

DN34: Discourse, Identity and Polarisation

Vilnius University, Lithuania

November 10–12, 2026

The **DN34 International Conference on Discourse, Identity and Polarisation** will be held
10–12 November 2026 at **Vilnius University** and online

The call for papers and panel proposals is open until **May 15th 2026**

This hybrid conference provides an interdisciplinary space for examining how individual and group identities are discursively constructed in today's increasingly polarised societies, and how discourse both reflects and shapes emerging social divisions. Although identity construction has long been central to discourse analysis, this conference places the interrelation between **identity, subjectivity and polarisation** at the forefront. In a context of political, cultural and epistemic fragmentation, identity is not only performed but also continually renegotiated through discourse.

We therefore invite contributions that explore how discursive practices contribute to the **reproduction, negotiation or mitigation of social divides**, and how **identities emerge** through processes of positioning, contestation and boundary-making.

Across global public spheres, **ongoing debates** around issues such as migration, climate change, social security, AI governance and geopolitical tensions have become **sharply polarised**. These debates not only construct conflict but also actively participate in defining hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects. Following Mouffe (1999, 2005, 2013), **antagonism** can be understood as a discursively constructed relation that shapes subjectivities and organises the social through competing visions of the common good. From a Foucauldian (1966/2005) perspective, these struggles are embedded within broader epistemes of historically specific formations of knowledge that delimit what can be said, thought and legitimised. **Polarisation** is therefore not merely an empirical phenomenon but part of a power/knowledge configuration that governs how social problems are framed, which subjects are authorised to speak, and which interpretations gain dominance. DN34 thus aims to problematise the very notion of polarisation, asking **how it is defined, invoked and contested** across disciplines, and what **consequences** these discourses have for identity, hegemony and social cohesion. The rise of right-wing populisms has intensified these dynamics, recontextualising polarisation as a form of antagonism (Mouffe, 1999) and further deepening social divisions (Kryżanowski, 2020; Mudde, 2022; Porto & Romano, 2025).

Building on this understanding of polarisation as a discursive process, research on discourse, identity and subjectivity further highlights how **linguistic choices** shape the ways individuals position themselves and others within specific **socio-cultural contexts** (Bös et al., 2018; Huang & Holmgreen, 2020; Morales-López & Floyd, 2017). These contexts, in turn, influence the social production of meaning (Angermuller, 2014) and interpretation of discourse (Frank, 2008), making discourse and context mutually constitutive. This dynamic interaction reveals how agency, legitimacy, power and polarisation materialise in communicative practices (Bamberg et al., 2011; Bucholtz & Hall, 2010). Polarisation, often realised as the discursive **opposition between “Us” and “Them”** (Van Leeuwen, 2008; Koller, 2012), thus provides an empirical tool for examining how social groups construct themselves and others (Van Dijk, 1998; Wodak, 2011, 2021) and connects directly back to the antagonistic configurations described above.

In this context, the conference invites **scholars at all career stages** from across the transdisciplinary field of **Critical Discourse Studies** to explore how social divisions, subjectivities and identities are discursively shaped, contested and transformed. Contributions may engage with, but are not limited to, the following **themes**:

- **Discourse and identity in times of polarisation:** How are individual and group identities discursively constructed in contexts of social division or conflict?
- **Identity, polarisation and socio-cultural situatedness:** How do specific socio-cultural settings shape the discursive construction of identity and polarisation?
- **Discursive strategies of identity and polarisation:** Which linguistic and/or multimodal strategies enhance, negotiate or challenge polarisation?
- **Affect, identity and polarisation:** What emotional registers are salient in discourses of identity and polarisation? How do affect and emotion shape subjectivities and social divisions?
- **Topical constructions of identity:** Which issues or policy areas become focal points for the discursive construction of identities and divisions?
- **Genres, media and polarisation:** How do different discourse genres shape identity and polarisation?
- **Nationalism, populism and identity politics:** How do populist and identity-based discourses contribute to polarisation, hegemony and counter-hegemony?
- **Discourse, identity and intersectionality:** How do dimensions such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality and ideology interact in the discursive construction of identity in polarised worlds?
- **Digital identities and online communities:** How are identities constructed in digital spaces, and what role do online communities play in spreading or contesting polarisation?
- **Historical and diachronic perspectives:** What can historical developments teach us about the evolving relationships between discourse, identity and polarisation?
- **Theoretical and methodological challenges:** Which theoretical frameworks and methods are most suitable for analysing discourse, identity and polarisation?

This conference aligns with the **EU-funded DARE project**, which supports the event and investigates how polarisation and identities surrounding the abortion debate are constructed in European mainstream news media.

Abstract submission and presentation guidelines

- Abstracts should be **250 - 400 words (including references)** and **anonymous**
- Use **APA 7th** edition style for references and include up to **five keywords**
- The language of the conference is **English**
- Please indicate your tentative **participation mode** (online or offline). This selection may be updated before the final registration update
- **Full panel proposals:** Panels with three to five presentations with a panel chair are welcome. Please submit the abstract of the panel and paper abstracts separately, making sure you indicate the panel title in each submission
- **Presentations** should be **20 minutes** long, followed by a 5-minute discussion (and 5 minutes to change rooms)
- Submit your abstracts via **the conference submission platform:**
<https://www.dare.flf.vu.lt/registration>

IMPORTANT DATES	
Abstract and panel submission deadline	May 15 th 2026
Notification of acceptance	June 30 th 2026
Registration deadline	September 1 st 2026
Conference dates	November 10 th - 12 th 2026

Fees & registration

Participants are required to hold an **active DiscourseNet membership**. No registration fee apart from DN membership is required.

You can obtain a valid DN membership via [this link](#). More information can be found [here](#).

The cost of coffee breaks and opening reception will be covered by the organisation.

Venue

The conference will be a **hybrid** event, held in person at Vilnius University (Universiteto g. 5, 01122 Vilnius, Lithuania) and online through MS Teams.

Committees and organisation

The conference is hosted by Vilnius University, Lithuania, in collaboration with DiscourseNet – International Association for Discourse Studies and the [DARE](#) Horizon Europe project, funded by the European Commission.

- **Local Organising Committee** (VU): Silvia Peterssen and Liudmila Arcimavičienė (chairs); Jurga Cibulskienė, Lina Inčiuraitė-Noreikienė, Lina Marčiulionytė, Virginija Masiulionytė and Irena Snukiškienė (organising team)
- **International Organising Committee**: Thomas Jacobs (UCLouvain) and Benno Herzog (University of Valencia)
- **Scientific Committee**: Isabel Alonso (Autonomous University of Madrid), Ieva Bisigirkaitė (VU), Aurora Fragonara (University of Picardy-Jules Verne), Michael Kranert (University of Southampton), Jens Maesse (University of Giessen), Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak (University of Łódź), Leandro Paolicchi (Mar del Plata University), Dolores Porto (University of Alcalá), Manuela Romano (Autonomous University of Madrid), Anna Ruskan (VU), Inesa Šeškauskienė (VU), Jolanta Šinkūnienė (VU), Audronė Šolienė (VU), Orlagh Woods (VU)

Keynotes

Ruth Breeze (University of Navarra)

Veronika Koller (Lancaster University)

Augusto Soares da Silva (Catholic University of Portugal)

Jan Zienkowski (Université Libre de Bruxelles)

Publication opportunities

Selected contributions may be considered for publication in an edited volume, to be tentatively published in the DiscourseNet Collaborative Working Paper series and the book series of Postdisciplinary Studies in Discourse.

Contact

For questions, please contact the organising team at: dare@flf.vu.lt

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