

Press Release

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Researchers at Freie Universität Warn of Division between European Leadership and Population

EU-Liaison Office of Freie Universität Organized Discussion in European Parliament —
Start of New Discussion Series for Researchers and Politicians

The political scientist Professor Thomas Risse of Freie Universität Berlin has called for stronger commitment and greater media presence of Members of the European Parliament in controversial issues. Otherwise, there is a risk that anti-European movements could be strengthened and that could lead to a split between European leaders and the population of EU countries. At a panel discussion at the European Parliament, Risse pointed out that the elected representatives are perceived in the countries of the European Union as legitimate commentators in questions of national policy, such as in social and migration policies.

The panel discussion was the first in a series organized by Freie Universität's EU-Liaison Office in Brussels. It was funded by the DFG Research College *The Transformative Power of Europe* that is headed by Professor Tanja Börzel and Professor Thomas Risse. Freie Universität is the only European university with a liaison office in Brussels.

Risse mentioned the recent political dispute between EU Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding and the French government on the issue of dealing with Roma camps, as an example of a public controversy. Professor Liesbet Hooghe from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, currently a visiting professor at Freie Universität Berlin, added to Risse's concern about the discrepancy between the opinions of the political leadership and the population of Europe. According to her, EU citizens should be more involved in the political process. At the same time she warned against holding referendums on too many issues, as it is not good to reduce complex policies to an all-or-nothing option. It makes more sense to involve the population more closely in the decision-making process.

One of the objectives of Freie Universität's EU-Liaison Office in Brussels is to make the scholarly expertise at Freie Universität available to politicians and institutions in Brussels through debates like these. The panel discussion was moderated by Jochen Bittner from the weekly *Die Zeit*. The discussants included a Member of the European Parliament Andrew Duff (Liberal Democrats) and Telmo Baltazar, a minister of Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding. Andrew Duff was one of three representatives of the European Parliament in the 2007 Intergovernmental Conference that drew up the Lisbon Treaty.

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