

How EU Values and the Charter of Fundamental Rights Are Under Threat

The EU is built on core values like democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. These principles—enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR)—are supposed to guarantee fairness, freedom, and justice for all EU citizens. But in recent years, these values have been seriously challenged in several ways. Let's break down how and why this matters.

1. Attacks on Judicial Independence



The rule of law depends on independent courts—judges must be free from political influence. But some governments have tried to control the judiciary, making it harder for courts to hold them accountable.

Examples:

Poland – The government created a "disciplinary chamber" to punish judges who ruled against them. The EU fined Poland €1 million per day until it scrapped the system.

Hungary – The government packed the courts with politically loyal judges, reducing checks on its power.

Why It Matters:



If courts aren't independent, laws can be manipulated to benefit those in power.



Citizens can't trust the legal system to protect their rights fairly.

2. Attacks on Press Freedom & Free Speech



Free media is essential for democracy, but some governments have taken over media outlets or restricted press freedom.

Examples:

Hungary – The state controls most media and independent journalists face harassment and censorship.

Slovenia (under former PM Janez Janša) – The government cut funding to public broadcasters and attacked journalists online.

Poland – The government forced a major opposition-friendly TV channel (TVN24) to sell part of its ownership.

Why It Matters:



Without independent media, governments control the narrative.



Corruption and abuses of power go unchallenged.

3. Weakening of Democracy & Political Opposition



Some EU governments have changed election laws, rewritten constitutions, or used public funds to benefit ruling parties.

Examples:

Hungary – The ruling party, Fidesz, changed election rules to favor itself, making it harder for the opposition to win.

Poland – The government used state-owned companies to support its political campaigns.

Why It Matters:



If elections aren't fair, democracy is weakened.



Corruption increases when there are no real political alternatives.

4. Attacks on LGBTQ+ & Minority Rights



The Charter of Fundamental Rights protects equality and bans discrimination. But some governments have passed laws targeting LGBTQ+ people, migrants, and minorities.

Examples:

Poland – Over 100 municipalities declared themselves "LGBT-free zones", restricting LGBTQ+ events and education. The EU cut funding to these towns.

Hungary – The government banned LGBTQ+ content in schools and media, claiming it was "protecting children."

Italy (under Meloni's government) – The government weakened protections for same-sex parents, removing their names from birth certificates.

Why It Matters:



Discrimination increases, making life harder for marginalized groups.



The EU's credibility is at stake—can it really claim to protect rights if it doesn't act strongly?



5. Corruption & Misuse of EU Funds



The EU gives billions of euros to member states for development, infrastructure, and COVID recovery. But in some countries, this money has been misused or directed to government allies.

Examples:

Hungary – The EU suspended €22 billion in funding over corruption and misuse of funds.

Poland – The EU blocked recovery funds because of rule-of-law violations.

Czech Republic – Former PM Andrej Babiš was accused of using EU funds for personal business projects.

Why It Matters:



EU taxpayers' money is wasted instead of helping citizens.



Corruption leads to weaker public services (hospitals, roads, education).

Conclusion:

The big question is: Will the EU become stricter in enforcing its values, or will it allow some governments to bend the rules?

Some argue the EU should have harsher penalties (like cutting funds more quickly).

Others say member states should decide their own policies without interference.

What do you think? Should the EU do more to enforce its values, or should national governments have more freedom to set their own rules?

