

Work package 4: Public opinions, debates and reforms

WP4 will analyse experiences and perspectives on differentiation of key actors (citizens, media, parliaments, sub-national levels) and how they shape conditions for EU reforms. Democratic reforms can be initiated by political institutions and/or through popular and societal pressure. In either case, public support seems necessary for ensuring the legitimacy and ultimately the success of reforms. Therefore, WP4 adopts a ‘bottom-up’ approach by empirically analysing public opinion, perceptions, discursive reactions and judgements on measures decided or proposed by the European Union.

WP4 provides empirical information on how much differentiation is necessary, conducive, sustainable and acceptable for European citizens. WP4 will collect survey data to cover the micro level, but it will also address the macro level by collecting data on parliamentary and societal discourses. For the latter, the empirical focus will be on media discourses assuming that journalists act as mediators of EU (differentiated) integration. In that sense, media plays a vital role in shaping and conditioning popular perceptions and evaluations of how much differentiation is necessary, conducive, sustainable and acceptable. We examine parliaments and the reforms they debate and propose because parliaments are a key institutional repository of democracy and source of democratic reforms.

The successful candidate is expected to contribute to the research under the following two tasks of WP 4:

Media assessment

Partners in charge: University of Copenhagen and ARENA, University of Oslo

This task focusses on the role of media: how positions towards EU differentiation are framed by the media, and what that tells us about the scope and directions for reform. In conjunction with a survey organised and run by the EU3D partner University of Konstanz, this will allow us to analyse how individual and group experiences of crisis take shape in media debates and how, in particular journalists, act as mediators of EU differentiated integration translating the complexity of polity designs and reforms (or not) into an accessible language that informs public opinion about the EU. We expect here proposals for further differentiation and proposals for further de-differentiation to be politicised to different degrees, be given selective salience, and framed in different and often polarising terms (e.g. along the lines of a pro- and anti-European divide).

Media serve as a transmission belt from society to the political system and the reverse: the news coverage impacts on the legitimacy of EU differentiated governance and shapes the public perceptions and experiences analysed in the survey. In that connection, media not only contributes to shaping public debates, they may also instil their own distinct *biases*. In particular, we are interested in the selective mechanism applied in mediated debates about forms of EU dominance and how EU criticism is selectively brought to the attention of European publics.

To empirically analyse the media selection and interpretative bias, we focus on the role of EU correspondents. The aim here is to establish whether this specialist group of EU correspondents balance the national perspective bias typically encountered in EU news coverage by giving salience to a broader range/different set of actors and claims about the issues and promote critical understanding of the EU and its reform process. By focusing on this mediating function, we can further assess whether there is a general propensity of journalists to simplify the complexity of EU

differentiated integration and give selective salience to national, and often Eurosceptic actors over EU institutions, parliaments or civil society actors (to be analysed in the task on debates and proposals - see below, and in other parts of the project).

Parliamentary debates and reform proposals

Partners in charge: University of Copenhagen and ARENA, University of Oslo

This task focuses on the role of parliaments in countering dominance and fostering democratic reforms. To that end, we assess parliamentary debates and track reform proposals from parliaments across levels. The challenge is both to overcome built-in democratic defects in the EU structure (parliaments have sought to catch up with executives and experts since the EU's inception), and to reverse the de-democratising effects of the crises. Recent developments such as the rise of Euroscepticism may affect the role of the EP as an EU-level democratising agent. The 2019 EP elections will be important in that regard, and thus figures prominently in our analyses.

Another structural aspect of the EU's democratic deficit is the discrepancy between the problem structure and the decision-making structure¹, in the sense that a range of decisions are formed in EU institutions (notably in the area of security and defence policy) without the EP authorising or controlling these. The Eurozone crisis has exacerbated this problem, not the least through the build-up of decision capacity around the Eurozone. An EU that further solidifies the Eurozone as EU-core, whether mainly in policy or in polity (structural-institutional) terms makes the question of parliamentary oversight and control ever-more pressing.

We focus on how the EP seeks to organise and control the system of Eurozone governance, in terms of internal reforms and with reference to the question of a parliament for the Eurozone,² and how a selection of national parliaments consider the issue of Eurozone governance. Further, we track the EP's debate and a selection of national parliaments' debates on the nature of EU immigration and asylum policy, and consider the debate in relation to two main frames: a humanitarian versus a securitisation frame. These frames imply very different roles for the EU in terms of the relationship between integration and differentiation, and questions of dominance. We will clarify what are prevailing frames across the institutions under study and discuss what that implies for EU democratic reform.

Further, we study a selection of parliamentary debates in the EP and national parliaments in order to discern underlying constitutional-democratic visions of the EU (in collaboration with WP5 on the future of Europe reforms). We consider which of the following three different democratic reform scenarios prevails: strengthening the EP; strengthening inter-parliamentary cooperation,³ or strengthening the role of national parliaments in European-level affairs within individual member states. These constellations refer to different ways of relating democracy and differentiation. Are there clear patterns in terms of preferential choice or is the main picture one of a diversity of views? That matters a lot to the overall anticipated reform thrust.

We will conduct a select number of case studies of parliamentary debates and organise a conference where we will invite specialists from the countries not covered by the in-depth case studies, to complement these studies and cover all the cases.

¹ J.E. Fossum, 'The Structure of EU Representation and the Crisis', in S. Kröger (ed.) *Political Representation in the European Union*, 2014.

² See J.E. Fossum, 'Democracy and Legitimacy in the EU. Challenges and Options', in L. Vai, P.D. Tortola, and N. Pirozzi (eds) *Governing Europe - How to Make the EU More Efficient and Democratic*, Peter Lang, 2017.

³ Inter-parliamentary cooperation has been referred to and discussed under the heading of 'multilevel parliamentary field', see B. Crum and J.E. Fossum, 'The Multilevel Parliamentary Field: A Framework for Theorising Representative Democracy in the EU', *European Political Science Review*, 1(2), 2009; B. Crum and J.E. Fossum (eds), *Practices of Interparliamentary Coordination in International Politics*, ECPR Press, 2013. We will discuss this in relation to other options. See J.E. Fossum, 'Democracy and Legitimacy in the EU. Challenges and Options', in L. Vai, P.D. Tortola, and N. Pirozzi (eds.) *Governing Europe - How to Make the EU More Efficient and Democratic*, Peter Lang, 2017.