



# Diversity, democracy, and solidarity in EU societies

EU-funded research projects in the areas of  
cohesion, extremism, democracy and political  
participation in Europe

**Horizon 2020 Societal Challenge 6**  
Europe in a changing world -  
Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies

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Can ethnographic case studies and quantitative research help to understand the ways stigmatised or conflictual youngsters engage with social, environmental and political issues, and how they create opportunities for social change? How will the concept of “democratic efficacy” help to counter populism? How do populists use social media? How could we use history to encourage debate amongst teenagers about religious tolerance?

The Horizon 2020 research projects presented in this brochure address these and many other questions, all sharing a common goal: helping understand how to create a more cohesive, inclusive and democratic Europe.

### **How to create a cohesive and democratic Europe that recognises differences and promotes solidarity?**

Over the first two decades of the 21st century, the EU has faced a series of multifaceted crises. Some analysts believe the Union is immersed in a polycrisis - a term coined by former European Commission president, Jean-Claude Juncker, back in 2016<sup>1</sup>.

After the economic crisis of 2008 and the following euro-crisis, Member States and the EU institutions struggled to offer appropriate responses to the so-called refugees and migration crisis. Soon after, the outcome of the Brexit referendum made it clear that the European integration process is not a given. The health emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, with its immediate health cost and the subsequent socio-economic implications, has made more visible some of the challenges of democratic governance in the EU.

The consequences of the pandemic follow a decade of unprecedented political polarisation. The erosion in living standards following the financial and economic crisis and the stalling of social mobility reinforced sentiments of public distrust towards democratic institutions. Populist discourses tried to discredit liberal democracy as too weak and cumbersome to manage the current challenges, mocking the role of experts and pretending to rally ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’. Threats to the rule of law in the form of democratic backsliding in parts of the Union, where basic constitutional principles are challenged through legal and political developments promoted by the ruling governments, jeopardise the stability and balance of a union established as a union of law.

How to create a cohesive Europe, capable of surviving challenging and critical times, based on solidarity, democracy and integration? The EU is a remarkable experiment in collective governance requiring the trust of its citizens in its democratic legitimacy and efficiency. Their trust must be earned through the kind of effective decision-making that takes the historical, cultural and social diversity of Europe into account. For this to happen, EU and national institutions need to address questions of how to involve citizens in order to understand better their needs, how to address existing and perceived social and economic inequalities and promote the egalitarian ethos of democracy, and how to increase the political participation of citizens, especially among youth and underrepresented groups.

The European Commission’s political priorities for 2020-24 include a “New push for European Democracy”, aimed at consolidating partnership with the European Parliament, enhancing the transparency and integrity of decision-making processes, and encouraging input from European citizens at all stages of EU policy-making. As part of this priority, the Commission announced its intention to launch a European Democracy Action Plan to help improve the resilience of democracies and address the threats of external interference in European elections. The strategy should be adopted in the fourth quarter of 2020 and will aim at countering disinformation and at adapting to evolving threats and manipulations, while supporting free and independent media.

In such a challenging political environment, it is essential that innovative social science research provides fact-based neutral analysis, devises innovative solutions to improve democratic systems, and assists in the formulation of evidence-based policy. The Commission counts on European researchers to rise to this challenge.

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<sup>1</sup>.Juncker, J.C. (2016) ‘Speech at the annual general meeting of the Hellenic federation of enterprises’, Athens, 21 June, available at [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-16-2293\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-2293_en.htm).

## How do EU policy and programmes help to fight the polycrisis?

The EU framework programmes for research and innovation have contributed significant funding towards the study of democracy and governance. In the case of Horizon 2020, this has been channelled through Societal Challenge 6 (SC6), “Europe in a changing world – Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies”, for collaborative research projects following calls for proposals, as well as through the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and European Research Council funding.

The different calls for proposals under SC6 have funded research related to trust in governance, the rule of law, differentiation in EU governance, societal and political engagement of young people, social rights and citizenship, populism, violent extremism and polarisation, as well as digitally-enabled open government, data-driven policy-making, transformation of public administration, etc.

As a recent policy review on EU-funded research on democracy confirmed, “it is above all comparative research on democracy which enriches our knowledge about the functioning or fails of democracy.”<sup>2</sup> This is critical because “without that knowledge, successful reform of democracy and its policies are more based on intuition, opportunism, or pure power seeking than on sound reasoning and empirical facts.” This is why the EU budget funds research in the Social Sciences and Humanities: it makes a significant contribution to addressing issues of democratic trust and legitimacy. Scientific knowledge, data, evidence-based recommendations and innovations are necessary in order to enhance decision-making in all aspects relevant to democratic governance. Overall, research projects can support policy action in favour of the stability of democracy and its further development to increase representation, participation, openness, pluralism, non-discrimination, and protection of fundamental rights and the application of the rule of law.

The projects showcased in this brochure are all working on specific problems analysed with a transnational perspective in order to understand the various socio-economic, institutional and cultural environments, issues and strengths of various European regions, and to address possible common solutions. Some of the projects in the brochure focus on understanding territorial inequalities and how these inequalities impact social cohesion, fuel discontent and threaten the European model. These projects analyse the factors determining the success or failure of some localities’ structures and processes, and which examples could be showcased to strengthen a more inclusive and democratic life.

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<sup>2</sup> Merkel W. (2019), *Past, present and future of Democracy: A Policy Review of Framework Programme Projects*. DG Research and Innovation/EC), available here: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4bebf83d-60ba-11e9-b6eb-01aa75ed71a1>

## **Proudly exhibiting our projects**

This publication features 15 projects which are working on finding solutions to strengthen cohesion, tackle extremist movements and increase democracy and political participation. It gives a short overview of the selected projects, allowing the reader to find further information, results and outcomes on the indicated project websites and on the corresponding CORDIS website.

Among the projects, RELOCAL tries to understand the strengths of localities in the application of cohesion policies and COHSMO aims at identifying structures and processes behind territorial inequalities. INDIVEU, EUIDEA and EU3D want to create a critical mass of knowledge on differentiated EU integration, to understand to which extent it can contribute to a more cohesive EU.

RECONNECT aims at understanding and providing solutions to the recent challenges faced by the EU. With an explicit focus on strengthening the EU's legitimacy through democracy and the rule of law, it seeks to build a new narrative for Europe, enabling the EU to become more attuned to the expectations of its citizens. DEMOS and PACE try to understand the roots and consequences of populism and find strategies to address it better, analysing positive examples for a solid democratic and institutional foundation of the EU. Similarly, POPREBEL examines the rise of populism, focusing on Central and Eastern Europe.

REMINDER studies mobility to understand the reasons behind it and the impact of mobility of people within the EU, finding that the receiving country benefits from it even if some political and media narratives may portray it in a different way.

RETOPEA wants to promote a more harmonious society and focuses on religious tolerance, limiting radicalisation and promoting religious coexistence. UNREST examines the memory of historical conflicts, recognising them as inevitable elements of society, but proposing another approach to their interpretation to avoid radicalisation.

CATCH-EyoU, PROMISE and EURYKA focus on young generations of European citizens, exploring the challenges they face and how they participate in politics. The projects explore the reasons behind social disengagement to understand whether it relates to the decline of social justice and territorial cohesion. Their overall aim is to understand how to strengthen youth political participation and European democratic life for more inclusive societies.

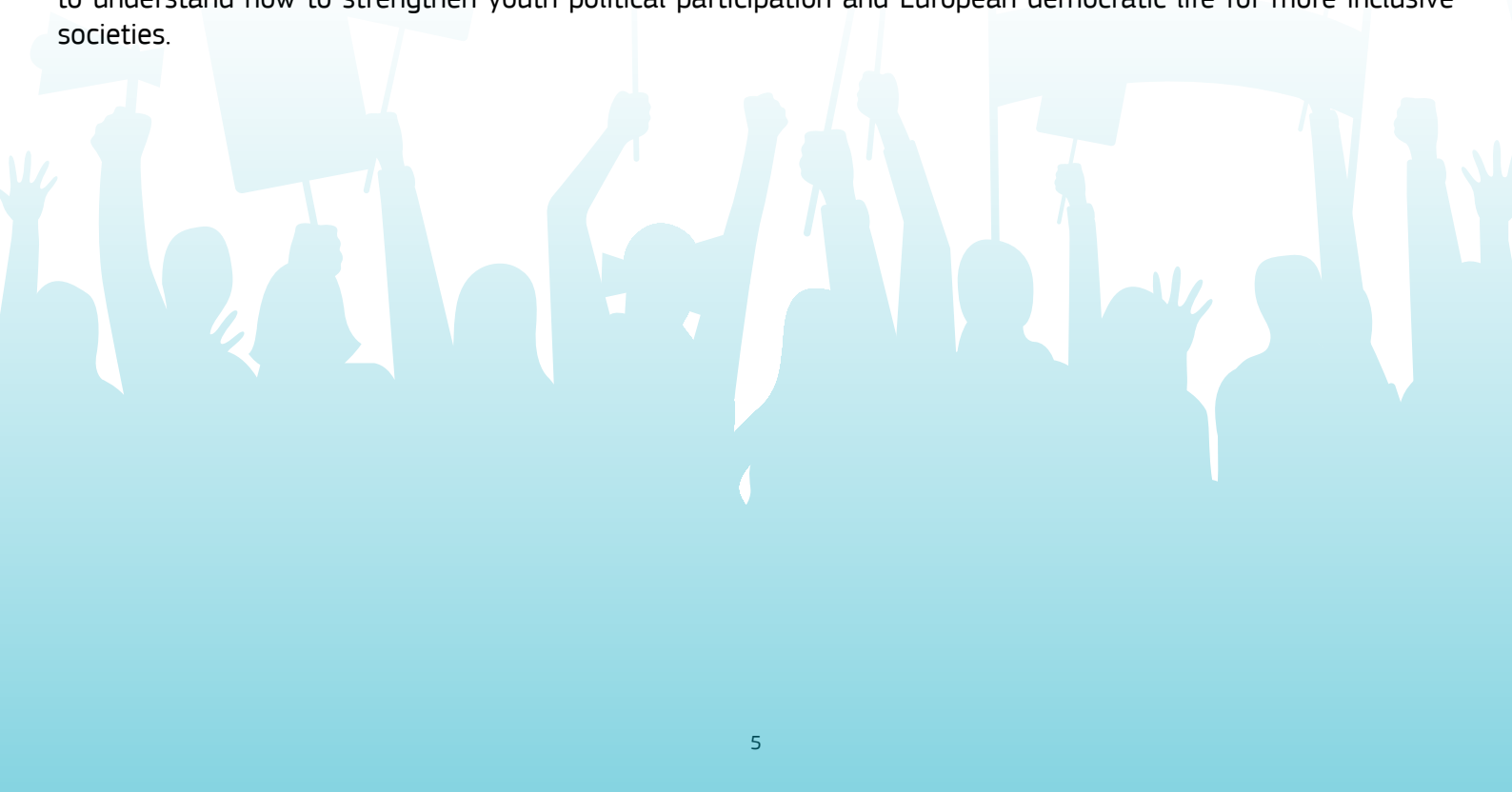




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# CATCH-EyoU

## Constructing Active Citizenship with European Youth: Policies, Practices, Challenges and Solution

The current generation of European youth was born in the EU; however, what does being member of the EU mean to youth? How do young people engage as active citizens in EU issues?

The CATCH-EyoU project investigated the processes of active citizenship among European young people. The nine partners in the CATCH-EyoU consortium analysed the factors that influenced young people’s perspectives towards the EU, their sense of EU identity and membership and the different forms of youth active engagement in European politics at various governance levels.

The project produced an extensive multi-disciplinary literature review on the topic of youth active citizenship, using different methods and a range of studies.

Moreover, CATCH-EyoU engaged young people to build the knowledge and develop solutions for improving the dialogue with institutions, issuing recommendations, tools and best practices.



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1 Sept. 2015 - 30 Sept. 2018



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[cordis.europa.eu/project/id/649538](http://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/649538)



Catch EyoU



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# PROMISE

## PROMoting youth Involvement and Social Engagement: Opportunities and challenges for ‘conflicted’ young people across Europe

The PROMISE project worked on the ‘social disengagement’ of young people across Europe, exploring young people’s role in shaping society. The project explored young people’s responses to the challenges they face, and focused in particular on youth who had conflict with authorities.

Young people, including those defined as ‘hard-to-reach’, shared their stories and their spaces with researchers. By employing a participatory approach including ethnographic, arts-based methods, young people were always at the centre of the project.

The project produced a series of reflections each containing ‘Five ways to make a difference’ with suggestions for policy and practice on:

- increasing feeling of belonging to a wider community
- breaking the cycle of isolation from society and disengagement
- preventing the media from prejudices towards certain groups, creating further isolation and mistrust
- finding ways to incorporate youth support in all areas (education, employment, social), for their social and political engagement.

Finally, the project issued proposals on directing investment towards ‘alternative’ systems for young people, and offering supportive and positive relationships.



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[promise.manchester.ac.uk/en/home-page/](http://promise.manchester.ac.uk/en/home-page/)



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€ 2 724 107,50



[cordis.europa.eu/project/id/693221](http://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/693221)



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## UNREST

### Unsettling Remembering and Social Cohesion in Transnational Europe

All across Europe, populist and nationalist movements use the heritage of war to push confrontational views of belonging.

The project focused on war museums in different countries and on memory cultures surrounding war-related exhumations of human remains in Spain (related to the civil war in the 1930s), Poland (related to the Second World War) and Bosnia (related to the Yugoslav civil wars of the 1990s). It showed that in war museums and around mass exhumations, the cosmopolitan memory discourse, the approach used by the EU, is stronger than the antagonistic one, used by populists, but it fails to engage the nationalist vernacular memory frame and its agents.

Using the agonistic memory, the UNREST project recognizes conflict as an inevitable element of society, upholding democracy and equality but at the same time understanding the social and political conditions of conflicts.

The project has successfully engaged stakeholders, especially practitioners in the museum field and in peacekeeping and post-conflict transformation, and the public, via the theatre play and the museum exhibition, that were developed as part of the project. It has also facilitated the contacts between academia, museums and civil society associations that deal with the cultural heritage of war and violent conflict.



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1 April 2016 - 31 March 2019

[unrest.eu/](http://unrest.eu/)[H2020\\_UNREST](https://twitter.com/H2020_UNREST)

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[cordis.europa.eu/project/id/693523](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/693523)[h2020unrest](https://www.facebook.com/h2020unrest)

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# RELOCAL

## Resituating the local in cohesion and territorial development

The RELOCAL project works to provide feasible solutions for a more cohesive Europe.

It is studying the factors that influence the local accessibility of the European policies, the ability to express needs and equality requests at a local level, as well as the possibility for local actors to benefit from the European policies. RELOCAL is addressing the issue of social mobility and economic activity being limited to many. The project is analysing the institutional factors related to localities, especially for individuals who live in uncertain conditions.

RELOCAL aims to contribute to a better understanding of the socio-economic, institutional and cultural environments in the different European regions. The project is also collecting knowledge and good practices in the application of cohesion policies in diverse European regions.



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1 Oct. 2016 – 31 May 2021



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RELOCAL H2020

## REMINDER

### Role of European Mobility and its Impacts in Narratives, Debates and EU Reforms

The REMINDER project analysed the economic, social, institutional and policy factors that have shaped the free movement within the EU, as well as the public and policy debates surrounding it.

REMINDER built knowledge around two areas:

- The nature and impact of mobility within the EU, including the reasons of mobility, the effects of free movement on economies and labour markets, and the impact of mobility on public service and welfare provision;
- Political and media narratives about mobility within the EU, including how migration had been portrayed in traditional and social media across Europe. Researchers also explored the public opinion about freedom of movement, and investigated the key drivers of opinions and norms across the EU.

The research has shown that EU free movement has mostly positive economic impacts for receiving countries. However, this is not necessarily reflected in media narratives or public perception.

The project has identified key mismatches between the actual impact of free movement and how the public perceived that impact. REMINDER has developed an interactive online tool based on its research findings, providing short summaries of the key findings and showing how different, seemingly unrelated factors within migration debates may affect each other.



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## EURYKA

### Reinventing Democracy in Europe: Youth Doing Politics in Times of Increasing Inequalities

How do young people form opinions and take actions to produce social and political change? The EURYKA project analysed the impact of inequalities on youth political participation and proposed new democratic models for inclusive European politics. The project focused on the idea of youth political participation as a mechanism to deal with inequalities. EURYKA explored the norms, values, attitudes and behaviours, which confirm such mechanisms and how they related to democracy, power, politics, policy-making, social and political participation. The project has collected a comprehensive dataset on European youth as a driver of new, inclusive and sustainable democratic models. EURYKA has also analysed youth participation in times of rising inequalities and economic crisis. A documentary was also produced and it is available at: <https://euroalter.com/project/euryka/>.



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# COHSMO

## Inequality, urbanization and Territorial Cohesion: Developing the European Social Model of economic growth and democratic capacity

Since the late 1970s, social differences seem to be increasing across the European Union. As a new feature, these differences have a clear territorial mark.

Researchers and politicians fear that the new levels of inequalities will impact social cohesion, producing discontent, instability and threaten the “European Social Model”.

The life chances of individuals depend on their place of birth and their social background.

Even if welfare state intervention addresses social inequalities through social policies, education, housing policies and regional programmes, the effect of the market has become more critical during the last decades. Social justice and territorial cohesion are decreasing with several implications for the society.

That is why the COHSMO project aims to identify the structures and processes behind territorial inequalities in order to understand why social inequalities are less pronounced in some localities and if that was achieved thanks to local, national or regional initiatives.



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# RECONNECT

## Reconciling Europe with its Citizens through Democracy and Rule of Law

Focused on strengthening EU's legitimacy through democracy and the rule of law, RECONNECT seeks to build a new narrative for Europe, enabling the EU to become more attuned to the expectations of its citizens.

There is growing distrust towards European institutions, especially in the context of recent crises. The growing gap between the EU and its citizens is being exploited by a new wave of populism, which challenges the EU's authority and legitimacy. The EU is also confronted with the erosion of the foundations of democracy and the rule of law in some of its Member States, where its core values are called into question.

RECONNECT aims to deliver policy recommendations, communication strategies and proposals for Treaty changes in order to enhance EU's legitimacy in the areas of democracy and the rule of law.



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# RETOPEA

## Religious Toleration and Peace

In the narratives of Europe today, the relation between religions and society is often characterised by conflicting views.

RETOPEA wants to limit radicalization, improving ways of dealing with religious conflicts and promoting a more harmonious society. The project focuses on increasing religious knowledge among teenagers and empowering young people to deal with conflicting information while promoting religious tolerance. It introduces a new educational project of 'empowering history'.

RETOPEA will provide young people with historical examples of religious coexistence, increasing their ability to analyse contemporary situations. RETOPEA uses historical peace treaties as cases of interactions between religions in order to develop critical thinking and media knowledge to help reduce all forms of discrimination and indoctrination.

RETOPEA will also provide recommendations for changes in the educational policies.



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# DEMOS

## Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe

The goal of the DEMOS project is to curb the spread of populist sentiments and politics across Europe and their potentially negative impact on society. It aims at contributing not only to a better understanding of the populist phenomenon, but also designing institutions, practices and tools to effectively address the populist challenge. DEMOS assumes that populism stems from a disconnection between democratic government systems and citizens' aspirations, needs and identities.

DEMOS identifies 'democratic efficacy' as a condition required to address the populist challenge.

The project focuses on how populism affects citizens and how they react to it, paying attention to under-represented groups in politics or groups targeted by populists (e.g., the youth, women, and immigrants). Interviews will study the potential "predictors" of populism (e.g. social inequality, influx of refugees, tolerance levels, political efficacy etc.) Populist leaders' political discourse will be also studied. Surveys and interviews will be conducted in Germany, Lithuania, Hungary and the Netherlands, comparing a variety of populisms across Europe, including their historical, cultural, and socio-economic roots, expression and impact. The project develops a populism index and elaborates scenarios on populism interactions with social actors and institutions at the national and EU level.



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# InDivEU

## Integrating Diversity in the European Union

In 2020, Europe is facing a critical moment in its development. Over time, the differences within the EU have grown. Brexit has further deepened the Differentiated Integration (DI). The InDivEU project wants to expand the knowledge of the phenomenon by building a knowledge hub on DI that would help EU's policy process, governmental systems and the permanent debate on the future of Europe.

The project aims at shedding more light on the causes and effects of DI and the different dynamics of internal and external differentiation, especially when the EU is working out a new relationship with a departing Member State.



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[indiveu.eui.eu](http://indiveu.eui.eu)



€ 3 132 250,50



[cordis.europa.eu/project/id/822304](http://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/822304)



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# EU IDEA

## EU Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness and Accountability

Differentiation has become the new normal in the European Union (EU) and one of the most crucial elements in defining its future. However, a number of challenges to the EU, including the economic crisis, the migration phenomenon, geopolitical tensions and Brexit, have reinforced the belief that EU's complex machinery needs more flexibility.

The EU IDEA project explores if, how much and what form of differentiation is appropriate in order to contribute effectively to a more cohesive and democratic EU.

Therefore, EU IDEA aspires to:

- analyse the causes and effects of differentiation
- situate differentiation in its historical context
- reconsider the existing models of differentiation
- examine the narratives on European identity
- evaluate the opportunities, benefits and risks of differentiation in key policy areas (e.g. Economic and Monetary Union, single market, foreign, security and defense policies, migration).



- |   |                 |
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## POPREBEL

### Populist rebellion against modernity in 21st-century Eastern Europe: neo-traditionalism and neo-feudalism

POPREBEL aims at understanding the recent rise of populism – in its various forms – in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), including the Western Balkans. The project describes the phenomenon; classifies its patterns; reconstructs directions of its rise and fall; studies its causes to understand its meanings; analyses its consequences; and finds policy solutions.

The goal of POPREBEL is to draw a complete picture of the rise of populism, focusing on Central and Eastern Europe, where it has emerged as a serious political option.

It will provide a framework, which other parts of Europe can use to analyse the rise of populism in their area, recognising the phenomenon and designing remedies. The project will provide and test future scenarios in public debates, to see how well they fit in the European countries.

Finally, the project aims to develop and apply a new tool for measuring people's sentiments towards populism. POPREBEL underlines the importance of economic and cultural factors in the rise of populism, but analyses them in an innovative way. It is based on two key concepts: neo-feudalism, as an economic subsystem, with nationalistic, exclusivist and isolationist discourse; and neo-traditionalism, referring to the lack of liberalism and the tendency to prefer a tradition to change.



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## EU3D

### EU Differentiation, Dominance and Democracy

The project EU3D wants to specify the conditions under which differentiation is politically acceptable, institutionally sustainable, and democratically appropriate, and the conditions under which it is not, examining this in relation to the discussion about the future of Europe.

The project focuses on the Euro (fiscal, monetary and banking policy) and on refugee crises, especially on the role and status of refugees (basic rights, border controls, terrorist and other security threats).

EU3D aims at understanding under which social and institutional conditions the EU can improve its capacity and resilience, with surveys to understand the public sentiments. It focuses also on the role of media to spread information on what the EU is, as well as on the institutional exponents of democratic reforms.

EU3D aims to provide important knowledge about the reasons why reforms may fail or succeed. Its goal is to provide benchmarks for determining which governmental systems are more feasible, democratic and sustainable.



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[eu3d.uio.no/](http://eu3d.uio.no/)

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# PaCE

## Populism And Civic Engagement – a fine-grained, dynamic, context-sensitive and forward-looking response to negative populist tendencies

The PaCE project aims to better understand and respond to the rise of populism in Europe.

The project engages with citizens and policy actors, especially with groups that are underrepresented in public affairs. Using on machine-learning algorithms, the project will develop new tools, to better identify, track and understand populist narratives, which will be used for online consultations and participatory tools. Finally, it aims at understanding how different actors could respond to the rise of populist groups, warning them on longer-term trends.

The project has analysed populist parties, showing how they maintain power. It has also created a database of online populist texts, which can be used to analyze social media posts. It has collected data on voting patterns to develop simulations of voting trends, and new tools to address ethical issues. Finally, it has set up an active programme for stakeholder engagement including under-represented groups, to ensure bottom-up input for new forms of democratic engagement.



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## Icons

## Legend



Partners



Duration



Overall budget



EU contribution



Project website



Project factsheet



Youtube channel



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► **Contacts:**

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