

Why member states need to measure trust in justice

Half-day conference, Brussels, 24 June





Hosted by:
Centre for European Policy Studies
Place du Congrès 1, Brussels
Conference Room
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Programme:

10:00 – 10:15	Welcome (Dr Manuela Alfé, European Commission)
10:15 – 11:00	The EURO-JUSTIS project: concepts and preliminary findings (Prof. Mike Hough, ICPR)
11:00 – 11:30	Coffee break
11:30 – 12:00	The Belgium experience of monitoring trust (Prof. Stephan Parmentier, Leuven Institute of Criminology)
12:00 – 12:30	Trust in justice and ethnic minorities (Prof. Sebastian Roché, CNRS)
12:30 – 12:45	Future work on trust in justice (Dr Stefano Maffei, University of Parma)
12:45 – 13:00	Closing – next steps (Prof. Mike Hough)
13:00	Lunch

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Trust in justice: an outline of the Euro-Justis project

The Euro-Justis project is grounded in 'procedural justice theory'. It assumes that if the justice system treats people fairly and respectfully, this builds public trust and public commitment to the rule of law. The attraction of the procedural justice perspective is that it resolves the tension that is often thought to exist between effective crime control and the respecting of people's rights. It shows that fair, respectful and legal behaviour on the part of justice officials is not only ethically desirable, but is an essential precondition for effective justice.

Co-financed by the European Union's FP7 Research programme, Euro-Justis has developed a standardised approach to measuring confidence in criminal justice and public feelings of security. The project has designed and tested a suite of survey questions which can be used by member states that want to measure trust in justice.

Led by the Institute for Criminal Policy Research at Birkbeck, University of London, the Euro-Justis research team argues that fresh indicators are needed to improve crime policy in the face of rapid change in European society. Economic change, population flux, and shifting patterns of migration and immigration are expected to drive up European crime levels and constitute a threat to social stability; in this altered socio-economic environment, maintaining commitment to the rule of law will become a growing challenge.

The central idea being tested by the project is that if people trust the police and the courts, they will regard them as a form of legitimate authority; they will then defer to this authority, obey the law and cooperate with the justice system. Institutions build legitimacy through public trust; and to earn trust, justice officials must treat citizens respectfully and observe their rights. If they are successful in earning public trust, the end result will be a system of justice that is both humane and effective. If, on the other hand, the police and other justice officials lose public trust, this will breed public cynicism about the rule of law and encourage law-breaking.

Procedural justice theory (associated in particular with the work of Tom Tyler in the United States) has been explored primarily in English-speaking cultures and has not yet been sufficiently tested in the varied cultural settings of continental Europe. Euro-Justis aims to fill this knowledge gap, asserting that building the legitimacy of formal authorities may be a powerful mechanism for securing normative compliance with the law. On the basis of pilot surveys conducted in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Italy and Lithuania, the researchers have developed an extensive suite of survey questions asking about people's attitudes toward the police, the courts, fear of crime and attitudes to punishment.

A sub-group of the Euro-Justis team has taken a core sub-set of these questions and developed them into a *Trust in Justice* module of the fifth European Social Survey, conducted in 2010. This has covered 28 countries, and will allow the team to identify the factors that shape trust in justice and affect the legitimacy of the police and courts in different parts of Europe. Analysis will start in the autumn of 2011. The Euro-Justis team believes that with the inclusion of the project's justice module, the ESS will constitute a unique resource for monitoring public trust and perceptions of institutional legitimacy across Europe.

Euro-Justis - Scientific Indicators of Confidence in Justice: Tools for Policy Assessment (duration: 1/3/2008-31/6/2011) is a Specific Targeted Research Project funded under the Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities Programme of the 7th Framework Programme for Research of the European Union, Thematic Priority 6 – Socio-economic and scientific indicators.

See: <http://www.eurojustis.eu/>

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