

# WHAT EUROPE BEFORE „MORE EUROPE“: THE EUROPEAN VALUES PERSPECTIVE

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## **Abstract:**

*The paper's starting point is that the answer to the question „what Europe“ should precede the quest for „more Europe“. It is argued that the increasing divergence on the understanding and attainment of core European values such as solidarity, justice and equality within and across EU member states makes the answer to the question „what Europe“ all the more difficult and problematic. Building on historical retrospection and contextualization of „European values“ in European documents, the paper sets out to study the state of convergence and divergence of values within EU focusing in two specific areas – immigration and gender/LGBT issues. To illustrate value frictions the study explores answers to relevant value-laden questions from the European Value Study 2017-2021. The analysis reveals that value divergences can diachronically be seen as a step or phase in the process of the „EU East“ catching up with the „EU West“. Yet, top-down imposition of policies and decisions neglecting the expressed values within societies would not lead to closure of values breaches but (would) rather contribute to rise of populist mobilization and additionally antagonize societies.*

**Keywords:** European values, oppositions within EU, EVS, migration, gender issues, LGBT rights

## **Introduction**

The title of the present paper puns on the topic of the conference where ambitions and realities are juxtaposed to consider the call for more Europe. „What (kind of) Europe?“ is a question that has been raised since the start of the process of unification and integration in the post-WWII Europe. And the answer to this question presupposes and sets the directions for the answers of

„more Europe“. To be sure there are many ways to address the question of „What Europe“. There are formal, normative or technical ways of answering it addressing institutional design, distribution of powers, *acquis communautaire* and policy issues. Considering realities (as in the conference title) implies, however, that we look also at the somewhat elusive concept of European values and frictions that stem therefrom.

There is hardly any doubt that convergence on values – particularly convergence on specific political values – marks the onset of the European project. Yet, as of today, divergences on values underline a number of internal frictions within the Union. Whether it is about questions of rule of law, migration, the EU external relations or LGBT issues, the opposing views and positions can be traced down to a clash of values. The present paper seeks to explore the divergence of values among the EU countries and within the European societies looking at some of the most value-laden issues such as migration and LGBT issues. The claim of value frictions is supported by data from the EVS 2017-2021.

The paper is structured in two parts. The first one conceptualizes „European values“ presenting the concept in a historical context with a particular focus on the analysis of the Future of Europe debates in the European Parliament that took place in 2018-2019. Drawing on data from the EVS 2017-2021, the second part analyses value frictions among and within EU states and societies in regards to immigration and LGBT issues.

## **Conceptualizing and contextualizing „European values“**

„Value/values“ is a term vastly used in philosophy and deriving social sciences to denote the human, social and cultural significance of certain phenomena of reality. Values are fundamental ideas and beliefs about what is important in life and as such they could serve as general guidelines (for choices and action) in all situations. Values are at the core of principles and norms which on their part determine behavior. They can also be seen as key building blocks of identity. Values pertain to individuals, but also to large social groups that are „the ultimate subjects of political values“<sup>1</sup>. Political values represent „conceptions of the way politics and society should be organized“, they are „about the ‘desirable’, and they are ‘moral’ in the sense that they describe the way things ‘should’ or ‘ought’ to be, rather than the way that they are or have been“<sup>2</sup>.

As a term „European values“ was coined relatively recently. It appeared in the 1980s in the process of outgrowing of the European Community into the European Union. However, what the term „European values“ stands for is

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<sup>1</sup> Mirosław Karwat (1982). Political Values as Ideas of Social Need. In: International Political Science Review, Vol. 3, No 2, p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> Miller et al. (1998). Values and Political Change in Postcommunist Europe. Palgrave Macmillan UK

far from recent. Since its inception (which was long before the start of its actual attainment after WWII) the European idea and its practical realization have been associated with the political values of the Enlightenment, which crystallized and prevailed with the French bourgeois revolution and the subsequent bourgeois revolutions of the mid-19th century. There lie the roots of human rights, rule of law and liberal democracy as core European values.

Following the WWII, when the fathers of European integration were looking for ways to establish a working and lasting cooperation between European countries (not least as a means of achieving lasting peace in Europe), there was an awareness that the deep foundations of such cooperation were to be laid not only in economic mutual benefit and the institutional advantages of pooling efforts to achieve goals of mutual interest, but also in the shared values underlying the organization of political communities and their functioning. At the same time, given the historical context at the onset of the European integration process, the core values, underlying this process were juxtaposed to the Realist types of values in the Cold war international relations lying behind the East-West bloc opposition.

By the time it appeared as a construct in the European political discourse, the „European values“ have become to be seen as a vehicle of delineating and boosting a European Identity denoting the shared deep (going back to the Enlightenment) and lasting beliefs and ideals of good and bad, right and wrong, desired and undesired. As political values, European values are believed to refer to what transcends national or state identity and thus can serve as a foundation for shared European identity and by this as a promoter of the European integration process itself. It is within this project of European integration towards the formation of the European Union that the notion of „European values“ has been put forward and promoted by the European Values Study that was launched in early 1980s as a long term-project of the University of Tilburg aimed at studying basic human values in the European populations.<sup>3</sup>

The outgrowth of the European cooperation into the European Union at the beginning of 1990s coincided with the major post-Cold War shifts in the international relations in Central and Eastern Europe. As a consequence, the process of European Eastern enlargement has been entangled with the process of sharing, ascribing to and recognition of European values. Starting with the Copenhagen criteria for joining the EU (especially the political part with its emphasis on democratic government, rule of law, human rights and protection of minorities)<sup>4</sup> the explication and promotion of the „European values“ climaxed in the Treaty of Lisbon which lists a number of values of the Union, namely „freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law and respect for

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<sup>3</sup> See the EVS page at the web-site of Tilburg University at <https://research.tilburguniversity.edu/en/publications/european-values-study> (last accessed October, 2021)

<sup>4</sup> See Accession Criteria (Copenhagen Criteria) at [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/accession\\_criteria\\_copenhagen.html](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen.html) (last accessed October, 2021)

human right, including the right of persons belonging to minorities“. These values in turn promote other values such as pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men.<sup>5</sup> These values are regarded as European core values upon which the European identity rests. The EU is said to safeguard these shared values to ensure that inclusion, tolerance, justice and solidarity prevail.

In the last decade, however, more than ever before it seems that sharing European values has been withering away. Internal and external shocks and consecutive crises of various nature bring to the fore political oppositions in regards to proclaimed European values of tolerance, solidarity, rule of law. „European values“ are waved liked a flag by EU and national politicians but the connection between values and political behaviour on a number of issues remains problematic.

Worth noting in this respect is the analysis of the Future of Europe debates in the European Parliament that took place in 2018-2019.<sup>6</sup> The importance of European values and the need to defend them, both within the EU and externally, is a recurring theme in the speeches of EU Heads of State or Government. The Spanish Prime Minister, for instance, pointed out that „now is the time to protect and defend the values that make our project unique, even envied in the world“ without reference as to the substance of the values. In fact, „defending EU values“ is one of the main messages that all speakers seem to agree upon often mentioning it together with European Identity. But then again some highlighted the Christian roots of the European identity, while others emphasized its basis in principles, values and common interest (without specifying those values).

As one of the core European values, solidarity was mentioned in connection with preserving EU unity. Since the debates preceded the outbreak of Covid-19 crisis, solidarity (or thereof the lack of such and hence the need of strengthening it) was put forth with a reference to migration and economic issues. Rule of law, another of the European core values, was considered as a separate topic in the speeches (coupled with press freedom – sic!). Its prominence, however, remained average: „rule of law“ as a topic appeared in one third of the speeches (7 of 20) with a weight of less than 2 points (in a 1 to 3 point scale).<sup>7</sup> Yet, in more practical terms it should be noted that a new proposal was put forward (by the President of the European Council Charles Michel), namely the introduction of a peer review mechanism on the rule of law<sup>8</sup>, as well as the new measures linking the EU budget with the rule of law

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<sup>5</sup> Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union - TITLE I. COMMON PROVISIONS - Article 2

<sup>6</sup> The Future of Europe debates in the European Parliament 2018-2019. A synthesis of the speeches by EU Heads of State or Government. EPRS. Lead authors: R. Drachenberg and Silvia Kotanidis. PE 637.948 - May 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 11, Figure 8..

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 12, Table 2.

introduced by the Commission. „Tolerance“ was not mentioned a single time. However, there was a new proposal (by the Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez) about the introduction of a binding gender-equality strategy, which clearly refers to the equality between men and women, but also to gender issues and LGBT rights.<sup>9</sup>

The overview of the Future of Europe debates in the European Parliament reveals that convergence on European values stays at a rather abstract level (as in the general recognition that the EU values must be defended). However, when it comes to practical implications and implementation of these values, one encounters varying interpretations and understandings of how these values should be translated into political behaviour and what are their scopes and limitations. Prominent examples here are:

- migration and refugee issue where prolonged (over 3 years) discussion on the proposals for reforms in the Common European asylum system could not reach a compromise among governments and EU institutions on the internal aspects of the EU's migration policy and thus trumps solidarity;
- rule of law issue as a continuous cause of internal frictions becoming particularly conspicuous after the decision of the Polish Constitutional court about the primacy of the national constitution over the EU legislation;
- gender issues and LGBT rights, on which there is a clear division between states that support such rights (in varying scope) and states that are overtly or more tacitly opposing them.

### **Societal dimensions of value frictions**

The deeper roots of value frictions within the EU are to be sought at the societal level, in „the values, beliefs, and attitudes that people living in the various European countries hold in important spheres of their private and social lives“, mapping of which is the core aim of EVS.<sup>10</sup>

This section presents and analyses the EVS 2017-2021<sup>11</sup> dataset results by country focusing on the results of 22 EU member states: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.<sup>12</sup>

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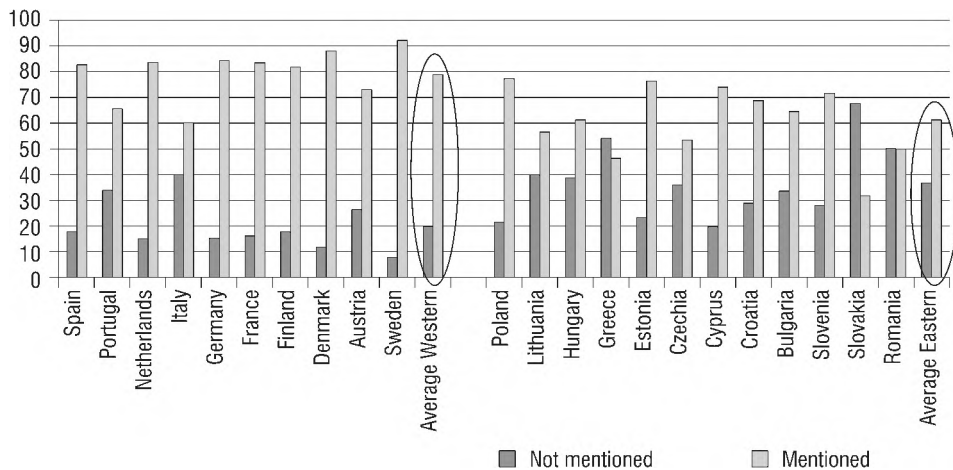
<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> See the EVS page at the web-site of Tilburg University at <https://research.tilburguniversity.edu/en/publications/european-values-study> (last accessed October, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Variable report - Tables. Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021. Dataset. GESIS-DAS and JD Systems Madrid. Doi: 10.4232/1.13737.

<sup>12</sup> The EVS 2017-2021 does not present results for Ireland, Luxemburg, Malta, Belgium and Latvia.

Several questions in the Study have a direct bearing on tolerance since they are related to attitudes to „the other“ – be it the immigrant/refugee or a member of the LGTB community. The first question is whether tolerance and respect for people is an important quality for a child.<sup>13</sup> In the polarity of two major possible answers – „Not mentioned“ and „Mentioned“ – predominates the latter. With the notable exception of Slovakia and Greece, in all countries tolerance is considered an important child quality mentioned in more than 50 % of the answers. On average 70% mention it in comparison to only 29% who do not (see Graph 1). The immensely higher percentage of answers that perceive tolerance as an important child quality is typical for the answers from all countries (except for Slovakia and Greece), although the positive percentage decreases as the answers come from Western EU countries to Eastern EU countries (see markings in green on Graph 1).



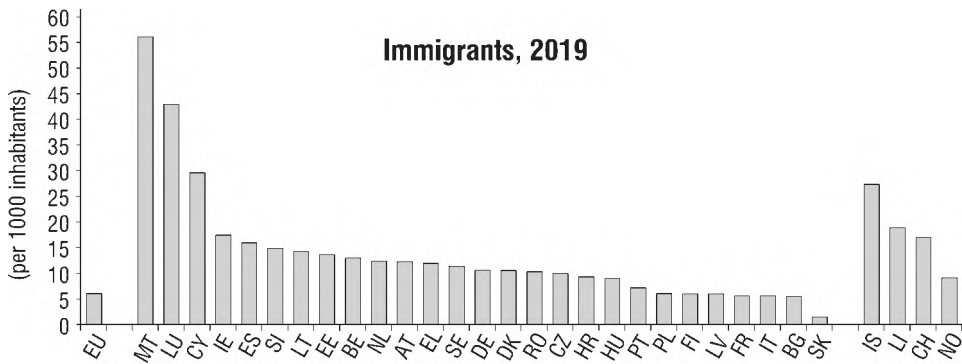
*Graph 1. Importance of tolerance and respect for people as a child quality*

*Source: prepared by the author building on EVS 201702021 data*

A number of questions have a direct bearing on the attitudes towards immigrants. There is a question asking whether one's neighbours are specifically designated as immigrants/foreign workers or not.<sup>14</sup> Anticipating the argument that answers could mostly reflect the real situation of having or not having immigrants for neighbours, it needs to be pointed out that answers in countries with a similar percentage of immigrants (see Graph 2) differ (in some cases rather significantly). For instance, in Cyprus, which is the third country by number of immigrants in 2019 (30 per 1000 inhabitants) more than 2/3 do not mention the designation „immigrant“ in relation to neighbours and only 20% mention it. In Czechia and Bulgaria (respectively 10 and 6 immigrants per 1000), „Not mentioned“ answers are 37% for both countries, while „Mentioned“ is chosen by 53% in Czechia and 50% in Bulgaria (see Graph 3).

<sup>13</sup> EVS 2027-2021, „A035 - Important child qualities: tolerance and respect for other people“, pp. 132-133.

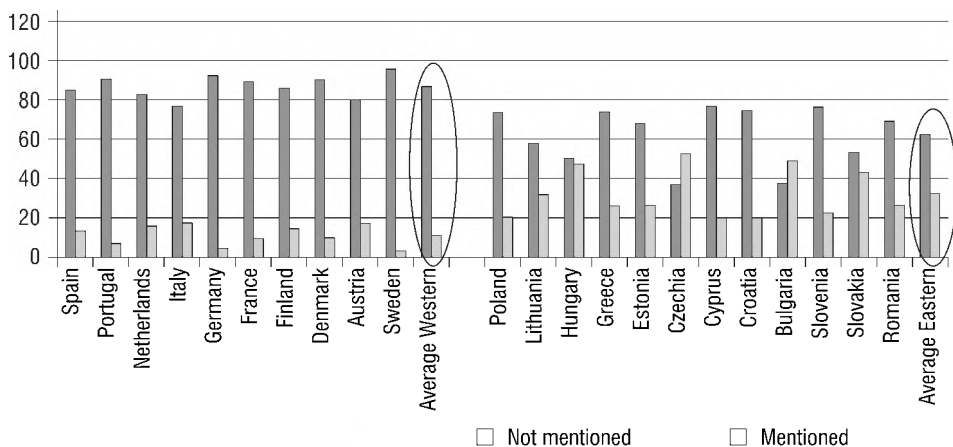
<sup>14</sup> EVS 2027-2021, „A124\_06 - Neighbours: Immigrants/foreign workers“, pp. 170-171.



Graph 2. Immigrants per 1000 inhabitants in 2019

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: migr\_imm1ctz and migr\_pop1ctz)<sup>15</sup>

Notably, in the Western EU countries the answers „Not mentioned“ (above 85% on average) predominate over „Mentioned“ (less than 12% on average). In the Eastern EU countries the two groups of answers are closer – above 60% „No mentioned“ on average and above 30% „Mentioned“ on average (see Graph 3). Although typical for all countries (except for Bulgaria and Czechia), it is clear that more people in the Western countries do not focus on whether their neighbours are immigrants or not and a really small percentage of people deem it important enough to designate their neighbours by this criterion. (For comparison, EVS data reveals that people both in Western and in Eastern EU countries are considerably more sensitive when it comes to drug addicts or heavy drinkers as one's neighbours and the respondents who do mention these as designations for their neighbours are more in all countries).

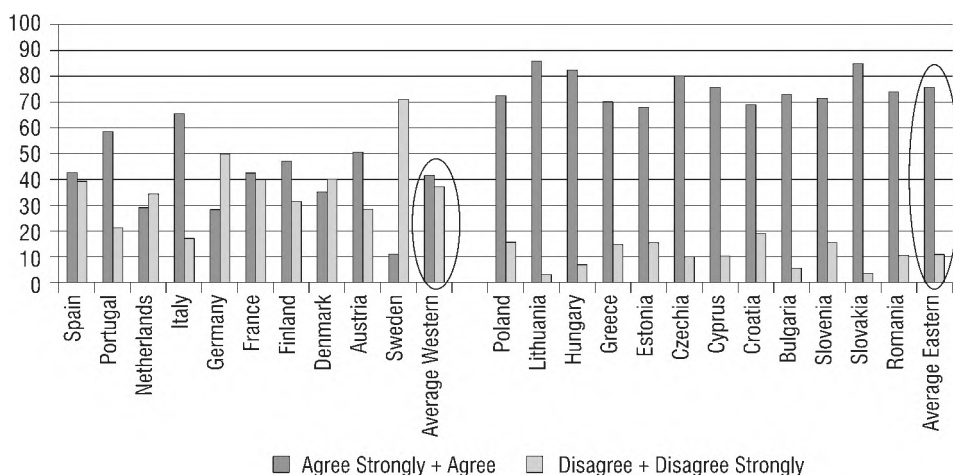


Graph 3. Designation of one's neighbours as immigrants/foreign workers

Source: prepared by the author building on EVS 201702021 data

<sup>15</sup> See „Migration and migrant population statistics“ at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration\\_and\\_migrant\\_population\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics) (last access October, 2021).

When it comes to more specific questions revealing attitudes to particular „others“, the East-West division gets particularly pronounced. Thus, in all the countries the question of whether employers should give more jobs to own nationals than immigrants receives generally more positive („Strongly agree“ and „Agree“) than negative answers („Disagree“ and „Disagree strongly“) (see Graph 4)<sup>16</sup>. However, in the Western EU countries along with the group of countries with predominantly positive/agree answers (Italy, Portugal and to a lesser extend Austria and Finland), there is a group of countries where „(strongly) agree“ and „(strongly) disagree“ answers are almost on a par – Spain, France, Denmark with a little prevalence of „agree“ answers and the Netherlands with a little prevalence of „disagree“ answers. There are also two countries – Sweden and Germany where considerably more people think that immigrants should get priority on the labor market. Consequently, the averages of „(strongly) agree“ and „(strongly) disagree“ for all West EU countries are very close – 41,4% and 37,5% respectively.



*Graph 4. Attitudes towards employers' giving priority to own nationals than immigrants*

*Source: prepared by the author building on EVS 201702021 data*

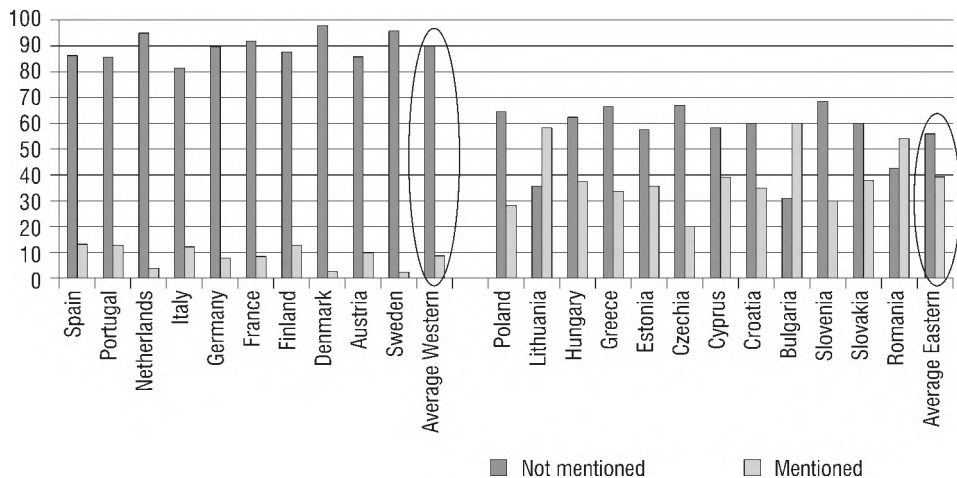
The picture is quite different in the right part of Graph 4 where the answers from the Eastern EU countries are presented. The results are straightforward and quite uniform for all the countries from this group – the „(strongly) agree“ answers exceed on average 7 times the „(strongly) disagree“ answers. Certainly there is more to this question than tolerance to the „other“. It is related also to economic situation, standard of life, levels of unemployment, etc. Nevertheless, the answers to this question (especially if considered in the light of the data

<sup>16</sup> EVS 2027-2021, „C002\_01- Jobs scarce: Employers should give priority to (nation) people than immigrants (5-point scale)“, pp. 186-187.



on the previous question about the neighbour-immigrant) reveal the attitudinal basis of an East-West divergence that hinges upon tolerance.

Value-laden divergence along East-West divisions becomes particularly conspicuous in regards to gender-sensitive issues. Graph 5 shows the answers to the question of specifically designating one's neighbour as a homosexual.<sup>17</sup> While in the Western EU countries less than 10 % mention it and 90% do not bother with this, in the Eastern EU countries nearly 40% mentioned the homosexuality of their neighbours and 56% do not consider homosexuality as a characteristic to describe their neighbours with. For Lithuania and Bulgaria the mentions outnumber the non-mentions significantly (for Romania this is moderately so). This is a clearly a matter of tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality within the society. In all of the Western EU countries in Graph 5 (with the notable exception of Catholic Italy) the same-sex marriage is legal, which is not the case in any of the Eastern EU countries. Hence, in the latter homosexuality becomes a more remarkable and less accepted „otherness“ which does not always feel comfortable revealing and expressing publicly itself and yet remains seen and „mentioned“.

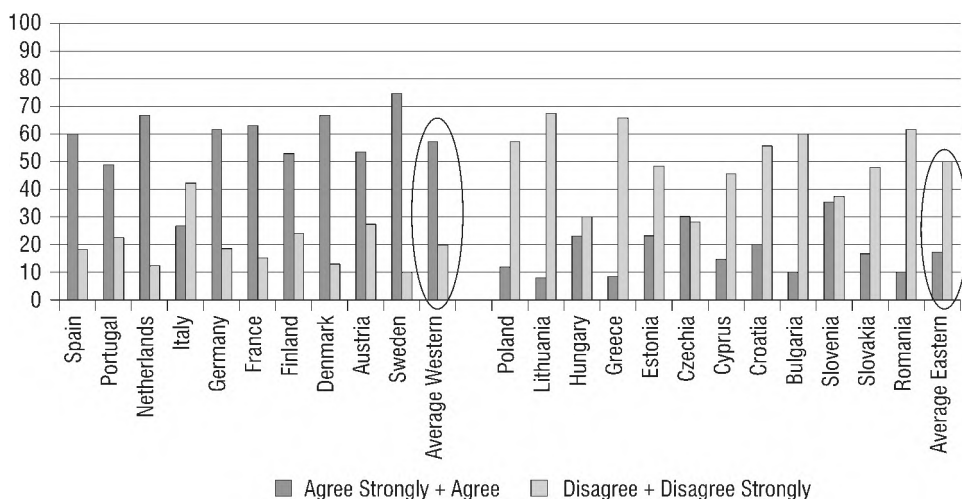


*Graph 5. Designation of one's neighbours as homosexual*

*Source: prepared by the author building on EVS 201702021 data*

The value rift becomes more pronounced when it comes to the assessment of parental capabilities of homosexual couples. The East-West result mirror each other with an average of 57% „(strongly) agree“ and 20% „(strongly) disagree“ for the Western EU countries and an average of 16% „(strongly) agree“ and 50% „(strongly) disagree“ for the Eastern EU countries (Graph 6).

<sup>17</sup> EVS 2027-2021, „A124\_06 - Neighbours: Immigrants/foreign workers“, pp. 170-171.



*Graph 6. Homosexual couples are as good parents as other couples*

*Source: prepared by the author building on EVS 201702021 data*

The revealed East-West divergence at the levels of tolerance towards the „otherness“ undermines solidarity when it comes to political solutions of practical issues such as migration inflows in the Union or fighting violence against women. It shows the societal foundation beneath the fact that it is precisely some of the Eastern EU member-states who are the most vocal champions of anti-immigration policies and refrain from the ratification of the Istanbul convention<sup>18</sup>.

The elaborated East-West divergence seems to provide the axis of the most conspicuous tensions within the EU – value-laden tensions between states and societies. Yet, the EVS data reveals that value breaches open not only between and among states and societies but more importantly within them. Some questions split the national respondents and receive close percentages of opposite answers. Thus, behind the almost equal averages in the Western EU countries of the „(strongly) agree“ and „(strongly) disagree“ answers to the question about more jobs to own nationals than to immigrants there are four states with very close agree/disagree answers – Spain, the Netherlands, France and Denmark (see Graph 4 above). In the assessment of parental capabilities of homosexual couples three of the Eastern EU countries exhibits very close agree/disagree answers – Slovenia, Czechia and Hungary. Moreover, as Ivan Krastev point out in a recent interview for DW „when it comes to

<sup>18</sup> The following EU member-states (all from the group of the Eastern EU countries, as described here) signed the Istanbul Convention but have not ratified it: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia. See Chart of signatures and Ratifications of treaty 210 „Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence“ at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=signatures-by-treaty&treatynum=210> (last visited October 2021).

liberal values, this part of the continent (Eastern) is not homogeneous at all. In capitals such as Budapest and Warsaw, citizens' political preferences, as well as election results, are closer to those in Berlin and Hamburg than in the depopulated, rural regions of their own countries".<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

The East-West value divergences within the EU are clearly expressed when it comes to immigration or gender/LGBT issues. However, if we take the data as a snap-shot (which in a way they are), value divergences can diachronically be seen as a step or phase in the process of the „EU East“ catching up with the „EU West“. In other words, as long as adherence to values is also a matter of socialization (Europeanization) which is still under way, the divergence would eventually subside. Still, three important repercussions should not be neglected. First, it is clear that protection of human rights is a key element of Western EU countries' political identity. In particular, they hold great attention to the rights of sexual minorities and see this as a part of what Europe *is/should be*. Yet, given the presented societal attitudes in the Eastern EU countries, top-down imposition of policies and decisions neglecting the expressed values would not lead to closure of values breaches. Second, the value rift between East and West might be seen as a rift between conservatism and liberalism, between right and left, when in reality it is a clash between liberal democracy and authoritarian populism. Consequently, and this is the third point, higher levels of intolerance or split societies over value-laden issues provide a fertile ground for populism in search of support for political mobilization thus additionally antagonizing societies.

A truism in political science posits „the need for a political system - especially a democratic political system - to be consistent with the political values of its people“. <sup>20</sup> Within the EU, though, such a consistency seems difficult to achieve at present given the divergent views on and varying adherence to core European values such as solidarity, tolerance, justice and equality within and across EU member-states. The question „what kind of Europe“ we want and need, remains to be answered.

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2. Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union - TITLE I. COMMON PROVISIONS - Article 2

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<sup>19</sup> Ivan Krastev, „Razlom mezhdru Iztoka i Zapada sled Merkel“ [A rift between East and West after Merkel] DW, 30.09.2021.

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