

# Conclusion

To conclude this discussion, it is worth returning to the three research questions I raised in the introduction. These were: (i) On what grounds, if any, can EU values be regarded as a meaningful and common moral standpoint amongst the member states? (ii) What type of institutional framework could best realise the common good in the EU? and (iii) What conditions can foster, or jeopardise, the development of stronger civic bonds amongst EU citizens? Let me briefly summarise the answers that I have provided.

I have claimed that public values – understood as those endorsed by a given polity through its fundamental legal sources, notably constitutions and international treaties – provide guidelines regarding what fundamental conditions and goals a society considers desirable. Contrary to personal or cultural values, public values are not connected to one’s worldview, ethical convictions or religious beliefs. By bridging the substantial moral differences amongst citizens, public values create a common viewpoint in which collective choices can be publicly labelled as “good” or “bad” – that is, the standpoint of the common good. I have further argued that when a group of states explicitly endorses common public values through international treaties, it is possible to derive a transnational conception of the common good.

This possibility, I have suggested, applies in the case of the EU member states. I have claimed that the values outlined in the EU treaties allow for the mapping of conditions and goals that member states jointly consider desirable, thus translating a shared understanding of the common good. These notably include maintaining liberal democracy, enabling decent standards of social welfare and ensuring a high level of environmental protection. Against what I have dubbed the cultural approach to European values, I have claimed that EU values are not European by definition. Indeed, they have been endorsed by a few non-European like-minded states. Furthermore, EU values are not set in stone. Indeed, they are subject to a gradual interpretation through EU policymaking processes, judicial decisions and public debates and may change more dramatically by means of reforming the EU treaties.

EU values, I have argued, are not just a moral point of reference. They should be promptly put into practice by the EU institutions, which have a duty to seek their enforcement by the member states and to promote an international order that enables their fulfilment. I have claimed that, in its capacity as guardian of EU values, the EU should develop robust safeguards against internal breaches of EU values, notably by better enforcing the provision of the Treaty on European Union regarding the suspension of the voting rights of non-compliant member states, as well as by creating a procedure through which chronically non-compliant member states could be ejected from the Union. At the same time, acting as an enabler of the European Model, the EU should create a set of bodies that would allow its values to be realised in a globalised world where non-state actors are increasingly powerful. I have presented three examples of such institutions: (i) a European Transnational Tax Authority, (ii) a European Credit Rating Agency and (iii) a European Agency for Fair Trade.

To be effective, this institutional framework to pursue EU values would need to be complemented by a few reforms of the EU decision-making process. This need for reform is linked to the fact that the national interests within the EU are highly diverse and must be reconciled for the common good to be realised. To achieve this goal, the member states and the EU should pursue at least two complementary strategies. First, EU actors should play a more active role in the processes of national interest formation at the domestic level. I have suggested that an effective avenue to achieve this goal would be upgrading the role of the Representations of the European Commission in the EU capitals, which would bring issues related to the common good of the EU to the attention of national authorities and citizens. Second, the voice and firepower of EU institutions should be strengthened, notably by becoming more representative of the EU demos as a whole (as opposed to national demoi) and by being granted appropriate resources to realise the common good.

Accordingly, I have put forward a few proposals that could help the EU move beyond tricky political deadlocks and act as a credible broker between the member states. More specifically, I have argued that the unanimity rule in the Council of the European Union is normatively undesirable and should be abolished. Furthermore, I have claimed that the impartiality of the European Commission could be enhanced by clearly separating its legislative and supervisory responsibilities. I have also suggested that the presidents of the Commission and the European Council should be directly elected. I have sustained the creation of a pan-European constituency for the European Parliament and the strengthening of the links between the national and European parliaments. Finally, I have proposed the launch of an EU Citizens' Assembly and an advisory board composed of former

presidents of EU institutions. Altogether, these institutional reforms could gear EU policymaking towards the pursuit of the common good.

Yet, I have argued that these reforms and the sacrifices that they may bring about will likely only be feasible if EU citizens develop stronger bonds of civic friendship among each other. I have claimed that this goal could be achieved if adequate public policies were to be adopted by the EU institutions and national governments. I have presented the following proposals: (i) creating a thicker social level playing field in the EU, namely by means of launching an EU labour code; (ii) reducing socioeconomic inequalities in the EU; (iii) improving the opportunities for political participation by EU citizens; (iv) reducing the barriers against freedom of movement, notably by curtailing administrative, legal and economic burdens currently facing free movers; (v) launching a transnational curriculum on EU citizenship education; and (vi) increasing defence cooperation, notably by upgrading the EU mutual defence clause and scaling up the PESCO programme and the EDF.

Despite the tone of disagreement and polarisation that often characterises the public debates on EU affairs, this book has demonstrated that EU member states share a thick understanding of the fundamental conditions and goals that they consider desirable. What seems to be currently missing is not so much a basic moral consensus but the appropriate institutional setting and sufficiently strong transnational civic bonds to bring these conditions and goals forward. In this regard, while admittedly ambitious, the package of proposals presented above would constitute a significant step towards acting and thinking for the common good.