



Europe's core values

(Published in [Benador Associates](#), January 16, 2007)

Nir Boms and Terry Newman

Colaboraciones n° 1461

January 30, 2007

Europe is rapidly growing. Facing immigration, new member states and continued enlargement talks, Europe finds itself asking an old question again: What is Europe about? The answer has to do with values – with core European values that need to be expressed in the positive in order for them to be a driving force in a renewing Europe.

Europe needs to initiate dialogue on its core values in order to define and defend acceptable interpretations from the vulgar. Without this dialogue, words like tolerance, individual freedoms or respect for reason might lose some of their meaning. The label on the wine bottle will stay but the wine will go ~~down~~ ~~down~~. How often have we heard "freedom of religion" used to justify the subjugation of women? Or "freedom of expression" to justify the rejection

of logic and reason? Only by giving positive definitions to their core values can Europe protect its individuals and its collective.

A positive – rather than a passive – definition necessarily excludes some interpretations. This may offend certain interest groups. But, they need to discuss the parameters of what wine is, and what is not, acceptable within the wine bottle. Let us start with three core values: (1) freedom of expression; (2) equality of the sexes; and (3) respect for logic and reason

Freedom of Expression should allow us to express ourselves freely – physically, politically and religiously – providing it does not overly offend others. The crux of this sentence is "overly." So let's spell out a few examples.

Physically, we should be able to wear the clothes we desire. Society will dictate fashion trends and we can choose to receive or reject these designs. But, we should all have the respect to cover private parts in public places, and the decency to reveal our true face in public places.

Politically, we should be entitled to choose our leaders. We should have access to information to choose wisely and the privacy of voting to prevent communal pressure.

Religiously, we should be entitled to "freedom of religion" and "freedom from religion." Faith groups form an integral and influential part of the fabric of our society. They often add the magic ingredient that is missing in a routine lifestyle. But some do not need nor want that magic ingredient.

This is their choice. And, some will choose to interpret their faith traditions in different ways to the mainstream. This is viewed as valid by some and invalid by others. But, the State should remain neutral. It is a personal matter between the individual and Creator. Religious leaders should recognize and respect this.

Equality of the sexes should enable us to choose our own destiny regardless of our sex or sexual orientation. Just as we can determine our destiny regardless of eye color. This benefits individuals who can achieve self-realization, and society that maximizes its productive potential.

Men and Women should be given

the same tools to analyze, study and think about the world. Yes, we may develop these tools in different directions. But, a unified basic toolbox must be provided to all to enable self-enhancement for those who so desire.

And, men and women should work. This may be in the home or the workplace. But each one of us has the right and responsibility to create and provide for ourselves and our loved ones.

Respect for reason and logic has facilitated the development of science and technology that have changed our continent and entire planet. The Internet, modern medicine and space travel are all positive outgrowths of this respect.

Yes, reason and logic have their limits. But, they have a self-corrective mechanism in the form of reasoned argument. And, they are currently the best model available for analyzing the world around us.

There should still be space for the faith and mysticism of believers. But faith with eyes and ears open. After all, you might pray before you travel on an aeroplane. Yet, you would never trust your spiritual leader to build the aeroplane.

History has taught us that continued dialogue on the positive meaning of our core values benefits the individual and society as a whole. For example, continued dialogue on the US constitution led to the metamorphosis of the phrase "All men are created equal" from meaning

white males to white males and females to all humans - black and white. The wine bottle remained. But the wine changed - for the better.

Only through continued dialogue on the positive definitions of its core values can Europe prevent an ideo-

logical vacuum in its society. And this is a dangerous vacuum that had led many fine European minds to satisfy their ideological appetite in radical movements - both secular and religious. The strongest tool they have to protect themselves and their society is to put the positive back into their core values.