

DECLARATION OF ROME

Adopted on 30.11.2002 by the European Association of former members of parliament of the member states of the Council of Europe or the European Union

1. In the Declaration of Laeken, the European Council raised for the first time the necessity for the European Union to have a Constitution. The former members of parliament consider that it is indispensable for the European Union to have a Constitution or Basic Treaty. Whatever we call this basic European legal text – Constitution, Basic Treaty or Organic Charter – it should reflect the common European values which are the pillars that underpin it.
2. It is for this reason that former members of parliament, representing the European Association of Former Members of Parliament of the Member States of the Council of Europe or the European Union and its 13 national associations of former parliamentarians, met in Rome on 30 November 2002 to discuss this subject which is currently a burning issue. They embarked on a process of reflection about the common values that shape our societies and political identities and enable a European union to be built on sound foundations. They also considered the institutional tools that would insure continued implementation of the process of building Europe. During their reflections, they based their discussions on the work already carried out, and attempted to make improvements. They consider that it is necessary to envisage the evolution and future development of the Union taking greater account of the aspirations, demands and proposals of citizens, their representative organizations and their elected representatives at local, regional and national level, without destroying or harming the Community heritage and the achievements so far in terms of integration.
3. Very often, the roots of European values are hidden behind the imprecise term “spiritual and moral heritage” (cf. Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU). There are many historic roots: Greco-Roman and Celtic civilisations, the values of Hebraism, Christianity and its evolutions, the contribution of the Arab culture in the Middle Ages, humanism, the Reformation, and the Age of Enlightenment, political and social evolutions and revolutions throughout Europe, contemporary social movements for emancipation and participation. The point is, for the very first time, to make a synthesis of all the experiences of the European continent, which date back several thousand years, and which have sometimes taken a heavy toll in civil and human terms. Wars, dictatorships, and the barbarism and atrocities caused by aggressive nationalism in Europe lead us to take on a commitment as democrats: to guarantee peace, fight against dictatorship, curb exaggerated nationalism and ensure respect for international law.
4. At the top of the list of values is human dignity: it is the most noble value, the central value in democracy. It is based on a conception of man as an individual, integrating naturally in social life. It highlights the essential value that is liberty, and which applies to acts of life and the development of social life, and gave birth to law, the rule of law, and the system of secular and democratic government of society. Certain fundamentalist concepts deny political pluralism and equal rights for women and men. Their followers wish to apply their conceptions to the socio-political sphere. We denounce such attempts, which are in contradiction with common European values and with democracy. On the other hand, we issue a heartfelt appeal for tolerance, humanism and intercultural dialogue.
5. The political system linked with European civilisation is that of a pluralistic and participatory parliamentary democracy at all levels. It must be based on a legislative elected by universal suffrage, an executive responsible before the Parliament and an independent and impartial judiciary. It is based on the freedom of the media and on the consultation and participation of all citizens. In some European countries, freedom of expression and information, the independence of the press and the pluralism of the media are unfortunately in danger, or even not respected.

6. This community with shared values includes a group of values both universal and European. One could classify them as democratic, social, economic, ecological, cultural and ethical values, aiming to reconcile the interest of individuals and the public interest, and characteristic of what we usually call the European social model, which is the foundation of the cohesion and social security of citizens.
7. Among the values that characterise the political identity of Europe, we wish to mention: human dignity, the European social model, the common cultural heritage enhanced by its diversity, the construction of an increasingly close-knit political, economic, monetary and social union, a system of protection of human rights that is unique in the world, the promotion of peace and the pre-eminence of law in international relations.
8. Therefore, the former members of parliament are convinced that the common values on which the European Union should be built are as follows: dignity of the human person, equality between men and women, liberty and responsibility, democracy and the rule of law, solidarity and social justice, protection of nature, tolerance, respect of minorities and of cultural diversities as well as peace and co-operation between peoples.
9. To be able to unite all Europeans around the pillars that constitute these values, it is necessary to continue the unification process started with the creation of the Council of Europe, the Economic Community and more recently the European Union. The fruits of this process are the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Community Charter of Basic Social Rights for Workers, as well as the Social Charter, which must form part of the European Constitution.
10. With this in mind, it is absolutely imperative that the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights should be mutually reinforcing, and that the Court in Luxembourg and the Court in Strasbourg should base their decisions on the same values, obligations and fundamental rights. Supported by the member states, the European Union should become a party to the European Convention of Human Rights. This is essential for a coherent approach to the protection of fundamental rights throughout Europe.
11. By establishing the fundamental rights and duties at European level and within each state, one will govern the social relationships of persons as such, and not only as citizens of different countries: this will found European citizenship.
12. The former parliamentarians consider that, far from being in contradiction with national Constitutions, the European Constitution – due to the fact that it is based on common values and principles – must support and strengthen them by guaranteeing, via the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, the defence and development of the various national and regional cultures, languages and traditions, saving them from power relations and the dangers deriving from conflict-inducing tensions and abuses of power.
13. The European Constitution must define – apart from Human Rights – the institutions, competencies, procedures and resources of the European Union, while also opening up the way for all European states.
14. To strengthen the democratic process, a key role must be assigned to the European Parliament as well as to national parliaments, by giving preference to the Community model rather than to the intergovernmental model.
15. A European Charter for genuine democracy is particularly desirable. It would contribute to reflecting European values more accurately in parliamentary reality and strengthening the democratic institutions.

16. National and European parliamentarians of Greater Europe must exercise their responsibilities with unquestionable integrity and according to ethical principles. That is why the former parliamentarians are convinced that codes of conduct are tools which, taking the form of statements of shared values to which national and European politicians subscribe, provide guidance on good practice and which strengthen the trust between elected representatives and citizens.
17. We recognise the existence of an active civil society, and its non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as an essential component of European society and as an important and indispensable element in pluralist and participatory democracy to strengthen the participation of citizens in political life.
18. As to the subsidiarity principle, the European identity should leave a considerable role for specific regional and national entities in Europe, with all their cultural, linguistic and artistic aspects. This cultural diversity represents one of the greatest assets of Europe. The defence of the historic, artistic and cultural heritage in its integrity and diversity should also be considered as a common European value, and it should be pointed out that all the peoples and nations of Europe must recognise the cultural realities of the whole of Europe as their own heritage, which needs to be known, respected and defended. Many countries know and practise federalism successfully; this form of political organisation is capable of ensuring the integrity and diversity of the political and cultural heritage of the European countries.
19. The affirmation of these values is in contrast to a series of anti-values such as racism, xenophobia, chauvinism, anti-Semitism, religious fanaticism, violence and machismo. These phenomena are not exclusively European, even if they exist in extreme forms in various regions of Europe. All the European institutions and all individuals are urged to fight against these anti-values. The best guarantee for driving back them is education in democratic values and the fight against poverty, social exclusion and unemployment. Access to unrestricted information must be ensured, and it must be guaranteed that all the means of social communication contribute to the extension and defence of democratic values. We issue an appeal to the voters of Europe to reject parties that do not defend democratic values.
20. The evolution of the world in every field imposes the construction of an integrated Europe, which is more influential at world level than the sum of its component parts. That is particularly the case for seeking and maintaining peace, the political and peaceful solution of international conflicts, scientific policy, defence policy and development aid. All institutions must cooperate both with resolve and with respect for the law in facing up to terrorism, political violence and organised crime, which constitute the most serious crimes in terms of harm to the freedom and peaceful life of citizens. On the international level, certain countries are tending to by-pass the international institutions charged with finding peaceful solutions to international conflicts. This attitude constitutes a genuine threat to our common values.
21. In the European Constitution, the relations between the Union and the Council of Europe must be a tool used for the benefit of the valuable work promoted by the Council over the last half-century, that of the dissemination of and education in the common values, i.e. liberty, all human rights, democracy, international cooperation and peace.
22. The former parliamentarians are convinced that a unified and structured Europe will be in a position to face up to the challenges of globalisation, not only in the economic and social, but also in the political and legal fields. It is necessary to promote globalisation of democratic values and a social and ecological market economy where sustainable human development and the rights of future generations form the reference point in a world-wide policy that offers a decent life to all human beings, both for present and future generations. The specific European values can provide impetus, and serve as a source of inspiration to a global society, which respects the basic requirements of human civilisation as well as a balanced sharing of prosperity.

23. In promoting democratic values, economic and social progress and human development, the united Europe must reinforce and intensify its special relations of co-operation with the peoples sharing its own culture and with those who are close to Europe on historical and geographical grounds.
24. The former parliamentarians wish to see the sustainable development and enlargement of the European Union, in conformity with these common values, which are also universal, and endeavour to spread them to countries neighbouring the Union, to preserve peace in Europe and around the world.