



19th EUROPEAN WEEK of
REGIONS and CITIES

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Conference
on the Future
of Europe

Mapping Regional Democracy in Europe

A Science2Public Perspective

EVENT REPORT

Online event, 2 November 2021



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Mapping Regional Democracy in Europe

A Science2Public Perspective

What is the role of regional democracy in the multilevel EU polity? In the context of the ongoing Conference on the Future of Europe, the online event “Mapping Regional Democracy in Europe” brought together European policy makers, academic experts, and European citizens to discuss this timely question. The event was organized as an official side event of this year’s [European Week of Regions and Cities](#) and featured the first public presentation of the innovative web portal [European Regional Democracy Map \(ERDM\)](#).

The ERDM addresses policy-makers, academic and other experts, analysts, as well as interested citizens who want to learn more about the diversity of regional democracy in Europe and about regional involvement in EU policy-making. By including information on the full range of legislative and governmental institutions at the regional level across the EU, the ERDM aims at visualizing the constitutional diversity of European regional democracy. In doing so, it also covers those regions often considered less powerful and puts special emphasis on the often-neglected subnational parliaments in the EU.

This event report provides a summary of the input presented by researchers, the interventions of the high-level speakers from the European Committee of the Regions, and the discussion and interaction with the audience.

ORGANIZERS & FUNDING

The event was jointly organized within the framework of two international research projects:

[REGIOPARL \(Regional Parliaments Lab\)](#) is a multi-annual research project studying the role of regional parliaments in EU multilevel governance. The project, headed by Dr. Sarah Meyer, is carried out under the lead of Danube University Krems, Department for European Policy and the Study of Democracy, together with international partners, in cooperation with and funded by [Forum Morgen](#).

[Strengthening Regional Democracy – Contributing to Good Democratic Governance](#) is a multi-annual research project studying regional democracy from a comparative perspective. Under the lead of its principal investigator, Prof. Arjan Schakel, the project is located at the University of Bergen, Department of Comparative Politics, and funded by the [Trond Mohn Foundation](#) and the University of Bergen.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

I Welcome and introduction	Moderation: Paul Kindermann
II Introduction of the European Democracy Map	Sarah Meyer
III Regional democracy & EU involvement – research insights	Arjan Schakel; Sarah Meyer
IV Strengthening the role of regions in EU multilevel governance – speakers' interventions & open debate	Mark Speich; Karl-Heinz Lambertz

SPEAKERS

Dr. Mark Speich | Secretary of State of North Rhine-Westphalia for Federal, European and International Affairs since 2017. Member of the European Committee of the Regions since 2018 and Chair of its Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX).

Karl-Heinz Lambertz | President of the Parliament of the German-speaking Community of Belgium since 2019 and from 2014-2016, formerly Governor of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (1999-2014). President of the European Committee of the Regions from 2017-2020 and currently Chair of its Subsidiarity Steering Group.

Prof. Arjan Schakel | Principal investigator of the research project *Strengthening Regional Democracy* at the University of Bergen, Department of Comparative Politics. Previously Assistant Professor at Maastricht University (2011-2019) and Newton International Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Edinburgh (2009-2011).

Dr. Sarah Meyer | Head of the research project *REGIOPARL* at Danube University Krems, Department for European Policy and the Study of Democracy. Previously policy officer on EU General Affairs at the Austrian Federal Chancellery (2015-2019) and post-doctoral researcher at the University of Vienna, Department of Political Science (since 2015).

INTRODUCING THE EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEMOCRACY MAP

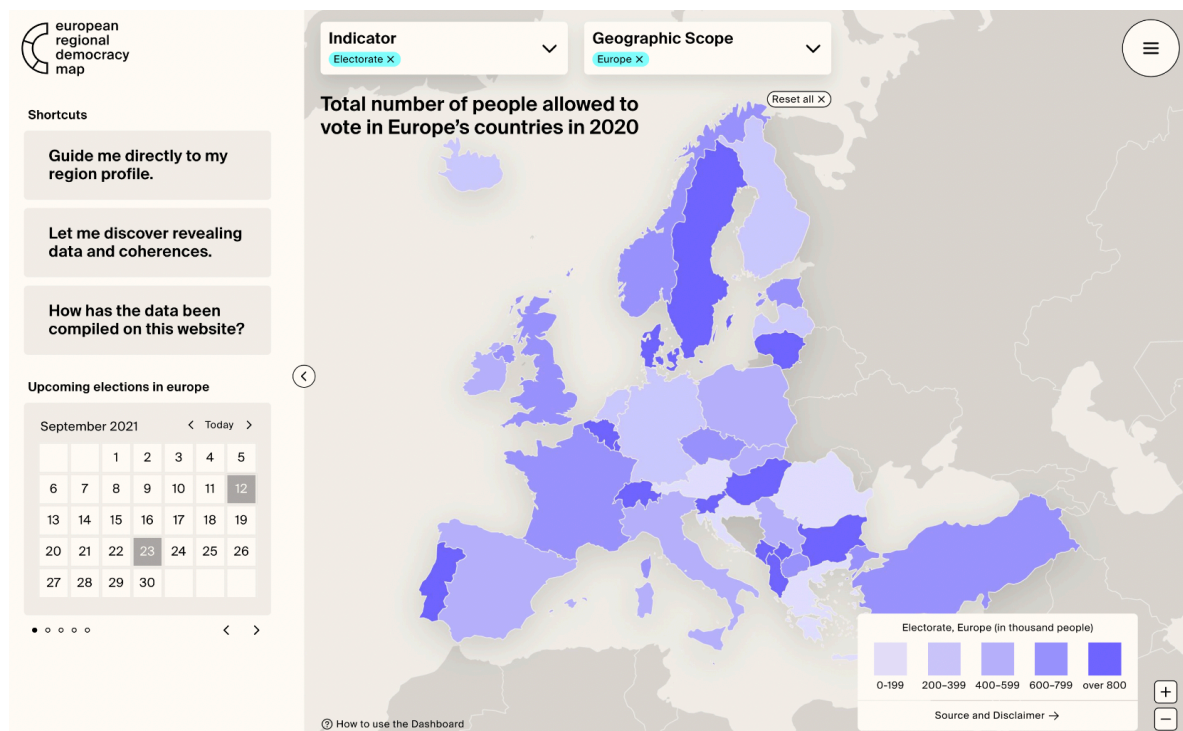
In the first part of the event, **Dr. Sarah Meyer**, head of the research project REGIOPARL at Danube University Krems, introduced the ERDM, previewing some of its visual features and powerful tools to access and compare data on regional elections, structures of government, or involvement in EU policy making. She stressed the importance of making such data available to a wider audience, which has been one of underlying motivations to start this ambitious project together with Arjan Schakel from the University of Bergen.

"The ERDM is an ambitious science2public project for visualizing the constitutional diversity of European regional democracy and regional involvement in the EU."

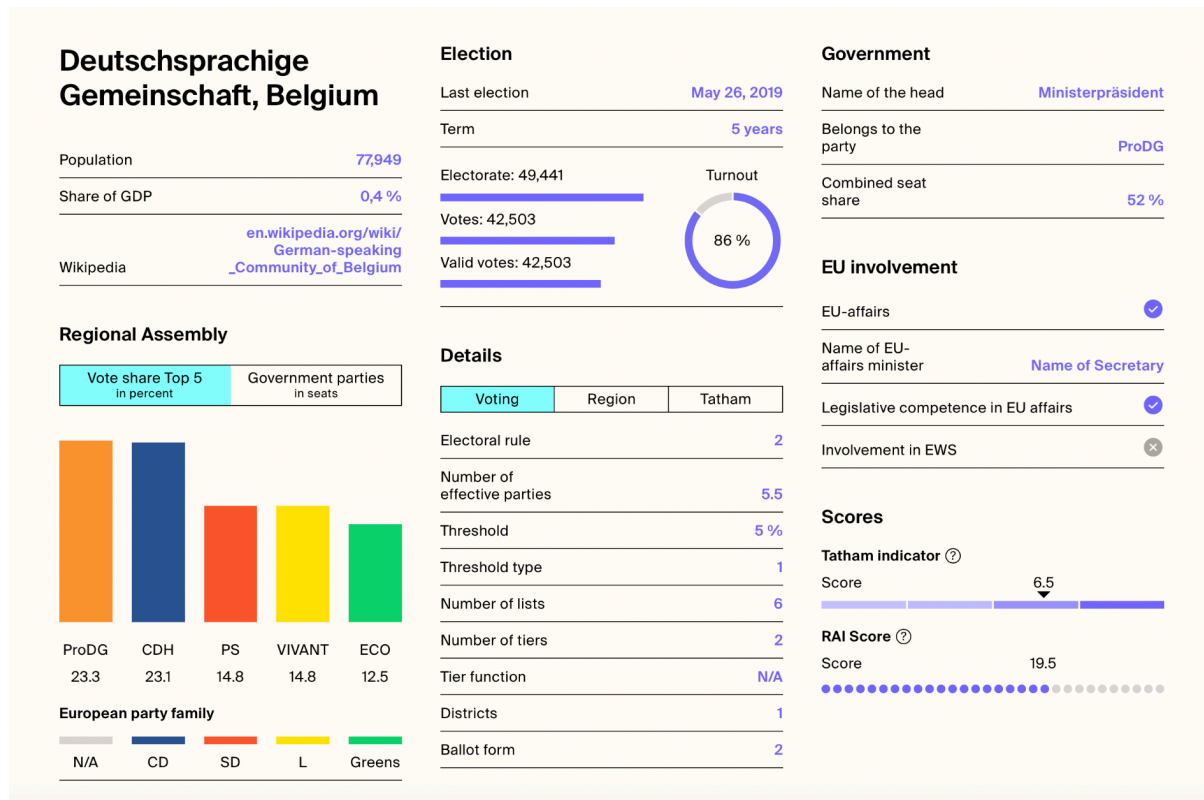
Sarah Meyer, Danube University Krems

During this first public presentation of the ERDM, participants of the event gained an impression of the web portal's two main features. The first feature, the interactive online map, provides information about regional democracy for European regions in a comparative fashion. Users of the ERDM can choose an indicator they are interested in, which will then be visualized on the map.

Regional profiles mark the second main feature of the ERDM. Users can select an individual region, which directly links them to its regional profile. The latter provides them with an overview and summary of relevant information on the structures of regional governance and EU involvement



An early screen design of the ERDM start page



Elements of the regional profiles of the ERDM

Sarah Meyer closed her introductory remarks by highlighting two key objectives of the ERDM: first, to incorporate those regions often considered less powerful and, therefore, to provide a comprehensive picture of regional diversity in Europe; second, to present the full range of legislative and governmental institutions at the regional level, including the often-neglected subnational parliaments in the EU.

REGIONAL DEMOCRACY & EU INVOLVEMENT RESEARCH INSIGHTS

Building on the rich database collected as part of the research project *Strengthening Regional Democracy*, **Prof. Arjan Schakel** provided insights into key aspects of regional electoral democracy.

He kicked-off his presentation with a provocative statement put to a vote among participants of the event: asked whether they agreed or disagreed that 'regional elections are just as unimportant as European elections', a vast majority of the audience rejected this statement. In the following presentation, Arjan Schakel compared voter turnout of regional elections and European Parliament elections at the regional level, demonstrating that the former is often significantly higher compared to the latter. He concluded that 'this indicates that European voters do care about democracy at the subnational level'.

“Regional electoral democracy has its own role to play in Europe’s multilevel democracy.”

Arjan Schakel, University of Bergen

Sarah Meyer continued with an overview of regional involvement in the EU, distinguishing three different access points available to regional political actors. First, regions can participate in the so-called Early Warning Mechanism for subsidiarity control by member states’ national parliaments – which was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. Second, via domestic channels for regional EU involvement and, finally, via representation in the European Committee of the Regions. Information and data on all of these forms of involvement can be found and visualized on the ERDM.

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF REGIONS IN EU MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE – SPEAKERS’ INTERVENTIONS & OPEN DEBATE

The *Conference on the Future of Europe* gave new momentum to the long-standing issue of how the EU’s democratic system can be strengthened – and of the role that regions as political entities could potentially play in that context. This question marked the background for the panel discussion with two distinguished speakers from the European Committee of the Regions (CoR): Dr. Mark Speich, Secretary of State of North Rhine-Westphalia and chair of the CoR’s CIVEX Commission, and Karl-Heinz Lambertz, president of the parliament of the German-speaking community of Belgium and former president of the CoR. During the debate, both speakers praised the ERDM as a project with great potential for regional democracy.

“The European Regional Democracy Map will be of great value also for political representatives. Seeking cooperation with other regions, we often lack the necessary information about other regions that could help to establish regional networks.”

Mark Speich, Secretary of State of North Rhine-Westphalia

Mark Speich started his intervention by highlighting the efforts taken by the CoR to provide evidence-based policy recommendations and long-term perspectives for regional politics in the EU polity. In that context, he referred to a recent survey commissioned by the CoR on local and regional representatives’ views on the future of the EU, where the majority of respondents said that strengthening the involvement of subnational/local government levels in EU decision-making would improve democracy in the EU. Mr. Speich also addressed the issue of such involvement more concretely, discussing perspectives for institutional reform. He considered an obligation of the EU institutions to take opinions of the CoR into account and suggested that the latter should become more evidence-based and focused on policy impact. REGHUB, he suggested, is a laudable project in this regard that would need to be developed further. Commenting on the ERDM and referring to his own attempts to strengthening inter-regional cooperation, he highlighted the project’s potential added value in supporting regional representatives in their efforts to connect and get involved in EU affairs.

“Given their closeness to European citizens, regional representatives and institutions can make an important contribution to the further democratization of the EU.”

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the Parliament of the German-speaking community of Belgium

Following up with a second intervention, **Karl-Heinz Lambertz** reflected on the structural features of regional politics in the EU. He emphasized the potential of regional institutions and representatives for the further democratization of the EU given their closeness to European citizens. He further stressed the CoR’s efforts and concrete initiatives in recent years and in the context of the ongoing *Conference on the Future of Europe* for strengthening citizens’ participation in the EU.

Apart from the Q&A session following speakers’ interventions, the audience got involved in the event with several short polls about the state of regional and EU democracy, regional involvement in the EU, and the participants’ perspective on how they would access and use the ERDM. Concluding the debate, both Arjan Schakel and Sarah Meyer followed up on remarks from the speakers and audience, with Ms. Meyer highlighting the importance of debating realistic scenarios and concrete models of regional involvement in the EU.

The conference organizers from Danube University Krems and the University of Bergen would like to thank all speakers and participants for joining the event and sharing their expertise and knowledge with the audience.

CONTACT

[Information on the European Regional Democracy Map](#)

Information on the co-organizers:

[Danube University Krems, Department for European Policy and the Study of Democracy](#)

[University of Bergen, Department of Comparative Politics](#)

