While the European Union (EU) aims for ‘unity in diversity’, one may wonder what actually unites European citizens apart from political, institutional and economic cooperation.

In building the European Union, member states have brought to a common table their own histories, languages, economies and political cultures... Moreover the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of modern European societies and the inhabitants of the EU have raised the question of the ability of democratic systems to find a balance between the integration of all groups into a broad consensus and around core values.

It is within this context that the idea of an EU citizenship was born – elaborated in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 which finally become a legal fact implying both rights and duties for its owners.

While it is fairly easy to understand how one is a citizen of a state, how do you define citizenship of a sui generis organization such as the European Union and what does it mean to belong to it and to be its citizen, in this transnational environment? From Athens to Dublin does this ‘European Spirit’ that Paul Valéry talks about exists as an invisible link between EU citizens? One may wonder whether people from Europe truly regard themselves as ‘European’, or whether this is a fiction which attempts to transform geography ‘into a state of mind?’ While certain key elements of EU citizenship are laid out in the EU treaties, wider questions persist as to what it really means for the people of Europe. Can there be such a thing as a
European 'identity' which connects EU citizen? Do symbols such as a European flag or anthem actually enhance the feeling of ‘Europeaness’ in one’s daily life or in one’s experiences abroad? These questions are at the core of the 2013 Europe Day event organized by the Center for International and European Studies (CIES) and its partners.

In an increasingly globalised world, marked by the exchange of ideas and the mobility of people, the Erasmus program can be seen as the facilitator of a European identity and one of the EU’s central tools in enhancing the feeling of belonging to Europe. In this European Year of Citizens, with the planned activities addressing the question of a European identity, the focus will be on Erasmus students with the screening of short movies realised by exchange students about their experience abroad and through a dedicated panel discussion on 'Unity in Diversity: European identity through the lens of Erasmus student'.

A second panel discussion on “Defining the concept of European Citizenship” will take into account the experiences and observations of some Turkish and European elites. Some of the participants for this panel will be reached through the use of Google’s Hangout technology.

Finally this Europe Day event will signal the launch of the “Catching Europe in Istanbul” photography exhibit where amateur photographers will share their visions of Europe in Istanbul in their daily lives. The best photographs will be awarded prizes by the organizers.

The Center for International and European Studies (CIES) at Kadir Has University is the principal organizer of the ‘Celebrating Europe Day’ event. Its partners include the Katadrom Arts, Culture and Social Politics Association, the Corporate Social Responsibility Association of Turkey (CSR Turkey), the International Cooperation and Education Office at Kadir Has University, and the Erasmus Student Network at Kadir Has University.

A detailed event program will be available shortly. More information can be found on the CIES website.