



TECHNISCHE  
UNIVERSITÄT  
DARMSTADT

## HEUREC Conference

# How Europeans understand solidarity, fairness, and reciprocity

15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> February 2024, Darmstadt

Room S3 | 13 | 10, Residenzschloss 1

Funded by the German Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), during 2021-2024 scientists at the Institute of Political Science (Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany) have been researching how Europeans understand fairness, reciprocity and cohesion. The HEUREC project aims to deeper understand what citizens in European Union member states expect from each other, their countries and the EU in times of crisis. Assuming that the patterns of transnational justice, support and reciprocity can be revealed through narratives, the project conducted focus group discussions in nine Eurozone countries: Finland, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain. Participants from various socio-demographic groups were asked to discuss possible European, country or individual level responses to the issues of solidarity in three different scenarios.

To conclude the project, the HEUREC team is organising an academic conference to present the research results and discuss them in a broader light of study on solidarity and social cohesion. The conference will consist of a keynote speech by Dr. Maurizio Ferrera (University of Milan) "Ideology, conflict and solidarity in the EU" and five panel discussions. Each panel will focus on a selected topic, depicting key findings from the HEUREC project and discussing them with invited experts in a respective field.

**Project website:** [https://www.politikwissenschaft.tu-darmstadt.de/institut/arbeitsbereiche\\_und\\_nachwuchsgruppen/transnationales\\_regieren/forschung\\_tr/heurec.en.jsp](https://www.politikwissenschaft.tu-darmstadt.de/institut/arbeitsbereiche_und_nachwuchsgruppen/transnationales_regieren/forschung_tr/heurec.en.jsp)

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## CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

15<sup>th</sup> February, Thursday

13:30-14:00	Participant registration
14:00-14:15	Welcome & opening speech
14:15-15:30	<p><b>Panel 1: Multiple conceptual strands in a multilevel system? The HEUREC key concepts in the EU context between unravelling and tying together</b></p> <p><i>HEUREC input by:</i> Jared Sonnicksen</p> <p><i>Panel members:</i> Henrik Serup Christensen (Åbo Akademi University, Finland); Christian Lahusen (University of Siegen, Germany); Sally Scholz (Villanova University, USA)</p> <p><i>Chair:</i> Hubert Heinelt</p>
15:30-16:00	Coffee break
16:00-17:15	<p><b>Panel 2: Beyond the numbers: Benefits and challenges of qualitative methodology in comparative research on solidarity in Europe</b></p> <p><i>HEUREC input by:</i> Inga Gaižauskaitė</p> <p><i>Panel members:</i> Adriaan Schout (Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael, The Netherlands); Daniela Braun (Saarland University, Germany); Katharina Kieslich (University of Vienna, Austria); Gianna M. Eick (University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands)</p> <p><i>Chair:</i> Björn Egner</p>
17:15-17:30	Short break
17:30-19:00	<p><b>Keynote speech: Ideology, conflict and solidarity in the EU</b></p> <p>Prof. Dr. Maurizio Ferrera (University of Milan, Italy)</p> <p><i>Chair:</i> Jens Steffek</p>

**16<sup>th</sup> February, Friday**

10:00-11:15	<p><b>Panel 3: Tracing narrative elements about solidarity, reciprocity, fairness and cohesion expressed by Europeans in focus group discussions. (Critical) Reflections of HEUREC findings</b></p> <p><i>HEUREC input by:</i> Hubert Heinelt, Jens Steffek</p> <p><i>Panel members:</i> Claudio Radaelli (European University Institute, Italy); Frank Fischer (Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany); Sonja Blum (University of Bielefeld, Germany); Sybille Münch (University of Hildesheim, Germany)</p> <p><i>Chair:</i> Jared Sonnicksen</p>
11:15-11:45	Coffee break
11:45-13:00	<p><b>Panel 4: Redistribution across borders? Implications of the HEUREC findings for European policies</b></p> <p><i>HEUREC input by:</i> Jens Steffek</p> <p><i>Panel members:</i> Waltraud Schelkle (European University Institute, Italy); Lisa Dellmuth (Stockholm University, Sweden); Holger Lengfeld (University of Leipzig, Germany)</p> <p><i>Chair:</i> Inga Gaižauskaitė</p>
13:00-14:30	Lunch
14:30-15:45	<p><b>Panel 5: Solidarity in federal fiscal arrangements</b></p> <p><i>HEUREC input by:</i> Björn Egner</p> <p><i>Panel members:</i> Arthur Benz (Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany); Sean Müller (University of Lausanne, Switzerland); Olga Shvetsova (University of Binghamton, USA)</p> <p><i>Chair:</i> Jared Sonnicksen</p>
15:45-16:30	Closing speech & discussion

## ABSTRACTS

### **Panel 1: Multiple Conceptual Strands in a Multilevel System? The HEUREC Key Concepts in the EU Context Between Unravelling and Tying Together**

**Chair:** *Hubert Heinelt*

**HEUREC input by:** Jared Sonnicksen

**Panel members:**

- Henrik Serup Christensen (Åbo Akademi University, Finland)
- Christian Lahusen (University of Siegen, Germany)
- Sally Scholz (Villanova University, USA)

Cohesion of political communities is as current as ever both for scholarly and societal discourses. This applies surely, though also in particularly challenging ways, for the European Union. The EU represents not only a multilevel system ranging across multiple policy areas, but also a union joining a multiplicity of states and peoples. These circumstances, coupled with a sequence of recent crises, render cohesion and a variety of related issues all the more relevant and pressing. Yet cohesion poses itself an ambivalent concept, not least in a political community, that comes with different understandings as well as implications, while it likewise links with further concepts in variable ways. Most notably in general, and in the particular context of the HEUREC project, they include solidarity, fairness and reciprocity.

With this multifaceted backdrop of the complex EU-polity, recent challenges and the HEUREC research project in mind, this panel brings a number of scholars together to revisit these key concepts of solidarity, fairness and reciprocity. How can they be conceptualised and conceived on their own, in connection with one another as well as with cohesion? Moreover, the panel aims to discuss on whether and how the HEUREC findings not only may provide fresh empirical insights, but also prompt reflection on these concepts in the EU context. Have we learned something new on the conditions, limits but also possibilities toward their realization in this complex political community?

### **Panel 2: Beyond the numbers: Benefits and challenges of qualitative methodology in comparative research on solidarity in Europe**

**Chair:** *Björn Egner*

**HEUREC input by:** Inga Gaižauskaitė

**Panel members:**

- Adriaan Schout (Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael, The Netherlands)
- Daniela Braun (Saarland University, Germany)
- Katharina Kieslich (University of Vienna, Austria)
- Gianna M. Eick (University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands)

Amidst multiple recent crises, the issues of solidarity, reciprocity and cohesion in the European Union gained an increased significance in academic, public and political debate. To better understand the challenges to the solidarity between the EU member states and their citizens, HEUREC project designed a comparative qualitative research involving Europeans from nine countries. Conventionally, trends of citizens' attitudes towards the EU, including their views on solidarity between EU members states and among the citizen are well registered by multi-country surveys (e.g., Eurobarometer). However, survey results are methodologically confined to the content of predefined indicators and response alternatives while nuances behind these responses remain undiscovered. While using survey data as a background, the empirical research of HEUREC went beyond the numbers and employed focus group discussion method to collect rich qualitative data on citizen perceptions of solidarity, fairness and reciprocity and context-bound reasoning.

The panel aims to reflect upon the value of such research approach but at the same time to assess challenges and risks that it may bring. Focusing on feasibility, resources required and data quality achieved via focus group research, the panel looks into methodological implications for the future research on solidarity.

**Panel 3: Tracing narrative elements about solidarity, reciprocity, fairness and cohesion expressed by Europeans in focus group discussions. (Critical) Reflections of HEUREC findings**

**Chair:** *Jared Sonnicksen*

**HEUREC input by:** Hubert Heinelt, Jens Steffek

**Panel members:**

- Claudio Radaelli (European University Institute, Italy)
- Sybille Münch (University of Hildesheim, Germany)
- Frank Fischer (Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany)
- Sonja Blum (University of Bielefeld, Germany)

The HEUREC project started from the assumptions that Europeans' understandings of solidarity reciprocity, fairness, and cohesion are expressed in narratives. It was the aim of the project to trace empirically such narratives by focus groups discussions conducted in nine EU member states of the Euro zone. In each of these member states focus groups discussions with participants of three social groups were carried out – namely with (a) high-skilled and high-income individuals, i.e. probably so-called “cosmopolitans”, (b) low-skilled and low-income persons as well as the unemployed, i.e. potentially so-called “communitarians”, and (c) young adults.

However, from the transcripts of the focus group discussions – each lasting 90 minutes and involving 5 to 8 participants – we were not able to reconstruct fully fleshed out narratives. The limited time frame and the moderators' attempts to allow all participants to participate as equally as possible did not seem to make this possible. Nevertheless, we were able to detect how participants could convince each other about a particular understanding of

solidarity, reciprocity and fairness as well as constrains but also opportunities of cohesion in the EU by using topoi or commonplaces. Furthermore, we were at least able to reconstruct for two countries widely shared storylines about European integration from the perspective of people living in these countries.

This panel aims at presenting and discussing (preliminary) results as well as identified advantages and challenges of focus groups discussions in tracing empirically narrative elements about solidarity, reciprocity, fairness and cohesion. In more concrete terms, it will be particularly about the following questions:

- Are we able to reconstruct narratives with focus group discussions?
- How should we assess the scientific results that the HEUREC team was able to achieve through focus group discussions?
- Do we need fully fleshed out narratives to grasp peoples understanding of solidarity, reciprocity, fairness, and cohesion? Isn't enough to see that particular statements are seen by others as reasoned (and convincing) ones because certain topoi/commonplaces are used in an ordinary communicative interaction (as simulated by focus group discussions)?
- If this is the case: Do we inevitably get trapped in a “narrative relativity” because we have not been able to reconstruct narratives as expected by proponents of the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF)? Are we thus also unable to arrive at generalisable insights?

#### **Panel 4: Redistribution across borders? Implications of the HEUREC findings for European policies**

**Chair:** *Inga Gaižauskaitė*

**HEUREC input by:** Jens Steffek

**Panel members:**

- Waltraud Schelkle (European University Institute, Italy)
- Lisa Dellmuth (Stockholm University, Sweden)
- Holger Lengfeld (University of Leipzig, Germany)

Scholars of European integration have argued for transfers of wealth from richer to poorer areas of the Union. The reasons given for such proposals are both moral and pragmatic. Morally, we might be obliged to guarantee a certain standard of living for all members of a polity. Pragmatically, transnational redistribution might stabilize the integration project, and in particular the Eurozone, by addressing the socio-economic inequalities that it produces. On the other hand, transfers of taxpayers' money across borders are politically contested. Populists across Europe, but especially in the “frugal four” countries, thrive on imaginaries of hard-earned national wealth being squandered by transfers to countries that are fiscally undisciplined, economically uncompetitive, corrupt etc. This panel is designed to address the implications of our findings from nine European countries for redistributive policies at the European level. How much redistribution would Europeans support, and under what circumstances?

## Panel 5: Solidarity in federal fiscal arrangements

**Chair:** *Jared Sonnicksen*

**HEUREC input by:** Björn Egner

**Panel members:**

- Arthur Benz (Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany)
- Sean Müller (University of Lausanne, Switzerland)
- Olga Shvetsova (University of Binghamton, USA)

The panel should discuss how solidarity is enshrined in the fiscal distributive/redistributive schemes inside multilevel systems. It is both interesting to observe and compare obvious parts, i.e. horizontal redistribution among states or vertical distribution of federal grants to states or from a state to its subunits (municipalities); but also, indirect effects like tax collection and apportionment. Different countries have different systems in place (e.g. Germany, Canada, United States, Australia) - the panel should discuss how the setup of the systems of “give and take” is connected to different ideas of solidarity and accompanying arguments (deservingness, need, conditionality or other).