

EU values, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law explained



The European Union (EU) is much more than an economic alliance or a political partnership—it's a **union based on shared values**. These values shape everything from how governments function to the rights you enjoy as an EU citizen. They are embedded in the **Treaty on European Union (TEU)**, protected by the **Charter of Fundamental Rights**, and upheld through the **rule of law**.



But how do these three elements
—EU values, the Charter, and the rule of law—
work together?
And why do they matter more than ever today?
Let's break it down.



1. EU Values: the foundation of the Union

They are listed in **Article 2 of the TEU** and include:

- ☐ **Democracy** – Free and fair elections, open political debate
- ☐ **Rule of Law** – Governments must follow the law and respect judicial independence
- ☐ **Human Rights** – Freedom of speech, press, and religion
- ☐ **Equality** – No discrimination based on gender, race, or sexual orientation
- ☐ **Freedom** – The right to live, work, and express yourself without oppression

>>> These values aren't just symbolic: they guide how the EU operates and influence decisions on funding, membership, and legal enforcement.



Example:

Candidate countries like Ukraine and Serbia must **prove their commitment to these values** before joining the EU.



2. The Charter of Fundamental Rights: Protecting Individual Freedoms

The **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (CFR)**, which came into force in 2009, strengthens these values by giving EU citizens **specific rights and protections**.

It covers six main areas:

Dignity

Right to life,
prohibition
of torture

Freedoms

Freedom of
expression,
privacy,
asylum rights

Equality

Gender
equality,
LGBTQ+ rights,
minority
protections

Solidarity

Workers'
rights, social
security,
healthcare
access

Citizens' Rights

Right to
vote, good
administration

Justice

Right to a
fair trial,
presumption
of innocence



How Does the Charter Work?

>>> It applies **only when EU law is involved** (e.g., a national law violating an EU directive)

>>> The **European Court of Justice (ECJ)** enforces it—if a national government violates your rights under the Charter, you can take the case to the ECJ



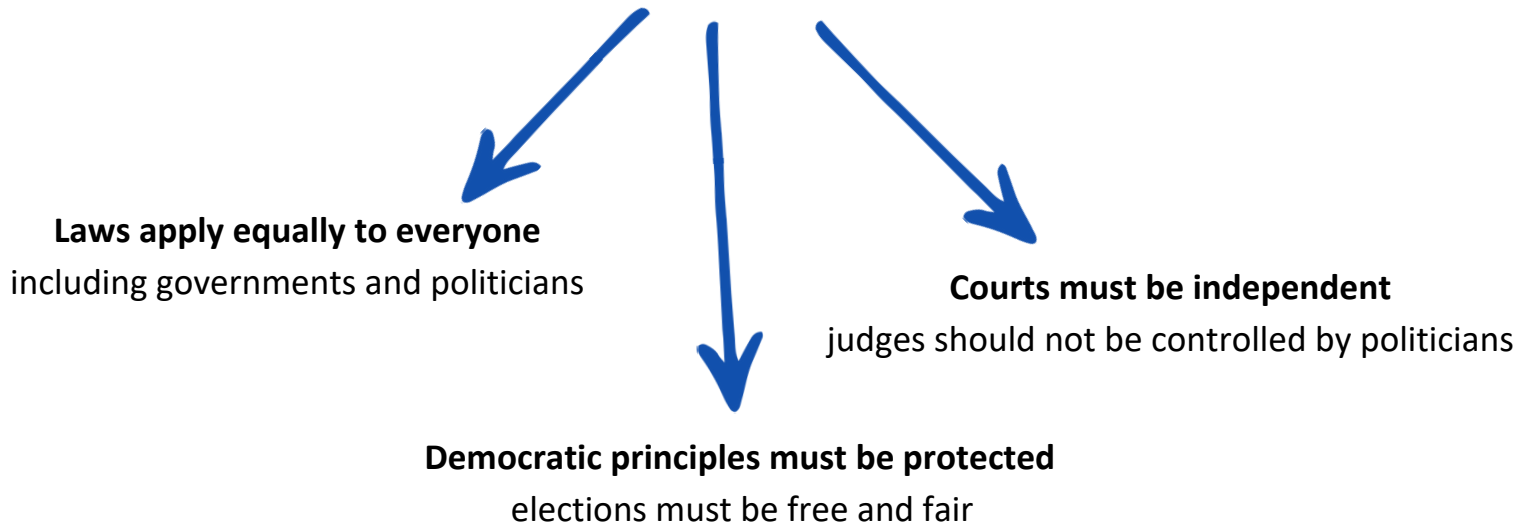
Example:
The **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** — which protects your personal data online — is based on the **right to privacy** under the Charter.



3. The Rule of Law: Holding Governments Accountable

The **rule of law** is what ensures that **EU values and fundamental rights** are respected in practice.

It means that:



➤➤➤ If a government **undermines the rule of law**, the EU can intervene <<<

How Does the EU Enforce the Rule of Law?

Annual Rule of Law Reports – Each EU country must submit a report on democracy, judicial independence, and corruption risks.

European Court of Justice (ECJ) – Can rule against governments that violate EU law.

Financial Sanctions – The EU can **block funds** for governments that break democratic principles.

Article 7 Procedure – The “nuclear option” that can **strip a country of voting rights** if it violates EU values (though it’s rarely used).

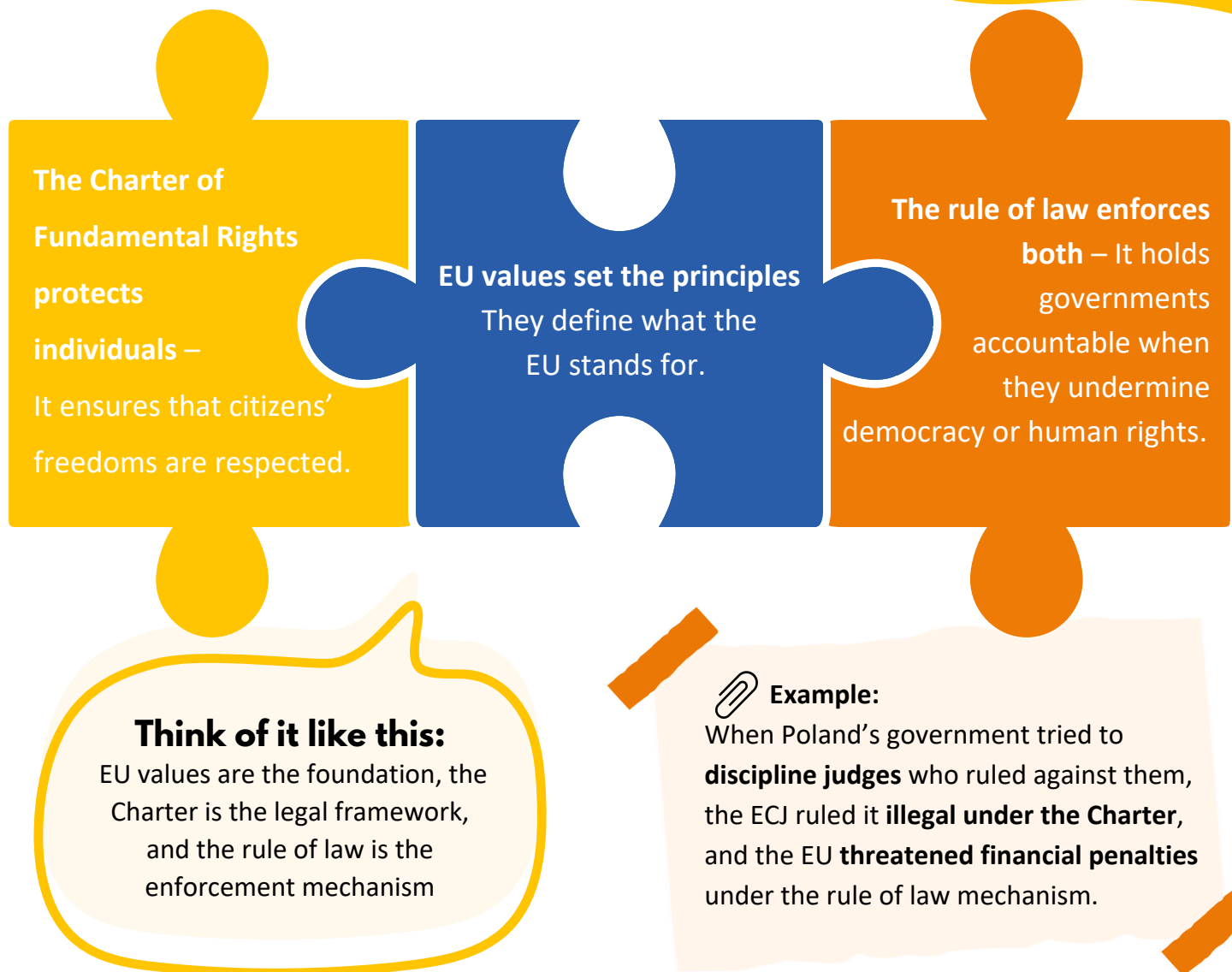


Example:

The EU suspended **billions of euros** in funding to Hungary and Poland for weakening judicial independence and controlling the media.



4. How Do They Work Together?



5. Why Does This Matter to You?

Your rights are protected	From online privacy to fair working conditions, these rules affect your daily life.
Democracy is at stake	If EU values weaken, governments could restrict press freedom, manipulate elections, or silence critics.
The EU's credibility is on the line	If the EU allows some governments to ignore these principles, its legitimacy is weakened.





Conclusion

The rule of law is **not just a legal principle,**
it is the foundation of European cooperation.

Its erosion in some member states threatens the EU's legal order, economic stability, and political unity. While the EU has taken measures to address these challenges, enforcement remains politically complex, requiring stronger institutional safeguards and political will from all member states to uphold democratic principles.

What do you think?



Should the EU be tougher in defending democracy and human rights, or should member states have more freedom to set their own rules?

