



## **D10.4 – Report of Pre-Presidency Conference 2023**

**Panel at TEPSA's Spanish Pre-Presidency Conference "Reclaiming Public Debates as an EU Response to Post-Truth Challenges: Deliberation, quality information and citizen education", Madrid, 1 June 2023**

**RECLAIM Work Package 10 (Lead: TEPSA)  
Due month: 24**



**RECLAIMING PUBLIC DEBATE AS AN EU RESPONSE TO POST-TRUTH CHALLENGES**  
DELIBERATION, QUALITY INFORMATION AND CITIZEN EDUCATION  
JUNE 1. 17:00-18:15 CEST  
#SpanishPPC  
SPANISH Pre-Presidency Conference

**TARU HAAPALA**  
Research Fellow, UAM. Member of the RECLAIM project / **Moderator**

**MAXIMILIAN CONRAD**  
Professor, University of Iceland. RECLAIM Principal Investigator

**LUIS BOUZA**  
Associate Professor, UAM. Member of the RECLAIM project

**NICOLETTA PIROZZI**  
Head of EU Politics and Institutions Programme, IAI. Member of the RECLAIM project

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## Reclaiming Public Debates as an EU Response to Post-Truth Challenges: Deliberation, quality information and citizen education

On June 1<sup>st</sup> 2023, in the framework of the Horizon Europe project RECLAIM, TEPSA organized in Madrid the panel "Reclaiming Public Debate as an EU Response to Post-Truth Challenges". The panel was part of the Pre-Presidency Conference (PPC), TEPSA's biannual flagship event that gathers academics, think tank experts, and policymakers to engage in discussions about the incoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The aim of the panel was to delve into some of the topics investigated by the RECLAIM project and more specifically on regulating disinformation and the role of civil education in addressing misinformation and disinformation. The panel was attended in person by 31 participants and a video recording of the panel was viewed online by significantly larger audience. As of one month following the publication of the video, it had accrued 52 views, and it will remain available online indefinitely to accrue further views.

The panel featured four distinguished RECLAIM researchers. **Taru Haapala**, Research Fellow at the Autonomous University of Madrid, moderated the panel. The speakers included Maximilian Conrad, Professor at the University of Iceland and RECLAIM Academic Coordinator; Luis Bouza, Associate Professor at the Autonomous University of Madrid; and Nicoletta Pirozzi, TEPSA Board member and Head of EU Politics and Institutions Programme at the Instituto Affari Internazionali.

After a brief introduction by the moderator, the panel opened with the presentation of **Maximilian Conrad**, who provided an overview of the RECLAIM project including the main topics addressed and the multifaceted approaches that will be used by the researchers involved to examine the intricacies of post-truth politics. Conrad elaborated on the concept of post-truth politics, its main features and the challenges this



phenomenon poses to liberal democracies. He described the epistemic crisis of democracy in our societies, where commitment to factual standards seems to have eroded, the authority of truth diminished, and many individuals support politicians even when their statements are factually incorrect. In this landscape, populism often presents a dichotomy between an "elite" perceived as corrupt or decadent and a "true people" experiencing reality in stark contrast. Conrad pointed to the example of Donald Trump's presidency in the United States as a prominent illustration of this dynamic. He concluded his presentation stressing that while there exists a close link between post-truth politics and populism, not all populist politics necessarily embrace a post-truth approach. However, a discernible correlation is undeniable.

The floor was then given to **Luis Bouza**, whose contribution to the RECLAIM project will be focused on exploring how the EU can effectively respond to specific aspects of post-truth politics in order to mitigate its negative impact on societies. In this context, scholars like Farkas and Schou have outlined four types of responses from governments to post-truth politics: establishing a 'cordon sanitaire' to contain the spread of disinformation; implementing measures to swiftly remove disinformation from the public sphere; slowing down the dissemination of disinformation; and empowering centers responsible for establishing the truth. Bouza further elaborated on how liberal democracies, and in particular the EU, can combat the negative effects of post-truth culture, emphasizing that to win this battle, we cannot rely solely on government intervention (inclusive of sanctions if necessary). Bouza stressed the importance of pluralism in the public sphere, asserting that a delicate balance must be struck between intervention and tolerance to maintain a thriving democratic environment. However, he also acknowledged the potential risks associated with verifying information by potentially interested parties such as social media platforms, as it might inadvertently lead journalists to refrain from publishing critical information or expressing their opinions freely. To preserve the integrity of liberal democracy, he advocated the promotion of civic education and the responsible use of information. Bouza concluded his presentation by elaborating on the regulation of political advertisements and the need for more transparency within the media sector.

**Nicoletta Pirozzi** offered an overview on the angle from which the research team of WP 8 will investigate the effects of post-truth politics on liberal democracies. In the framework of the RECLAIM project, education, particularly at the primary and secondary school levels, is identified as a pivotal aspect in preparing individuals to be responsible citizens who not only actively participate in democratic society but also contribute to curb the negative effects of post-truth politics. Pirozzi outlined three main areas that WP 8 team aims to address. First, it will explore the extent to which existing educational approaches at the European level, particularly in primary and secondary schools, adequately address the challenges of misinformation and disinformation. To answer this, the team plans to conduct research in both EU and non-EU countries, engaging key actors such as students, educators, and stakeholders in the Ministries of Education. Secondly, her team will conduct a comparative analysis of different educational systems to identify best practices that could be adapted or replicated in other member states. Thirdly and lastly, her team will develop a set of recommendations for policymakers as well as a toolbox that could be utilized at the EU level to further promote citizenship education on these critical topics.

Following the panel presentations, an engaging and thought-provoking discussion unfolded, touching upon a multitude of pertinent topics. The speakers and the audience engaged in a conversation on the definition of "authority" and its connection to the concept of truth, exploring how differing notions of authority impact the broader discourse on post-truth politics. The growing trend of polarization within the public sphere and its ramifications on societal fragmentation also captured significant attention during the discussion. The emergence and increasing influence of social media as a prominent source of information and disinformation added another layer of complexity to the conversation. One critical point of discussion involved striking the right balance between regulation by the EU and the need for guaranteeing fundamental rights like the freedom of speech. Participants delved into the implications of potential over-



regulation or under-regulation, contemplating how these extremes might influence in the future the dynamics of democratic discourse in the EU.

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## Pictures from the event

