

## Europe: A question of values

Beyond political union and the single market, the European Union is also a question of values. Thanks to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, legally binding since 2009, Europeans are guaranteed the exercise of their fundamental rights and freedoms, an objective for which the Civil Liberties Committee of the European Parliament works. In addition, citizens can be heard in Europe through the Petitions Committee and the European Ombudsman, two bodies dependent on the European Parliament. But the promotion of European values extends beyond European borders, thanks to the intense diplomatic work carried out by the European Parliament in this regard and the recognition of those who work for freedom and human rights, through the granting of Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Conscience.

## The fundamental values of the EU

The Treaty of Lisbon includes as fundamental values of the European Union respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and human rights and establishes that the Union aims to promote the peace and well-being of its peoples. These are legally binding principles that Member States are obliged to observe. In case of serious infringement, the European Parliament could approve the suspension of rights derived from the EU Treaties.

Since its creation, the European Parliament has been characterized as the main defender of these values both inside and outside European borders. Not in vain, according to the latest opinion polls, EU citizens believe that human rights are the value that the European Parliament must defend as a priority. In this way, the European Parliament has over time become the sounding board for universal values and a forum for the defense of human rights and freedoms through its many diplomatic instruments.

# The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU

The European Parliament's tireless struggle for fundamental rights made possible the proclamation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which was adopted in Nice in 2000. At the convention responsible for drafting the Charter, the delegation of the The European Parliament played a fundamental role. Subsequently, the Parliament's efforts focused on claiming its inclusion in the constituent treaties and finally in 2007 it obtained that the Treaty of Lisbon granted binding force. The European Parliament also promoted the creation of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights, created in 2007 as an independent agency of the EU in charge of providing advice to the Member States on fundamental rights issues

## The promotion of European values within the EU

Through its Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, the European Parliament ensures the protection of freedoms and the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Throughout this legislature, the European Parliament has approved numerous initiatives in this area, among which the reform of European legislation on data protection, the extension of the rights of asylum seekers, the fight against trafficking in persons and the protection of victims, with special emphasis on the protection of victims of ill-treatment beyond their national borders.

## A democratic European Union

. Being the only community institution directly elected by Europeans, the European Parliament is leading the efforts to democratize the European Union and to place the citizen at the center of political decisions. In this sense, two bodies are responsible for addressing the claims of European citizens:

On the one hand, the Petitions Committee allows citizens of the EU, as well as companies, associations or organizations with their registered office in the EU,

to exercise their right to submit a petition to the European Parliament on a subject that falls within the scope of the scope of action of the Union and which directly affects it. Over the past year, the European Parliament received 2,885 requests, representing an increase of 45% over the previous year. Spaniards are among the most active Europeans when it comes to exercising the right of petition: in 2012, a total of 311 Spanish citizens submitted a petition to the European Parliament, only surpassed by the Germans, with 475 petitions.

On the other hand, the European Ombudsman is responsible for investigating complaints against the institutions and bodies of the European Union for maladministration, including the European Commission, the Council of the EU, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee and all the EU agencies. In 2012, the Ombudsman registered 2,442 complaints, initiated 465 investigations and concluded 390. The Spaniards led the complaints that year, with 340 registered complaints, compared to 273 of the Germans and 235 of the Poles.

## Human rights beyond European borders

The role of the European Parliament in the promotion of European values and, above all, of human rights is not confined to the 28 countries that make up the European Union. Also in the common foreign and security policy of the EU, the European Parliament supports the declared objective of "developing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms". In this regard, the European Parliament debates the urgent cases of violation of human rights in third countries every month in plenary session and sends ad hoc delegations to assess the human rights situation on the ground. In addition, MEPs can block the conclusion of agreements with third countries in case of serious violation of human rights and democratic principles, as happened with Syria in 2011.

In the recent crisis in Ukraine, the European Parliament has expressed its support for the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian demonstrators who demanded to increase relations with the EU and demanded greater firmness from Russia. It has also given its approval to the granting of a package of financial aid to Ukraine of more than 11,000 million euros.

# The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Conscience

One of the most important and most media-related points of the European Parliament's work on human rights is the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Conscience, which is awarded each December to individuals or organizations fighting for human rights and fundamental liberties. It is the highest award granted by the European Union to the efforts made in favor of human rights and provides moral support to those who receive it to continue fighting for the cause they defend.

With a prize of 50,000 euros, the Sakharov Prize is awarded to people and associations of very different profiles: dissidents, political leaders, journalists, lawyers, activists, writers, minority leaders, prisoners of conscience and even graphic comedians. Among the winners since the creation of the award in 1988, Nelson Mandela (1988), the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (1992), the group Basta ya! (2000), Kofi Annan (2003) and Reporters Without Borders (2005).

In 2013, coinciding with its 25th anniversary, the European Parliament awarded the Sakharov Prize to the Pakistani girl activist Malala Yousafzai, who was shot in the face by the Taliban for defending the right of women to education.

## VALUES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

You often hear "is that there are no values", as if values were a component of fashion that when they fulfill their function disappear from the market. No, the values are always there, generating wills for or against. Our lives revolve around values that we propose as ends. It is true that there are many types of existing values whose achievement we pursue with unequal fortune. Every day we go out of our way for "values" related to the world of economics and finance, where there are objective "values" and "goods" expressed in the price we are willing to pay for them; but in parallel we can also judge our behaviors based on the cultural and moral values that make up our fundamental principles. These are the most "valuable" and, therefore, the most complex and controversial, whose progression is neither continuous nor stable. It is not a question of theorizing now about the nature of these values, from the perspective of the

formal and "cold" ethics of Kant or the more "warm" of Max Scheler, but of defending the existence of positive values where they are consolidated or where they intend to establish themselves, and at the same time reject vigorously the domain of the counter-values. Each era, each society has its own specific framework that conditions the perception of values, as well as the possibilities and priorities of them. And there is no doubt that the value is transformed profoundly, radically according to the number of individuals in which it becomes aware, in which it is realized. It is, without doubt, the execution of values that dignifies people; it is the advance, the implantation of these values that we have to consider as a scale of

The story, in short, is nothing but a long distance race to get closer to that goal. And often, too, to get away from it. Good example of the latter is in the recent war in Iraq, where lies, the abuse of all kinds of human rights and the law of the strongest, is the sad baggage of dominant values. But today, fortunately, we are witnessing other events that represent a step forward in the realization and declaration of fundamental human values. Although it seems a contradiction, I think that this reading can be done with the reactions produced after the terrible tsunami in Southeast Asia. It is true that if we "dig a little" everything that glitters is not gold, but the solidarity shown by countries, institutions and people deserves great respect; Even in the future there are projects to form intervention teams, so that the presence of soldiers and armies does not give rise to fears and threats (at least not always), which shows their possible reconversion. But these days, the role belongs to the future European Constitution and its referendum in our country next day 20. authentic human progress.

We must welcome and welcome with joy the attempt of this Magna Carta to extend the so-called values of the Union to a large number of countries: "The values of respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights ... pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men ". It is a declaration of principles, a program that by itself can not be developed. It requires the support and control of each of the citizens of the Union. No one will claim that it is a complete or finished project, but a promising development. Before reaching the conquest of these values, each of the 25 member countries has made its own historical career, has gone through its dark and painful tunnel, in which disunity prevailed in front of the Union. Therefore, now, there are reasons for optimism, to see the bottle half full. And if we review these last years, since our incorporation into the European Union, we must recognize its effects in multiple sectors such as work, infrastructure, new currency, social and educational projects, conservation of spaces and cities (ours, without going any further) . Our development would not have been the same. Therefore, in addition to the strength of respect for democratic values in themselves, gratitude should be part of our reasons for supporting the Union. And I would like to think that all political parties defend their support, abstain or reject the future European Constitution by deep and free convictions, and not by assumptions based on their own electoralist corset.

The Union itself tells us that "it is based on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to MS in a society characterized by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men. "

Article 49 EU Treaty (TEU) says "Any European State that respects the values mentioned in art. 2 and undertakes to promote them may apply for membership in the Union. The European Parliament and national Parliaments will be informed of this request. The requesting State shall address its request to the Council, which shall act unanimously after having consulted the Commission and with the prior approval of the European Parliament, which shall act by a majority of its members. The eligibility criteria agreed by the European Council will be taken into account.

The conditions of admission and the adaptations that such admission implies in those relating to the Treaties on which the Union is founded will be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the requesting State. Said agreement shall be submitted for ratification by all Contracting States, in accordance with their respective constitutional norms. "

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