

Questions from Prof. Kate Graney

Tuesday, August 4, 2020 3:00pm EDT

What is the need and difference of the Schengen Area in Europe as compared to the EU? You refer to Europe as having liberal politics, but how do you justify the numerous monarchies throughout the continent? Thank you.

Submitted: Regina C. '74

Hi, Regina! Thanks so much for your questions. The distinction and difference between the EU, the Schengen Area and "Europe" is a complicated and important one. The EU itself has evolved over many years, and not all members of the EU participate in all of the EU's programs. For example, not every EU member state has chosen to or qualified for membership in the Eurozone Euro Currency Community. Same thing with Schengen – not all have applied or qualified. On the other hand, there are non-EU members who can gain special permission to join some EU programs or get some EU benefits, such as visa-free travel. And this question of whether or not the EU is synonymous with "Europe" is exactly what I look at in my book! Since the EU has become the main "face" of "Europe" on the world stage, and indeed, in the lives of many "Europeans" who live in those EU member states, does that mean that any country NOT in the EU is NOT European? If so, that might explain why countries such as Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova are so keen to join the EU – they want not just the political and economic benefits of the EU but also the sort of emotional / psychological prestige that goes with being considered "European". Geographers and others don't really agree on where Europe begins or ends geographically or on a map, so the borders of "Europe" are very malleable and open to this type of political wrangling. This is the question that really interests me a lot!

Also, regarding the monarchies. Another great question! All countries that join the EU, including the many that, as you point out, still have monarchies, MUST abide by the democratic norms and rules that the EU supports. Countries that don't do this and which "backslide" towards autocracy (such as Poland and Hungary currently), risk financial penalties and other punishments from the EU. NONE of the EU member countries with monarchies have ever been censured in this way. This is because in all of these places, the monarchy is at this point almost entirely symbolic and serves only as a sort of national figurehead or symbol of national history and tradition. Members of the royal family might have ceremonial duties, such as opening parliament, but they do not have any real power in terms of legislating or governing. As you might imagine, it is a real debate in a lot of these countries about why you even still have the monarchies. It might be that someday some of them decide to "retire" the monarchies. But other countries seem to really appreciate having these institutions as a symbolic unifier of the nation.

Thanks for your questions.

A young woman (from India) who had a PhD in math specializing in data analytics lived at my house in Spring 2019 - until she lost her job: The Russian company for whom she was doing social media in the US was shut down by the US Gov so she had a choice: move to Moscow or you lose your job. How strong is Russian social media in Europe? How much did it impact the Brexit vote to break up Europe?

Submitted: Karen J. '69

ANSWER

Hello, Karen! Thanks so much for your question. Russia regular media and also social media is present across the European media space, just like it is in the US. RT and Sputnik are two news agencies sponsored by the Russian government that have their own TV channels, websites, FB and Instagram pages, and other outlets in the European media sphere. While there are some forces in Europe that are pro-Russia and deny any nefarious Russian influence in the media or political spheres in Europe, the EU has been much more proactive in terms of trying to stop Russian misinformation campaigns than the US government has been. It's just not as controversial there—most politicians believe it is happening and want to combat it.

The British government issued a report in July detailing the extensive pro-Brexit Russian influence on the Brexit process, and the government's failure to notice or stop that process. It's a pretty accessible document: <https://docs.google.com/a/independent.gov.uk/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=aW5kZXBlbmRlbnQuZ292LnVrfGlzY3xneDo1Y2RhMGEyN2Y3NjM0OWFI>

Thanks for your questions!!

Kate

COMMENTS:

fabulous! thank you!

Submitted: Karen J. '69