



## **D10.3 – Report of Pre-Presidency Conference 2022**

**Panel at TEPSA's Swedish Pre-Presidency Conference "The Future of the Union and its Fundamental Values", Stockholm 1 December 2022**

**RECLAIM Work Package 10 (Lead: TEPSA)  
Due month: 12**



#SwedishPPC  
SWEDISH PRE-PRESIDENCY CONFERENCE

# THE FUTURE OF THE UNION AND ITS FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

15:15-16:30 CET  
THURSDAY 1 DECEMBER

RECLAIM  
Funded by the European Union

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## The Future of the Union and its Fundamental Values

On December 1<sup>st</sup> 2022, TEPSA organized a panel discussion on "The Future of the Union and its Fundamental Values" in Stockholm. This panel was organised within the framework of the Horizon project **RECLAIM** "Reclaiming Liberal Democracy in the Post-Factual Age," and was part of the Swedish Pre-Presidency Conference (PPC). The PPC is TEPSA's biannual flagship event, hosted before the start of each new Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The primary objective of the conference is to bring together academics, think tank experts, policymakers, media representatives, and members of civil society to engage in discussions about the agenda and challenges that lie ahead for both the upcoming Presidency and the broader European Union.

The RECLAIM panel focused on the challenges posed by different phenomena that characterise the era of post-truth politics – disinformation and fake news, increased polarization, distrust of institutions and experts, lack of accountability – on the future of liberal democracies, and on the European Union. The panel was attended in person by 68 participants and was followed online through the publication of a video recording of the panel. As of one month following the publication of the video, it had garnered 46 views, and it will remain available online indefinitely to accrue further views. The panel was moderated by Göran von Sydow, Director of the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), and featured three highly distinguished speakers: Maximilian Conrad, Professor at the University of Iceland and RECLAIM Academic Coordinator; Agnieszka Sadecka, Assistant Professor at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków and RECLAIM Researcher; and Richard Youngs, TEPSA Board member and Senior Fellow in the Democracy, Conflict and Governance Program at Carnegie Europe.

In his opening remarks, **Göran von Sydow** reflected on two significant anniversaries: 13 years since Sweden last held the Presidency of the Council and since the entry into force of the Lisbon. Drawing from the importance of these milestones, von Sydow emphasized the critical need for the Union to uphold the



values enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty, which include the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. He further delved into the current state of democracy, both globally and within the EU, highlighting concerns about certain states veering towards autocracy or experiencing democratic backsliding. Moreover, von Sydow shed light on how the global context surrounding the EU has a profound impact on its democracy and security.

**Maximilian Conrad** discussed the impact of post-truth politics on liberal democracy and the EU's fundamental values. He distinguished between disinformation and post-truth politics, emphasizing that the latter goes beyond factual inaccuracies to create a reality where truth becomes irrelevant. Conrad highlighted the intimate link between post-truth communication, populism, and authoritarianism, stressing the need to understand this connection while addressing the challenges posed to liberal democracy. He presented post-truth politics as an attack on democratic values, requiring efforts to reclaim and safeguard liberal democracy. Additionally, he pointed out how post-truth politics lead to a rejection of expertise, contributing to an epistemic crisis in democratic societies. Given these premises, Conrad stressed the importance of finding ways to address the impact of post-truth politics on democracy and protect the EU's core principles outlined in the Lisbon Treaty and Charter of Fundamental Rights.

**Agnieszka Sadecka** focused on the phenomenon of democratic backsliding in the context of populism in Poland and Hungary, highlighting the concerning effects of extended right-wing populist rule, which has led to a more permanent shift from liberal democracy. Considering the six key values mentioned in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), Sadecka highlighted worrisome developments in both countries. Notably, she discussed the limiting of judicial independence, questioning the supremacy of law, and non-compliance with rulings by the European Court of Justice. The blurring of the separation of powers and a focus on executive authority during the pandemic have further eroded democratic standards. Additionally, she pointed out challenges to freedom of expression, media control, repression of activists, and erosion of human rights and solidarity towards asylum seekers. She emphasized the importance of exploring remedies to protect the EU's fundamental values and preserving liberal democracy amidst the impact of populism in these countries.

**Richard Youngs** offered his insights into the current state of democracy at the global level and the challenges the EU faces in countering democratic backsliding and populism not only abroad, but also within the Union. Youngs emphasized that, although the protection of democratic values is not a new topic, the EU still lacks an effective toolbox to properly address the issue. Young recognized that in 2022 the EU launched several new policy initiatives aimed at supporting democratic values, but stressed that, in order to see some meaningful impact at the EU level, the Union should recognize the importance of tapping into grassroots and local-level democratic movements. Regarding the worrisome democratic backsliding within the Union, Youngs predicted an increased attention on not only Poland and Hungary but on Sweden and Italy, where two right-wing/populist governments were recently elected.

Youngs also raised concerns about the EU's external dimension, where despite rhetoric about defending democratic values, the Union has engaged in deals with non-democratic regimes, presenting a paradox in its approach. Youngs underscored the complexity of the geopolitical dynamics surrounding Russia's aggression war in Ukraine, indicating that the distinction between democratic and authoritarian worlds is not as clear-cut as portrayed in EU narratives. Despite the challenges, Youngs expressed that there is still room for innovation and change, and the EU must find effective ways to uphold democratic values and counter threats to democracy.

After the presentations, a dynamic and engaging discussion unfolded among the speakers and the audience, which led to further considerations into the themes of populism, post-truth politics, and



democratic backsliding. The panelists offered valuable insights on potential initiatives that EU institutions could implement to enhance the resilience of European democracies against the impact of post-truth politics and to mitigate disruptive pressures from external sources. The audience actively participated in the dialogue, posing thought-provoking questions that enriched the discourse even further. An important takeaway from the panelists' concluding remarks was the resounding emphasis on the significance of European institutions proactively engaging with citizens and civil society groups to bolster democratic practices and reinforce the democratic fabric of Europe.

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## Pictures from the event

