

PLATO's research objectives



What you need to know about PLATO's research in preparing applications for a position as an Early Stage Researcher (ESR).

PLATO will investigate whether the European Union is in legitimacy crisis. To research that question, PLATO will appoint 15 Early Stage Researchers (ESRs). Each ESR completes a PhD on a specified topic.

As explained elsewhere in the call, applicants should first identify one of the projects and apply to the partner university where that research will be located. Applicants can apply to up to a maximum of 3 of the 15 PhD projects, provided you have a genuine interest in more than one project and the time to make more than one high-quality application.

Applicants should follow the guidelines stipulated by the partner university to which you are applying. However, in preparing research proposals, you should be aware of two general points:

- Each proposal should aim both to cover the points in one of the existing project descriptions and to go beyond that description. Each proposal should itself identify an original, yet feasible way of researching the project to which the application is being made.
- In preparing research proposals, applicants should be aware that you will be conducting the research as part of a team of 15 ESRs within an integrated research programme. Indeed, that is the exceptional opportunity offered by PLATO. As a PhD researcher you will have your own precisely defined project. You will also be part of an integrated programme that will ask a very big question indeed. For, by researching whether there is a crisis in the legitimacy of the European Union, PLATO will also ask whether the very nature of political order in Europe needs rethinking.

To help applicants prepare research proposals that take the foregoing into account, this outline:

1. Explains the importance of PLATO's research;
2. Lays out PLATO's research design;
3. Provides descriptions of each of the 15 PhD projects within PLATO;
4. Specifies the methods PLATO will use;
5. Explains the role of different disciplines in PLATO's research.

1. Importance of PLATO's research

Legitimacy is at the core of 'good government'. It means the justified or rightful exercise of political power. Since a right to exercise political power implies that people may have an obligation to comply even with some laws they do not like, legitimate polities are more likely to enjoy the unforced compliance of publics. As the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu put it, legitimacy operates as a 'coercion-minimising device'.¹ That is crucial. For, governments that can concentrate more on satisfying the needs and values of citizens – rather than coercing

¹ P. Bourdieu, 'Rethinking the State', *Sociological Theory* 12(1), 1994.

them – are more likely to deliver high levels of economic performance and to score well on indicators of human development.

Not only, though, are legitimate political systems needed to make legitimate laws. But legitimately made laws are needed to regulate the external effects of other systems: economic, social and ecological. Otherwise, positive externalities – which benefit more than those who produce them – will be under-provided. Conversely negative externalities – which harm more than those who produce them – will be over-provided. So, for example, too little will be done to clean up climate change (a positive externality) and too much to create climate change (a negative externality). Too little will be done to provide stable systems of human security and economic exchange (positive externalities) and too much to create financial risks that put entire economic systems at risk (negative externalities).

Legitimacy, however, does not always come easily. Laws have to be made within values and institutions publics acknowledge as justified. Political systems are, therefore, constrained in the laws they can agree to regulate relationships within and between other systems. Political systems can, indeed, become burdened with responsibilities for making laws to regulate interactions between other systems, which exceed their capacity to generate legitimacy with publics and with all those whose cooperation they need if their solutions are to work.

Understanding how crises can be displaced from one system to another so that they end up as crises of political legitimacy is plainly important to understanding relationships between economy, society and politics in contemporary Europe. After 2008, EU governments spent € 4.5 trillion of taxpayers' money rescuing European banks from a crisis that largely originated in the international financial system.² That displaced a financial crisis into political systems by straining public finances and social protections in all EU member states, bringing some to the point of insolvency, and threatening the survival of the EU's single currency, perhaps even of the Union itself.

Whilst, however, the EU has experienced serial crises, it remains to be investigated whether it has experienced a legitimacy crisis. As Jürgen Habermas originally defined the term, the Union would only be in 'legitimacy crisis' in so far as crises originating in other systems make it hard for the EU to satisfy all the conditions needed for its own legitimacy simultaneously.³ Yet, we lack the knowledge, concepts, theories and methods needed to investigate scientifically just how far, if at all, the Union's ability to make rightful or justified use of political power is in some way unequal to crises it has to manage. The problem is that the existing literature mainly developed from an analysis of legitimacy crises *within* states. That, though, may not help us identify the character, causes and consequences of legitimacy crises where political power is exercised from *beyond* the state by bodies like the EU. Neither problems nor solutions to legitimacy crises are likely to be the same where the political order is not itself a state. Rather, the EU is a multi-state, non-state political system that seeks to solve problems from beyond the state, and in a manner that even transforms the very nature of political authority within the state itself.⁴

Indeed, legitimacy crises will almost certainly be fundamentally different in the EU, rather

² European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the EP and the Council, A Roadmap towards Banking Union*, 2012.

³ J. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, Beacon Press, 1975.

⁴ D. Beetham & C. Lord, *Legitimacy and the European Union*, Longman, 1998; J.H.H. Weiler, *The Constitution of Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1999; E.O. Eriksen, *The Unfinished Democratization of Europe*, Oxford University Press, 2009; J.E. Fossum & A.J. Menéndez, *The Constitution's Gift*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2011; C. Bickerton, *European Integration*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

than in single states. Here is why: only the EU, and not its component states, can suffer from the predicament that democracy beyond the state may be both necessary and impossible.⁵ Consider first why some element of democracy beyond the state may be needed. The Union makes laws, and, in societies that assume citizens are free and equal, individuals must have democratic control of their own laws, if citizens are, indeed, to be free and equal.⁶ Yet it is likely to be difficult for the EU to practise democracy beyond the state. A long and demanding set of conditions may be needed for democracy to work well, including: (a) freedoms and rights; (b) a form of political competition that offers voters choices relevant to the control of the political system; (c) a civil society in which all groups have equal opportunity to organise to influence the polity; (d) a public sphere in which all opinions have equal access to public debate, and (e) a defined *demos*, or, at least agreement on who should have votes and voice in the making of decisions binding on all. Achieving all these conditions simultaneously may be hard for a body such as the EU that operates from beyond the state and is not, therefore, itself a state. The capacity of the state to concentrate power, resources and legal enforcement has been useful in all kinds of ways to democracy: in ensuring that the decisions of democratic majorities are carried out; in guaranteeing rights needed for democracy; in drawing the boundaries of defined political communities; and in motivating voters and elites to participate in democratic competition for the control of an entity which manifestly affects their needs and values.

If, then, it is difficult to make the EU democratic because it is not itself a state, it might seem better to secure its democratic control through the democratic institutions of its member states. But, that may not solve legitimacy crises either. Remember legitimacy crises occur where problems are displaced into and between political systems in ways that make it hard for those political systems to satisfy all the conditions needed for their own legitimacy. Yet, if any one national democracy has an interest in imposing harms on its neighbours or in free-riding on the efforts of others to maintain economic, ecological or security systems, then its own electorate and parliament may also have an interest in behaving in those ways. If legitimacy crises arise where political systems lack the legitimacy needed to deal with problems originating in other systems, states can, under contemporary conditions of interdependence, even aggravate the problem. Interdependence increases their ability to impose negative externalities on other states and decreases their ability to provide their own citizens with key positive externalities or public goods.⁷

2. Research design

In sum, the existing literature has developed from an analysis of legitimacy crises within states. Yet, the European Union is not a state. PLATO will respond to that difficulty by building a theory of legitimacy crisis that is specific to the European Union. It will follow the well-established research strategy of building new theory through multiple, connected case studies. To cover the variations that may need to be taken into account in constructing a theory of legitimacy crisis specific to the European Union, some of PLATO's case studies will

⁵ C. Offe, 'Europe Entrapped', *European Law Journal* 19(5), 2013.

⁶ J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, 1993; J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, MIT Press, 1996.

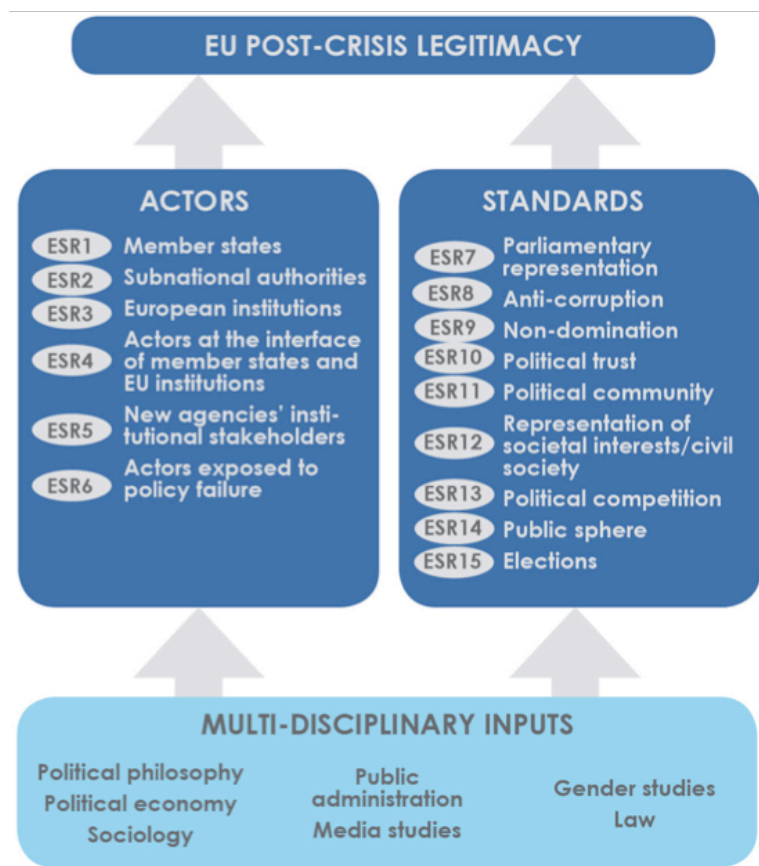
⁷ S. Collignon, *The European Republic, Reflection on the Political Economy of a Future Constitution*, The Federal Trust, 2003.

investigate different actors with whom the Union needs to be legitimate. Other PLATO case studies will investigate different standards by which the Union may need to be legitimate.

Distinguishing different actors is essential, since the Union needs to be legitimate with both member states and citizens. Even before citizens are called upon to comply with EU laws, member states need to be convinced those laws are sufficiently legitimate to oblige them to enforce them on their own citizens.⁸

Six PLATO cases will **test the legitimacy of the Union's crisis responses with member states and other implementing authorities**. ESR1 tests how far member states accept the legitimacy of crisis responses that imply greater EU involvement with core state powers of taxing, borrowing and spending; ESR2 tests the legitimacy of the Union's crisis responses with sub-national implementing authorities; ESR3 tests how far the Union's legitimacy of the Union's crisis responses has been 'horizontally' contested through inter-institutional disagreements at European level; ESR4 tests how far they have been 'vertically' contested within interface mechanisms between the EU and its member states; ESR5 then combines both horizontal and vertical axes by testing how far new agencies introduced in response to the crisis are accepted as legitimate by all their institutional stakeholders; ESR6 tests whether greater contestation and disagreement has had knock-on effects to agree policy.

However, the need for the EU to be legitimate with member states hardly removes the need for it to be legitimate with citizens too.⁹ The origin of EU laws in EU institutions is often visible to citizens. Above all, EU laws need to be legitimate with **citizens** themselves if we assume that citizens ultimately need to be able to control all their own laws as equals in societies that assume individuals are, indeed, free and equal. Hence, PLATO uses nine further cases to **test how far the Union's crisis responses meet standards of democratic legitimacy**. These cover parliamentary representation (ESR7); anti-corruption (ESR8); non-domination (ESR9); political trust (ESR10); identities (ESR11); civil society (ESR12); acceptance of political competition (ESR13); contestation in the public sphere (ESR14) and elections (ESR15).



⁸ F. Scharpf, 'Legitimacy in the Multilevel European Polity', *European Political Science Review*, 1(2), 2009.

⁹ J.-M. Ferry, *La Question de l'État Européen*, Gallimard, 2000.

3. Project descriptions

ESR1: Legitimacy crisis and core state powers (Berlin Graduate School of Transnational Studies). It is sometimes argued that how far the EU needs to be legitimate with citizens and member states depends on how far it can confine itself to cooperating in relatively unpoliticised matters that are considered to be at the margins, rather than at the core, of state powers. This research will use **process-tracing** methods to analyse how far responses to the crisis – such as the European Semester – have increased the Union's involvement in core state powers to determine levels of taxation, spending and borrowing. It will go well beyond other research in this area by devising tests of how far the legitimacy of these responses has then been accepted or contested across the different components of national political actors or mass publics. Possible primary discipline: *Political science*; Secondary discipline: *Law, political economy, public administration*.

ESR2: The legitimacy of multi-level orders (Twente Graduate School). The legitimacy of the EU partly depends on its capacity to solve urgent social and economic problems (output legitimacy). Yet, legislation needed to achieve this objective is shaped in a distinctive multi-level governance setting in which rules and norms that are created in one political arena have to be accepted in another. In matters of trade, health, the environment or migration, many EU regulations originate in global institutions. In the end, however, they are often implemented by local authorities. While transnational developments have created new needs to agree on standards at the global and EU level, processes of globalisation and Europeanisation have intensified forms of contestation at sub-national and local levels. The current legitimacy crisis related to global and EU decisions (e.g. in relation to new trade and investment agreements, or the refugee crisis) can partly be explained by the inability of policy makers to link legitimacy at different levels of decision-making. This research will investigate the acceptance of the multilevel regulatory order in Europe. It will investigate the problem 'bottom up' to assess variation in how far post-national rule-making is legitimate from the point of view of sub-national authorities which have to implement and even enforce those rules. It will develop indicators of that variation, such as differences in the extent to which sub-national authorities deem post-national rules to be justified, the extent to which they implement those rules in practice, whether they are able to contest or complain about those rules or ask for accounts to be given for them, and in which ways they are consulted and able to shape the policy agenda associated with those rules. Possible primary discipline: *Law*; Secondary discipline: *Political science*.

ESR3: Legitimacy crisis and inter-institutional conflict (SciencesPo). Legitimacy crises often arise where all those who are needed to agree responses to a crisis are unable to agree on the legitimacy of those responses. The EU can, therefore, be expected to experience legitimacy crises in the form of inter-institutional disagreements. On the one hand, the Union is a compound political order in which different actors and institutions need to use their powers together if they are to use their powers at all. On the other hand there is potential for disagreement on questions of legitimacy precisely because those different institutions often claim to represent different principles of democratic legitimacy and different ways of organising it. This research will use **process-tracing** methods to investigate whether the effectiveness of the Union's responses to the financial crisis was, indeed, limited by inter-institutional disagreements on questions of legitimacy. It will construct case studies of how the Union responded to the financial crisis through the creation of bailout funds, the European semester and banking union. Each case study will identify: (a) the options

considered at each stage of each of those decisions; (b) the disagreements they provoked within and between institutions; and (c) how far options were limited or excluded altogether as a result of disagreements about their legitimacy. What also needs to be researched is the role played by the EU in influencing, shaping and monitoring national countries' reactions to the crisis, especially within the European Semester procedure. Some claim that the EU got a stronger and more coercive role in its capacity to influence national reforms (especially reforms of labour market and the welfare state) and this should be documented through empirical and precise process-tracing studies linking the chain of influence between EU recommendation/procedures and national action plans and reforms, especially with the welfare-state field. Possible primary discipline: *Political science*; Secondary discipline: *Sociology*.

ESR4: Legitimacy crisis and interface mechanisms between the EU and member states (Berlin Graduate School of Transnational Studies). Since member state governments need to accept that EU policies are legitimate enough to oblige them to enforce those measures, 'interface' mechanisms have developed between the EU and its member states. These include Comitology, agencies, networks, the Council Presidency as well as legal principles and techniques such as subsidiarity. If the financial crisis has caused disagreements that have, in turn, diminished the effectiveness and legitimacy of the Union's responses to the crisis, we would expect to find evidence of that within the interface mechanisms. This research will test that possibility by selecting case studies of different policy responses to the crisis and by using **process-tracing** methods to analyse: (a) how far the legitimacy of crisis responses has been contested in different interface mechanisms; and (b) how far that has, in turn, limited the capacity of the EU to agree those crisis responses. Possible primary discipline: *Political science*; Secondary discipline: *Law (for an investigation of courts), public administration (for an investigation of agencies, Comitology, etc.)*.

ESR5: Legitimacy crisis and the delegation of powers (Antwerp Centre for Institutions and Multilevel Politics). This project will investigate institutional choice in the wake of the financial crisis. In particular, it will seek to explain different forms of delegation to the Union and how far they are legitimate with different institutional stakeholders. It will cover several new delegations of power to the European Banking Authority, the European Central Bank, the European Commission and authorities created through new intergovernmental treaties. It will identify and seek to explain this variety of different forms of delegation of powers that have been made in extending fiscal coordination through the Six-pack and in conferring new responsibilities on the Union for supervising the stability of the European financial system through banking union. By employing **process-tracing methods** it will use publicly available documents and interviews with key decision makers to identify the preferences, interests and compromises involved in making those delegations of power. Possible primary discipline: *Political science*; Secondary discipline: *Political economy*.

ESR6: Legitimacy crisis and policy failure (ARENA Centre for European Studies, Oslo). The legitimacy crisis literature argues that political orders can be caught in a downward spiral of declining effectiveness and declining legitimacy where they assume responsibilities for managing other systems that exceed their ability to generate the legitimacy needed to discharge those responsibilities. Have problems originating in the financial system created legitimacy difficulties for the EU, which have, in turn, limited its ability to reform its Carbon Trading scheme to manage ecological problems? This research

will: (a) identify options the European Commission has considered to reform the Carbon Trading scheme; (b) frame hypotheses that test whether there is any link between the financial crisis, legitimacy indicators and difficulties reforming the Carbon Trading scheme; and (c) test those hypotheses through **process-tracing techniques**, including analysis of official documents and interviews with key decisions in EU institutions and member states. Possible primary discipline: *Political science*; Secondary discipline: *Public administration*.

ESR7: Legitimacy crisis and parliamentary representation (Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna). Since legitimacy crises occur where political orders struggle to respond to crises in ways that also maintain core standards of legitimacy, the European semester is a key test of whether the financial crisis has also occasioned a legitimacy crisis in the EU. Given its role in ensuring consistency between large areas of economic policy – including taxation, spending and borrowing – the semester is critical to the Union's response to the crisis. Yet, the Semester alters one of the main procedures by which publics scrutinise and control their own governments: namely, decisions on annual budgets. This research will investigate how far parliaments have adapted to the Semester in ways that meet standards of public control. It will develop indicators of parliamentary scrutiny of decisions, and of the role of parliaments in securing justifications for decisions and communicating choices to the public. It will use those indicators to assess the role of the European Parliament and selected national parliaments in the semester, as well as inter-parliamentary co-operation such as 'Article 13' Conferences. It will use **media content analysis** to assess the salience and impact of parliamentary scrutiny of the semester in public debate, and **focus groups** to assess the quality of parliamentary communication to the public on the semester. Possible primary discipline: *Political science*; Secondary discipline: *Media studies*.

ESR8: Legitimacy crisis and anti-corruption (Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague). EU institutions may be seen as legitimate in so far as they provide external support for rule of law standards in individual states. The rule-of-law can, in turn, be understood as the opposite of arbitrariness and of decisions that are based on the corrupt favouring of individuals, rather than rules and standards that apply to all. Corruption has adverse effects across numerous areas of public policy. In so far as the crisis was caused by the influence of private finance over the political system and the financing of political parties, responses to the crisis may depend on adoption and especially implementation of effective and legitimate anti-corruption policies. The EU has incorporated anti-corruption measures into the European semester and banking union. Yet, even where they are similar in design, the implementation and in particular the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures is likely to vary across member states. The causes of corruption can be local – focusing on structural issues and/or behaviour of political actors (costs of implementation), however much their effects spill across fiscal and financial systems. This research will employ **mixed methods approach** (qualitative and quantitative methods, including among others in-depth interviews with political actors, anti-corruption agencies, ombudsmen and NGOs) to investigate: (a) what changes to their anti-corruption policies and standards countries have made in response to the crisis; (b) how far those changes have been coordinated, encouraged or required by the EU; (c) the extent to which citizens perceive these changes as effective, legitimate and driven by domestic/European efforts. Possible primary discipline: *Political science, sociology*; Secondary discipline: *Public policy*.

ESR9: Legitimacy crisis and democratic state failure (ARENA Centre for European Studies, Oslo). It is often argued that democracy was partially suspended in some member states during the crisis: that the terms of bailouts (Greece, Ireland and

Portugal) amounted to ‘economic guardianship’, whilst some crisis measures were enacted by unelected/technocratic governments (Greece & Italy). This research will use democratic theory to evaluate the legitimacy of the adjustments that the Union required of member states during the crisis. It will use **focus groups** in at least three countries to test how far citizens believe the Union has been justified in seeking changes to the economic and social policies of member states. Possible primary discipline: *Political philosophy/political theory*; Secondary discipline: *Political economy*.

ESR10: Legitimacy crisis and political trust (Twente Graduate School). Political trust is a basic indicator of legitimacy. It provides a stable sense of confidence amongst citizens that political institutions and political interactions will conform to normative standards. Traditionally, the nation state was the natural frame for citizens’ political identification and for developing their political orientations. Yet, the ‘hollowing out of the nation state’ – through an upward shift of competences to the supranational level and a downward shift of competences to the regional and local tiers of government – may have changed the public’s understanding of the relative contributions the nation state and other tiers of government to the legitimacy of political order. This research will investigate how vertical shifts in governance over time and cross-national differences in the distribution of competences over tiers of government, may affect political trust in different levels of governance. By using **survey evidence** to compare variations in trust in EU institutions and in other levels of government, the project will analyse: (a) how far political trust in the EU’s political institutions is related to cross-national or over-time differences in vertical distributions of power; and (b) to what extent this relation is affected by variations in economic conditions (times of crisis). Possible primary discipline: *Political science*; Secondary discipline: *Sociology*.

ESR11: Legitimacy crisis and identity (Institute for European Studies, Krakow). Although there are many ways of identifying with a political system, some sense of political obligation is a condition for legitimacy. Some forms of identity – maybe those that are more cosmopolitan, more multi-level or just less exclusive -are likely to be more compatible than others with a sense of political obligation to a transnational political order such as the EU. This PhD will identify ways of distinguishing different forms of identity and of investigating whether some are more compatible than others with the legitimacy of European political order. It will then identify ways of testing whether identities supportive of the legitimacy of European political order have been strengthened or weakened by the crisis. It will select country case studies that are likely to test variation in how identities supportive of the European political order may have been affected by the crisis, and then use **focus groups** and **media content analysis** to test that variation. Possible primary discipline: *Political science*; Secondary discipline: *Cultural studies*.

ESR12: Legitimacy crisis and societal interests (Antwerp Centre for Institutions and Multilevel Politics). The EU responded to the financial crisis by adopting new regulations; by creating new agencies to regulate financial markets; and by establishing a Banking Union. These institutional changes provide an unusual opportunity to test whether the European political system can manage a severe crisis in a legitimate way. For this purpose, the project will identify new regulations in the area of economic governance introduced in response to the financial crisis. It will then identify the venues and agencies competent for enforcing these regulations. More specifically, we aim to analyse and evaluate the legal arrangements and procedures that require those agencies to consult societal interests as well as the *de facto* practice of stakeholder involvement and consultations. The project will use a detailed mapping of various consultation rounds, elite **surveys** and expert

interviews to test and explain variation in how far societal interests are effectively heard by newly established agencies and the preparedness of those societal interests to accept the enforcement of new powers and regulations introduced in response to the crisis as legitimate. Possible primary discipline: *Political science*; Secondary discipline: *Public policy*.

ESR13: Legitimacy crisis and anti-politics (Department of Politics and International Studies, Cambridge). One important test of the legitimacy of any political order is whether it meets its own standards. The Lisbon Treaty claims that the Union is based on standards of representative democracy. However, the credibility of this claim rests on an understanding of representative democracy in which competitions between political parties for the people's vote – in European elections and in national elections – can directly and indirectly give EU institutions a legitimate right to make decisions binding on all. Yet two contrasting trends in contemporary European politics – technocracy and populism – question how far a standard understanding of representation based on competition and compromise between political parties confers legitimacy at all. For defenders of technocracy, political competition cannot confer legitimacy where it produces wrong or inexpert decisions. For populists, political competition between political parties is a disguised form of elitism. This research will use an analysis of: (a) the discourse of EU institutions such as the European Commission and the European Central Bank; (b) the content of **media debate**; and (c) the content of political speeches and related political literature to investigate how far the Union's responses to the crises have been contested on technocratic or populist grounds. It will then devise hypotheses to test how far variation in the relative frequency of populist or technocratic forms of contestation can be attributed to the financial crisis or to alternative mid-term and long-term explanations. Possible primary discipline: *Political science*; Secondary discipline: *Sociology (on populism), public administration (on technocracy)*.

ESR14: Legitimacy crisis and the public sphere (ARENA Centre for European Studies, Oslo). Media debates form a core component of the public sphere in contemporary democracies. State-of-the-art methods of studying **media debates** thus provide a good way of investigating how far and in what ways the legitimacy of European political order really has become more contested as a result of the crisis. This research will develop a detailed coding scheme for identifying different ways in which the EU is contested in the media, and for distinguishing where and how that contestation questions the legitimacy of the EU itself. The research will then propose tests of variation in those forms of contestation over time, actors and issues that, in turn indicate whether the legitimacy of the Union has become more contested as a result of the crisis; and with whom and in what ways. The research will finally formulate more fine-grained tests of whether particular aspects of the crisis or of responses to it have done more than others to call the legitimacy of the Union into question. Possible primary discipline: *Sociology of the media*; Secondary discipline: *Political science*.

ESR15: Legitimacy crisis and European elections (Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna). It has long been argued that European elections are mainly contested on national issues and, therefore, have little to do with the EU. If, however, the financial crisis has created legitimacy problems for the EU we might expect the policies and institutions of the Union itself to have become more contested in European elections. This research will investigate this possibility through a mixed methods analysis of quantitative data from the 2014 election **survey** and quantitative/qualitative **content analysis of media coverage** of European elections. The election survey will provide data on the relative salience of European and national issues. The media content analysis will provide further evidence of how far any change in the salience of EU issues can be attributed to increased contestation of

Union policies and questioning of its legitimacy. Together the two data sources will be used to test the hypothesis that the financial crisis may even have had the paradoxical effect of democratising the EU. Evidence that the financial crisis has encouraged greater public debate in European elections on EU issues voter will be taken as supporting that hypothesis. Evidence that the financial crisis has only encouraged voter participation and media debate based on outright rejection of the Union polity as democratically legitimate will be taken as refuting it. Possible primary discipline: *Political science*; Secondary discipline: *Sociology, political (democratic) theory*.

4. Methods

From the kick-off conference (October 2017), the PLATO network will work together to develop standards to evaluate the legitimacy of the Union's responses to the financial crisis. As with any process of theory building, PLATO will start off with provisional standards that are then confirmed, elaborated or abandoned as the research proceeds. Different projects will contribute to that process in different ways. As explained in the project descriptions, some projects call for normative analysis of the difficulties of applying standards under difficult conditions, and of what that may, in turn, mean for the standards themselves. Most of the case studies, however, call for more empirical assessments of how different actors themselves understand the Union's responses to crisis as legitimate. **Attitudinal methods** – surveys, focus groups, content analysis of media debates, official documents, parliamentary debates and party programmes – will test actors' stated opinions of EU legitimacy. **Behavioural methods** – including process-tracing – will test how far actors behave in ways that imply the Union's crisis responses are legitimate. The detailed project descriptions anticipate which of these methods are most likely to be used in each case study.

5. Multi-disciplinarity

PLATO's research requires multi-disciplinary understanding of how different systems – political, economic, social, legal and ecological – can interact to produce problems that challenge the legitimacy of political systems within and beyond the state. PLATO's research also requires methods that can identify all the normative and empirical components of legitimacy.

PLATO will achieve that multi-disciplinarity at the level of the network as a whole. Hence, applicants with a strong background in one discipline are most welcome to apply. If, on the other hand, applicants have degrees in different disciplines, they are encouraged to indicate in their proposals how they might use their different disciplinary skills to research one the projects. To help guide applicants each project indicates a primary discipline that is most suited to it, and secondary disciplines that could plausibly add further insight.