

# What is Europe? A Reflection from Overseas on the Federalization of the European Union

## Abstract

This paper explores the continent's identity through four foundational pillars – *logos*, *ethos*, *polis*, and *ius* – that have shaped both European and Western civilization. Amidst the richness of its diversity, Christianity, understood as a historical and cultural cornerstone rather than a confessional framework, emerges as a potential unifying force. However, as the European Union shifts towards an economistic and procedural approach, prioritizing regulations over deeper philosophical foundations, its claim to be a “union of values” risks becoming merely declarative. In this context, reconsidering the nature of European unity becomes essential. Rather than seeking homogenization or a superficial consensus, Europe's identity should embrace the paradox of unity in diversity—an intricate interplay of cultural, historical, and moral traditions that fosters dynamism and innovation. Moreover, the course of EU integration, whether in a federal or alternative form, has profound implications not only for Europe itself, but also for the wider Western world and its moral and political foundations.

**KEYWORDS:** european identity, western identity, European Union, federalization, *logos*, *ethos*, *polis*, *ius*, united in diversity

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# 1 | Introduction

In 2017, at the foot of the iconic Warsaw Uprising Monument, Donald Trump delivered a speech that reverberated with the enduring themes of resilience, freedom, and the pivotal role of Europe in the West. He declared:

For two centuries, Poland suffered constant and brutal attacks. But while Poland could be invaded and occupied, and its borders even erased from the map, it could never be erased from history or from your hearts. [...] Through four decades of communist rule, Poland and the other captive nations of Europe endured a brutal campaign to demolish freedom, your faith, your laws, your history, your identity – indeed the very essence of your culture and your humanity. [...] A strong Poland is a blessing to the nations of Europe, and they know that. A strong Europe is a blessing to the West and to the world.<sup>[1]</sup>

In the course of his speech, the 45th President of the United States emphasised the Western world as the epitome of freedom and a remarkable community of nations. He portrayed it as a society that seamlessly combines a reverence for its history with a forward-looking perspective – honouring its heroes, preserving enduring traditions, and constantly exploring new possibilities. It is committed to the rule of law, protects the right to free speech, and bases its values on faith and family rather than the pursuit of power or bureaucratic control. He proclaimed, “It is the people, not the powerful, who have always formed the foundation of freedom and the cornerstone of our defense.”

While these words were not originally spoken within the context of the internal dynamics between the European Union and its Member States, they acquire profound resonance when viewed through the lens of the ongoing project of EU federalization. Their emphasis on “the people” as a counterbalance to the centralization of “power and bureaucracy,” coupled with their invocation of cherished traditions and the protection of faith and family – values frequently defended by Member States in response to Brussels’ expanding influence in these areas – takes on renewed significance.

Six years later, in June 2024, at the World Economic Forum’s Annual Meeting in Davos, the rising political leader Javier Milei, the current

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<sup>1</sup> Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland on July 6, 2017. <https://www.president.pl/news/remarks-by-president-trump-to-the-people-of-poland,36457> [accessed: 5.1.2025].

president of Argentina, made remarks that stood in stark contrast to the optimistic vision articulated above. His speech, imbued with a distinctly pessimistic tone, also presented – though without direct reference – a critical perspective that aligns perfectly with the ongoing federalization efforts of the European Union. Among his key statements were the following:

Today I'm here to tell you that the Western world is in danger. [...] The essential problem of the West today is not just that we need to come to grips with those who, even after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the overwhelming empirical evidence, continue to advocate for [...] not greater freedom but rather greater regulation, which creates a downward spiral of regulations until we are all poorer and our lives depend on a bureaucrat sitting in a luxury office.<sup>[2]</sup>

In a speech that can be seen as a critique of, but not limited to, EU federalism, using alarmist language and ideas, he remarked that the adversaries of the free world have shifted their focus from traditional class struggle rhetoric to newer forms of division, such as the dynamics between men and women – despite the West's long-standing recognition of sex equality – or the perceived discord between humankind and nature. These emerging narratives, he argued, have gradually infiltrated international organizations, exerting a profound and often unacknowledged influence on the political and economic decisions of member states. Building on this observation, he suggested that the West has increasingly leveraged various economic tools to control people's lives and promote ideologies that stand in opposition to the model that has fostered human progress. This critique resonates with the concerns expressed by many member states about the expanding decision-making powers of the EU.

The purpose of including these extensive quotations is to emphasize the widespread concern about the growing influence of an increasingly centralized government model – a bureaucracy that, whether explicitly or subtly, imposes a new set of values on citizens across various sectors. This concern is also echoed by political leaders across the Atlantic as they observe Europe's trajectory.

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<sup>2</sup> Special address by Javier Milei, President of Argentina, at World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos on 17 January 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/01/special-address-by-javier-milei-president-of-argentina/>. [accessed: 5.1.2025].

It is true that the presence of both concern and fascination from the other side of the Atlantic is not a new phenomenon. *Mutatis mutandis*, the concerns expressed by Tocqueville regarding America's then-nascent democracy reflect those about the current dynamics within the European Union. While Tocqueville warned that democracy could lead to despotism by undermining intermediate associations and concentrating power in the State, today, the centralization of power within the EU institutions risks diminishing the role and sovereignty of the Member States and, consequently, the freedom of its citizens. Now, instead of Europeans judging the American democratic experiment, leaders from both Americas express both admiration and caution when observing Europe. The underlying reason for their attention to Europe is that it remains the key paradigm of Western civilization, and many hope for its continued central role, even as they voice growing concern about the changes occurring within the EU.

In contemporary Europe, the issue of identity emerges as a central challenge, particularly in relation to the intensified unification process. While Europe has a distinct identity, it transcends politics and is deeply rooted in cultural elements. Historically, national identities, despite their relatively artificial nature, have played a key role in consolidating nation states by appealing to different social groups and thereby fostering a strong sense of cohesion. However, evoking such sentiments at the EU level presents significant challenges, primarily due to the absence of essential elements that once anchored nation-states, such as a shared language, history, culture, religion, and a common ethical foundation. In the current context, the EU institutions, whether explicitly or implicitly, have adopted a strategy of encouraging Member States to base their national identities within a framework of shared European political values, thereby promoting a form of idealistic Habermasian "constitutional patriotism" – a "solidarity within strangers" – that seeks to shape "a political culture that can be shared by all European citizens".<sup>[3]</sup>

In this context that the primary concern, also from the other side of the Atlantic, is the challenges and threats posed by excessive cultural and political homogenization, particularly in line with certain trends from Brussels, which could undermine the richness of European and, more broadly, Western identity. In response, it is necessary to reconsider what kind of

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<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Why Europe Needs a Constitution" *New Left Review*, 11 (2001). <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii11/articles/jurgen-habermas-why-europe-needs-a-constitution>. [accessed: 5.1.2025].

unity is both possible and desirable, aligned with the EU's motto, "United in Diversity," to avoid it being sacrificed through over-homogenization or reduced to a merely superficial unity.

## 2 | The Western Identity

When reflecting on the question of what defines Europe, Joseph Ratzinger's Regensburg speech – unfortunately better known for the misunderstandings it sparked – comes to mind, as it was not, as is often assumed, directed at Islam but at the West. In fact, its purpose was to emphasise that an understanding of Europe requires a reconsideration of the historical "inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry," which constituted "an event of decisive importance not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of world history," which as such "concerns us even today."<sup>[4]</sup> Moreover, far from offering an archaic vision, Ratzinger's conception of Europe, in addition to incorporating the Roman heritage into the concept of the *logos*, "unreservedly recognizes" all the positive aspects of modernity, which also "created Europe and remain the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe." However, this amalgam of Athens, Jerusalem, Rome, and modernity underwent many historical developments of "dehellenization" due to the advent of a diminished concept of *logos* within certain intellectual and spiritual traditions, beginning with Scotism in the late Middle Ages, continuing through the Reformation, nineteenth-century historicism, and contemporary cultural pluralism.

Ratzinger's warning in Regensburg has great relevance for today's reflection on Europe and its identity. Indeed, the "authentic dialogue of cultures and religions that is so urgently needed today" requires an expanded reason, a reason that "reveals its vast horizons" and, in so doing, "overcomes the self-imposed limitation [...] to the empirically falsifiable." This is a warning of great significance: given that what primarily distinguishes

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<sup>4</sup> Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University. Memories and Reflections". Meeting with the Representatives of Science, University of Regensburg, 12 September 2006. [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html). [accessed: 5.1.2025].

Western culture from other great civilizations in history is its foundation in a shared cultural heritage, rather than in environmental or ethnic homogeneity, it is only through a commitment to this heritage – guided by an expanded reason that listens to and respects the profound experiences and insights of all those who have contributed to the common Western history – that dialogue is made possible, a dialogue that listens to and respects every voice. Without this, it is impossible to solidly build the “unity in diversity” that the European Union aspires to and preaches. The European identity lies in the paradox that unites a common heritage with the richness of the different cultural, historical, and moral narratives that have emerged from various parts of the continent, which not only allow for the coexistence of a multiplicity of ideas and practices but also create a dynamic and innovative social and cultural environment that should not be subjected to standardization through politico-normative means.

In his article *Reason, Faith, and the Struggle for Western Civilization*, Samuel Gregg, an Australian philosopher based in the United States and currently affiliated with the American Institute for Economic Research, offers a Ratzingerian interpretation of the elements that have shaped Western cultural heritage. Drawing on Ratzinger’s assertion that “Europe comes to know its identity most clearly when it is forcibly confronted with something that represents its very opposite,”<sup>[5]</sup> Gregg presents the compelling argument that when violent forces – specifically jihadists – advocate for the destruction of Western civilization, they compel us to reflect on the essence of our identity, and the best way to do this is to examine some of the West’s most defining achievements:

No one would designate the Rule of Benedict, the Magna Carta, Michelangelo’s “David,” Mozart’s “Coronation Mass,” Plato’s *Gorgias*, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, Justinian’s *Corpus Juris Civilis*, Jefferson’s Monticello, or Shakespeare’s *Richard III* as representative of Japanese, Persian, or Tibetan culture. Likewise, would anyone seriously question that ideas such as the rule of law, limited government, and the distinction between the spiritual and the temporal realms, have developed and received their fullest expression in Western societies rather than in Javanese or Arab cultures?<sup>[6]</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Europe: A heritage with obligations for Christians”, [in:] *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*. (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 168.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Gregg, “Reason, Faith, and the Struggle for Western Civilization” *Public Discourse*, 14 August 2017. <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2017/08/19819/>. [accessed: 5.1.2025].

These achievements can only be understood through the deep philosophical and religious foundations that made them possible. Conversely, “when those foundations are shaken, we should not be surprised that all that is built on them begins to falter.”<sup>[7]</sup> This is reflective of the situation currently unfolding within the European Union. The grand ideals that once underpinned its unification project, as well as the historical achievements of its early decades, have gradually lost their *raison d’être*. Today, the complex and increasingly bureaucratic governance structures of the EU attempt to address its most pressing issues – namely, the growing apathy and distrust among its citizens – through convoluted frameworks and technical management models. These efforts, however, ultimately fail to address the root cause: citizens no longer identify with its values. When the foundational elements are weakened, the only remaining solutions often become mere technical and structural adjustments. These fail to address the deeper problem, serving only to mask its symptoms, and are therefore bound to fail.

## 2.1. Logos, Ethos and Polis

One of the fundamental elements that comes to mind when reflecting on the roots of the West is the dedication to rational inquiry in the pursuit of truth: the *logos* embodying the idea that human reason is capable of inquiring and grasping the truth of reality not just the empirical ones, but also philosophical and religious truths. This conviction, rooted in the Greek philosophical tradition as well as in the Christian understanding of God as *Logos* (John 1:1), gave rise to a culture where reason is not just a tool but a means of understanding reality and of establishing ethical and social order: reason is inextricably linked to freedom, justice and doing the right thing. In fact, the *logos* uprooted in the West guides “to comprehend and shape aspects of reality as well as to distinguish which choices are rational, good, and right from those that are not.”<sup>[8]</sup>

Furthermore, it is this conception of *logos*, i.e. that it is the shared understanding of the nature of things, what enables the distinction between what is good or bad and what is just or unjust (*ethos*), giving rise in turn to what, in Aristotelian terms, constitutes political friendship, the foundation of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

the unity of the *polis*. Indeed, political friendship can be understood as the rational agreement reached through *logos*, an agreement that constitutes the essence of political life.<sup>[9]</sup>

Centuries later, modern political philosophy gradually diverged from the *logos-ethos-polis* perspective of truth, justice, and political friendship/civic discourse – that is, from “given/natural values” – to assert the “unnaturalness” of political society. In doing so, it began to deny the significance of the transcendental past (nature) in social life. Furthermore, when a society’s orientation is entirely future-oriented, there is a tendency to diminish the importance of the chronological past (history), as evidenced by the tendencies of radical liberalism and socialism. Society is conceptualized as an autonomous entity founded on human creative freedom, with limited acknowledgment of its historical foundations. This perspective is presented as the pinnacle of reason and liberty; however, this understanding of reason is, in fact, based on a voluntarist principle, reduced to an epistemological methodology. Whether through Cartesian doubt, Kantian critical methods, Hegelian dialectic, or Marxist materialism, this methodology determines the philosophical grounds of knowledge. Freedom, for its part, is conceived as the purest form of creativity, defined as liberation from all forms of heteronomy, and this emancipation requires severing ties with the constraints of the past, perceived as an obstacle to both freedom and creative potential. Consequently, the past is reduced to a “burden.” It is a perspective that exacts a significant toll on identity and justice, both of which are undermined in the pursuit of lightness and flexibility. Without accounting for the past – both transcendental and chronological – justice remains elusive.

Building on this outlook, liberalism advocates for a minimal state (centered on the primacy of freedom), while socialism champions a maximal state (centered on the primacy of equality). Yet, despite their differences, both ideologies depend on the state to provide unity to a society that either lacks it or refuses to acknowledge the unity it inherently possesses – unity

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<sup>9</sup> As affirmed in *Politics*, man is a political animal because “among the animals, he is the only one with the gift of speech (*logos*)” – different from voice (*phoné*), which only expresses pain and pleasure, as with any other animal – “designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man, in distinction from the other animals, that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a polis.” Aristotle, *Politics* I, 1, 1253a, 14-18.



rooted in the “past.” Thus, political creativity demands a foundational unity, and since the unity derived from the past is dismissed in principle, a new, “artificial” one must be constructed. Faced with this challenge, a set of values is proposed as a potential foundation for “unity.” It is suggested that the political community should now rest on a fundamental principle: respect for individual rights. However, this approach encounters a significant obstacle. Respect cannot be imposed, as individuality – lacking a shared foundation – does not inherently ensure agreement among individuals. Moreover, respect rooted in mere consensus is not genuine respect, as evidenced by the inability to implement respect for declarations affirming rights in the face of conflicts.

## 2.2. Religion and the European identity

Identity does not arise in a vacuum but is the product of various historical, cultural elements, and common projects. In the case of Europe, it is precisely the common roots provided by Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome that can sustain the project of a Europe united in diversity. Indeed, religion plays a particularly important role in this process. As has been repeatedly observed, one need only travel across Europe from north to south and east to west to see that, wherever one goes, there are temples in the central places of cities, towns, and villages, regardless of the architectural or religious diversity.

In this context, the contemporary debate regarding the identity of Europe finally resides in the conflict between those who, whether they are believers or not, advocate the complete exclusion of religion from the public sphere, reducing it to the status of *res privata*, and those who consider its presence in public life an autotelic value, regardless of worldview – whether they are believers, agnostics or even atheists. It is worth recalling in this context authors such as Jürgen Habermas and Marcello Pera and their dialogues with Joseph Ratzinger.<sup>[10]</sup> As the drafting of the European Union’s Constitution in 2003 made well evident, the decision not to include a reference to “Europe’s Christian roots” in the preamble, despite the fact that for many citizens they were an essential part of their identity, revealed that liberal democracy alone is not enough to give people’s lives

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, Jürgen Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007).

meaning. Proclaiming certain “European values” or human rights does not tell people what to do with their freedom, while the fact of our mortality prompts us to seek meaning in our concrete lives.

As noted by Professor Simon Yarza, the prominent legal theorist Karl-Heinz Ladeur, in his insightful study, observed that, regardless of the personal nature of any religious belief and the constitutional prohibition of any coercion, the communal dimension of religion and the impossibility of completely excluding its expressions from public life cannot be ignored.<sup>[11]</sup> Moreover, the importance of certain religious symbols or customs, such as crosses along roadsides or traditional processions, to collective memory cannot be diminished. In this context, it is worth recalling that many intellectuals and statesmen have referred to the existence of constitutional and political assumptions that precede the text of the constitution itself. Böckenförde’s maxim that “a liberal, secular state has a basis in something that it cannot guarantee by itself” is well-known. Elsewhere, Böckenförde notes that

the state can exist as a liberal state only by virtue of the fact that the freedom it provides to citizens will be regulated from within, by virtue of the moral substance of the individual and the unity of society. [...] The state cannot guarantee the existence of this moral substance by means of legal coercion and authoritarian command; it cannot do so without abandoning its liberalism and without making its totalitarian claims, from which it freed itself by emerging from the era of religious wars.<sup>[12]</sup>

To demonstrate that the thesis that “self-construction of identity” emerges from the democratic process is inadequate, it suffices to recognize that the personal self is largely the result of inherited cultural assumptions. Where there is a shared culture, there are also symbols, and a community cannot be expected to renounce them in the name of ideological freedom for those who do not share them. Why, in such cases, should tensions be resolved in favor of one group of individuals against others? In fact, it is

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<sup>11</sup> Karl-Heinz Ladeur, “The myth of the neutral state and the individualization of religion: the relationship between state and religion in the face of fundamentalism” *Cardozo Law Review*, 6 (2009): 2451 and 2459. Quoted from: Fernando Simon Yarza, “Símbolos religiosos, derechos subjetivos y derecho objetivo. Reflexiones en torno a Lautsi” *Revista de Derecho Comunitario Europeo*, 43 (2012): 901-925. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2589072>.

<sup>12</sup> Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, *Wolność – państwo – kościół*. tłum. Paweł Kaczorowski, Grzegorz Sowiński (Kraków: Znak, 1994), 120.

worth noting that the key issue here is not so much the consideration of religious freedom as a human right (which of course it is), but the very content of the common culture. The neutrality of the state is often cited as an argument for the exclusion of all expressions of religion, but at least from the perspective of cultural implications, the decision to favor individual interest over the common interest cannot be considered neutral, regardless of its content.

### 3 | The European Identity

The Italian jurist Francesco D'Agostino, in discussing the debate surrounding references to Christian roots in the Constitution of the European Union, insightfully observed that the discussion lacked depth in two crucial areas. First, it failed to differentiate Christianity as a historical and conceptual framework from its theological or sociological-legal dimensions. Second, it overlooked Christianity's potential to function as a "synthesis of identity" for a Europe striving to be "united in diversity."<sup>[13]</sup> In this regard, the debate over the inclusion of Europe's Christian roots in a constitutional text was tied to concerns that it would legitimize an unjust confessional privilege for Christianity. At its core, however, it revealed a "cognitive" misstep: such a reference to Christian roots was never intended to institutionalize a confessional privilege for Christianity, but rather to recognize a historical-cultural identity that could offer a solid foundation for the integration of the European peoples.

As D'Agostino further explained, the idea that in a constitutional text a reference to Christianity could serve as a "synthesis of identity" "clearly presupposes the need to cognitively identify what is meant by Europe. To identify involves perceiving differences, as identity can only be perceived against the backdrop of difference. In this regard, as Nietzsche profoundly observed, knowledge of ourselves is only possible when we are capable of presupposing that of the other: the «you» is older than the «I». This principle applies to any dynamic of identity; it is valid for individuals

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<sup>13</sup> Francesco D'Agostino, "Raíces y futuro de la identidad europea" *Humanitas*, 2 August 2004. <https://www.humanitas.cl/analisis-de-nuestro-tiempo/raices-y-futuro-de-la-identidad-europea>. [accessed: 5.1.2025].

as particular beings, just as it is for collectives, peoples, and cultures.”<sup>[14]</sup> Thus, to speak of a European identity is to distinguish the European from the non-European.

Today, however, Europe seems increasingly hesitant to affirm its own identity. A naive adherence to the ideology of “multiculturalism” has led many to believe that respecting “other” cultures requires the sacrifice, or even the negation, of one’s own cultural identity. This reasoning suggests that, in its efforts to engage with the global community – both culturally and religiously – Europe should minimize, or even abandon, its own identity to avoid the perceived dangers of Eurocentrism. While every culture tends to assert itself in a self-referential manner, designating “the others” as “barbarians,” D’Agostino’s thesis posits that European culture stands as an exception to this principle:

Its specific dimension (paradoxically) consists in not being Eurocentric, but rather anthropocentric. Amid a thousand contradictions, some of which are undoubtedly brutally violent, Europe has not denied other cultures; on the contrary, it has always sought to “know” and “assimilate” them within a paradigm of “universality,” placing not the European man at its center, but man tout court. This is what has made, and continues to make, European culture unique among other cultures, without conferring upon it any primacy, because what Europe has said, and continues to say, about itself, it has said and continues to say for all men of all cultures.<sup>[15]</sup>

It is notable that the European anthropocentrism postulated by D’Agostino is inherently “multicultural” in origin, drawing from Jerusalem and Athens and further enriched by the vital contribution of the Roman *ius*. As the Italian jurist explained, the glory of Roman law lies not primarily in its jurisprudence – though this is undoubtedly an impressive historical achievement – but in its profound affirmation of an “objectivity” governing the social world, paralleling the “objectivity” foundational to the natural world. This concept encapsulates the essence of *ius*: the recognition that law possesses its own inherent objectivity, thereby rendering justice fundamentally stable. This reveals that the issue is not multiculturalism per se. On the contrary, if multiculturalism is grounded in the objectivity offered by *logos*, the acknowledgment of history, and the stability provided

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

by laws in an ordered system, it becomes possible to construct an identity that unites a wide array of peoples. Such an identity allows all individuals to “communicate” through the language of law, proposing objective solutions – based on *ius* – to their disputes. In fact, the experience of Rome illustrates precisely “that political identity might lack a national foundation – and that sovereignty rightfully belongs to whoever can identify and promote the *bonum commune* [...]. In late antiquity, this sovereignty could be embodied by a Spaniard like Trajan, an African like Septimius Severus, an Arab like Philip, or a Dalmatian like Diocletian, without their ethnic origins contradicting their «Romanity» in any way.”<sup>[16]</sup>

Thus, history, *logos*, and *ius* coalesce into a triad that guarantees the communicative ideal, the *communitas*, that the intricate and multifaceted roots of European culture necessitated, both as a foundational principle and as the ultimate aspiration of the human condition: a communication predicated on a shared sense of belonging to a common history, the acknowledgment of a shared *logos*, and a collective reference anchored in *ius*. Rather than being confined by geographical boundaries, this perspective is defined by shared ideals, cultivating a space where individuals are valued for their common humanity and inherent rights rather than their differences. This nuanced logic of communication, shaped by Europe’s historical trajectory, transcends its regional origins to achieve universal relevance for humanity as a whole. This phenomenon may aptly be described as the aforementioned European “anthropocentrism.” Such reasoning underscores why Europe cannot be understood merely as a culture emerging within a specific geographic space – a concept that, in practical terms, does not exist – but rather as a *spiritus movens*: a driving force that not only created its own geographic space but continues to redefine and expand it.

## 4 | Conclusion

In addressing the federalization of the European Union, after reflecting on the fundamental elements necessary to ensure the enduring unity of Europe, I advocate for a renewed recognition of its historical and cultural identity. On the one hand, while it is imperative to acknowledge that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

the European Union emerged within the framework of modern political philosophy – a framework that champions an abstract, creative, and autonomous conception of freedom and democratic equality – its trajectory over recent decades, grounded in an uninterested, non-metaphysical rational enquiry into the human good, has fostered a superficial understanding of its identity. This understanding diverges from the logos and the religious contributions that have historically shaped the conception of human nature and society. On the other hand, the European integration project arose, in part, as a response to the catastrophic “historical past” of the World Wars. This context might explain the EU lack of interest and marginalization of the past. However, the disregard for the transcendent (natural) past, symbolized by Athens, and the chronological (historical) past, represented by Jerusalem, contributed to the tragic conflicts of the twentieth century, as Ratzinger insightfully noted. In fact, it was the synthesis of logos, ethos, and polis from the Greek, Roman, and Judeo-Christian traditions – where the concept of the *imago Dei* underscores human dignity and equality, distinguishing man from God and, thus, advocating for limited government – that provided Europe with the strength to shape what we now recognize as Western culture.

Nevertheless, the abandonment of these roots – partly aimed at preventing future conflict – has paradoxically created an ethical void within the European Union that has progressively been filled by an economistic and ideological interpretation of law, which discards the social objectivity of the *ius* and the ideal of *communitas* epitomized by Rome, replacing them with *lex*, i.e. by regulations grounded solely in political power and procedural legitimacy, devoid of any deep ethical foundation. Today, when the EU refers to itself as a “union of values” or justifies its actions on ethical grounds, these claims often lack grounding in any universal truths about humanity or society, remaining merely declarative. The EU in a bid to construct a political community on a non-metaphysical foundation, has surrendered shared rational enquiry into the human good.

This neglect of the foundational ideas that once unified Europe is particularly concerning in light of the current trajectory toward federalization. The EU has become an entity overly reliant on the presumed superior efficiency of centralization, operating under the assumption that its institutions inherently know what is best for the particular Member States and their citizens. This top-down approach reflects an arrogance that presumes to define and impose notions of what is good, just, and democratic through a narrow and arbitrary understanding of these concepts,

significantly departing from the conception of human nature and dignity that inspired the foundational human rights texts of the post-war period. Indeed, the jurists, philosophers, and diplomats who crafted these declarations sought to prevent materialist, individualist, or collectivist interpretations of humanity. Yet, the EU's current approach to rights often overlooks these foundational principles and disregards the diverse historical trajectories of its Member States.

Looking ahead, it is imperative to reassess the federalization project in order to ensure a lasting unity in Europe that respects its diversity. This requires a return to a conception of European identity grounded in the rich historical, legal, and cultural heritage that has long defined the continent, rather than relying on a superficial, bureaucratic, or ideological notion of 'neutrality' that explicitly rejects such foundations and grounds human rights in democratic consensus and the levelling egalitarianism.<sup>[17]</sup> Only by reaffirming these foundational principles of shared history, *logos*, and *ius* can the European Union genuinely embody the ideals of *communitas* and achieve an inclusive, democratic, and sustainable unity. On a practical level, a more integrated Europe must be anchored in a distinctly European framework, designed to accommodate varying levels of integration based on the specific needs and aspirations of each Member State. This model would be both flexible and adaptable, capable of evolving in response to the diverse and dynamic nature of European societies.

For non-European Western countries, the European Union model of integration – whether federal or not – holds significant importance, as it may pose a considerable threat by eroding the very concept of the West, along with its distinct identity and moral frameworks that have historically defined Western societies. In this context, it is crucial to remember that the Western world needs a Europe that remains faithful to its origins, as well as a European Union with an integration project that prioritizes peace, liberty, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, all understood through the lens of Europe's philosophical and historical trajectory. An integrated Europe can only endure if it is united around a common good, rather than a common will, especially if the latter mirrors, as it does today, a kind of soft despotism like the one that Tocqueville described as an "immense protective power," akin to a paternal authority, where the state takes care of citizens as long as its power remains the "sole agent and judge

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Samuel Gregg, "The End of Europe" *Public Discourse*, 17 November 2015. <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/11/15989/>. [accessed: 5.1.2025].

of it.”<sup>[18]</sup> This soft despotism involves a voluntary surrender of freedom in exchange for material ease, a dynamic reflected in the transactional relationship between citizens and politicians at the national level, or between the Member States and the EU institutions, where material benefits are promised in exchange for political benefits.

Clearly, the core concern lies not in the state's efforts to serve its citizens as this is its fundamental purpose, but in the considerable expansion of governmental power beyond traditional domains such as foreign policy, national defense, protection of private property, public works, and the administration of justice. More troubling is the EU's assumption of many of these roles, effectively removing them from the Member States, and its establishment of a social agenda that sets political parameters for interpreting traditional rights and formulating new ones based on priorities and principles that are neither neutral nor consistent with the traditions of its Member States.<sup>[19]</sup>

As John Paul II put it in more than 40 years ago in Santiago de Compostela, we need a Europe united around its common roots, those “by which the continent has seen its civilization mature: its culture, its dynamism, its activity, its capacity for constructive expansion to other continents as well; in a word, all that makes up its glory.” Those roots that built in during the centuries a Europe of “human values, such as those of the dignity of the human person, a deep sense of justice and liberty, of industry and a spirit of initiative, of love for the family, of respect for life, of tolerance with the desire for cooperation and peace, which are notes which characterize it.”<sup>[20]</sup>

In this same spirit, from a humble and distant corner of Argentina, I dare to echo his appeal:

Europe, [...] find yourself again. Be yourself. Discover your origins, revive your roots. Return to those authentic values which made your history

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<sup>18</sup> For this reference to Tocqueville, cf. Samuel Gregg, *Becoming Europe: Economic Decline, Culture, and How America Can Avoid a European Future* (New York: Encounter Books, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> An example of this soft-despotism mentality is the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (understandably unratified), which ambitiously covered a wide range of subjects, from fishing to humanitarian aid, space policy, sports, tourism, and more. This framework would have provided EU officials with the legal basis to intervene in nearly any area.

<sup>20</sup> Delegation of the European Union to the Holy See, *The Popes and Sixty Years of European Integration*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 35.



a glorious one and your presence so beneficent in the other continents. Rebuild your spiritual unity in a climate of complete respect for other religions and genuine liberties. Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. Do not become so proud of your achievements that you forget their possible negative effects. Do not become discouraged for the quantitative loss of some of your greatness in the world or for the social and cultural crises which affect you today. You can still be the guiding light of civilization and the stimulus of progress for the world. The other continents look to you and also hope to receive from you (as a reply): "I can do it".<sup>[21]</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, 36.

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