

DAAD Meeting „Setting Out for the Future – How can we Drive Europe Forward?“

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Workshop „The European Way of Life “ – Policy Paper’s Draft

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1. Why we need a discourse on European values

*‘Europe is an idea... and Europe will only live through the idea that we have of it’
– President Macron, Sorbonne speech*

What is Europe? Is the European Union primarily an economic project, a geopolitical entity, or a union based on values rooted in a common idea and a common history? And if the latter, what are these fundamental values, and how should they be realized in practice? The answer to these questions is at the heart of current debates regarding the future of Europe.

The idea of Europe has a long history, but is also fundamentally problematic. Freedom, democracy, rule of law, human rights, solidarity, critical thinking and the pursuit of knowledge are part of the European inheritance shaped by the Classical world, Europe’s religious traditions, European humanism and the Enlightenment. But this history is also characterized by colonialism, violent expansion, and the exclusion and oppression of groups and individuals based on class, gender, race, nationality, religion or sexual identity. Because of this history, which also shapes our present, it is necessary to reflect **critically** on Europe’s traditional self-image as the singular representative of universal ideals of progress, democracy, and human rights.

Furthermore, while it may not be difficult to produce a basic list of European values, individual persons as well as member states may not identify with all of these values or agree how to implement them in practice. Consider, for example, different interpretations of the value of solidarity in the European debt crisis, or conflicts regarding the jurisdiction of the European courts when it comes to the rule of law. Because Europe is socially, culturally, economically and politically diverse, values cannot be imposed from above by politicians or academics, or by individual member states; instead, they must take shape from the bottom up in an **inclusive** manner through a process of experimentation, negotiation and creative imagination.

Finally, it has too often been the case that the discourse on European values receives attention only when a crisis occurs – e.g. regarding solidarity in relation to the debt crisis, human rights in relation to the refugee crisis, sovereignty and security in relation to the war in Ukraine – and when the crisis lulls, people lose interest. On the other hand, crises may cause values to retreat into the background in the face of strategic or economic concerns, as may be the case today with the impact of the war in Ukraine on the conflict regarding rule of law in Poland and Hungary. For this reason, we must find ways to create a **sustained** discourse on European values and identity which is active rather than reactive, which helps shape the European response to crises rather than being shaped by them.

This policy paper proposes approaches to achieving a sustained, inclusive, critical discourse on European values in the fields of the sciences, education, and arts. Finally, it proposes setting up an annual challenge awarding a prize to projects in different fields which demonstrate creative solutions for applying European values in practice.

2. Ideas and Approaches in...

2.1 Sciences

The goal is to strengthen one of the essential European values, academic freedom, at universities and for researchers at all career stages and in all research fields. The aim is to establish a platform, **VOICES (Providing Opportunities for International Cooperation Among Scholars under Pressure)**, for scientists and decision-makers to network and support each other in their research fields when their interests are endangered in their home countries by populist, discriminatory or in other ways restrictive worldviews.

2.2 Education

Under the umbrella of the [DAAD EU-Ideas-Lab](#), we have been discussing and deepening ideas on how education in Europe can better respond to the growing pressures of right-wing populism, hatred and racism that are increasingly threatening the European way of life and its democratic values. These discussions involve education professionals such as teachers, academics, civil society leaders and others interested in the topic. After several sessions of passionate discussions and analyses, our reflections and ideas focused on the need to increasingly promote education for democratic citizenship in our schools as a better way to defend and promote European values. Recognizing the role of the teacher in the mediation and dissemination of knowledge and values in society, the discussion groups concluded that to achieve this it is necessary to create a **Center for Networking and Continuing Teacher Training on Education for Democratic Citizenship**. Such a centre will creatively help to better disseminate the European values of democracy, human rights, justice, solidarity, among others, and consequently help to minimize outbreaks of hatred, right-wing populism, discrimination and racist actions.

2.3 Ideas and Approaches in Arts

It is precisely thinking art, science and technology together that has the potential to generate an expanded knowledge and consciousness, according to Peter Sloterdijk.¹ The novel concept of **Art Thinking** – a complementary model to “design thinking” – can foster an analytical, non-standard type of thought process. Art Thinking proves to be a key novel approach in the innovation cycle that may be integrated into formal education curricula, business practices and community learning alike, which was proven by the recently finished MASTmodule.eu project.² Artists tend to find solutions for non-existing problems or make problems where there are none – but might soon arise without doing something! In the context of political education and exchange of perspectives and values, art may be a fruitful catalyst. **Speculative art** takes into consideration what we know now, makes predictions on the future and proposes solutions to problems that have not yet arisen, or might never, which makes them particularly relevant for addressing the yet unforeseeable and unknown issues on sustainability, accessibility and equitability of (discourses on) European values. We therefore want to create a framework and an open space for art projects touching on socio-political topics to exchange, to intertwine and to flourish.

2.4 Rewarding Initiatives and Discussion: living valEU

We will create a **platform** that enables us to reward the commitment to European values, expanding knowledge and actively furthering not only values, but also the definition of values. Different protagonists from European countries can apply for an **award and funding** for already existing projects that are connected to a European value. Part of the challenge will be for the participants to show what the value is and how their project realizes it in practice. The awardees, chosen by a jury that consists of an ethics committee legitimated by expertise and diversity, will interact with other actors in politics, media, civil society, education and academia to form a platform within which discourse about European values thrives in the form of conferences, publications and interactive best practices. The aim of this challenge is thus to reward initiatives and simultaneously facilitate a discussion on what exactly European values are, i.e. what kinds of foci different values have in different European cultural contexts. This way, public awareness as well as an open-minded and equal discussion about the plurality of value-concepts is furthered. **A more detailed Policy Booklet can be found [here](#).**

¹ Peter Sloterdijk, The Aesthetic Imperative: Writings on Art (Polity, K. Margolis, Trans.; 1st edition, 2017).

² Castillo-Rutz, Nayari and Peter Purg (Eds.), MAST Manual (Nova Gorica: University of Nova Gorica Press, 2021), 26-39.