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European Sentiment Compass 2025: It’s culture, stupid!

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Europe must not cave in to Trump's culture war, say the Sentiment Compass 2025 authors and call the EU leaders to invest in European belonging, which rises strengthened after a decade of crises, to win over Trump's Truman Show of today.

The rising EU-USA tension goes “beyond tanks and tariffs”, as said in the launching of the European Sentiment Compass 2025
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Speakers in this year’s Sentiment Compass event agreed on the firm position that Europe needs to keep in the cultural war, ignited by Trumpists and the MAGA narrative.

What is at stake is who defines the ‘values’ of the West, as argued by Powel Zerka, Senior Policy Fellow of the European Council on Foreign Relations: “the most dangerous element is that Trump tries to shape a completely different debate about what freedom and democracy should be about, and he has plenty of room for that as we, Europeans and Americans, we are part of the same cultural sphere”.

The fight is between the universal notion of the ‘free world’ as meant by European liberals and American democrats and the West as the civilisation of white Christians, according to the ideals of MAGA and the European new right. Apart from this ideological fight on values definition and domination, there is a second and more subtle battlefield, reads the Sentiment Compass 2025.

Europe to Win Trump's Truman Show

“This is a struggle for the EU’s dignity, credibility and identity as an autonomous actor on the global stage”. In this context, Europe is presented as stuck in a Truman Show, with Trump’s America as the director, engaging his MAGA ideological allies in

European politics, while humiliating Europeans in their dealings with the US.

"Today's Hollywood would never make a movie like Truman Show, as it is a movie about individual freedom and courage of going against the established normal", commented Powel Zerka.

The Sentiment authors warn that “While Trumpists are exploiting loopholes in European public opinion and division and hesitation among the EU’s leaders” and call for not just fighting this war, but winning it.

“71 years ago EU founders knew that it is much more coal and steel. It needs a European sentiment of belonging, which is to be developed through culture and education”, said André Wilkens, Director of the European Cultural Foundation.

“Europe must take the next step and stand more firmly on its feet, to invest in its security, its digital future and its cultural confidence”, agreed in her keynote speech, Sabine Verheyen, First Vice-President of the European Parliament and former Chairwoman of the EP Cult Committee. “We need a stronger European sentiment, a sense that together we are more than the sum of our parts” she continued, highlighting that "This cultural war ships into Europe through big social media platforms we all use. Our answer must be rooted in our values".

Background

'Reality Show. Why Europe must not cave in to Trump's culture war'. The European Sentiment Compass is an annual project by the European Cultural Foundation and the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). Following last year’s widely discussed 'Welcome to Barbieland', the 2025 edition examines European sentiment under Trump’s second presidency — and makes the case for why Europe must fight the culture war being waged against it.

Find more here

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