

**EUROPEANS' UNDERSTANDINGS AND EVALUATIONS OF
DEMOCRACY
ESS POLICY SEMINAR
HOSTED BY THE OECD STATISTICS DIRECTORATE**

**Venue: OECD Conference Centre
2, rue André Pascal
75775 Paris Cedex 16, France**

23 May 2014

The European Social Survey (ESS) is a biennial social survey charting stability and change of Europeans' social attitudes and behaviours. Round 6 of the ESS, which was fielded in 29 European countries in 2012, included a dedicated module on Europeans' understandings and evaluations of democracy. The ESS ERIC Director will provide an overview of the ESS followed by consideration of the methodological issues that arose when developing the module. Preliminary findings from 23 countries will then be presented by members of the Question module Design Team.

- 13.00 – 13.10** Welcome, Marco Mira d'Ercole, OECD
- 13.10 – 13.30** General Introduction to the European Social Survey and challenges of measuring attitudes to democracy, Rory Fitzgerald (ESS ERIC Director, ESS ERIC HQ, City University London, UK) (see [presentation](#))
- 13.30 – 14.30** Initial findings from the ESS democracy module, Professor Hanspeter Kriesi and Dr Monica Ferrin (European University Institute, Italy) (see [presentation](#))
- 14.30 – 14.50** Discussants:
Francois Roubaud (DIAL, France), 10 min.
Marleen Desmedt (Eurostat), 10 min. (see [presentation](#))
- 14.50 – 15.20** General Discussion
- 15.20 – 15.30** Closing remarks

Attitudes to democracy: Overview of module

Citizens' attitudes towards their democratic systems have become a major topic in the social sciences over the recent years. One of the reasons for the emphasis on democracy is the changing context of established democracies resulting from the most recent wave of democratization and the interest in the consolidation of democracy in the transition countries. A second reason is that, with the breakdown of the state-socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the fall of the so-called iron curtain, researchers studying political support and democratic attitudes observed a decline in satisfaction with the working of democracy in some established democracies of Western Europe. In spite of this apparent trend of "democratic dissatisfaction", existing indicators on people's views about their democratic regime in industrialized democracies paint a less clear picture than the one assumed by these authors. Indeed, although dissatisfaction appears as a persistent and widespread phenomenon in Western democracies, it is also true that there is a great deal of variation across and within countries regarding their levels of satisfaction with the performance of particular regimes. Until now, however, no study has provided specific data on what particular aspects people are dissatisfied with in their democracies. More critically, this has impeded a systematic analysis of the causes of citizens' dissatisfaction and its variation across European countries.

The ESS in Round 6 explored citizens attitudes towards their democratic systems. Key elements of the approach included efforts to clarify the often used indicators of *support for* and *satisfaction with* democracy; the creation of individual-level indicators designed to permit comparison with the existing macro-level indices on the quality of democracy; and analysis on (a) people's beliefs and expectations about what a democracy should be, and (b) people's evaluations of their own democracies, to identify the causes of dissatisfaction and the effects of democratic attitudes on people's political behaviour.