



RELAY kick-off conference

'Europa', how will you tackle the main challenges you are facing?

4 December 2020

Online conference organised by [Maastricht University Campus Brussels](#)

Abstract

'Within the Union, the European institutions must be brought closer to its citizens. Citizens undoubtedly support the Union's broad aims, but they do not always see a connection between those goals and the Union's everyday action' (European Council 2001)

Although this quote is almost 20 years old, it is still relevant today, in terms of the gap that many perceive to exist between the EU's 'elites' and its citizens. The Jean Monnet project 'Spreading and relating EU affairs beyond the EU institutions' (RELAY) seeks to address this issue. It aims to **make the process of EU integration more tangible** and to more closely **involve citizens** in it, when it comes to both the internal and external dimension of the EU.

The EU is facing numerous and unprecedented **challenges**, in a context of political turmoil and change. In RELAY we take the 'headline ambitions' of the current European Commission as a point of departure, from the European Green Deal to a new push for European democracy, in order to tackle these challenges and engage European citizens in the shaping of EU policies.

This conference brings together **academics and stakeholders** to explore alternative perspectives on the challenges the EU is facing, in a range of issue areas, from digitalisation to the EU's role in the world.

These challenges have become ever more pertinent against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic that "constitutes an unprecedented challenge with very severe socio-economic consequences" (European Council 2020).

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Programme of the day

09:00-09:30 | Opening of virtual room

09:30-09:45 | Welcome and introduction to the RELAY project: objectives and approach

Speaker:

Christine Neuhold

Professor of EU Democratic Governance, Maastricht University (UM) and Chair of the Board, UM Campus Brussels

09:45-11:00 | Panel 1: Making the EU more 'democratic' and more 'socially fair': challenges ahead

The EU is seen to suffer from a "democratic deficit" and the new European Commission (2019-2024) proposes to go 'further than ever' to tackle this deficit by proposing a "Conference on the future of Europe". At the same time, the EU faces the double challenge of increasing citizen participation and inclusivity, and retaining its social market economy, while remaining competitive. To what extent are these realistic endeavours? What issues need to be prioritized? How can these issues be tackled and by whom?

Speakers:

Ian Cooper

Research Fellow, Brexit Institute at Dublin City University

Vitor Teixeira

Advocacy Officer EU Integrity, Transparency International EU

Alberto Alemanno

Founder and Director of the Good Lobby

Bernard Reber

Research Director, National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), Political Research Centre of Science Po Paris

Sophie Pornschlegel

Fellow, Karlspreis Academy and Senior Policy Analyst, European Policy Centre

Moderator:

Christine Neuhold

Professor of EU Democratic Governance, Maastricht University (UM) and Chair of the Board, UM Campus Brussels

11:00-11:15 | Break



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11:15-12:30 | Panel 2: Promoting 'EU values' and assuming 'global leadership'

While equality, tolerance and social fairness are promoted as being at the heart of European integration, to what extent are these principles under pressure? Has the European project lost sight of social cohesion? To what extent do threats to the rule of law challenge the legal, political and economic foundations of the EU? This session will probe into these questions and at the same time examine how the core values of the EU can be upheld on the global stage: To what extent can the EU be a global player? Does the changing global order weaken the EU's liberal orientation as an international actor or does it in fact strengthen the principles that frame a rules-based liberal international order?

Speakers:

Marie Walter-Franke

Fellow, Karlspreis Academy and Affiliate Policy Fellow, Jacques Delors Centre

Manuel Müller

Senior Researcher, Institute for European Policy, Berlin

Alena Vieira

Assistant Professor in International Relations, Minho University

Veronica Junjan

Assistant Professor of Public Management, University of Twente

Ringo Ossewaarde

Associate Professor in Governance, Society and Technology, University of Twente

Iulian Romanyshyn

Fellow, Karlspreis Academy and Center for Advanced Security, Strategic and Integration Studies - University of Bonn

Moderator:

Giselle Bosse

Associate Professor/Jean Monnet Chair of EU External Relations, Maastricht University and Director, Centre for European Research in Maastricht (CERiM)

12:30-13:30 | Lunch break

13:30-14:45 | Panel 3: A 'sustainable' and 'green' Europe and one that is 'fit' for the digital age; how to get there?

The impact of climate change has moved to the top of the (European) political agenda. The European Commission strives for Europe to be the first climate-neutral continent. But how do we get there? What role does the European Green Deal play in this context? How will it impact on those without a strong 'voice' (e.g. people living in poverty, animals, nature)?

Speaking of those that might 'lose out': what about the impact of digital transformations? What about the impact of the governance of digitalisation, how to address the exacerbation



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of social cleavages? What does making Europe 'fit' for the digital age imply for different societal groups?

Speakers:

Ceren Pekdemir

Assistant Professor, Maastricht Sustainability Institute

Nathalie Blanc

Director of Research, Centre des Politiques de la Terre

Photini Vrikki

Fellow, Karlspreis Academy and Lecturer in Digital Media and Culture, King's College London

Tobias Ernst

Chief Executive Officer, Kiron Education

Moderator:

Darian Meacham

Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Maastricht University and Principal Investigator, Brightlands Institute for Smart Services and Society (BISS)

14:45-15:00 | Break

15:00-15:45 | Parallel thematic breakout rooms

Speakers and participants will get together in thematic breakout rooms, in line with the three previous panels, to continue the discussions and explore issues more in-depth. The breakout room setup will also serve as a networking opportunity.

15:45-16:30 | Concluding discussion: insights of the day and impact of Covid-19 on the European Commission's political priorities

The conference will conclude by summarising the main insights of the day, examining how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on the different domains, and highlighting some of the main challenges ahead.

Speakers:

Federico Fabbrini

Director, Brexit Institute at Dublin City University and Fellow, Karlspreis Academy

Neculai-Cristian Surubaru

Post-doctoral researcher in European Studies, Maastricht Working on Europe

Giselle Bosse

Associate Professor/Jean Monnet Chair of EU External Relations, Maastricht University and Director, Centre for European Research in Maastricht (CERiM)



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Pim Martens

Professor of Sustainable Development, Maastricht Sustainability Institute

Darian Meacham

Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Maastricht University and Principal Investigator,
Brightlands Institute for Smart Services and Society (BISS)

Christine Neuhold

Professor of EU Democratic Governance, Maastricht University (UM) and Chair of the Board,
UM Campus Brussels

What is RELAY?

RELAY is a Jean Monnet project that aims at discussing the European Commission's political guidelines and work programme with a wide and diverse array of stakeholders. Stakeholders will be able to provide input through a series of conferences, workshops, and working papers. At the end of the project, the results of these discussions will be integrated into a policy brief with recommendations. For more information, please [visit the RELAY website](#).

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Project coordinator



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