

Between narratives and reality: The EU at the gates of a new mandate

20-21 June 2024, Maastricht

Call for papers

The Law Faculty of Maastricht University and Studio Europa are organising an academic conference in the context of the incoming new term of the European Parliament and European Commission. The conference will explore how the ‘big narratives’ of the EU (its values, agenda, ambitions) relate to what the EU actually does: its legislation, actions, and ‘impact on the ground’. The goal is to reflect on the challenges of the next political mandate, from 2024 onwards.

In the past years, the Union’s initiatives have revolved around building a stronger and resilient Europe (amidst economic difficulty and war in the continent); achieving a greener economy; defending the common European values; and providing citizens a central role in shaping the future of the European project. Significant milestones have been attained, such as the establishment of *NextGenerationEU* as an unprecedented recovery instrument; the coordinated and strong response to the war of aggression against Ukraine; the adoption of key pieces of legislation delivering on 2030 climate targets; the use of the EU legal system against breaches of founding EU values; and the organisation of a citizen-led Conference on the Future of Europe.

At the same time, the EU has sometimes fallen short of its ambitions. Political divisions, the dominance of certain interests in the policy-making process, insufficient solidarity towards vulnerable collectives and distrust of the impartiality and the effectiveness of EU institutions

have been visible in recent times, challenging the official narratives put forward and questioning the Union's strategic agenda.

This conference aims at facilitating an inter-disciplinary dialogue on how narratives became (or fail to become) specific realities in the EU. Within this dialogue, we want to reflect on the most urgent issues that the Union legislature and the new Commission will have to face in the upcoming mandate. In particular, we seek to discuss how the Union is bridging the gap, or intends to bridge the gap, between goals and actions across four different themes corresponding to four panels:

- 1. *Environmental protection:*** The fight against climate change is a central priority of the EU. The current legislature has enacted an ambitious climate package to deliver on the protection of the environment. Yet political circumstances and contrasting interests have weakened the Green Deal agenda. This panel seeks to examine the gap between ambitions and accomplishments in relation to environmental protection, including policy areas (agricultural policy, energy, trade) that have a significant environmental impact.
- 2. *Borders and membership:*** While the Union is premised as a border-free zone amongst its Member States, borders are very present as an external delimitation of belonging to the EU. At the same time, superseding existing borders through further enlargement is the ambition of the EU as a space of shared values. Discussions in this panel will revolve around migration, asylum, enlargement, and inclusion. It will explore the tensions between borders and the EU founding values, as well as the interactions between the different dimensions of borders in the EU today.
- 3. *Inequality and cohesion in the EU:*** Equality a principle of paramount importance in the EU. The spirit of solidarity enshrined in the recovery instrument *NextGenerationEU* and in the European Pillar of Social Rights coexists with persistent inequalities between individuals, regions, companies, and States. The EU is expected to play a more prominent role in achieving social and territorial justice, and yet the Union's actions sometimes appear to increase inequality. This panel seeks to discuss the tensions that characterise the Union's redistributive instruments (such as structural and recovery

funds) as well as other policy areas (internal market, equality law) that can play a role in fostering an equal or unequal system.

4. ***EU Institutional change: Identifying failures and opportunities:*** EU institutions have evolved to match the developments of the Union and its increased competences. Proposals for institutional reform are centrepiece in the discussions on future enlargements, but the functioning of the EU institutions had already been questioned in the Conference on the Future of Europe and amidst the deepening of rule of law crisis. This panel will explore the possible future geometries of EU institutional change, the ambitions that should guide this process, and how it could impact individuals.

The conference aims at analysing the four themes selected through the lens of the discrepancy between narratives and reality. To do that, we welcome submissions from all career stages from any of the following disciplines: Law, Economics, Philosophy, History, Sociology, Political Sciences, European Studies. Examples of contributions could include (but are not limited to):

- Legal analyses in the selected policy areas;
- Empirical studies of EU policies and legislation;
- Applied economic studies;
- Perspectives on interest representation in EU policy-making;
- Studies on voting rules and EU decision-making;
- Analyses on litigation and access to justice;
- Studies on externalisation of borders and accountability;
- Perspectives on the interaction between values and EU policies and actions;
- Philosophical approaches to the EU;
- Works on the role of ideas;
- Theoretical approaches, including critical research;
- Studies on law and political economy.

Practical information

Interested applicants should submit an abstract (up to 500 words) with a title of the contribution, and a brief author bio by **29 February 2024**. Please ensure that the author's name is clearly mentioned in the abstract file. Abstracts and author bios must be submitted via our online platform.

Authors of selected abstracts will be notified by 20 March 2024 and asked to submit draft papers (of 4,000 – 5,000 words) by 5 June 2024.

The conference will take place in person on **20-21 June 2024** in Maastricht.

Travel expenses and accommodation in Maastricht will be covered. Speakers' contributions will be published (in full or summarised form) as an edited Studio Europa working paper series.

Any questions about the conference or the submission process should be directed to the organisers, Dr Leticia Díez Sánchez (leticia.diezsanchez@maastrichtuniversity.nl) and Dr Fulvia Ristuccia (fulvia.ristuccia@maastrichtuniversity.nl).

Organising Committee: Leticia Díez Sánchez, Fulvia Ristuccia, Julia Reinold

Scientific Adviser: Christine Arnold