

THE BELGIAN YOUTH DEMOCRACY LAB

On 9 April 2025, TEPSA and the Institute for European Studies of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (IEE-ULB) co-organised the [ActEU's Belgian Youth Democracy Lab](#). The event was embedded in the university course *Questions de science politique interne*, part of the second-year Bachelor's programme in Political Science at the ULB.

The workshop, held in French, **brought together 18 students** and was moderated by Alvaro Oleari (FNRS postdoctoral researcher, IEE-ULB). It aimed to engage young people in the ActEU project and, more specifically, in its **recommendation-building process**. Participants were invited to produce concrete proposals in response to two guiding questions:

- What should politicians do to strengthen European democracy?
- Which topics should schools and other educational institutions prioritise to prepare young people for life in a democracy?

In the first part of the workshop, students shared their views on the **main shortcomings of contemporary democracies**. Participants highlighted a range of issues related to representation, participation, and trust. Specifically, they pointed to:

- A significant crisis of trust in elected officials;
- A gap between rapid technological developments in society and the slower pace of democratic adaptation;
- The difficulty of accessing unbiased, trustworthy information in the media;
- The increasing repression of social movements;
- The deterioration of public services;
- The lack of citizens' involvement at higher levels of governance – especially when compared to local governance structures.

In group discussions, students were subsequently invited to formulate **concrete policy recommendations** targeted at policy-makers, civil society, and educators, responding to the previously identified issues. Recommendations included the need to **strengthen democratic engagement** and **increase citizens' consultations** that meaningfully influence policy-makers' decisions, as well as creating a **unified digital portal** to guarantee universal access to public services, paired with a **simplification of administrative procedures**. Students also proposed **greater transparency measures** to clarify how public funds are used, accompanied by independent anti-corruption bodies in each country.

To respond to the challenges posed by media and social media, students proposed several recommendations, including **ending online anonymity** by requiring ID verification for social media registration, along with charters between platforms and states to ensure judicial cooperation. They also thought traditional media should provide **more accurate coverage of activism**, and citizens should be better informed about their rights in protest.

Finally, to make EU governance more democratic, participants suggested directly electing the President of the European Commission and introducing **transnational lists** for the European Parliament elections. Finally, they stressed the need for **continuous civic education** to foster active and informed citizenship.

