

Max Planck Institute for Social Law and Social Policy

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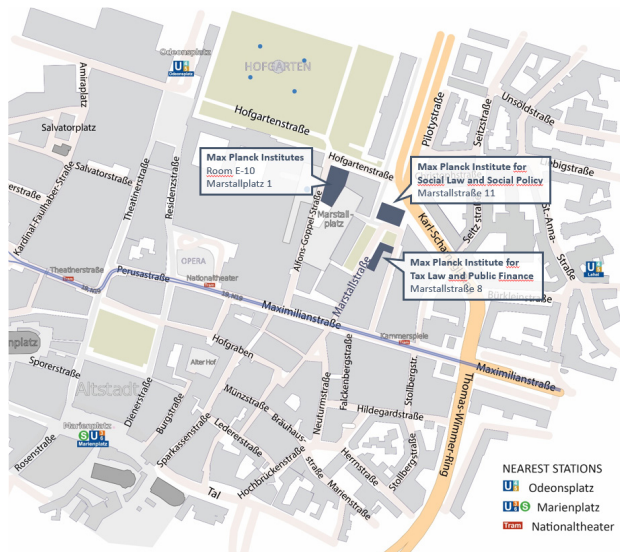
MPI for Social Law
and Social Policy
Marstallstr. 11
80539 Munich
www.mpsoc.mpg.de

MPI für Tax Law and
Public Finance
Marstallplatz 1
80539 Munich
www.tax.mpg.de

Contact Persons

Dr. Julia Hagn
Science Communication
Phone (089) 38602-428
Fax (089) 38602-590
presse@mpsoc.mpg.de

Gabriele Auer
Assistance
Phone (089) 24246-5417
Fax (089) 24246-524
gabriele.auer@tax.mpg.de



Max Planck Institute for Tax Law and Public Finance

Max Planck Hub Fiscal and Social State

Democracy and Power in the New Activist European Union

Prof. Floris de Witte

London School of Economics and
Political Science (LSE)



11 March 2025, 6:15 p.m.

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For the purpose of hosting the event, the processing of your personal data is necessary. With your registration you agree to this. The consent can be revoked at any time by email to Datenschutz.TL@tax.mpg.de.

The Topic

The new activist EU is usually presented as a consequence of relatively recent exogenous pressures exerted on the integration project – which push it to be more resilient, more independent, and more strategic. There is, however, a longer story to be told, of the EU gradually strengthening and making more sophisticated its centre. This story is one that focuses on state-building and system closure and comprises not just the more activist economic forms of governance, but also the articulation of values, the centralisation of institutional and regulatory power, and the production of narrative strategies revolving around Europe’s sovereignty. Combined, these three processes have equipped the EU for much more direct forms of rule, which no longer are mediated by domestic infrastructures and institutions. The emergence of this ‘new’ European Union that rules much more directly has implications for how its political authority is sourced and re-produced.

In this talk, I will look at the way in which the EU’s direct rule depends on different forms of authority, distinguishing between ‘coercion’, ‘capital’ and ‘commitment’. It will be argued that while the EU’s reliance on coercive and financial instruments has grown, its institutional ability to produce or be receptive to democratic commitment has not. For the EU to be able to move from a compliance structure that depends on coercion and capital to one that is more solidly rooted in commitment and produces democratic forms of authority, the challenge is to integrate trust networks within the EU apparatus, which presupposes radical reforms to the EU’s legal and political structures. The sheer radicalness – and thereby implausibility – of such reforms suggests that the EU’s direction of travel is towards authoritarian rather than democratic forms of rule.

About the Speaker

Floris de Witte is Professor at LSE Law School and an affiliated member of the LSE European Institute. His research focuses on EU law in its broadest sense, ranging from constitutional law and internal market law to interdisciplinary approaches to EU law such as legal geography. Prof. De Witte is currently writing a monograph entitled ‘The Reality of EU Law: Time and Space in European Integration’ (CUP 2026) in which he tries to make sense of the lived experience and contestation of EU law. Moreover, he is on the editorial board of *European Law Open* and the *German Law Journal*.



About the Lecture Series

The lecture series on the ‘Future of the Fiscal State and the Social State in the European Union’ has been set up in order to address major issues of the future framework of the European Union dealing with taxation, social security, fiscal transfers, multi-level fiscal and social governance and the concept of solidarity within Europe. This involves both the division of labour between the Member States and the European Union as well as the interaction between the different European Institutions and their inner workings.

11 March 2025 at 6:15 p.m.

Room E 10, Marstallplatz 1, 80539 Munich

Lecture language: English

Please register by 9 March @ events@mpisoc.mpg.de