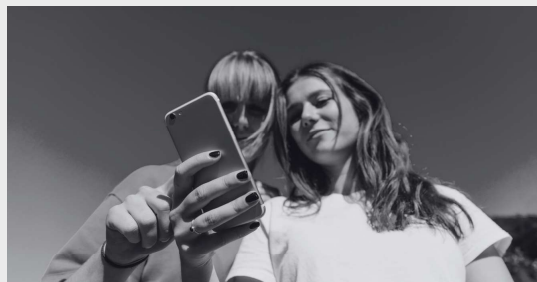


# STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

*Building trust and tackling polarisation in Europe*

## #ActEU

# MID - TERM CONFERENCE



12 DECEMBER  
2024

11 RUE D'EGMONT,  
1000 BRUSSELS

09:15 - 19:00



# Agenda

09:45 - 10:15 *Registrations*

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10:15 - 10:30 **Welcome & Opening Remarks**

- Michael Kaeding, Professor & ActEU coordinator, University Duisburg-Essen
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10:30 - 12:00 **Session 1: Assessing ActEU's initial findings: key challenges, successes, and future directions**

This panel will explore the preliminary results from the ActEU project, discussing key deliverables with insights into research successes and methodological challenges. Our selected researchers, joined by experienced civil society members, will provide perspectives on the project's impact so far, addressing the complexities of assessing democratic engagement, polarisation, and public trust in Europe. Through a moderated conversation, panellists will highlight lessons learned and set the stage for the next phase of ActEU, fostering a collaborative approach to democratic resilience and social cohesion.

**Session Chair: Daniela Braun, Professor, Saarland University**

**1) Trust dynamics ([read the report](#))**

- *Henrik Serup Christensen, Senior Lecturer, Åbo Akademi University*

**2) Voting behaviour in Europe ([read the report](#))**

- *Carles Pamies, ActEU project researcher, Spanish National Research Council*

**3) Representation patterns ([read the report](#))**

- *Matilde Ceron, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Salzburg*

**Discussant: Zora Siebert, Head of EU Policy Programme, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung EU & ActEU Civil Society Network Member**

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12:00 - 13:00 *Lunch Break*

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## 13:15 - 14:30 **Session 2: Is representative democracy in Europe under pressure?**

This panel examines the challenges facing representative democracy in Europe, exploring patterns of trust, disaffection, and political engagement at multiple levels of governance. Presenters will address the multidimensional nature of trust in political institutions, identifying evidence of distinct trust dimensions and examining how these dimensions influence public attitudes and behaviours. This panel offers fresh insights into the changing relationship between citizens and democratic institutions, shedding light on the pressures facing representative democracy today.

**Session Chair: Alexander Hoppe, Lecturer, University Duisburg-Essen**

### 1) Understanding trust in political institutions (read the abstract)

- *Jens Carstens, PhD student, Sciences Po*

### 2) Democracy under pressure: citizen disaffection in Europe (read the abstract)

- *Ruth Berkowitz, Research Associate, University Duisburg-Essen*

### 3) Political trust at local levels across Europe (read the abstract)

- *Felix-Christopher von Nostitz, Associate Professor in Political Science, ESPOL-LAB, Université Catholique de Lille*
- *Giulia Sandri, Researcher & Scientific Advisor, Université Libre de Bruxelles*

**Discussant: Daniela Vancic, European Program Manager, Democracy International & Civil Society Network Member**

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14:30- 14:45 *Short Break*

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## 14:45- 16:00 **Session 3: What drives trust, representation, and political engagement in a changing Europe?**

This panel investigates the critical factors shaping trust, representational preferences, and public engagement in politics. It examines the influence of politicians' behaviours, representational diversity, and responses to controversial policies on European citizens.

**Session Chair: Petr Kratochvíl, Professor, Institute of International Relations Prague**

### 1) Deceitful behaviour and political trust (read the abstract)

- *Henrik Serup Christensen, Senior Lecturer, Åbo Akademi University*

### 2) Preferences for representation by women and minorities (read the abstract)

- *Janette Huttunen, Postdoctoral researcher, Åbo Akademi University*

### 3) Engagement triggers in response to controversial policies (read the abstract)

- *Daniela Braun, Professor & ActEU scientific lead, University of Saarland*

**Discussant: Anna Kern, Assistant Professor, Ghent University**

16:00-16:30 *Coffee Break*

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16:30-18:00 **Session 4: How is polarisation fragmenting democratic norms and reshaping European politics?**

This session explores how polarisation across Europe is impacting democratic norms, with a focus on the divisive forces shaping contemporary political and social landscapes. Presenters will discuss findings from a range of studies that examine culture wars, public attitudes, political polarisation, and media narratives. Together, these presentations provide a nuanced look at the role of polarisation in redefining civic values and influencing democratic cohesion in Europe.

**Session Chair: Kristina Weissenbach, Acting Professor, University Duisburg-Essen**

**1) Culture wars and climate activism (read the abstract)**

- *Laura Morales, Professor, CSIC*

**2) Public attitudes on gender equality and democracy (read the abstract)**

- *Matilde Ceron, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Salzburg*

**3) Tracking narratives on gender, climate, and migration (read the abstract)**

- *Daniel Gayo-Avello, Associate Professor University of Oviedo*

**4) Polarisation among EU political parties (read the abstract)**

- *Alexander Hartland, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Saarland*

**Discussant: Manuel Müller, Senior Researcher, Finnish Institute of International Affairs & ActEU Advisory Board Member**

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18:00 - 18:15 **Concluding Remarks**

- *Daniela Braun, Professor & ActEU scientific lead, Saarland University*
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18:15-19:00 *Cocktail Reception*

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19:00 *Dinner*

## About TEPSA



The Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) was established in 1974 as the first transnational research network in the field of EU affairs. It comprises leading research institutes throughout Europe, with an office in Brussels. Its aim is to provide high-quality research on European integration to stimulate discussion on policies and political options for Europe. This is achieved by the interaction between the European and national institutions as well as the academic and research community. TEPSA is active on a wide range of research topics, focusing on differentiated integration, the EU's external relations, democratic participation and citizens' engagement.

More information on our activities can be found at <http://www.tepsa.eu>



## About ActEU

How can we conceptualise and empirically measure political trust and legitimacy beyond the usual survey question “How much trust do you have in the parliament?”? Does the multi-level nature of European representative democracies require an identical level of citizen support at the regional, national and EU levels? ActEU aims at finding answers to these questions and more by pursuing two overarching goals. First, in phase 1, we map and investigate persistent problems of declining trust, legitimacy and representation in Europe with particular attention to the polarisation of societies and the EU’s multi-level structure. Knowledge gained from phase 1 will flow directly into the development of a toolbox of remedial actions characterising phase 2, which will craft tailor-made toolkits for political and civil society actors, school teachers and university lecturers to deal with issues of declining political trust in representative democracies in flux and counteract a further decrease. We develop context-sensitive solutions for all policy levels and types of polarising fields (migration, environment, gender).

More information on our activities can be found at <https://acteu.org/>

