-26) is led by the European University Viadrina (Germany) and co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission.



Objectives

In recent years, the EU has faced unprecedented challenges in living up to its mission to create a peaceful future based on shared values and their incorporation into instruments of global governance, as these values as well as the methods by which the EU propagates them have been increasingly contested. Improving our understanding of such contestations and critically reflecting on whether and how the EU safeguards the values it has prescribed for itself and others will be instrumental in deriving a more realistic account of EU foreign policy and developing impactful counterstrategies and policy alternatives.

Network activities

ValEUs activities are organised around the network’s three central themes: Research collaboration, co-teaching, and engaging in dialogue with civil society. Our work aims to foster interdisciplinary debate on EU foreign policy and values, disseminate the latest research insights among scientific and higher education communities, and engage in meaningful dialogue with civil society. The following provides a brief insight into the network’s various endeavours:

- **RESEARCH COLLABORATION:** Conferences and workshops, network publications (“Interdisciplinary Review of ValEUs”), ValEUs Lecture Series, scholar mobility, supporting academia in Ukraine
- **CO-TEACHING:** Multiple co-teaching formats, a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), summer schools, student conferences

- **DIALOGUE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY:** ValEUs Foreign Policy Debates with Civil Society, workshops, a visualisation tool for civil society initiatives counteracting contestations of EU foreign policy

Our work in 2024

The dissemination of network insights and perspectives towards multifaceted audiences is integral to ValEUs. In this vein, the network features a variety of openly accessible formats (live stream, video, and audio). This includes previous and upcoming editions of our Lecture Series and Podcast, as well as the first ValEUs Foreign Policy Debate with Civil Society, which discussed climate change, activism, and government policy in the EU and beyond.

Furthermore, the scholarly exchange within the network has been the central pillar of our activities in 2024, culminating in the first Annual ValEUs Conference in Astana. Early on, the network engaged in a series of debates (“Provocations”), in which pointed contributions fuelled open discussions on the contradictions and contestations of values in EU foreign policy. Building on these insightful debates, the University Paris 8 hosted the **WORKSHOP: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON EUROPEAN VALUES**. The workshop represents a crucial step in shaping the scholarly work of the ValEUs network by exploring the foundations of a constructive critical perspective on European values through the reflection of their immanent critique, performativity, and historical contextualisation.

These lively discussions among the network provided an invaluable basis for our **FIRST ANNUAL VALEUS CONFERENCE: THE CONTESTATION OF EUROPEAN VALUES FROM AFAR**, held

by Nazarbayev University (Astana, Kazakhstan) in September 2024. Including more than thirty contributions from ValEUs scholars, the conference discussed the global relevance and perception of 'European' values, critically reflecting on the contradictions and ambiguities of EU foreign policy behaviour, the EU's discursive approaches and policy responses to the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and the contestation of the EU's foundational values from within.

The various insights and perspectives presented in Astana facilitated a vibrant debate on future focal points of our scholarly work. As a result, an initial set of thematic platforms to develop research agendas and policy recommendations was established:

- **CRITIQUING OR AFFIRMING THE EU/VALUES VERSUS REALPOLITIK:** Analysing real-world situations in which actors and institutions of the EU – in their policies and actions – are in friction with the values the EU promotes (i.e. migration and asylum policy, austerity policy, memory politics, and post-colonial discourses).
- **DECOLONISATION:** Exploring the EU's relation with the Global South, putting an emphasis on former European colonies (i.e. critically reflecting on development policies, trade agreements, and the EU's response to the war in Gaza).
- **DEMIGRANTISING MIGRATION:** A post-postmodern and anthropocentric approach to examining radicalisation processes behind "us-against-them" discourses, emphasising similarities between migrant(-origin) and non-migrant populations.
- **POPULISM AND EUROSCEPTICISM:** Scrutinising the EU's response to the (internal) challenges of populism and Euroscepticism, discussing EU policy vis-à-vis political and electoral transformations and the spread of illiberal democracy and identitarian movements.

What's to come in 2025

In the area of research collaboration, ValEUs will publish the first two issues of the "Interdisciplinary Review of ValEUs" (open access) featuring multiple formats (i.e. working papers, policy papers, book reviews, and review essays). This will correspond with further deepening the scholarly exchange among the network through the start of our research exchange

programme and the second Annual ValEUs Conference in Zagreb.

Our co-teaching activities in 2025 will include the ValEUs Summer Schools (in Istanbul, Roskilde, and Guadalajara), a collaborative Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), and co-teaching classes with the Ukrainian Global University (UGU).

Our dialogue with civil society will continue through two editions of our ValEUs Foreign Policy Debates with Civil Society in Poznań and Guadalajara, a workshop on the "Future Pathways of Culture in International Relations" in Amsterdam, and the establishment of an interactive database mapping civil society initiatives counteracting (illiberal) contestations of EU foreign policy and the EU's foundational values.

