

ACT FOR DEMOCRACY

*Policy solutions
for the future*

Student contest

Call for papers.



Deadline: 16 December 2025

“Democracy is in danger!” Unfortunately, this is becoming a recurring statement, as it’s shown by the decline in trust levels in democratic institutions, diminished political participation and rising polarisation. For the first time in 20 years, there are more autocracies than democracies in the world.

/ Will this trend continue unabated?



/ Or is this a temporary issue with solutions in sight?



To counter the symptoms of democratic decline, we need **effective policy responses** that not only react to the issue of democratic decline, but also actively shape a better future for our democracies. In launching this paper contest, we invite university students and young researchers **to stand up and act.**

👉 Do you have ideas for policy solutions that can help reverse democratic decline and give the future of participatory democracy a better chance? **Then this call to submit papers is for you!**

ActEU

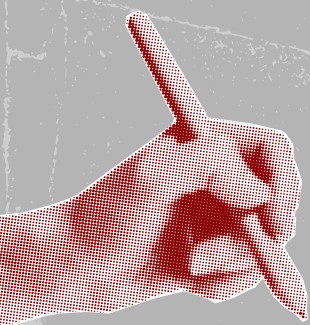
This call for submissions is organised by the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) in collaboration with the Horizon Europe project “Activating Citizens’ Trust in Times of Crises and Polarization” (ActEU).



trans-
european
policy
studies
association

ABOUT THE CONTEST

“Act for democracy: Policy solutions for the future” is a paper contest that asks: **What can we do to ensure a brighter future for participatory democracy?**



We are looking for **original short essays or policy briefs** (maximum 2000 words excluding spaces) which should include a set of recommendations to counter the trend of democratic backsliding.

The paper should address one or more of the five questions below (although new topics are welcome):

What strategies can help reduce political polarisation in Europe?

What electoral reforms can best increase democratic participation and restore public trust?



How can digital technologies be integrated into policy-making processes to enhance citizen participation?

How do different forms of non-electoral participation influence policy-making?

How can the EU better support democracy in its neighbourhood?

For information on formatting and referencing, check out the [APA guidelines](#).

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?


- / University students (Bachelor, Master, and PhD students) or 
- / Young researchers (< 30 years old) 
- / People from all nationalities and residencies are welcome to participate

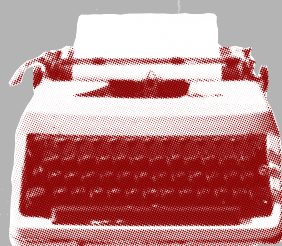


TIMELINE

- / Submission open: 19 November 2025
- / Deadline: **16 December 2025** (midnight CET) 
- / Winners contacted: 19 December 2025

WHAT IS IN IT FOR YOU?

- / Two outstanding papers will be chosen as winners and **published by TEPSA and ActEU** on their websites.
- / Winning authors will be **invited to participate in the ActEU final conference**, taking place in Brussels  on 5 February 2026, with travel and accommodation reimbursed up to a cost of EUR 500.
- / Award winners will be invited **to present their papers directly to leading researchers** from the ActEU project, gaining valuable feedback, tailored advice, and unique networking opportunities within an international academic community.



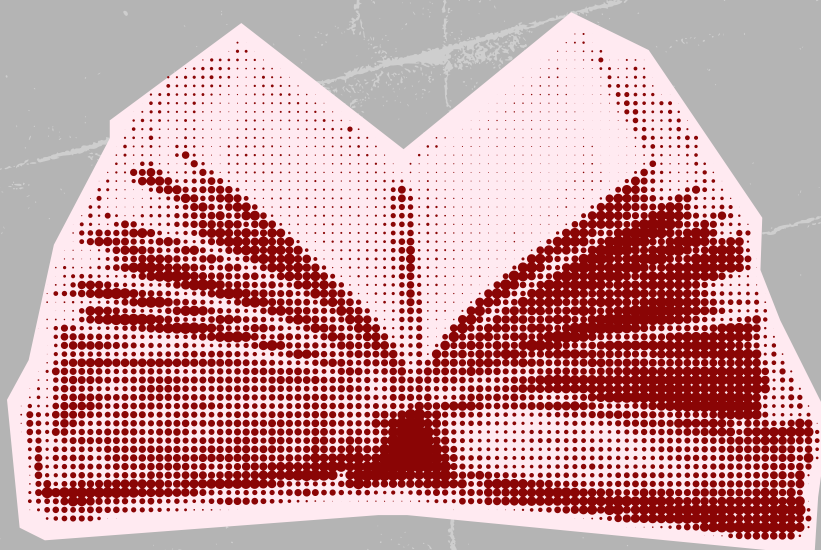
HOW WILL SUBMISSIONS BE EVALUATED?

A jury composed of experts from TEPSA will select two winners based on relevance to the theme, quality of analysis and clarity and persuasiveness of proposed solutions.

HOW TO SUBMIT

Please send your papers to communications@tepsa.eu with: "ActEU Student contest_LAST NAME" as the subject of the email. For any questions on the contests, please reach out!

We can't wait to read your papers!



ABOUT / ActEU

How can we conceptualize and empirically measure political trust and legitimacy beyond the usual survey question “How much trust do you have in the parliament?”? Does the multi-level nature of European representative democracies require an identical level of citizen support at the regional, national and EU level? ActEU aims at findings answers to these questions and more by pursuing two overarching goals: First, in phase 1, we map and investigate persistent problems of declining trust, legitimacy and representation in Europe with a particular attention to the polarization of societies and the EU’s multi-level structure. Knowledge gained from phase 1 will flow directly into the development of a toolbox of remedial actions characterizing phase 2, which will craft tailor-made toolkits for political and civil society actors, school teachers and university lecturers to deal with issues of declining political trust in representative democracies in flux and counteract a further decrease. We develop context-sensitive solutions for all polity levels and type of polarizing policy field (migration, environment, gender).

Visit ActEU website: <https://acteu.org/>

ABOUT



The Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) was established in 1974 as the first transnational research network in the field of EU affairs. It comprises leading research institutes throughout Europe, with an office in Brussels. Its aim is to provide high-quality research on European integration to stimulate discussion on policies and political options for Europe. This is achieved by the interaction between the European and national institutions as well as the academic and research community. TEPSA is active on a wide range of research topics, focusing on differentiated integration, the EU's external relations, democratic participation and citizens' engagement.

