

What Would Our Daily Lives Be Like Without the European Union?

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I am 30 years old. I was born in the year Spain became part of the European Union. I have never known a life without the European Union. When I heard the result of the EU referendum in the UK, I was shocked. Then, I tried to imagine how my life would be without the EU. Since I belong to the younger generations educated and socialised in a Spain which is part of the European Union, I have to draw on the memories of my parents and my grandparents who lived in different times and witnessed the beginning of Spain's EU membership. I will use their experiences to imagine how different my day-to-day life would be if there were no European Union.

Travel

As it is holiday time right now, I would probably want to travel to another country. Apart from the fact that travelling would be more expensive, I would have to plan in advance where I want to go. I love having a few days off and just catch a plane to some corner of Europe where I haven't been so far. Without European citizenship this would not be possible. It would probably be necessary to obtain a visa which is a time consuming process. Also, I should go to the bank and change my 'pesetas' into the national currency of my destination, which is another time and money consuming (transaction costs) procedure. But that would not be all: I'd have to get a medical insurance, because without European Health Insurance Card, I would not have access to such a basic right as health care under the same conditions as nationals of the country of destination.

Migration: work and study

Freedom of movement is a valuable right introduced by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. For young people like me the EU is an opportunity to get the job that I cannot obtain in Spain elsewhere. After the Great Recession, the rate of youth unemployment in Spain has risen dramatically and young people experience serious difficulties to obtain proper jobs. Therefore, working in another European country can be an option for many to fulfil their expectations. However, labour migration would be much harder without the EU.

Imagine I have my Spanish university degree and I want to get a job in another European country. The first thing I have to do is get my certificate recognised by the authorities in that country; otherwise I will not be allowed to practise my profession. But the situation is even more complicated than that. In most cases I will need a job before I can settle in that country as it is usually a condition to get a permit of residency. And if I am lucky enough to find a job, I could not enjoy my retirement back in Spain. No chance to see colonies of British and German pensioners at the Spanish coast ever again.

And that is not to mention the language issue. In Spain, until recent years there has been no awareness of the need to speak another language. Educational EU programmes such as ERASMUS have helped students to improve their language skills. Although there are more mobility programmes (e.g. for apprentices or teachers) ERASMUS remains the best known. Programmes such as ERASMUS are 'life experiences' that you will always remember. These experiences would not be possible if the EU did not exist.

Culture

Free movement together with the single European market are the main advantages the EU has to offer. But this means more than the pleasure and ease to travel: border regions thrive on these principles. My grandparents are from a small village bordering Portugal. Since I was a child, I am used to go to Portugal to drink coffee and buy the famous Portuguese sheets and tablecloths. I spent almost every Sunday enjoying Portuguese food and culture. Thanks to this special relationship with our neighbouring country, my grandmother's best recipe is 'golden cod', a delicious Portuguese dish. There is even an annual fair, held on both sides of the Portuguese-Spanish border. Such transnational interactions foster a European identity and promote the advancement of the European project.

Rights and values

The European project was born as an economic project but with the objective of overcoming the consequences of the Second World War and maintain the peace on the European continent. The EU is based on common values and fundamental rights which were laid down for all European citizens in the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU](#). Perhaps Europeans do not really appreciate enough that they all enjoy the same rights as EU citizens: without the EU, Europeans would be treated differently depending on their nationality. Moreover, they could not go to the European Court of Justice to claim their rights: without the European Court of Justice, [Spanish eviction laws](#) would have continued to cause grief for hundreds of thousands of families.

What future?

All this shows that without the EU my life (all our lives) would be different. In a globalised world, free movement and a single market are clear advantages. In addition, we as EU citizens share common values and rights that protect us and at the same time we can enjoy our linguistic and cultural diversity. Still, for a growing number of European citizens this does no longer seem to be enough: the European project is seriously called into question. I also want a better Europe. The way the Great Recession was dealt with (austerity measures), the growing lack of solidarity among Member States, the way the refugee crisis was handled including the EU-Turkey deal, these are only a few of the issues which require a change in policy. But what many critics of the EU seem to forget is that it is *us* – you and me – who *are* the EU. The European Union is not an abstract entity; it is built with our decisions. We choose our leaders that make decisions on the EU with the mandate we gave them. After the Brexit referendum, now should be the right moment for Europeans to think about the future, but not without looking back at the past and being aware of everything we have achieved so far. What would *your* life be like, if the EU did not exist?