With Euro-skepticism growing in most European societies after the grave and consequential Leave victory in the United Kingdom, this issue of Perspectives on Europe explores the core values and ideas around the process of European integration, and what is distinctively positive about the image the EU projects worldwide and within Europe. In this issue, we will stress the role of the EU as a positive force of justice and fairness, which spreads democratic and human rights values, as well as its role as a guarantor of institutional change, good governance, and transparency in some Southern and Eastern countries in Europe. We will explore the role of the EU as a moderating and distinctive voice in international relations, especially in relation to the Middle East. Lastly, we will discuss the mixed results of the monetary union as an engine of growth and economic modernization.

The process of European integration has had an undisputed role in the diffusion and consolidation of democratic values in countries with a dictatorial past like Greece, Portugal, or Spain, and in Eastern Europe. As a result, there has been remarkable institutional convergence in Europe, from Scandinavia to Spain, and from Ireland to the Ukraine. In the book European Legal Cultures in Transition, authors Åse B. Grødeland and William Miller study legal cultures in five European countries (the UK, Norway, Bulgaria, Poland, and the Ukraine), pointing at the persistence of remarkable differences in legal cultures in the countries studied, as well as their rapid convergence. In his review of the book, Lawrence Friedman, in his review of the book, resolves the paradox of convergence among such diverse societies. For Friedman, the global success of the “human rights culture,” the idea that we are all equal in front of the law and that we all deserve a chance in life, explains the greater homogeneity of legal cultures in Europe and across other developed and developing countries around the world.

The Human Rights Culture is a powerful mechanism of social integration. Several voices in Europe and the Middle East have pointed at alleged fundamental contradictions between Islam and modern democracies, but Friedman argues that the evidence collected by Grødeland and Miller (from surveys on Muslim minorities in Europe) show this community has fully interiorized the human rights culture. The result is that European countries have fairly homogeneous legal cultures, even in countries with profound ethnic or religious divisions. This evidence is a fitting testament of the power of the human rights culture to integrate ethnic or religious minorities in
Europe and elsewhere.

Despite the spread of the Human Rights culture, terrorists in Europe and the Middle East as well as xenophobes in Europe, envision the inevitable clash of civilizations between Western capitalism and Islam. In his book *The Love of Strangers: What Six Muslim Students Learned in Jane Austen's London*, Nile Green weaves a compelling narrative of friendship and reciprocal discovery between Europeans and Muslims in the mid-nineteenth century. In the process, he uncovers a secret tradition of Europhilia in the Muslim world, a far cry from imperial submission or collaboration with the oppressor. Although Green’s six Iranian students in London were not a representative sample of the Muslim population of their time, this fascinating history opens a horizon of mutual understanding, reciprocal interest, and collaboration. Some of these values have been embedded in EU’s less aggressive and more co-operative foreign policy stance, especially towards the Middle East.

In Southern Europe, the European Union is still widely seen as a powerful force of modernization, institutional change, and a guarantor of social justice. Trust in political parties is declining across Europe due to the inability of governments and parliaments to restore economic growth. This decline is particularly acute in Southern Europe, where a lethal combination of corruption and economic crisis has cracked open the political system. Using evidence from the European Social Survey, Francisco Herreros analyzes the determinants of political trust in several European countries, demonstrating how in some countries the levels of trust did not deteriorate during the crisis. Countries in Southern Europe, where a severe recession went hand in hand with a heightened perception of corruption, took a hit in terms of the legitimacy of political institutions. The lack of trust of Southern Europeans towards their politicians explains how, in spite of the massive dose of fiscal austerity imposed in the Eurozone, euro-skepticism is not yet dominant in Southern Europe. There, the European Union is still seen as a positive force of institutional change and modernization, and a necessary check to the power of domestic politicians.

Given the inherently positive values associated with the process of European integration (such as human rights and rule of law, good governance, and equality) the question becomes: why is the European idea so contested across Europe? To a great extent, the incompleteness of the process of European integration becomes EU’s main problem. In Juan Díez Medrano’s essay, he reviews Kathleen McNamara’s recent book *The Politics of*
Everyday Europe. In this book, McNamara dissects the ways in which the European Union constructs and projects legitimacy and authority. In her view, although both the symbolic and practical influences of the EU on the daily lives of Europeans are undeniable, they are still unappreciated. The main reason, argues McNamara, is that the EU competes with nation-states when projecting legitimacy and authority. For this reason, EU policymaking emphasizes its technical and technocratic nature, projecting symbols and narratives that integrate national traditions. One example of this is the botched attempt at drafting and later voting for a European Constitution. The cultural and symbolic scaffolding of the EU remains weak, even banal, making it difficult and perhaps undesirable to deepen the process of European integration.

Nothing has eroded more consistently than the legitimacy of the EU—like the disastrous management of the Eurozone crisis, which has compared very unfavorably with the management of the financial crisis in the US and the UK. Juan Flores reviews the recent book by Martin Sandbu, a writer at the Financial Times, on the workings of the Eurozone. Sandbu’s book, Europe’s Orphan: The Future of the Euro and the Politics of Debt is special in that it does not consider the design of the euro as fatally flawed. In fact, Sandbu credits the euro for successes in many counts, especially as a powerful force of integration and modernization in Europe (capital mobility, decline and harmonization of interest rates, and its status as international reserve currency). For Sandbu, the main culprit for the current crisis is the deficient management of the banking and sovereign debt crises. Although Juan Flores agrees on the characterization of the Eurozone, he remains somewhat skeptical about the main claims of the book and evaluates the plausibility of several counterfactual policies explored in the book.

Besieged by an unsolvable financial and sovereign debt crisis, an incomplete and often dysfunctional process of integration, and a refugee crisis of gigantic proportions, citizens have started to have doubts concerning the ability of European institutions to solve these most pressing problems. In many countries, EU policymaking is seen as disconnected, non-accountable, and undemocratic. If European political elites do not react to the challenges ahead there is a growing risk of consolidation of the domestic versions of populism and nationalism spreading everywhere in Europe, as we have just seen in Britain. As a cautionary note, this issue of Perspectives on Europe includes an essay by Larry Eugene Jones on the collapse of the Weimar Republic in the 1930s, which is based on his book Hitler versus Hindenburg: The 1932 Presidential elections and the end of the Weimar Republic. Jones notes that the rise of Hitler was by no means inevitable, but the depth of
the economic and political crisis certainly made the ascent of charismatic personalities like Hitler possible.

Political elites across Europe must deliver a fairer and quicker recovery, and EU institutions need to restore their credibility as guarantors of economic, political, and institutional modernization, while preserving the main tenets of the European social model, or else we are at risk of a chaotic dismantling of the process of European integration. If the EU were to implode, the values we associate with the EU could very likely be in danger.

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