



# Universities, promoters of European democratic values

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# Introduction

## Complex times

- A resumption of wars
- A globalization of economics
- A major climate change
- Major disasters...

How can we talk about peace and freedom in a context where business and deals, whatever the field, govern diplomatic responses?



# Introduction and Plan

- The European Union is founded on values
- Universities are a compass for democracy; universities have to play a major role today, in the face of the rise of authoritarian regimes and populims
- **Universities have been able to benefit from multiple tools to promote this knowledge, this companionship (I);** this is how we can fight against the rejection of others, discrimination, the reification of certain individuals.
- **Universities develop the critical spirit of students, which is why they are most often the object of immediate criticism from authoritarian and populist regimes (II).**



# I- Knowledge of others in mutual respect permitted by universities

Freedom and respect for others, wherever they come from, are consubstantial to universities.

By promoting exchanges (A), universities allow the confrontation of political and institutional systems (B) under the aegis of the principles of the rule of law (B)



# I- Knowledge of others in mutual respect permitted by universities

## A-Encouraged and strengthened exchanges

- Erasmus and Erasmus+
- The Alliances

## B-A welcome confrontation of political and institutional systems

- Common responses to European calls for projects
- Constitution of networks, which don't know borders



Universities constitute an effective rampart against populism (A),  
because they teach people to live together (B),  
which is rejected by populist or authoritarian regimes



## **II-A critical spirit developed by universities in the name of academic freedom**

### **A-An effective rampart against populism**

Populism is a political approach that pits the people against the political, intellectual, and social elites, by claiming to be the real people.

This is the opposite of the knowledge taught by universities. No scientific truth can be imposed if it has not been discussed, proven, argued, repeated, delivered to peers to be analyzed and criticized. Everything must be discussed, nothing is acquired, especially since universities are based on a fundamental principle: academic freedom.

**It is not up to the State to say what to work on and especially what not to work on.**



## II-A critical spirit developed by universities in the name of academic freedom

In the name of an ideological dogmatism that we thought was almost impossible, we today see governments prohibiting researchers from working on the climate, on gender, on minorities, on equality between men and women...

But universities imply a solidarity of knowledge without borders:

- Flexible mechanisms being put in place to allow the most exposed researchers to leave their country to continue their research elsewhere, in another country, in another university.
- PAUSE program (Emergency program for scientists and artists in exile) or Safe Place for Science launched by Aix-Marseille University, programs that we did not think we would have to activate for researchers from Western countries...





### **B-A living together claimed**

- Universities allow the acceptance of differences, whether cultural, linguistic or gender-driven; the construction around common values is their specificity
- Influence on citizens
- The role of universities is then not to impose a point of view, but to allow the confrontation of points of view; it is not to tell a truth, but to spark contradictory debate.
- In this sense, universities are the opposite of populism which will seek the support of the people during a referendum.

# Conclusion

Universities have a fundamental role today. The scientific community, the European university community must mobilize against any form of confiscation of research, against any challenge to academic freedom because, as with justice, what is at stake is the challenge to independence of mind, to freedom of judgment





**Many thanks for your attention**