

The motto of the European Union

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The European Union motto

The motto of the Union is *'united in diversity'*. Like the other symbols, the motto clearly highlights the sense of European identity that is the birthright of every citizen of the Union, over and above the actual European Union. The preamble to the Treaty, in which the term *'united in diversity'* is used in the fifth recital, goes some way towards interpreting the meaning of the motto set out in Article I-8 of the Constitutional Treaty. Let us consider the two words used in the European Union motto: *'united'* and *'diversity'*.

The term *'united in diversity'* refers to Europe, its values and its cultural, religious and humanist heritage. These are values that place two protagonists at the centre of social life: on the one hand, man and his rights and, on the other, the respect for law. For the purposes of interpreting the motto, the most illuminating passage of the preamble is to be found in the fourth recital, which states that the peoples of Europe, while remaining proud of their own national identities and history, are determined to transcend their former divisions and, united ever more closely, to forge a common destiny.

This phrase clearly explains both the notion of unity and the notion of diversity. The concepts expressing unity are not new. They recall, and appropriately take up, the formula of *'ever closer union'* included in the preamble to the Treaty on European Union. The path towards ever closer ties is gradual and proceeds — as heralded right from the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950 — from concrete achievements that create actual solidarity. However, *'unity'* is not an end in itself but has a specific goal: forging a *'common destiny'*. The notion of *'diversity'* is nevertheless also explained. It lies in the strong call for peoples to be proud of their national identities and history and for the respect of everyone's rights.

For a full understanding of what the motto actually means, the stress has to be placed on the values common to the Member States and, therefore, the founding values of the European Union. Article I-2 of the Constitutional Treaty lists six values: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. These values are shared in a European society, which in turn is based on pluralism, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination. Further elements helping to explain the motto can be drawn from Article I-2. The reference to both *'unity'* (Union, community, society) and *'diversity'* (pluralism, tolerance) stands out.

Striking a balance between unity and diversity is crucial. Too much unity would run the risk of standardisation and therefore the destruction of national identities. Too much diversity

could easily prevent intentions from converging and, in the long term, undermine the construction of a re-united Europe. Jack Lang understood this very well when he said that 'diversity is not division (...), difference is not indifference, union is not uniformity.' It is seen as crucial to seek unity in basic values and the combined presence of unity and difference. At the end of the 1920s, José Ortega y Gasset coined a metaphor in this respect that has become rightly famous: 'Europe is a swarm: many bees and a single flight'. The risks of implosion may nevertheless also be within the system. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing has pointed out that the dominant culture within the institutions in Brussels systematically underestimates diversity, viewing it as an obstacle to the further standardisation of Europe. Standardisation is, moreover, one of the objectives that this culture has set itself the task of achieving in practice by trying to impose it from above through standardising rules and pressures on mechanisms of identity. In Giscard d'Estaing's view, however, diversity is the genetic heritage of our continent in which unifying factors such as a single language, a common religion or a central power able to impose a uniform European model are lacking. As he points out, 50 years of integration have not managed to standardise Europeans' way of life. As it is not possible to rely on the assimilation brought about by a common language (as in the United States, which is nevertheless becoming a multilingual country along the lines of Europe) or a dominant people (as in China, where 80 % of the population is from the Han ethnic group), Europe has to be organised on the basis of its diversity and not against its diversity. A reasonable balance therefore has to be struck between the needs of diversity and the need to form a coherent whole.