



Young Generation Policy Brief

Young Generation Policy Briefs in the ValeUs Jean Monnet Policy Network

Enquiring into European Values from the Young Generation's Perspective

By Timm Beichelt

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Executive Summary

The publication of policy briefs is an essential part of the Jean Monnet Policy Network "ValEUs", as it allows for an extended societal dialogue on project results. ValEUs aims to provide a realistic account of EU foreign policy and to scrutinise attacks on its foundational values. The Young Generation Policy Briefs series introduces the perspective of university students and other young voices, identifying problems with self-proclaimed European values and suggesting possible solutions. This first issue presents a practical guide to writing a policy brief and serves as an introduction to the series, summarising the key issues at stake in the proclamation and contestation of European values.

This policy brief is published as part of the EU-funded Jean Monnet Policy Network "ValEUs".

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VALEUS JEAN MONNET POLICY NETWORK

Within the ValEUs network, policy briefs play an important role in communicating project results to the broader public and to political decision makers. As a global network that leans on a triangle of research, teaching and civil society dialogue, these policy briefs are designed to have a people-to-people character. They aim to extend societal dialogue on the EU and EU-related issues by discussing the real-world nature of the values defined in the European Treaties.

The European Union, committed to upholding values such as human dignity, freedom, equality, and solidarity, faces unprecedented challenges in implementing its mission globally. Despite expectations of global acceptance of the EU values in post-Iron Curtain reality, the rise of illiberal governments, conflicts like the Yugoslav Wars or Russia's aggression in Ukraine have contributed to a reevaluation of the EU's effectiveness in fostering peace. As can be seen on the example of the Hamas attack on Israel or Israel's ongoing war on Gaza, this has to do with the EU's reluctance to condemn violations of international law, allegedly applying double standards with regard to different actors on the international stage. But also challenges within Europe, including rising inequalities, populist movements, and struggles in policy areas like migration, climate, and energy, further complicate the EU's efforts to uphold self-proclaimed values.

The "ValEUs" network, which aims to provide a realistic account of EU foreign policy, has taken on the task to develop alternative policy agendas and to identify counterstrategies to current and future contestations. Moreover, it seeks to strengthen the role of universities as globally responsible, socially invested, and democratic actors.

In this context, the ValEUs network organises a series of student policy briefs, which are fuelled by seminars held in its consortium universities. These policy briefs are written from a student perspective and deal with actions and practices of the EU, but also with knowledge frames that surround these actions and practices. ValEUs Young Generation Policy Briefs seek to identify real-world problems in which "European values" are widely seen to be violated, and to identify ways to better align EU actions with the intangible goals of EU policies.

THE STAKES

Many official documents of the EU contain reference to values. For example, Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union

mentions the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law as well as the respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, as values on which the EU is founded. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union makes an interesting distinction between indivisible and universal values, on the one hand, and principles on which the EU is founded, on the other. Human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity are named as values; democracy and the rule of law are seen as principles to uphold these values. While the list of values inherent to the Union is not exhaustive – they also extend to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, to the Social Charters adopted by the EU, and to norms protected by Court of Justice and European Court of Human Rights –, indeed democracy and the rule of law are seen as mechanisms that ensure the validity of the values for both EU citizens and third country individuals.

The distinction between universal values and founding principles, which is often overread or seen as unproblematic, signals fuzzy rules with regard to the question of who has a right to be treated in accordance with fundamental values. The international legal system does not foresee the EU or its member states to enforce universal values everywhere. The EU may offer incentives or threaten inconveniences to other states, or non-state actors, to act in accordance with certain values. A full system to assure the validity of rights, however, is only established within the EU. The preamble to the Fundamental Charter underlines this point by stating that the Union "places the individual at the heart of its activities, by establishing the citizenship of the Union and by creating an area of freedom, security and justice." Where there are citizens enjoying certain rights, there are also non-citizens without these rights.

The implications of this distinction are far-reaching. The credibility of any organisation is undermined if its commitment to values is different on paper than in reality. For decades, the EU has insisted on a foreign policy approach which combines power with norms, for example by concentrating on civilian and peace building practices rather than on more robust approaches on the international stage. It has therefore become an easy target for accusations of double standards, not only when it comes to the enforcement of universal human rights, but also in other fields.

To this day, the core of the EU consists of its internal market, whose economic actors and interests have a natural interest in the expansion of its underlying norms. Given the global inequalities of the (post-) colonial and the (late-) capitalist era, the vision of creating a more prosperous, social and secure Europe rests on a dynamic in which prosperity, equality, and security cannot at the same time be provided to the external world. It may be exaggerated to assume that European well-being is generally linked to extraction and exploitation. However, it is quite clear that the European economic community follows interests and therefore applies its norms and values not universally, but selectively. While this holds true for any actor on the international stage, the EU has to some extent fallen into a double trap. Against the background of its self-confident proclamation as a normative power, the EU is unable to ensure the implementation of those values it claims to be universal, and it lacks the power to ensure that its particular values are played out in responsible and fair ways. These inconsistencies damage the normative position of the EU on the international stage.

Internally, things are not going particularly well either. Squeezed between global competition, authoritarian challenges, and a series of crises, the EU's general course has recently not been towards deepening democracy and the rule of law. At least one member state – Hungary – has developed into a clear-cut autocracy. In many other EU member states, populist forces are gathering with the aim of weakening "Brussels". Integration through neo-functional practices is explicitly rejected, and the legitimacy of the Commission and the Court of Justice to apply rule of law practices is challenged by the counter-principle of national sovereignty.

In this context, the EU's founding values of democracy and the rule of law have acquired a status of challenged symbols. Populist forces are trying to re-establish national democracy as the "real" manifestation of European democracy. Even more so, the enforcement of the principle of rule of law is now used and seen as an instrument to assert EU rule against practices that are grounded in local cultural, economic, and/or political structures. Even if such practices are often marked by particular interests or even cronyism, we are faced with a

constellation in which one value system weighs against another.

Another area in which the validity of supposedly "European" values is at stake concerns their distribution between individuals and collectives. The values attributed to the Union in official documents are often attributed to individuals in the form of fundamental rights. For example, the value of freedom is re-contextualised as negative or positive freedom ("freedom from" or "freedom to") through rulings of the Court of Justice in the context of the internal market. As long as fundamental rights have the legal status of universal rights, there is no categorical difference between value-holders inside the EU and outside. "Liberty and security of person" are, as Article 6 of the Charter states, open to "everyone".

Things change, however, as soon as non-fundamental rights come into play. To protect their economic freedom, for example, non-EU citizens (or legal entities) have to turn to international judicial bodies, not to the European Court of Justice. While EU citizens have direct access to institutions defending their rights, non-EU citizens often have to rely on organisations within the EU that take up their interests and bring them into EU politics and policy-making.

This constellation is also of interest if it is reflected from the perspective of collective rights and values. In recent decades, group identities have received much scholarly interest, in particular when it comes to identifying cross-sectional disadvantages and discriminations. In this context, issues like third country employment conditions or local interests of indigenous groups in ecologically endangered territories have come into focus of EU decision-makers. The rights of these and many other groups are linked to the question of whether the core values stated in EU documents are fairly distributed around the globe.

Identity, however, also plays a role within the EU. During her first term, Ursula von der Leyen has famously made the promotion of the "European Way of Life", including the protection of "our citizens and our values", a core part of her agenda.¹ She gave additional weight to this by nominating a pertinent Commission Vice-President, Margaritis Schinas. While the step has evoked a controversial debate, there is no doubt that an (albeit indirectly) elected executive body has to

¹ See https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-of-life_en, download December 12, 2024.

serve the needs and preferences of its population, including matters of identity. The question therefore arises as to which way values are seen to be attached to the “European” population, and which are not. Should all collective values be considered universal, or are there particular values which distinguish Europe from the rest of the world? In any case, it seems clear that the construction of values in specific historical and cultural settings plays an important role in understanding and considering them.

To sum up, dealing with values in the European and EU context means facing fundamental ambiguities about norms which are often seen as unproblematic. Values such as freedom, security, or equality do not exist in a vacuum, but need to be justified inside and outside of Europe. Economic freedom within the EU may restrict economic freedom in other parts of the world, European collective security is in some friction with the EU’s obligation to offer respect of human dignity to every person seeking refuge in Europe. And the promises of social policy, which fall short of establishing equality within Europe, are not designed to cover people outside of the EU.

ValEUs Young Generation Policy Briefs are an exciting exercise in which members of the younger generation enquire into such contradictions and thus try to provide a more realistic account of the values European and non-European societies are built on.

CHARACTERISTICS OF VALEUS YOUNG GENERATION POLICY BRIEFS

ValEUs Young Generation Policy Briefs are characterised by the following aspects:

- They are addressed to a non-academic audience, in particular to student or civil society groups working in the field of EU politics and/or EU foreign policy. EU policy makers belong the target audience as well; they are offered unique perspectives of youth on the EU, its institutions and its policies.
- They usually start by diagnosing a particular issue or situation, and typically argue for a solution that will address that issue or situation.
- They present evidence to support the main argument of the policy brief. Policy briefs are never purely normative. They do not discuss the values per se but investigate the practices of EU policy and the ways

values are constructed by actors and/or the public in specific settings.

- They take account of the fact that the target audience does not have much time and does not want to read a book on the subject. They provide a comprehensive summary which focuses on the problem, the evidence, and the proposed solution(s).

More specifically, the basic elements of ValEUs Young Generation Policy Briefs include:

- The description of the context and significance of the problem.
- The discussion of a range of policy options which present choices for addressing the value-related policy problem.
- The criteria for judging policy choices and a short discussion why these criteria are considered appropriate. A distinction may be made between evaluative criteria, such as efficiency and fairness, and practical criteria, such as legality and political acceptability.
- The policy recommendation itself, usually stemming from the logical application of the previously defined criteria to the discussed policy choices.

ValEUs Young Generation Policy Briefs will be discussed and used in the activities of the ValEUs network, in particular in the context of four platforms that have evolved during the first year of the network’s existence. These platforms are related to migration, decolonisation, populism and euro-scepticism, and in the general to the relation of critique and affirmation in discourses on the European Union.

TARGET AUDIENCE

While these elements form the core of the policy briefs, a certain flexibility applies with regard to their authors and target audiences. The ValEUs network consists of 20 universities in 17 countries. Each teaching institution has its own profile, and potential readers in the 17 countries are embedded in different public spheres. In order to create coherence across the ValEUs Young Generation Policy Brief series, one target audience of each policy brief consists of young people who are active in fields where EU policies are considered relevant. This could be in policy areas such as

asylum policy, foreign trade policy, or EU foreign policy in contemporary conflicts. Young people who are addressed can be young members of EU institutions or young activists, for example in lobby or civil society groups.

This broad group of young people can be expected to have a special interest in the application of values in an EU context. Since all values are subject to interpretation, it can be assumed that young activists interested in EU politics are uncertain about the meaning or relevance of values as laid down in the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights or in other documents. While it is not claimed that the authors of the ValEUs Young Generation Policy Briefs are completely certain about values-related aspects of EU action and what sense they make of them, the resulting debate will prove fruitful not only for young people, but also for those involved in EU decision-making.

PARTICIPATING UNIVERSITIES

A considerable number of member universities are committed to integrating ValEUs Young Generation Policy Briefs into their teaching curricula. Teaching activities include seminars or workshops in which the policy briefs are written, usually by students or groups of students. In some cases, these students are enrolled in educational programmes that focus on public policy, in others they come from a political sciences background, in still others, values are part of interdisciplinary teaching programmes. The variety of backgrounds add to the vibrancy of the policy briefs. All members of the ValEUs network are active in redistributing the policy briefs, for example in classes or external communication.

Member institutions actively involved in the production of ValEUs Young Generation Policy Briefs are:

- **European University Viadrina (Frankfurt/Oder, Germany)** runs a MA programme of European Studies in which at least one seminar per year is dedicated to producing policy briefs covering a wide range of policies and issues. Due to the university's location on the German-Polish border, there will be a certain focus on the issues of borders, migration, and EU enlargement. The university is partnering with an important organisation in the Berlin region both for developing writing techniques and for innovative distribution of youth-to-youth communication in European affairs (institution tbc).

- **Istanbul Bilgi University** offers an MA in International Relations and a double degree in European Studies in cooperation with the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany. These programmes provide an in-depth focus on Turkey-EU relations, with particular attention to the challenges and opportunities of EU enlargement. The programme aims to prepare students to produce policy briefs and analyses that reflect current European affairs.
- The **University of Pittsburgh** has developed a policy writing series that capitalises on research platforms that have evolved within the Valeus network. The series, which builds on the long-standing expertise of Professor Müge Finkel, will begin with a hybrid workshop in early 2025 and will be presented in collaboration with the University of Banja Luka around the Annual ValEUs conference in October 2025.
- At the **University of Florence**, scholars from the Department of Political and Social Sciences will integrate the ValEUs Young Generation Policy Briefs into their courses: Sorina Soare (Theory and Practices of Interest Groups), Giorgia Bulli (Political Language Analysis), Enrico Borghetto (The European Union in the Contemporary World), and Laura Leonardi (Society and Social Change in Europe). The results will be used in EU Talks to be organised in Florence in 2026 as a flagship of the ValEUs project.
- The **Universidad del Norte** will participate in this initiative with students from the Law and International Relations programmes as part of the courses on Public International Law, EU Policy, and International Cooperation. Special attention will be given to issues related to international trade, Euro-Latin American relations, peace, and sustainable development.

DISTRIBUTION

Starting in early 2025, the ValEUs website (<https://valeus.eu/>) will be filled with scholarly content in the form of articles, reviews, and other formats. This content will be distributed not only through the website, but also through a platform hosted by the University of Pittsburgh. On this platform, the

Interdisciplinary Review of ValEUs will be presented (<https://valeus.pitt.edu/index.php/valeus>). The ValEUs Young Generation Policy Briefs will be distributed through all channels of the network, including the above-mentioned website and the platform hosted by the University of Pittsburgh.

While the website and the platform are suitable for reaching large audiences, they may lack the capacity to address regional or local audiences. Value-related debates vary according to national contexts, particularly with regard to stakeholders, the structures of political will-formation, and institutional structures. Some universities may therefore choose to cooperate with regional organisations active in European affairs or, more generally, in civil society.

For the European University Viadrina, the partner for this initiative will be the European Academy Berlin (EAB, <https://www.eab-berlin.eu/>). As a Framework Partner of the European Union in the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV), the EAB serves as a publicly funded hub for fostering and disseminating knowledge across the spectrum of European politics and societies. The EAB's expertise will not only enrich the workshops but also extend to providing access to its extensive network, including its well-established and effectively managed distribution channels.

The Author(s)



PROF. DR. TIMM BEICHELT

Timm Beichelt is a political scientist from Frankfurt (Oder), a town on the German-Polish Border. He has been teaching as a professor for European Studies at Viadrina University since 2003. He is the principal investigator of the ValEUs consortium which deals with the status of values within European societies and the EU's political system, in particular in relation to the non-European world.

About the Project

ValEUs brings together 20 universities from five continents, combining their strong expertise in EU studies across a wide range of academic disciplines. The Jean Monnet Network will foster joint research capacities, develop innovative teaching collaboration, and engage in societal policy debate to establish impactful policy recommendations. ValEUs is funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission (2024-2026).

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Email: contact@valeus.eu

Website: <https://valeus.eu/>