

LEARNING GUIDELINES

EU VALUES

This module on EU values consists of **three parts**:

It starts with a **four-of-a-kind game**, with which the players discover the EU's common values and some concrete examples of how the EU puts them into practice. After getting to know these values, pupils are asked to reflect critically on them through an **individual exercise**. Finally, they further develop their democratic skills through a **class debate exercise**, with 16 statements to choose from. The game can also be played separately from the other two parts.

Methodology	Duration	Materials
Educational game: EU values	20 mins	- <u>Set of 32 value cards</u> for each group of players. The cards need to be printed on one side and cut out. - <u>Set of 30 true or false cards</u> for each group of players. The cards need to be printed on one side and cut out.
Individual exercise	10 mins	- <u>Personal value map</u> for every pupil.
Class debate exercise	10 minutes per statement	- Computer + projector - <u>Presentation</u> - The completed personal value maps of the pupils.

OBJECTIVES AND SKILLS

Attitude

- The pupils are fully aware of the EU's common values.

Knowledge

- The pupils know the European Union's values and some concrete examples of how the EU puts them into practice.

Skills

- The pupils develop their own opinion about the European Union's values.
- The pupils train their debating skills.

STEP BY STEP

1. THE GAME

Setting

The class is divided into smaller groups, preferably of four pupils each. Groups of three or five pupils are also possible, if necessary. Each group sits around a table. The pupils play against the others in their group. Every group has one set of 32 value cards and one set of 30 true or false question cards.

Process

- The value cards are distributed to the group members. If there are four players, each player receives eight cards. If there are three or five players, some players will have an extra card. The players hold their cards in their hands and don't show them to the other players.
- In the middle of the table there is a stack of 30 true or false question cards, with the blank sides facing upwards.
- The ultimate goal of the game is to collect the most sets of four cards of the same EU value.
- The oldest group member starts. They **ask** another player of choice if they have a **game card of a specific EU value, e.g. solidarity**. This first player must have at least one game card of this EU value himself.
 - If the other player doesn't have the requested card, they say so and the player on the left takes their turn.
 - If the other player does have the requested card, they take a true or false card from the stack of cards in the middle of the table and ask the question on it.
 - If the first player answers correctly, they receive the requested game card. 'True' or 'false' is sufficient as an answer; the player doesn't have to give any additional information.
 - If the answer is incorrect, there is no exchange of cards and the true or false card is put back at the bottom of the stack of cards on the table.
 - In both cases, the player on the left is the next to take their turn.
- When a player gathers a set of four cards of the same EU value, they shout 'four of a kind!' and put the set on the table. That set of cards cannot be taken away from the player.
- The game is over when all eight sets are complete. The pupil(s) with the most sets wins/win the game.

Content

See the document with the game cards and true or false cards for the content.

- On the 32 value cards, the pupils discover eight EU values and some examples of how the European Union/European Parliament puts these values into practice in the EU and abroad. There are eight sets of four cards.
- The 30 true-or-false cards each contain a true or false question that corresponds to the information on the value cards. The pupils can use the information on their value cards to respond to the true or false cards.

2. INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE

The goal of this exercise is to reflect on each of the values and form an opinion. This exercise is a preparation for the class debate exercise.

Setting

Each pupil sits at a table and is given a personal value map.

Process

The teacher hands out a personal value map to every student. This is a personal document meant only for the student. On the personal value map, the EU values are already given, along with a basic definition. The teacher gives the following instructions:

1. Indicate whether or not you personally agree with the values

The teacher asks the pupils to reflect individually on each of the values and the basic definition of it.

Ask yourself the question: 'Do I personally endorse these values?' In other words, do you agree (on a personal level) that every man should be free, equal, live in a democracy, live by the rule of law, respect human dignity and human rights, be tolerant and show solidarity? Think about it and put a circle around 'agree' or 'disagree' next to each value, according to your opinion.

2. Rank the values according to their importance

In the 'Priorities for the EU' column on the value map, students rank the values according to how important to the EU they think this value should be (1 = most important, 8 = least important). This is an individual exercise for which the outcome will differ for every student.

3. CLASS DEBATE EXERCISE

The goal of this part is to work together to elaborate on the meaning of (some of) the values. For every value, there are two statements in the presentation. The teacher chooses two to four statements to discuss in the classroom, according to the interests of the students.

Note: the statements are meant to prompt a discussion about the value. They are not opinions on the value.

Setting

The setting should be appropriate for a class discussion and should also allow the students to see the statements shown on the screen at the front of the classroom.

Process

Discussion process, for each statement:

1. FIRST VOTE

The teacher shows the class a statement of their choice and gives instructions: 'Look at the statement. Think about it briefly and decide for yourself whether you agree or disagree. There is no "in between"; you have to choose one side.'

Some important remarks:

- There may be some questions about the statement. The teacher clarifies what is meant by the statement (where possible).
- This is just an intuitive vote after which the topic will be discussed in more detail.
- There is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer.
- The statements are only meant to spark a discussion; they are not real opinions.

The teacher counts the votes and writes them down.

2. PLENARY DISCUSSION

The teacher asks one of the students to explain their point of view. After that, the teacher asks the group who agrees and who disagrees with the person who had the floor to trigger a group discussion. Tip: choosing someone from the 'minority' group of voters to speak first can provoke reactions from the students who voted in the opposite way. This will encourage the pupils to debate.

The teacher moderates the discussion.

3. SECOND VOTE (OPTIONAL)

After the group discussion, the teacher opens a second vote. They count the votes and compare them to the results of the first round. Did some students change their mind?

4. CONCLUSION

After the second vote, the teacher asks the pupils to check whether their answer is in line with what they indicated on their personal value map: Do they still agree with this value? Would they change the ranking?

Some tips for moderating the discussion

- Start off with pointing out the basic rules of the discussion: listen to each other; wait for your turn to talk; stay polite; stay on topic; don't talk for too long and let others have their say as well. This allows you to refer to these rules during the discussion.
- Do not express your own opinion; be as neutral as possible, as long as your pupils follow the rules of discussion.

- Try to give the floor to as many different students as possible.
- When there is no immediate reaction, reformulate or play devil's advocate by asking provocative questions.
- If one student dominates the discussion, try to interrupt, politely summarise what he or she said and give the floor to another student, e.g. by asking which students agree or disagree with what has just been said.
- If a student wanders off topic, interrupt and ask them to stick to the main subject. This might seem impolite, but other students might be grateful.

Content

The statements are shown in the presentation for this module. Here, the statements are repeated with some extra information.

DISCLAIMER

The statements used are meant to prompt a class discussion about European Union values. They are not opinions on the value, nor do they represent the point of view of the European Parliament.

DEMOCRACY

1. 'Every citizen in the EU should have the right to vote and be heard.'

This statement encourages students to reflect on the fundamental principles of democracy — in particular, the right of every citizen to participate in decision-making by voting and having their voice taken into account. In the European Union, this includes the right to vote in local and European elections, even when living in another Member State — a right that does not apply to national elections, which remain governed by each country's own rules. But being "heard" goes beyond voting: it also raises questions about how citizens can participate in democracy and influence decisions between elections, especially in complex matters where a single vote may not capture the full range of public opinion. How can democratic systems ensure that everyone's voice counts — not only on election day, but also in shaping the policies that affect their daily lives?

2. 'European citizens should be able to launch EU-wide binding referendums if enough people in different EU countries agree.'

This statement invites students to reflect on whether EU citizens should have the right to initiate binding referendums across borders. It raises questions about how direct democracy can function at the EU level, given its complexity and size — 445 million citizens across 27 countries. Could such cross-border referendums strengthen democratic participation, or would they present practical and political challenges?

This is an opportunity to introduce the [European Citizens' Initiative \(ECI\)](#), the official tool for cross-border participation under the EU Treaties. If one million citizens from at least seven EU countries support a proposal, they can invite the European Commission to consider tabling new legislation on a specific issue — although the Commission is not obliged to act, but has to justify such a decision. As part of the process, the organisers of a successful ECI will meet with Commission representatives and then participate at a public hearing organised by the European Parliament. In this hearing with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), Parliament will ensure that the Commission has followed due process and that it is represented at the appropriate level, while also inviting other institutions and stakeholders.

FREEDOM

1. 'Freedom means not having any responsibilities.'

Responsibilities' can mean many things: Being responsible in your society, e.g., helping others, helping your family, taking care of your elderly parents or grandparents, taking care of your children... In a broader sense, it means 'citizenship', behaving in a way that is respectful to oneself and to others, not damaging or polluting public infrastructure (roads for example), etc.

If everyone agrees, you can play devil's advocate by asking whether they think that someone who chooses not to do anything for society is entitled to all the benefits of a welfare state like free education, cheap medical care, unemployment allowance, etc., for which others pay.

2. 'Freedom of expression means: Discriminating or hateful speech must be tolerated in the European Parliament.'

If a political party supports viewpoints that are against the EU values, like being discriminative or inciting hatred against specific groups of people, does this mean they should not be able to express their beliefs and be excluded from parliamentary processes?

Once pupils have shared their opinions on that statement, you may explain the following:

a. Parliament has strict [standards of conduct](#) for its Members, which stipulate that "*Members shall not resort to offensive language,*" which includes defamatory language, hate speech, and incitement to discrimination. The Rules of Procedure also lay down different [measures in case of non-compliance](#) – which can never include restrictions on an MEP's right to vote in plenary.

b. Parliament has a [very clear position](#) in favour of criminalising hate speech under EU law, to ensure universal protection for all, with a special focus on targeted persons and vulnerable groups. Currently, member states' criminal laws deal with hate speech and hate crime in different ways, while EU-wide rules apply only when such crimes are committed based on race, skin colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin.

c. In practice, political groups can (and have, for several legislative terms) work together to ensure that members who subscribe to extreme positions do not get elected to office in Parliament (e.g. committee chairs and members of the Bureau). The Members have the [freedom of mandate](#), which means they can choose whom to vote for, and they have consistently chosen to limit the influence of groups espousing extreme ideas.

SOLIDARITY

1. 'EU countries should help one another in times of need.'

This statement asks whether the countries within the EU should show solidarity towards other Member States when they are in trouble. Should the EU be that kind of Union, in which countries can count on each other?

The Treaty on the functioning of the EU does include a "solidarity clause" (article 222), which stipulates that *"the Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster. The Union shall mobilise all the instruments at its disposal, including the military resources made available by the Member States"*

This principle has been applied in various situations. After the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, EU countries provided military and intelligence support to France. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they coordinated medical aid and set up a joint vaccine programme. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism has helped respond to floods and wildfires, while the Recovery and Resilience Facility was created to support economic recovery across Member States. In response to Russia's war against Ukraine, the EU has also supported countries hosting refugees. These examples show how solidarity can take many forms in times of crisis.

2. 'If an EU country cannot pay its debts, other EU countries have to step in to help.'

This statement encourages students to consider the meaning of solidarity within the European Union, especially in times of economic crisis. Should Member States be required to support one another financially if one of them faces serious debt problems? This became a central question during the eurozone crisis, when countries like Greece received financial assistance from other EU countries and international institutions, under strict conditions.

Such support raises important questions: Is it fair for taxpayers in one country to contribute to another country's debts? On the other hand, could refusing to help risk the stability of the EU as a whole – not only economically, but also in areas where cooperation is becoming increasingly important, such as defence and security? Should there be any conditions to such help, as during the financial crises, where financial assistance to countries was tied to strict reform programmes and budgetary oversight? This also touches on broader debates about shared responsibility, national sovereignty, and the limits of EU intervention. Where should the line be drawn between national and EU-level responsibilities in economic matters?

Article 125 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union addresses this issue. Known as the "no-bailout clause," it stipulates that *"a Member State shall not be liable for or assume the commitments of [...] another Member State."*

EQUALITY / NON-DISCRIMINATION

1. 'Everyone in the EU should have equal opportunities in all aspects of life.'

The teacher can point out the difference between the desired situation and the real situation. Is everyone equal, and should they be treated equally? For example, would a member of a marginalised ethnic group be treated fairly in court? Does every woman have equal access to sexual and reproductive rights and healthcare? Are the fundamental rights of LGBTIQ+ people equally applied and protected in all Member States?

The underlying issue here is the fact that our society, in each Member State, is comprised of different social groups. What needs to be reflected upon is that while we are all equal before the law, is this equality true in reality?

The statement is reflected in the Charter of Fundamental Rights (which has the same legal value as the EU Treaties), especially in:

- Article 20 (equality before the law),
- Article 21 (non-discrimination),
- and Article 23 (equality between women and men).

2. To achieve real equality in the EU, (temporary) quotas are needed to address long-standing imbalances.'

Quotas, also known as 'Positive discrimination' = the practice of giving special benefits to people from a group that is sometimes being treated in an unfair way or are not well-represented in the labour market, in higher positions, etc. For example, in many European countries, employers who hire a disabled person are rewarded financially as an incentive for hiring them. Another example is the introduction of targets or quotas in EU law to [increase the representation of women on company boards](#). Parliament uses gender and other quotas internally (e.g. gender quotas for committee bureaux and geographic ones for delegations), and has also pushed for a revision of the [rules for European Elections](#) that would apply this principle.

Should such measures be used as temporary tools to help achieve equality (i.e. until equality becomes the norm), or are there reasons why they should not be used at all?

THE RULE OF LAW / JUSTICE

1. 'All criminals have the right to a fair trial, with a proper defence.'

The picture in the presentation shows Anders Breivik, a Norwegian far-right terrorist who, on 22 July 2011, killed eight people in Oslo, then shot dead 69 young people on a summer camp on the island of Utøya. In August 2012 he was convicted of mass murder and terrorism.

This statement is to provoke a discussion on the importance of the right to a fair trial — even in extreme and emotionally difficult cases. Should individuals who have clearly committed horrific crimes still be entitled to a proper legal defence, be considered 'innocent until proven guilty'? This raises fundamental questions about justice, human rights, and the rule of law: are these rights universal and unconditional, or can there be exceptions?

The right to a fair trial and proper defence is protected by Articles 47 and 48 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

2. 'The EU must strictly enforce the rule of law by putting sanctions on EU countries that fail to support an independent court system.'

This statement raises the question of how the EU can respond when a Member State no longer guarantees judicial independence, which affects first and foremost the fundamental rights of all Europeans and the functioning of the internal market. EU law provides several mechanisms to enforce the rule of law – a principle each Member State committed to upholding upon joining the Union. These include infringement procedures (led by the European Commission), proceedings

foreseen in Article 7 of the Treaty on the EU (which can lead to the suspension of a country's voting rights, upon consent by the European Parliament), and the conditionality mechanism (enshrined in [Regulation 2020/2092](#)), which allows the EU to suspend EU funds if breaches risk affecting the EU budget. These tools aim to uphold shared values while protecting the integrity of the Union.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

1. **'The EU should not do business with regimes that violate human rights, even if the deal would be good for the EU'.**

The EU does make trade or other deals with regimes that reportedly violate human rights. For example, the EU makes deals with African countries who repeatedly violate human rights, to stop migrants from coming to the EU. Additionally, some deals are necessary to obtain certain raw materials we do not have in Europe, e.g. cobalt, which we use in cell phones.

At the same time, the EU is committed to promoting human rights globally. Most of its trade and cooperation agreements include human rights clauses, which, in principle, allow for suspension in cases of serious violations. The European Parliament has adopted several resolutions calling for stricter enforcement of these provisions, particularly where abuses are persistent.

More information is available on the [European Commission's page on trade and human rights](#).

2. **'EU tech companies should be stopped from selling surveillance software to governments that use it to silence protest movements.**

This statement raises ethical and legal questions about the export of surveillance technologies. While such tools can help fight crime or terrorism, they can also be misused by authoritarian regimes to monitor and repress civil society, journalists, and protest movements.

Under EU export control law, particularly the [Dual-Use Regulation \(link\)](#), companies must obtain authorisation before exporting certain technologies that can be used for both civilian and military purposes — including cyber-surveillance tools. Export licences can be denied if there is a clear risk that the technology could be used for internal repression or serious violations of human rights. The regulation also encourages greater transparency and coordination among Member States when evaluating such risks.

However, some argue that this puts EU companies at a disadvantage compared to companies from non-EU countries, which may not face the same strict rules and can sell similar technologies more easily.

TOLERANCE / PLURALISM

1. **'Wearing religious symbols, like a cross or a veil, should be allowed at school and at work.'**

Freedom of freedom of thought, conscience and religion is enshrined in article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The question here is whether students think that practicing your religion at work or school should be allowed.

This is a debate that has been or is going on in several EU countries. A minority of EU countries have national, regional and/or local legal prohibitions relating to the wearing of (some forms of) religious

clothing and symbols at work in public and/or private employment, in other areas or even in all public spaces. A few other Member States are considering such legislation. Therefore, practices vary significantly between Member States.

Under Article 9(2) of the European Convention on Human Rights, to which all EU Member States are parties, the right to manifest one's religion can only be restricted if certain conditions are fulfilled: the restriction must be prescribed by law; must be necessary in a democratic society by fulfilling a pressing social need; must have a legitimate aim (these aims are mentioned in the same article); and, the means used to achieve that aim must be proportionate and necessary. Cases concerning the scope and justification of such restrictions are regularly brought before the European Court of Human Rights.

2. 'Intolerant jokes and comments are fine between friends, as long as you keep them to yourself'

This statement invites students to think about situations where people make jokes or comments among friends that might seem harmless — but could actually be offensive or hurtful to others. Have they ever heard or made such jokes? Did they think it was just fun, or did someone feel uncomfortable?

Even if something is said in private, it can still affect how we see certain groups and contribute to discrimination. Some might say it's just freedom of speech — but where is the line between expressing yourself and harming others?

This raises important questions about respect, responsibility, and the impact of words — even when said "just between friends".

RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY

1. 'No one in the EU should have to live on the streets.'

This statement encourages students to think about homelessness and housing insecurity in the EU. What does it mean to have a decent standard of living, and whose responsibility is it to ensure that everyone has a place to live?

Housing is a basic human need, and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) states that people in need should have access to shelter and support. Many EU countries have programmes to fight homelessness, but the situation remains difficult in many places. Should the EU do more to help, or is this mainly the job of national or local governments?

This topic raises questions about social justice, dignity, and the kind of society the EU wants to build.

The EU supports countries in fighting homelessness by helping them share ideas and fund local projects. In 2021, it set up the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness to encourage cooperation and find better solutions. Through EU funds like the European Social Fund+, money is also made available to support housing and social services.

2. 'When human dignity is at risk, the EU should be allowed to intervene, even if it means challenging national governments.'

This statement invites students to reflect on the balance between national sovereignty and shared values in the EU. Human dignity is one of the core principles of the EU, protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (article 1). But what happens when a government in an EU country fails to protect this principle — for example, by intentionally mistreating minorities or foreigners, systematically turning a blind eye to breaches of human rights by law enforcement or restricting

essential services for specific groups on ideological grounds, or failing to care for vulnerable people, like unaccompanied underage migrants?

The EU can take action in certain cases, such as through legal procedures, funding conditions, or political pressure. But these steps can be controversial, as some argue that each country should decide on its own how to handle social and moral issues.

This raises important questions: Should the EU be more active in defending human dignity across Europe, or would that go too far in interfering with national choices?

Useful links

- [Aims and Values of the European Union](#)
- [How the EU can act \(infographic\)](#)
- [Democracy and human rights in the European Parliament](#)
- [Protecting fundamental rights within the Union](#)
- [The protection of Article 2 TEU values in the EU](#)
- Read more about the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#)
- Read more about the Sakharov Prize on www.europarl.europa.eu/sakharovprize