



The Transformative Power of Economic Democracy

Towards democratic practices in public spending,
the workplace, and public services

3 July 2024

09:00 - 16:00 (CEST)

@ the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC),

Rue Van Maerlant 2, 1040 Brussels (Room VMA21)

BACKGROUND

The current economic system has resulted in a significant concentration of power in the hands of a few and created record inequality. There is a need for a new **paradigm** — one that provides both a fair outcome and secures a democratic process. **Economic democracy** offers a solution by **giving people agency over their economic activities**, both at the individual and collective levels. If implemented successfully, it can not only bring positive economic results but also strengthen the societal fabric and individual well-being.

In collaboration with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Open Society Foundations (OSF), FEPS will organise a conference on **3 July 2024 between 09:00 – 16:00** to discuss approaches and practices that help build and scale up economic democracy. Hosted **at the EESC**, this event will bring together researchers, practitioners, policymakers and activists in the field.

The conference will start with a keynote presentation by Dr. Andrew Cumbers, Dr. Karen Bilsland and Dr. Robert McMaster, the research team from the University of Glasgow, on the **results of the policy study** within the ongoing Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) – Open Society Foundations (OSF) project. This will be followed by several panel **discussions** among practitioners and policymakers **on diverse aspects of economic democracy** including

- Democracy in public spending: Spending for people's well-being
- Democracy at the workplace: Sharing power through employee participation and ownership
- Democratising public services: How to make public ownership democratic

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Looking at the examples of successful initiatives on democratising the economy: what were the factors of their success? What are the theories of change that work?
- How to scale up economic democracy practices?
- Who should drive the democratic economic transformation and how to organize it?
- How should governments and public authorities adapt their processes to ensure more democratic oversight and participation in key socio-economic areas?



AGENDA

9:00-9:30 Registration and Coffee

9:30-9:40 **WELCOME REMARKS**

László Andor, FEPS Secretary General

Karim Harris, Programme Manager at the Open Society Foundations

SESSION 1 – PRESENTATION OF FEPS & OSF POLICY STUDY

ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY: ITS FEATURES AND MECHANISMS

9:40-10:40 *Presentation of the policy study “Building Economic Democracy in Europe: Concepts, Cases and Achieving Progressive Change” by the research team of the Adam Smith Business School at the University of Glasgow:*

- **Andrew Cumbers**, Professor of Political Economy
- **Robert McMaster**, Professor of Political Economy
- **Karen Bilsland**, Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour

Comments:

- **Thomas Marois**, Professor of Political Economy at McMaster University
- **Martin O’Neill**, Professor of Political Philosophy at University of York

Moderator: **Anna Kolesnichenko**, FEPS Economic Policy Analyst

10:40-11:00 Coffee Break

SESSION 2: PANEL SESSIONS BY POLICY FIELD

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

11:00-12:00 **Panel 1: Democracy in public spending**

How to organise citizen engagement in decision-making on public spending to channel public money towards people’s wellbeing and priorities, with:

- **Matthew Brown**, Senior Fellow at Democracy Collaborative, Preston (UK) City Council Leader, former advisor to the Labour Party’s Community Wealth Building Unit
- **Matic Primc**, President at Organisation for participatory society (Organizacija za participatorno družbo)
- **Bogdan-Alexandru Chelariu**, EU Policy Officer at CEE Bankwatch Network

Moderator: **Niccolo Milanese**, Founding Director of European Alternatives



12:00-13:00 Panel 2: Democracy at the workplace

Sharing the power through employee participation and ownership, with:

- **Sophia Reisecker**, Member of the EESC, Head of the Department for European and international Affairs and corporations of GPA union (Austria)
- **Stefan Gran**, Senior Advisor at European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
- **Giuseppe Guerini**, Member of the EESC, President of the European confederation of industrial and service cooperatives (CECOP-CICOPA Europe)
- **Kosta Juri**, Head of Research and Policy at Institute for Economic Democracy (IED)

Moderator: **Sara Lafuente**, Senior Researcher at European Trade Union Institute (ETUI)

13:00-13:50 Lunch Break & Networking

13:50-14:50 Panel 3: Democratising public services

How to make public services democratic, accountable and resilient, with

- **Anne Le Strat**, Consultant and Lecturer, former Deputy Mayor of Paris in charge of the water policy
- **Mirco Beisheim**, Campaign Manager at #TschüssKohle (Hamburg)
- **Milo Fiasconaro**, Executive Director at Aqua Publica Europea (The European Association of public water operators)

Moderator: **Tuscany Bell**, Policy Officer – Utilities at European Federation of Public Service Unions

14:50-16:00 SESSION 3: POLICIES TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

- **Oliver Röpke**, President of the EESC
- **Ruth Paserman**, Director for Funds: Programming and Implementation at DG EMPL, European Commission
- **Idoia Mendia**, S&D MEP
- **Graça Fonseca**, former Minister of Culture and former State Secretary for Administrative Modernization of Portugal, Co-founder and CEO of Because Impact
- **Diana Dovgan**, Secretary General of the European confederation of industrial and service cooperatives (CECOP-CICOPA Europe)

Moderator: **László Andor**, FEPS Secretary General