

# **The rise of populism and euroscepticism in the EU**

**June 1 2015, Palais d'Egmont**

This conference gathered a very diverse and interesting panel of academics, journalists, politicians and researchers to debate about the very heated topic of the rise of populism and euroscepticism in the EU and the potential solutions to this extremely pressing challenge.

A first question tackled by the speakers concerned the definitions and potential causes and drivers of this phenomenon. They discussed various topics salient in the academic literature on the subject as well as in more general discourses on the issue: the traditional opposition between “hard” and “soft” euroscepticism, the general features of populism, the differences between right-wing and left-wing populism, the importance of nationalism within particular strands of populism and euroscepticism and the fact that they have become closer to the core of politics rather than remaining confined to its margins. They also examined the reasons for the increasing popular support to such ideas and movements: they explored its strategic, tactical and ideological causes and its more long term structural reasons.

Some of the speakers also adopted a more practical perspective when they analyzed the dynamics of specific parties and movements frequently labeled as ‘eurosceptics’ or ‘populists’. Among the issues addressed were the recent election results in Spain, Poland and the UK as well as the risks of Brexit and Grexit. The internal diversity among the discourses and strategies of these actors was particularly highlighted, as well as the fact that they represent deeper tendencies within the European population – such as a decrease in the level of trust towards the EU and politicians in general and a discontent with the broader social and economic situation.

Finally, the panelists and the audience explored the potential solutions to hamper the rise of populist forms of euroscepticism, such as: the necessary changes in national politicians’ behaviour when they deal with European topics - who are too often in a ‘state of denial’ about their own participation in the EU decision-making process - , a better communication strategy from the part of the EU institutions and the European commission in particular, an improved allocation of competences at EU, national, regional and local levels according to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, the necessity to improve 'input' and 'output' legitimacy – as opposed to a mere focus on European identity – and, more fundamentally, the urgent necessity to rehabilitate sovereignty at the European level.