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in re:trospect

re:constitution

Fellowships 2022/2023

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Preface

Issues of democracy and the rule of law were more omnipresent than ever in the years 2022/2023, especially in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. Whether in the case of the admission of refugees, arms deliveries, seeking proper compensation for war damage caused by the Russian Federation, or the redefinition of international relations, the law served as a regulatory instrument. However, this regulation also limited addressing and resolving these pressing concerns. Despite Europe's dense normative network, uniform answers to these acute questions remained elusive, indicating the complexity and challenge of finding comprehensive solutions.

Against this backdrop, the re:constitution project successfully continued to establish a Europe-wide platform for meaningful discussions, uniting early career academics and practitioners to address these evocative issues. A highlight of this was the kick-off meeting in the form of the conference *Distance and Convergence*, which took place in Berlin in September 2022. Alongside lectures and panels, an intensive exchange took place at the "Democracy and the Rule of Law Marketplace", where different projects, programmes, and centres could present their work. The keynote by Koen Lenaerts, President of the Court of Justice of the European Union, made clear that the rule of law crisis in individual European Union Member States poses challenges for the EU as a whole and how difficult it is to overcome the rifts that have opened in recent years.



The second meeting of the Fellows took place online in February 2023. It was more inward than outward looking and addressed the question of ‘scholactivism’—that is, the role of (academic) research in European societies. The third meeting in Leuven and Brussels in June 2023, titled “Fundamental Rights in the EU: Taking Stock”, enabled us, at least in part, to continue the discussions started in Berlin.

The hallmarks of the re:constitution programme, however, are not only the fascinating conferences and meetings, but above all the research achievements of the Fellows. These are presented in detail in this issue. We hope you enjoy reading it.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Nufberger', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Angelika Nufberger

What is it all about?

The rule of law guarantees respect for fundamental values such as freedom, equality, and democracy in the European Union. Considering the ongoing multidimensional crises in Europe, it is essential to preserve and strengthen these values. This is the context in which re:constitution operates.

How can a research network and programme about the rule of law and democracy in Europe at the interface of science and practice make a difference?

As a joint programme of the Forum Transregionale Studien and Democracy Reporting International (DRI), re:constitution combines academic research with practical and quickly accessible analysis in a variety of ways. The platform that re:constitution provides for its stakeholders can give rise to valuable, solution-oriented contributions towards preserving rule of law structures and democratic processes in Europe.

Starting in 2023, re:constitution has continued into a second project phase that directly followed the first phase (2019–2022). This continuation is made possible by new funding from Stiftung Mercator. The exchange between academics and practitioners across Europe remains at the centre of the programme's activities, as cross-border and cross-disciplinary exchange is more important than ever in view of multilateral challenges in and around Europe.

Three modules comprise re:constitution 2.0:

1. the re:constitution Fellowships,
2. the re:constitution Alumni Network,
3. and the re:constitution Analysis & Outreach (managed by DRI).

One of the core elements of the programme is the promotion of pan-European mobility for the Fellows with a new part-time mobility option now included besides the full-time mobility periods that Fellows usually undertake. This will make the Fellowships particularly interesting for practitioners who are only able to step back from professional commitments for a limited time.

The programme awards 15 Fellowships to academics and practitioners, and all **15 re:constitution Fellows** work with selected partners and host institutions on topics and projects of common interest during their mobility periods and publish their project outcomes via re:constitution.

After their time as Fellows, participants can join the **re:constitution Alumni Network** of scholars and practitioners who continue to work together towards upholding democracy and the rule of law in Europe. The programme enables its alumni to connect across borders, disciplines, and backgrounds long after re:constitution Fellowships end. These collaborations allow alumni to collectively shape debates about the ongoing challenges to democratic principles and rule of law backsliding and to contribute to developing solutions at the European level. In a co-creative process, a group of alumni from several re:constitution Fellow cohorts will develop a joint network strategy for sustainable work for the steadily growing group of alumni.

DRI is responsible for the third re:constitution module, **Analysis & Outreach**. Their current analyses of the rule of law in Europe in digital publication formats (including reports and infographics) promote a fact-based public debate and serve as an accessible source of information for journalists and political decision-makers. Fellows can become involved in the broader analytical work of the re:constitution programme run by DRI.

With the start of the second project phase, a newly convened Advisory Board of representatives from academia and practice will advise the programme on its content and strategic development. This includes stakeholders from the extended re:constitution network. The Advisory Board is chaired by Prof. Angelika Nußberger, Director of the Academy for European Human Rights Protection. The new members of the Advisory Board will also support the selection of Fellows and represent the programme in public.

Programme partners

Forum Transregionale Studien

The Forum Transregionale Studien promotes international cooperation between scholars of different expertise and perspectives on global issues. The Forum provides scope for exchange on questions of science policy, epistemology and ethics, and develops infrastructures and formats that allow transregional research ideas and projects to be tested, implemented and communicated. It appoints scholars from around the world as fellows and engages in joint research programs and initiatives with partners from universities and research institutions in and outside Berlin. The Forum is funded by the Berlin Senate Department for Higher Education and Research, Health and Long-Term Care.

Democracy Reporting International

Democracy Reporting International (DRI) is an independent organisation dedicated to promoting democracy worldwide. We believe that people are active participants in public life, not subjects of their governments. Our work centres on analysis, reporting, and capacity-building. For this, we are guided by the democratic and human rights obligations enshrined in international law. Headquartered in Berlin, DRI has offices in Lebanon, Libya, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tunisia and Ukraine.

Stiftung Mercator

Stiftung Mercator is a private, independent, and non-profit foundation that acts on the basis of scientific expertise and practical project experience. Since 1996, it has been advocating for a society based on solidarity and participation. To this end, it supports and develops projects that improve participation and cohesion in an increasingly diverse community. Stiftung Mercator stands up for a cosmopolitan, democratic Europe, a digital transformation of state and society based on fundamental rights, and socially just climate change mitigation. Stiftung Mercator pursues activities in Germany, Europe and worldwide. It has a particular affinity with the Ruhr region, the home of its founder's family and of the foundation's headquarters.

Meet the Team



Paul Zoubkov

As Programmes Manager, Paul leads on DRI's work across Europe and on digital democracy work worldwide. He has over two decades

of experience in anti-corruption, good governance and human rights, and has served as expert advisor to a range of multilateral institutions, development agencies and INGOs. Paul holds Bachelor's and a Master's degrees in Law, and a BA in Politics and Philosophy from the Victoria University, New Zealand.

"It has been wonderful to engage with the re:constitution Fellows, and to explore the insightful results of their work towards a more resilient rule of law in Europe. These are some of the brightest up-and-coming minds tackling complex legal questions with deep political and social impact. I look forward to their future contributions, including as part of the re:constitution alumni family, and their potential collaborations with DRI."



Jakub Jaraczewski

As Research Coordinator—Rule of Law, Jakub conducts research and analysis on the rule of law and human rights, working with

our Europe Team on the re:constitution—Exchange and Analysis on Democracy and the Rule of Law in Europe programme. Jakub has extensive experience in academia, as a researcher at the Adam Mickiewicz University and lectured at several other universities. He holds a Master's in law from Adam Mickiewicz University, where he is currently pursuing a PhD.

"The June 2023 meeting with the Fellows in Leuven was one of my favourites. With a small group of Fellows, tight discussions, and compact surroundings, it was a nice break from big cities and hustle. Similarly, the ideas discussed there were grounded and relevant, speaking to pressing needs to protect fundamental rights in Europe. re:con-

stitution Fellows are uniquely positioned to strengthen human rights on the continent."



Nino Tsereteli

As a Research Officer for the re:constitution project, Nino tackles the rule of law challenges in the EU, including issues related to the

independence of the judiciary and constitutional courts' confrontation with European Courts. Before joining DRI, Nino worked as a senior researcher for the Judicial Studies Institute at Masaryk University, a researcher at the University of Oslo, and Ilia State University. She also worked as a legal advisor at the Ministry of Justice of Georgia. Nino holds a Doctorate in Law from the University of Oslo and an LL.M. degree from Central European University and Leiden University.

"Reflecting on the past year, I am truly grateful for the numerous fantastic events and enriching exchanges with the Fellows. If I were to choose a favourite one, it would be the February session with DRI. The Fellows engaged in animated discussions about potential impactful collaboration between academics and civil society, addressing the opportunities that lie ahead as well as the challenges and limitations. Participating in the Fellows' presentation of their work in progress was equally rewarding, as it helped identify possible areas of cooperation. I am excited about several collaborations on the rule of law already in the pipeline."



Dennis Wenzl

As Outreach Officer, Dennis is responsible for designing and implementing DRI's outreach

strategies. He also monitors developments among relevant international institutions and actors. Before joining DRI, Dennis worked in communications and public policy in Brussels after completing a traineeship in the Democratic Governance Depart-

ment of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Dennis holds a Master's in Democracy Studies and a Bachelor's in political science and German Philology from the University of Regensburg.

"The political context in the European Union has evolved over the past year and re:constitution has adapted. The Fellows and Fellowship alumni are taking on a responsibility beyond their academic obligations and are establishing themselves as thought-leaders and discourse-shapers. While the trend of politicising the rule of law debate in Europe has reached new extremes and with European institutions distracted by homemade problems and external crises, European civil society is challenged more than ever to deliver solutions to counter rule of law backsliding. The re:constitution Fellows are keeping up with this challenge and offer fresh voices, research, and ideas on how to safeguard the rule of law and help conceptualise a vision of the future of European democracy."



Albert Guasch Rafael

As Communications Coordinator, Albert oversees DRI's communications and outreach efforts, guaranteeing a consistent message

and visibility across headquarters and country offices. Before joining DRI, he worked in communications at Club de Madrid and as a freelance journalist for outlets such as La Vanguardia, Euronews and Are We Europe. Albert holds a Master's in European Integration and a Bachelor's in journalism, both from the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

"The opportunity to collaborate with the brilliant researchers of the re:constitution project has been an incredibly fulfilling journey. I am glad to be contributing to a wider dissemination of their insights and ideas on complex rule of law issues that deeply impact our lives. With fresh takes and innovative approaches, the Fellows are best positioned to build greater

awareness and understanding of rule of law issues throughout Europe, among policymakers, civil society, and citizens alike."



Aysu Uygur

As Programme Officer, Aysu is responsible for project coordination, fundraising and monitoring and evaluation for the Europe

Team at DRI. Her previous experience includes working at the Berghof Foundation in Berlin, focusing on peacebuilding and democratisation, and rights-based reporting at the Association for Monitoring Equal Rights in Istanbul. Aysu holds an LL.M. in European and International Human Rights Law from Leiden University and an LL.B. from Istanbul Bilgi University.

"Joining the re:constitution team in 2023 has been a very exciting journey for me. I've been fortunate to connect with a remarkable group of Fellows, each with their unique perspectives and experiences. As we prepare to launch the alumni network, I can't help but feel a sense of excitement and gratitude. Working with these brilliant minds passionately addressing complex legal questions with real-life implications has been a truly inspiring experience. I eagerly look forward to what the future holds for this network."



Dorit Modersitzki

Dorit is the re:constitution Programme Coordinator. She oversees all aspects of programme management for the re:constitution

Fellowships and Alumni Network and the strategic development of the programme. In her work, she focuses on fostering international collaboration in networks. Before joining re:constitution, Dorit held various project management roles at universities including serving as International Strategy Officer at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. She holds a Master's in British Studies from Humboldt-Universität and studied

towards a Bachelor's degree in European Studies at the universities of Osnabrück, Germany and East Anglia, UK.

"I was thrilled to accompany our transition to re:constitution 2.0 this year and see the programme continue to thrive. It is now more vital than ever to connect academics and practitioners as Fellows in such a formative stage in their careers and support their research on democracy and the rule of law! Climbing the library tower in Leuven during our last Fellows' Exchange Meeting and seeing the bigger picture, I felt honoured and proud—not only of overcoming vertigo, but of being able to help them establish lasting connections around their shared interest in advancing the rule of law."



Celia Steffens

Celia has been a student assistant at re:constitution since August 2022. She is currently pursuing an MA in International Criminal Justice at the Philipps-University of Marburg, following a BA in European Studies from the University of Osnabrück. Celia's academic and professional journey has included stays in France, Greece, and Turkey. Her primary areas of interest revolve around strategic litigation, socio-legal studies, and human rights.

"The Alumni and Network Conference held in September 2022 truly stood out for me as a highlight. It was an event that I had been involved with since my very first day at the Berlin office, making my onboarding experience very exciting. I enjoyed the interactive events and connecting with various people at the Democracy and Rule of Law Marketplace!"



Julia Türtscher

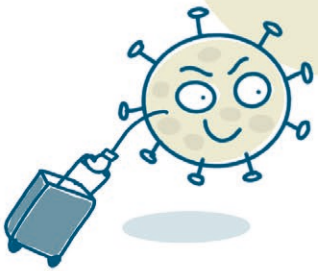
Julia is a programme associate for re:constitution. She is responsible for the communication with Fellows and the organisation of Fellows' Exchange Meetings. She also works on the re:constitution Working Paper series. She was previously involved in a popular education initiative in Toulouse, France, and worked at the Institute for European Studies at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). Julia holds an MA in Socio-Cultural Studies from the Viadrina University and a BA in Cultural Studies from Leuphana University in Lüneburg. Her interests include critical migration and border studies and relations between nature, nonhumans, and culture.

"Having joined re:constitution just after the conference in September 2022, a true highlight for me was to finally meet the Fellows in person at the third Fellows' Exchange Meeting in Leuven and Brussels. After months of virtual communication, I very much enjoyed getting to know them and seeing them exchange ideas and debate during those three days."

your FELLOWSHIP YEAR



MOBILITY PHASE I





Alumni and Network Conference

Distance and Convergence: re:constituting Democracy and the Rule of Law in Europe

8–9 September 2022, Berlin



- **Keynotes:**

Koen Lenaerts, President of the Court of Justice of the European Union: **Preserving Constitutional Structures: On the Rule of Law within the European Union**

Angelika Nußberger, Director of Academy for European Human Rights Protection: **Convergence is Key—The Importance of Cooperation between European Actors to Promote Democracy and the Rule of Law**



• **Debates & Parallel Interactive Sessions**

designed by Alumni & Partners



• **Democracy and Rule of Law Marketplace**

featuring

- Das progressive Zentrum
- Democracy Reporting International
- Review of Democracy
- European Implementation Network
- Stiftung Mercator
- European Partnership for Democracy
- Verfassungsblog
- Forum Transregionale Studien
- Good Lobby Profs
- Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law
- RARE—Recharging Advocacy for Rights in Europe, Hertie School
- RESILIO/Institut für Europäische Politik



- **Panel: The Implications of the War in Ukraine for the Institutional Structure and Values of the EU** with Christophe Hillion, Viktoriya Sereda, Susann Worschech (on-site) and Roman Petrov (online from Ukraine)

Fellows' Exchange Meetings



On Scholactivism— The Role of (Academic) Research in European Societies

8-9 February 2023 (online)

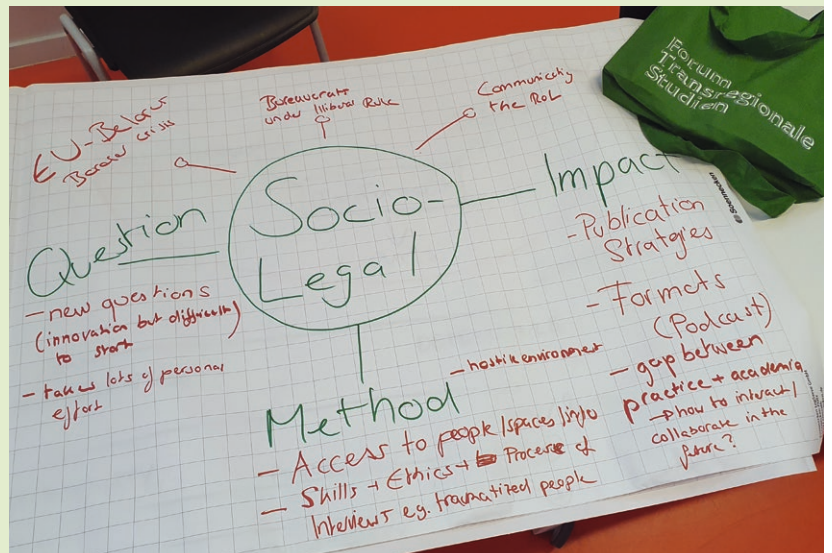


- **Online Workshop** on the re:constitution Alumni Network—Engagement and Impact
- **Sessions:**
 - **Transforming knowledge into action? —The Question of Scholactivism** with Tarunabh Khaitan, Professor of Public Law and Legal Theory, Head of Research in the Bonavero Institute of Human Rights, Oxford
 - **Academic Knowledge and Constitutional Law: Informing Everyday Legal Practice?** with Gonçalo de Almeida Ribeiro, Judge at the Constitutional Court of Portugal, Professor of Law at Universidade Católica Portuguesa

Fundamental Rights Protection in the EU: Taking Stock

14-16 June 2023 (Leuven & Brussels)

Organised in cooperation with the RESHUF-FLE project at the Institute for European Law at KU Leuven & the Connecting Europe project at European Policy Centre in Brussels



- Public panel debate at the Representation of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia to the EU in Brussels: **A cornerstone of Media Regulation: What's next for the European Media Freedom Act?** co-organised with Fellow Viktoria Kreaetzig and Alumna Neus Vidal Martí



Reflections by Jakub Jaraczewski, Democracy Reporting International

Every cohort of re:constitution Fellows has been unique. Naturally, the 2022/2023 group stands out as well, acting as a bridge between two iterations of the re:constitution project. In fact, while the project has continued under the same name and with the same objectives since 2019, the first funding phase of re:constitution —re:constitution 1.0—ended on 31 December 2022. On the first day of 2023, the second project phase, re:constitution 2.0, sprang to life. During this transition, the Fellows remained with us as an end of one chapter and the start of the next.

The first Fellows' Exchange Meeting of the new cohort was also unique. Taking place in the form of the re:constitution conference in September 2022 and set in Berlin's Umweltforum, a former church, it was a significant milestone of the programme as a whole. The conference aimed at fostering a network of scholars, experts, and organisations interacting with re:constitution. Called *Distance and Convergence: re:constituting Democracy and the Rule of Law in Europe*, it tackled the themes listed in its title through keynote lectures by Koen Lenaerts, President of the Court of Justice of the European Union, and Angelika Nussberger, a patron of re:constitution. Additionally, the conference featured panels and presentations by current and past re:constitution Fellows. During this conference, we at Democracy Reporting International (DRI) held a session with Fellows, journalists, lawyers, and researchers that asked how best to report on issues related to the rule of law for a general audience.

The second exchange meeting took place online in February 2023. The discussion focused on scholastic activism ('scholactivism') and the role of academics in a world where the rule of law experiences continual crises. For this meeting, DRI organised a session on the challenges of and opportunities for cooperation between academia and civil society. Our work at DRI focuses on the collaboration between scholars and journalists and on combining their knowledge to better inform the public debates on the rule of law. This event was a welcome opportunity for the Fellows to discuss obstacles they might encounter when engaging with nongovernmental organisations and what such collaborations can offer them.

A third meeting in June 2023 brought DRI and the Fellows together in the picturesque academic town of Leuven in Belgium, an important point on the global map of research on human rights and the rule of law. Accordingly, the topic of the meeting, fundamental rights in the European Union, matched the location well. For the DRI session, we tried something different. Instead of discussing a single topic, we asked the Fellows to brainstorm ideas for four small projects aimed at advancing fundamental rights in the EU. Over the following few months, we plan to help the Fellows develop these ideas by offering assistance and resources towards realising them.

Beyond these meetings, DRI has engaged with the Fellows on multiple occasions and in varied formats. We have drawn upon the Fellows' expertise for our analysis of the rule of law in European countries ahead of elections. Nino Tsereteli, our expert on Georgia and Western Europe, appeared on an episode of the Central European University's Review of Democracy podcast on the invitation of re:constitution Fellow Oliver Garner. Our latest publication, "Rule of Law FAQs", would not have been possible without assistance from another Fellow, Edit Zgut-Przybylska. These are just some of the many ways DRI and re:constitution Fellows have worked together to advance the rule of law in the EU.

The 2022/2023 Fellowships took place at a time of crisis in Europe. The many-faceted fallout of the Russian invasion of Ukraine continues to affect us all, as does the ongoing rule of law crisis in some EU Member States and the challenges to the rule of law in others. On the positive side, with the COVID-19 pandemic largely retreating, this cohort could enjoy one of the significant advantages of being a re:constitution Fellow: mobility. We at DRI greatly enjoyed our interactions with the Fellows from the transitional cohort, and we hope that they keep in touch with us in the years to come!



Reflections by Oliver Garner, re:constitution Fellow

I applied for the Fellowship following encouragement from the Director of the Bingham Centre. I engaged with re:constitution in 2020 when I prepared a session on Brexit for a fellows meeting. My mobility phases enabled me to engage more deeply with an institution for whom I already worked—the CEU Democracy Institute in Budapest—and to forge new connections at the European Policy Centre in Brussels.

I had a very literal experience of mobility for the first fellows meeting in Berlin in September 2022. I travelled by train from a conference in Lille to Berlin, via Brussels, before travelling to Budapest by bus via Prague and Bratislava. To experience Europe on the ground was a perfect



accompaniment to intellectual reflection on the challenges it currently faces. The variety of plenary sessions and interactive workshops at the conference were stimulating, and the keynote speech was even more memorable for the news of Queen Elizabeth II's death emerging as the President of the Court of Justice of the EU spoke.

My first mobility period in autumn allowed engagement with the local legal commu-

nity in Budapest through a conference on Rule of Law resilience at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and engagement with international academics at the opening event for the AUTHLIB project. I also launched the CEU DI Working Paper series, providing a further platform for re:constitution Fellows and affiliates.

I engaged with those in practice during my second mobility period in spring 2023. In addition to colleagues at the European Policy Centre, I met with officials from the EU institutions working on the Rule of Law crisis. My visit culminated in a presentation at the EPC Lunch & Learn series ahead of my online Fellows talk. I received both pragmatic and intellectual feedback. I am grateful for the exchanges with current Fellows and alumni during the year. I received invaluable input into my own project, and learnt much about other topics. These weekly talks provided routine throughout the Fellowship year.

The final fellows exchange meeting in Leuven and Brussels was a perfect denouement to the fellowship. The guided visit to the University of Leuven's library was a highlight. The re:constitution alumni network will assist my career as a source of project funding, and an enduring community for policy and intellectual engagement.

Impressions



UPCOMING MEETINGS

2. 5.	BARBARA M. GRADOWSKA	10 ⁰⁰ - 12 ⁰⁰
15. 5.	Imperson meeting South Moravia	All day
16. 5.	JUSTIN Doors Open Days	10 ⁰⁰ - 12 ⁰⁰
26. 6.	BARBARA M. GRADOWSKA	11 ⁰⁰ - 15 ⁰⁰
29. 8.	MRS. FAVEL	10 ⁰⁰ - 12 ⁰⁰

MEETS, VACATION PAW



Reflections by Teresa Violante, re:constitution Fellow

I was attracted to the re:constitution Fellowship programme by its emphasis on combining an academic environment with institutional practice. Being in the final stages of my PhD after five years of fully dedicated academic research, I saw this as an opportunity to explore different avenues of work with a diverse group of professionals connected through similar interests. Moreover, having turned to academia after more than a decade of working as a clerk at the Constitutional Court of Portugal, I missed the atmosphere of practical institutions.

Being part of the group that joined the 2022/2023 cohort in late October 2023, I did not attend the first personal meeting in Berlin. My introduction was initially remote, through the online Fellows' meetings. It did not come as a surprise to see several familiar faces and names. The online meetings provided a safe space to explore each other's interests and research advancements, give and collect feedback, and grow stronger as a group. I quickly realised that my research paths converged with the topics that Matteo Bonelli and, particularly, Oliver Garner explored. These meetings also broadened our horizons beyond our specific research and interests. High-level presentations and subsequent discussions provided us with state-of-the-art developments on relevant issues that expanded our knowledge beyond our areas of expertise.

Periods of mobility are the cornerstone of the re:constitution Fellowship. During this time, I was hosted by iCourts at the University of Copenhagen, under the supervision of Prof. Jan Komarék. Here, I developed the first part of my project and presented it at a collective workshop, where a lively and fruitful discussion aided it. My second mobility phase was conducted

at the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in the Cabinet of Judge Nuno Piçarra. I benefitted from contact with the référendaires, who provided me with further information on the relevant case laws of the CJEU, including on pending cases, but I also experienced the institution's inner workings at closer proximity.

Finally, the third group meeting in Leuven, accompanied by a rich programme, proved that we had built a cohesive group throughout the year. Personally, I am grateful for the opportunity to further my research and to connect with wonderful people that I will undoubtedly continue to encounter in my future work.



Matteo Bonelli The EU as a Union of Values: Reactive and Proactive Strategies

Matteo Bonelli is assistant professor of European Union law at the Faculty of Law of Maastricht University (the Netherlands). There he is a member of the Maastricht Centre for European Law and a researcher in the UM Globalisation and Law Network. Matteo studied law in Turin, Antwerp and Maastricht and completed his PhD research at Maastricht University in 2019. His main research interests are in the area of EU constitutional law and EU fundamental rights, and he has published in particular on the EU's tool to tackle constitutional backsliding in the Member States, effective judicial protection in EU



law, national identity, and judicial dialogue in the EU. He is a member

of the editorial board of European Constitutional Law Review.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger?

In my re:constitution project, I wanted to understand whether and how the response to the democratic and rule of law crises in the Member States of the European Union is transforming the union. Even if the results of EU intervention might have been disappointing so far, if we look closely, we can notice, for example, that the toolbox to protect the common values has become stronger, or that the values, and in particular the rule of law, have been defined more precisely. This can be seen as a contribution to the process of the constitutionalisation of the EU, of the shift from a community of economic interests to a true union of values. During the re:constitution Fellowship, I explored the new proactive approaches developed by the European Commission in the context of the European Democracy Action Plan, which have the goal of consolidating and protecting national democracies via legislative action at the EU level.

How did you come up with your re:constitution project? What inspired you to pursue this question?

Before re:constitution, I had worked on questions linked to the protection of democracy and the rule of law in the EU for a while. The debate focused mostly on finding new solutions to ongoing crises—and rightly so, of course!—and often on criticising EU institutions for failing to intervene effectively—again, unfortunately, rightly so. These were and are very important questions, but I felt the need to look at the broader picture and to change my perspective. As many other times in the past, the reaction to a crisis is changing the EU and European integration, and my project seeks to highlight these deeper transformations.

What made you apply to the programme? What did you get out of it?

re:constitution seemed the perfect opportunity to move away from a small-scale perspective and look at the bigger picture. I was searching for time to think, reflect, and develop a new project, and for a community of diverse scholars to debate ideas and receive feedback—and the Fellowship offered me just that. Of

course, I also greatly benefitted from the expertise of the centres I visited during my mobility phases.

How would you describe the current situation of democracy and the rule of law in Europe? Are we moving forward or backwards?

This is a moment of contradictions, I believe. If one looks at the EU level, there are reasons for optimism. We see stronger and more coordinated actions in protecting common values, for example the activation of financial conditionality mechanisms, or the infringement actions seeking to protect LGBTIQ+ rights in Hungary or against the ‘lex Tusk’ in Poland. At the same time, we do not see any fundamental change on the ground, the results are still meagre, and there are even worrying trends in other Member States. I doubt these contradictions can be

re:constitution seemed the perfect opportunity to move away from a small-scale perspective and look at the bigger picture.

fully resolved soon, but the forthcoming electoral cycle, first in key Member States including Poland, and then at the EU level, can fundamentally shape the trajectory of democracy and the rule of law in Europe.

What is your next project?

My upcoming bigger project is to finalise my monograph, which will consolidate the results of my Fellowship ideas and analyse how the reaction to the crises we have discussed is transforming the EU. I am also interested in following the implementation of financial conditionality mechanisms as tools of rule of law protection. Together with my colleague Antonia Baraggia, I will write a chapter on the most recent developments at the EU level for the Maastricht-based project Governance through Funding, led by Lilian Tsourdi and Marijn van der Sluis.

Dániel G. Szabó Bureaucrats under Illiberal Rule

Dániel G. Szabó has been a Head of Department at the Municipality of Budapest responsible for participatory governance, the city council, and IT with a staff of 130 since 2019. He supervised the city’s first participatory budget process and he is currently working on bringing citizen-oriented digital services. Previously he worked on the rule of law and the independence of administrative courts at the Hungarian Helsinki Committee. He has a background in social activism, worked as a journalist and as a think-tank analyst. Previously he was a consultant and intern for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in



Europe. He was a member of the Hungarian National Election Commission for two election periods. He holds an LL.M. in Comparative

Constitutional Law from the Central European University.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger?

Civil servants, and not only those working for illiberal governments, have at least two duties that might collide: loyalty to the democratically elected political leadership and professional responsibility towards good governance. Think of a civil servant disagreeing with a minister on the direction of a certain policy. One answer to this is that the minister and the government are democratically elected and, thus, should have the final say on the matter. But what is to be done when the political will and the conviction of the civil servant diverge exceedingly? The need for a civil servant to choose between loyalty towards democratically elected political leaders and good governance might be present everywhere, but it is more accentuated in times of crisis, such as during illiberal governments, when the requests of a political leadership might strikingly collide with constitutional values or the public good. I researched this in the context of Hungary and Poland.

In your view, how can re:constitution and its forthcoming alumni network make a difference?

The single biggest value of the re:constitution programme is to bring interesting people together. I believe that the forthcoming alumni network will be an opportunity for new and old Fellows to meet, inspire each other, and create value for our societies. The re:constitution Fellowship is aimed at the public good, and the alumni network will be a ground to develop new projects and new research for the betterment of European democracies.

What is your favourite place in Europe (off the beaten track)? Trieste, in Northern Italy, is a great place. A major port for centuries, the city has a rich his-

tory, where Central Europe, the Balkans, and Western Europe meet in several ways. One can feel at home in its familiar alleys while watching the sea, and then visit the Miramare castle, which is a beautiful building in harmony with the surrounding hills and the Adriatic.

How would you describe the current situation of democracy and the rule of law in Europe? Are we moving forward or backwards?

I am more optimistic than not regarding the state of democracy and the rule of law in Europe. Democracy is very often unpleasant: protests are rarely elegant, and politics is often nasty. But the development of politics at the EU level is ground for optimism. Just ten years ago, who could have imagined that hard-hitting financial sanctions would be issued by the EU against states not respecting common values, or that the EU would regulate Big Tech, step up against climate change, and finance defence investments? These debates help create a strong union where decisions are made in a democratic way. Higher responsibility often brings about positive character change in individuals. So far, I believe, democracy at a European level is no different.

What is your next project?

I have now returned to my duties at the Budapest City Hall. We have launched several new and exciting participatory projects in the last years, and these are bearing fruit.

Participatory budgeting is our flagship project in this field, and we are amid a major reflection process on what we should keep or change. A new website is also coming for the city. It is created by a developer team employing extensive user research, so you can easily find what you need. Meanwhile, local elections are scheduled for next June, and the run-up to the election is always busy.

The re:constitution Fellowship is aimed at the public good, and the alumni network will be a ground to develop new projects and new research for the betterment of European democracies.

Oliver Garner A Bridge between Brexit and the Rule of Law Crisis?

Oliver Garner is a Maurice Wohl Research Fellow in European Rule of Law at the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law, BIICL. He is also Editor of the Review of Democracy at the CEU Democracy Institute and an incoming Research Fellow. Oliver received his Ph.D. and LL.M. degrees from the European University Institute, and a BA in law from the University of Oxford. His research considers constitutionalism, with specific engagement on withdrawal from the EU, differentiation, EU citizenship, and judicial primacy conflicts. He has published in the *European Law Review*, the *Cambridge Yearbook of European Legal Studies*, the *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, and the *European Journal of Legal Studies*. Oliver contributes to online platforms including *Verfassungsblog*, the UK



Constitutional Law Association Blog, and *RevDem*. His analysis has appeared in media outlets including *Politico*, *LBC Radio*, and *GB News*. Bingham Centre reports co-authored by Oliver have been cited by Members of Parliament, and he has contributed written and oral evidence

to Parliamentary Select Committees working on EU issues. Most recently his oral evidence on retained EU law was directly quoted in the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee's inquiry report and informed recommendations presented to the UK Government.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger?

Brexit proved that a Member State of the EU that disagrees with European integration can leave the union in an orderly manner. However, the EU has also been challenged by two states—Hungary and Poland—who appear to disagree with integration while still remaining members. My project considers how this resistance should be addressed in a way that preserves the EU's values without making resistant Member States subservient. I argue that financial sanctions could result in a client-patron relationship between the EU and these states and may induce insincere compliance. My project instead suggests that enhanced mechanisms for dialogue should be created. The resistant Member States should be compelled to present their vision of European integration to their constituent partners. If they are unable to persuade the other Member States that

these amendments should be made, then the resistant Member States should make a political commitment to consider withdrawal.

Have there been any (political) events in the last year that have changed your view of your research topic?

Poland's proposal for a commission to investigate the connections of those in public office with Russian interference from 2007 to 2022 changed my view on whether the values crisis is being resolved. The proposal by the Hungarian and Polish parliaments of bills that would address milestones issued by the EU regarding the composition of their judiciaries earlier in the year suggested that financial pressure could work to reverse backsliding. However, the continuation of domestic measures that could undermine electoral competition, and which accordingly have led to an EU infringement

action, also indicate that such financial pressure may only induce insincere compliance in discrete areas rather than addressing the problem at its source.

re:constitution promotes research and mobility across borders. How important is this for your professional development?

The opportunity to undertake research and mobility across borders for the re:constitution project was particularly important for me due to the potential chilling effects of Brexit on academic collaboration between UK and continental European researchers. The UK's current nonparticipation in the Horizon Europe programme has closed off an important avenue. My participation in the re:constitution alumni network means that there will always be a way to pursue further mobility and collaboration across borders, regardless of future EU–UK agreements on research. My research focus on the streams of post-Brexit UK constitutionalism, rule of law developments in Europe, and the connection between them means that opportunities for mobility are important for my future professional development. A network between institutions is also important for me, and my home employer, the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law, remains open to re:constitution Fellows in the future.

The opportunity to undertake research and mobility across borders for the re:constitution project was particularly important for me due to the potential chilling effects of Brexit (...).

Villa Schifanoia calcetto (football) pitch in San Domenico in the hills above Florence. Each year, Schifanoia is home to the European University Institute's (EUI) *Coppa Pavone* (Peacock Cup), a two-week festival of five-a-side football, music, and barbeque burgers. This is one of my favourite places in Europe as it demonstrates the unity of the community built by the EUI despite the diversity of different places from which researchers and staff originate.

What is your next project? I will next work on a funding application, submitted through the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law and Exeter University, for a project that investigates the role of the legal profession in rule of law backsliding. Previous research has focused

on executive action and its effects on the judiciary and other constitutional actors. However, those who practice the law are on the frontline of these conflicts. The project proposes a mixed-method study of six countries using surveys and semi-structured interviews. These countries encompass consolidated democracies and nonconsolidated democracies, as well as members of the EU and the European Convention on Human Rights and nonmembers. I am particularly interested in how the legal profession can be and has been utilised to assist rule of law backsliding to complement the more familiar expectation of resistance by professionals.

What is your favourite place in Europe (off the beaten track)? My favourite place in Europe is the

Barbara Grabowska-Moroz Pegasus in Times of the Rule of Law Crisis—Surveillance and Illiberalism in Central and Eastern Europe

Barbara Grabowska-Moroz is a research fellow at CEU Democracy Institute (Budapest, Hungary) and post-doctoral research fellow at University of Wrocław. In 2018–2021 she was a postdoc researcher

in the RECONNECT project (University of Groningen, the Netherlands). In 2010–2018 she worked as a lawyer and a project coordinator in the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Warsaw, Poland).

Her research concentrates on the rule of law and human rights, but also covers issues such as surveillance, civil society and women's rights.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger?

My project deals with the link between the erosion of rule of law principles and technologies that allow for invasive surveillance. The so-called Pegasus scandal was the central case study on which my analysis was based. The abuse of surveillance technology in Poland and Hungary, where rule of law backsliding has been growing in recent years, is an extremely interesting field to investigate. Some of the problems are typical for backsliding states (e.g., an undermined independence of the courts that are tasked with the oversight of secret services) while others are present throughout Europe in varying degrees (e.g., the lack of an effective remedy to these issues).

re:constitution promotes research and mobility across borders. How important is this for your future professional development? Mobility provides great opportunities for conducting valuable research in the social sciences. However, mobility with a small child is also a huge challenge. Work in academia as a researcher is demanding, and especially so for parents, particularly when mobility means moving your whole life to a new place, city, or state. A fear of missing out is inevitable—you wish you could travel more and conduct more study visits, but when it happens, you feel like you should be with your child. Luckily the pandemic changed many things in this regard.

How would you describe the current situation of democracy and the rule of law in Europe? Are we moving forward or backwards? We can see that old problems in Hungary and Poland have not been solved and, meanwhile, backsliding tendencies are still present in European domestic politics. Rule of law issues (e.g., shrinking judicial independence) have transformed into problems for democracy (e.g., the fairness of elections). It is a strategically important moment right now. For the EU there are two options available. First, EU institutions and its Member States can fulfil their obligations under the Treaties and clearly signal that the erosion of checks and balances is unacceptable in the EU. However, the second option is that the European political community accepts the existing



situation of rule of law backsliding (e.g., that judicial independence is undermined). In this case, attacks on judiciary or media independence will become business as usual.

How can a diverse group of rule of law and democracy experts make difference? Democracy and the rule of law are closely interconnected. In a modern world, a democracy without the rule of law can easily transform into an autocracy because legal norms in such a case would not limit public authorities. Meanwhile, it seems that the debates around the rule of law and democracy are conducted in separate ‘bubbles’.

The rule of law is both a legal and a political phenomenon.

The rule of law is both a legal and a political phenomenon. Democracy is also regulated through law; it is not only ruled by political practice. Problems with the rule of law will sooner or later infect the democratic process, such as access to public information, the accountability of public officials, and the transparency of decision-making processes. Linking these dots is crucial to tackle the crisis of values effectively.

What is your next project? I will conduct research on the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the ongoing debate on the rule of law in the EU and its Member States. As I see it, CSOs are the only entities that follow these ongoing developments. At the same time, they do not have a standing before EU institutions and they are not seen as legitimate partners in the discussion. Nonetheless, some of the organisations have become government-organised nongovernmental organisations (GONGOs)—that is, private entities (foundations or associations) supporting illiberal governments and their narratives. Put briefly, I would like to investigate the limits and possibilities of and threats to CSO engagement in the rule of law debate.

Ivo Gruev Anti-liberal Constitutionalism on the Rise: Contesting Gender before Eastern European Constitutional Courts

Ivo Gruev is a comparative constitutional scholar and postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Fundamental Rights, Hertie School of Governance. His research combines doctrinal and law-in context approaches that draw on institutional design, legal culture, constitution-making history, and political developments to examine the constitutional protection of fundamental rights in European societies transitioning from, or back into, authoritarian rule. Ivo holds a doctorate (DPhil), a Master of Studies, and a Magister Juris from the University of Oxford, as well as a law degree (Erstes Staatsexamen) from the Humboldt-University in Berlin. Previously, he convened the Oxford Transitional Justice Research group, acted as Chairperson of Oxford Pro Bono Publico, and taught human rights law, jurisprudence, critical legal studies, and public interna-



tional law at Oxford and Sciences Po. Being interested in the intersection between research and public policy, he has also worked for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the German Parliament, the International Criminal Court, and the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law. Through his re:constitution

Fellowship, Ivo seeks to gain comparative insights into the erosion of liberal constitutionalism and the changing relationship between governments, courts, and vulnerable groups in both young and more consolidated democracies.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger?

The world is facing a rising wave of illiberalism. At the same time, there is a global rollback on gender equality and women's rights. My project looks at the overlap between these two trends as manifested in the surprising backlash against the Istanbul Convention—a 2011 European human rights treaty against domestic violence. This document is being contested as unconstitutional in most countries in Central and Eastern Europe. I am interested in who drives these contestations, on what grounds, and with what effect. The broader questions that motivate my research are how constitutional courts and texts respond to anti-liberal pushback and

how this affects the rule of law and, more specifically, the protection of the fundamental rights of citizens.

What questions are on your mind right now? How and where will you be looking for answers?

I am interested in the relationship between law and time, especially the regulation and litigation of the past and the future. This issue is receiving increased academic attention in relation to topics such as 'memory laws' (e.g., in contexts of transitional justice after periods of authoritarian rule) and temporality in public law. Perhaps somewhat curiously, my inspiration to explore these questions in more depth comes from the novel *Time*

Shelter by Georgi Gospodinov, which is about seeking refuge from the present in artificial clinics for the past. I am curious about how constitutional texts can be and are being used in a similar vein—that is, as laboratories for (re)constructing national histories and identities, and for resisting or accelerating social and political change.

Have there been any (political) events in the last year that have changed your view of your research topic?

As I write this, mass protests against domestic violence are happening on the streets of several cities in Bulgaria—the country that I am from and one of my academic case studies. We are witnessing a long-overdue reaction to the failure of state institutions to address the causes and effects of this local example of the global pandemic of gender-based violence. These events attest to the relevance of, and need for more, interdisciplinary and context-sensitive research in this area.

I am interested in the relationship between law and time, especially the regulation and litigation of the past and the future.

What is your favourite place in Europe (off the beaten track)?

One of my favourite places in Europe

is Strandzha—a mystical and incredibly biodiverse mountain range on the border between Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece. Its eastern ridges descend into the Black Sea, forming a (still) pristine and wild landscape on the edge of Europe. I try to visit this natural reserve at least once a year to recharge and recalibrate.

What is your next project? My next comparative project, Religion, Illiberal Constitutionalism and the Retrogression of Fundamental Rights in East Central Europe (ReLiCon), builds on and expands my re:constitution research. It is concerned with the changing relationship

between religion and constitutionalism in illiberal contexts. More specifically, I look at how religion-based arguments are used in constitutional litigation to distort, misappropriate, and, ultimately, erode fundamental

rights. There are three lenses through which I approach this question: who uses religion to litigate against equality rights, how these contestations are anchored in a constitutional text, and how these processes affect the judicial interpretation of fundamental rights.

Aleksandra Jolkina Beyond the ‘Hybrid Threat’ Paradigm: EU-Belarus Border Crisis and the Erosion of Asylum-Seeker Rights in a Comparative Perspective

Aleksandra Jolkina is a socio-legal scholar working in the field of European and comparative migration, asylum and nationality law. She holds a PhD in law from Queen Mary University of London (2021) and has previously taught EU law at London School of Economics (LSE). Her research interests currently concentrate on two broad areas: family migration and access to international protection. Her PhD thesis (under contract with

Brill) critically examines the concept of marriages of convenience in EU and UK law in so far as it concerns the residence rights of EU citizens and their non-EU national spouses. For her PhD, she has received the ELFA 2021 award for the best doctoral thesis on European law (proxime accessit). Under the auspices of her re:constitution Fellowship, she is working on a project focusing on the EU-Belarus border crisis, particularly where it concerns

access to the asylum procedure and compliance with the Rule of Law. Aleksandra has a multidisciplinary background and has transferred to academia after a nearly 15-year career in journalism. She completed her PhD part-time whilst being based in Bonn where she worked for Germany’s international broadcaster Deutsche Welle (Russian Service).

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger?

My project focuses on the crisis at the EU's external border with Belarus that began in summer 2021 and is ongoing. In response to the rising numbers of asylum seekers—predominantly from the Middle East—trying to cross into the EU from Belarus, three EU Member States—Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania—severely restricted the right to seek asylum and formalised pushbacks. Such actions openly violate EU and international human rights law. In all the three Member States involved, the issue has been widely portrayed as a 'hybrid attack' and an 'instrumentalisation of migration' by the Belarusian regime that 'artificially' creates migratory flows to destabilise the EU. This narrative has also been accepted by the European Commission. I approach the topic from a socio-legal perspective. In my research, I compare the legislation introduced by Polish, Latvian, and Lithuanian governments and look at how these measures practically affect the non-EU nationals involved. I also critically assess the EU-level response to the events at the border and argue that the 'instrumentalisation of migration' paradigm is problematic on many levels.

How did you come up with your re:constitution project? What inspired you to pursue this question?

My current project grew out of my research into the situation at the Latvia-Belarus border, which I began in autumn 2021. At the time, European public attention only focused on the events in Poland and, to a lesser extent, in Lithuania, while the situation in Latvia was almost entirely neglected. Over the following months, I managed to interview over 40 non-EU nationals who had attempted to cross into Latvia from Belarus. Their testimonies revealed that the pattern of pushbacks, exercised by the Latvian authorities, was very different from that in Poland or Lithuania. In Latvia, these affected a relatively small group of largely the same people who were daily pushed back and forth across the border and typically remained trapped in the forest for several months. After seeing how the events



unfolded in Latvia, I decided to expand my research into a comparative study.

How did your 'mobility phases' at the Polish Association for Legal Intervention and the Amsterdam Centre for Migration and Refugee Law contribute to your research?

During my first mobility phase, I travelled to Poland and Lithuania to interview NGO representatives, humanitarian aid volunteers, and lawyers who have been providing assistance to people who attempt to cross from Belarus. I also had the opportunity to visit the Polish-Belarus border region and see the wall the Polish government has built to block asylum seekers from entering. My second mobility phase took me to Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, where I had a chance to meet and share my research with many scholars in the field. The Fellowship also offered me excellent networking opportunities. In total, I was able to present my research at over 15 conferences, seminars, and other events in Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, London, Oxford, and elsewhere.

What are some of the most significant findings or discoveries you have made during your research?

What do you draw from them? One of my particularly striking discoveries was the extremely hostile environment I found myself in when doing research on Latvia. Unlike in Poland, in Latvia there were no local media or scholars documenting the crisis from the human rights perspective. None of the local journalists published interviews with people crossing the border;

I approach the topic from a socio-legal perspective.

they portrayed them as ‘hybrid warfare’ instead. As a foreign-based researcher, I turned out to be the only person documenting the events at the Latvia–Belarus border during the winter of 2021/2022. After I published the preliminary findings of my research, I was subjected to hostile attacks on social media and by the Latvian right-wing press, which claimed that the testimonies were deliberately falsified and described people crossing from Belarus in the most derogatory and even openly racist terms.

What is your next project? Over the course of my research, I became increasingly interested in Iraq in general and the Kurdistan region in particular, as this is where most of my interviewees come from. The Kurdistan region currently hosts around a million refugees and internally displaces persons, such as the Yazidi minority, most of whom have been living in protracted displacement for years. I am interested in learning more about their legal situation, their pathways to Europe, and the EU’s external migration management policy in Iraq.

Viktoria Kraetzig Copyright as a rule of law challenge

Viktoria Kraetzig is Postdoc (Habilitation) at Goethe-University, Frankfurt am Main. She is a postdoctoral fellow in the cluster initiative ConTrust at the research center Normative Orders. She completed her PhD thesis on “Copyright Law as Censorship Law” summa cum laude in 2021. During her PhD she worked as an attorney at law in Berlin, specialized in intellectual property law, and as legal counsel of Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. She still writes regularly for Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, one of the largest daily newspapers of Germany.



How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? My re:constitution project, Copyright as a rule of law challenge, deals with the fundamental rights conflict between copyright and the freedom of communication. Copyright gives its owner a very powerful right: through the copyright, the rights holder can suppress the protected subject matter and thus exclude third parties from it. Copyright-protected subject matter

is always also communication content. Copyright law must therefore ensure that a fair balance is struck with users’ communication interests. In the digital age, where more and more communication matter is protected by copyright, this is more important than ever.

re:constitution promotes research and mobility across borders. How important is this for your

future professional development? The programme made my first two research stays abroad possible, and I am truly grateful for this. Both stays have shown me how important it is to get to know other legal systems and to work with people who have a different educational background. I learnt a lot—not only answers to specific questions but, overall, I took away a great amount about how other jurisdictions deal with the challenges of our time. I particularly enjoyed this at the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), where I spent my first research stay. When exchanging ideas with lawyers from all Member States of the EU, exciting discussions took place because everyone had a completely different approach to legal issues.

What was your best re:constitution moment so far? (could be anything...)

As part of our third Fellows' Meeting in Leuven—which was a great time with the other Fellows in other ways as well—I had the pleasure of cohosting a panel in Brussels on the European Media Freedom Act with re:constitution alumna Neus Vidal-Martí. I met Neus at my first re:constitution meeting. We have many common interests and got along very well right away. As the discussions around the European Media Freedom Act became increasingly intense, we knew that the time had come for a common project. With the help of re:constitution—not only financially but also on a personal level—we were able to curate

Both stays have shown me how important it is to get to know other legal systems and to work with people who have a different educational background.

our first Verfassungsblog debate, titled “Shifting Paradigms of European Media Regulation”, and we could even co-organise a panel in Brussels on which we both participated with members of the European Commission, academics, and stakeholders.

I mention this moment not only because I enjoyed the time in Brussels with my Fellows cohort, but because working with Neus showed me how valuable the re:constitution network is for meeting people with

the same interests and developing ideas together. We already have new plans for further joint projects, so our collaboration—and by now friendship—will outlast the re:constitution Fellowship.

What fascinates you the most about your work?

That's very easy to answer for me: I still cannot believe that in academia you pick topics that interest you and then work on them. When you come from a practitioner's background, it seems too good to be true.

What is your next project?

I have always been interested in freedom of information law and how it can be restricted by private interests. That might be something for my next project—certainly also from a comparative law perspective. It would also connect perfectly with my re:constitution project since copyright, which limits the freedom of information, is also one of the private interests.

Maciej Krogel Legal Scholars as Constitutional Agents Designing the Protection of the Rule of Law and Democracy

Maciej Krogel is a PhD researcher at the European University Institute in Florence, where he also obtained his LL.M. degree. He is editor of the European Journal of Legal Studies. Maciej

lectured EU law and comparative law in universities in Belgium, Denmark, Italy and Portugal. In his PhD research he analyses how the application of EU common values from Article 2 TEU by EU institu-

tions contributes to developing Union's constitutional order and redefining constitutional conflicts. Maciej's research interests are EU constitutional law, constitutional theory, constitutionalism in East-

Central Europe and critical and comparative legal methods. In his re:constitution Fellowship project, Maciej investigates the role of legal scholars during the crisis of the rule of law and democracy in the EU.



How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger?

Legal scholars are preoccupied with what is happening in Europe to the rule of law, democracy, and human rights. Many of them interpret these principles not only in their academic work, but also in the media and other public venues. They wish to impact the public opinion and judicial decisions. But this (potential) impact of scholars entails important theoretical questions, for example about responsibility and legitimacy. At the same time, how to secure the independence of scholars in these circumstances and if scholars can be seen as actors of constitutional change are important questions for me. I am exploring these topics.

How did you come up with your re:constitution project? What inspired you to pursue this question?

I have always been interested in delving into the various capacities and roles that we can play in society while doing a particular job. In the context of re:constitution, I, as a legal scholar, now also pursue a self-reflective project, concerning the role, impact, and responsibility of legal scholars. Academics play various roles and expectations towards them are increasing, but there is still not that much reflection on these issues.

What made you apply to the programme? What did you get out of it?

I very much appreciate places and networks that give you resources (e.g., time, funds, and

contacts) for open research and considerate reflection. It is rather luxurious to get such an opportunity in today's academia, which is full of rushing, commercialisation, rigid criteria of assessment, and the cult of efficiency. The re:constitution programme, however, enables a real pursuit of curiosity.

In your view, how can re:constitution and its forthcoming alumni network make a

difference? I think that the most important possible impact of re:constitution Fellows and alumni is that they can become exemplary for many other networks of scholars, lawyers, and policymakers working on similar subjects. re:constitution proves that it is still possible to create communities of academics and professionals who are independent, but connected by trust, shared curiosity, mutual learning, and free exchange.

What is your next project? In the next few months, I am planning to complete my PhD project, which I am pursuing at the Department of Law at the EUI in Florence. My research is situated at the intersection of legal theory, constitutional law, and EU law. I am investigating how some of the classic ideas and concepts of EU constitutional law now reappear in EU reactions to the rule of law crisis.

I think that the most important possible impact of re:constitution Fellows and alumni is that they can become exemplary for many other networks of scholars, lawyers, and policymakers (...).

Raphael Oidtmann Fighting Impunity Through Intermediaries—The European Union, International Criminal Justice, and the Rule of Law in Times of War

Raphael currently serves as a parliamentary and legal advisor to the State Parliament of Hesse and holds appointments as adjunct lecturer at Mannheim Law School, associate researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, and associate postgraduate at Centre Marc Bloch. Previously, he was the scientific advisor to the executive director at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt and held positions as a research fellow and lecturer at the universities of Mannheim and Mainz. Raphael holds Master's degrees in political science (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz), international and comparative law (University of Mannheim & University of Adelaide) and international relations (University of Cambridge), respectively, and currently finalizes a PhD dissertation project at Goethe



University Frankfurt. His principal teaching and research interests pertain to international law, international criminal law, human rights and the law of armed conflict as well as international relations theory and history, geopolitics, international security studies and European Union integration. His

research focusses on (1) the actor-ness qualities of international institutions, especially international courts, (2) the interplay of global health and international law, and (3) questions of implementing and maintaining jurisdiction in areas of limited statehood (such as the High Seas, the Arctic, or Antarctica).

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? My project inquires how, in what ways, and to what extent the EU engages in the so-called 'fight against impunity'—or, in other words, the effort to make sure that alleged perpetrators of international crimes such as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, or the crime of aggression are being brought to justice and have to face their individual responsibility for such crimes. I'm interested in investigating how the EU, from a legal perspective, empowers competent mechanisms and institutions, such as the International Criminal Court, and how this is organised and administered within the currently applicable European law framework.

re:constitution promotes research and mobility across borders. How important is this for your future professional development? Given that my research is located at the intersection of international law and international relations, a certain degree of 'internationality' is engrained in almost every project I work on. Mobility—both intellectually and practically—is a core component of my work. Particularly within the context of our re:constitution projects, I perceived the emphasis on mobility, including the opportunity to spend time at different research institutions and organisations across Europe, as a distinguishing facet that not only enriched each research project and thus our profes-

sional development, but likewise left a positive mark on each Fellow personally. To freely move around Europe, to study and work in different locations on the continent, and to make new friends across borders is one of the most fascinating parts of working on and within the EU.

What fascinates you the most about your work?

I'm drawn to my work by the opportunity to remain intellectually curious, to address fascinating research questions continually, and to work with so many inspiring colleagues who often even become friends. Beyond that, I regularly try to combine my research interests with practically relevant and policy-infused insights, which I attained in my 'second career' as a parliamentary and legal advisor. Hence, bridging the sometimes prevailing 'theory-practice' gap has evolved into a core characteristic of my research endeavours in recent years.

How would you describe the current situation of democracy and the rule of law in Europe? Are we moving forward or backwards?

Europe's state of democracy and its rule of law standard currently seem to be under a constant 'stress test' as different political developments keep exerting pressure on Europe's institutional and political framework(s). In this situation,

(...) to make new friends across borders is one of the most fascinating parts of working on and within the EU.

Europe and, particularly, the EU have to demonstrate their resilience against such external influences and threats, thus also calling for novel approaches to constantly improve and strengthen their legal and political structures—a core issue that we also addressed as

re:constitution Fellows and that will be taken up by the alumni network. I am not entirely sure whether we are moving forward or backwards—rather, I have the impression that we are witnessing 'sideways' movements, in the sense that people feel a degree of change,

yet don't perceive it as too dramatic. This 'slow but steady' development, in my view, is most visible in the seeming normalisation of right-wing and populist voices across the continent, many of which openly discuss abandoning the EU and want to retreat into nationalist times. I perceive this development as an incremental erosion of the state of democracy and rule of law across Europe, something that we must closely watch, including in the upcoming European Parliament elections next year.

What is your next project? Honestly, I am not yet sure. I might just (finally) finish my PhD project. But, as has been the case in recent years, interesting projects often appear unexpectedly. So, if you ask me again in six months' time, the answer may be different.

Polly Ruth Polak The Lesser of Two Evils: An Unlawful Withdrawal Notification under the EU's Article 2 Values

Polly Ruth Polak carries out legal research in the domains of EU withdrawal law, Art. 2 TEU values, EU citizenship and relevant CJEU case law. Having obtained her Bachelor's in Law at the University of Granada (Spain) and her

Masters Degree in EU studies at the University of Salamanca (Spain), she also holds a PhD in Law from this same University after defending her Thesis in May 2021 titled 'To (not) Have One's Cake and Eat It. The Restricted Legal Regime of

Member State Withdrawal from the European Union in Light of Brexit'. During this time, she published many articles on Brexit in national and international journals, carried out a research visit at Queen Mary University of London and collabo-

rated with many other academic institutions, including the Brexit Institute in Dublin. Later she carried out a fully funded postdoc at the EU Law Department of the University of Groningen until achieving a permanent position as Assistant Professor back at her home University of Salamanca, where she currently teaches Public International Law, EU law and International Relations.



How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger?

Recently, during Brexit, the UK sought to ‘take back control’ from a central authority. It did so with a nationalist discourse easily mistakable for those used in other independence movements. This process evidenced that EU withdrawal bears a closer resemblance to peaceful secession by constitutional means than to an ordinary treaty exit. That we find similarities in the causes is unsurprising given that a decision to withdraw from the EU means that a country wishes to (re)gain sovereignty and (re)design a newly independent legal and political order, including the establishment of a new citizenship regime after the loss of the supranational rights attached to EU citizenship. In sum, there is no other context of treaty withdrawal in which the legal, political, economic, and social ramifications of the phenomenon place it on such a clear par with secession. At the same time, most of the legal doctrine understands the EU’s withdrawal clause—the famous Article 50 TEU—as a classic mechanism of international treaty denouncement. The main aim of my project is to refute this narrow view for failing to reflect the reality that EU withdrawal is a democratically and constitutionally significant decision for all parties involved that requires a legal and procedural framework like that provided for peaceful secessions. With this idea in mind, my project adds to the growing

It was wonderful to discover that my cohort researched areas like my own, but each with their own points of view and background.

literature on the EU’s Article 2 TEU values—literature that so far mainly focuses on their enforcement during accession and membership—by considering the operation of the principles of democracy and the rule of law during EU withdrawal.

How did you come up with your re:constitution project? What inspired you to pursue this question?

My PhD, finished in 2021, focused on the legal and procedural restrictions placed on EU withdrawal in light of Brexit. Of these restrictions, I found especially interesting the role that the EU’s Article 2 TEU values should play during the process and wished to dig deeper into the need to comply with them in order to withdraw lawfully. After various exchanges with Dimitry Kochenov, the senior researcher I am working with on my re:constitution project, I was inspired to view EU withdrawal from a more constitutional perspective and compare it to the secession of a territory from its parent state.

What is your favourite place in Europe (off the beaten track)?

It’s Casares, a small white village in the south of Spain where we moved to from England and where I lived from the age of four. Its narrow streets winding through whitewashed houses nestled among

dusty mountains, its kind people and simple way of life; this was a magical place to grow up.

In what way did the various encounters with the other re:constitution Fellows in your cohort impact your thinking, your research or other areas of your professional life?

I strongly enjoyed my re:constitution Fellowship thanks to the Fellows' Meetings held every week. It was wonderful to discover that my cohort researched areas like my own, but each with their own points of view and background. These online sessions were especially important for me as my baby girl was born during this time and I was unable to travel to the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest as initially planned. Fortunately, the re:constitution team was great at keeping us all connected and I am especially grateful

for the other Fellows' comments on my project, which gave me a lot of food for thought.

What is your next project? I will soon be working on a teaching and research project with the aim of acquiring tenure at the University of Salamanca in Spain. Its aim is to publish a paper offering a diagnosis of the current state of the evolution of EU law. As is well known, the constitutionalising process of the EU has generally been propelled by the successive crises that have afflicted the integration project. Thus, with the importance of the rule of law for constitutionalism in mind, my updated assessment of the present stage of the evolution of the legal phenomenon of European integration will focus on how the EU's ongoing rule of law crisis is impacting its constitutionalising process.

Satyajit Sarna The Genesis of the Proposed EU Directive on SLAPPs

Satyajit Sarna is a practising lawyer with over a decade of experience of appearing before the courts in India in a wide range of matters. He has extensive first-hand experience defending against SLAPPs in courts in India, as part of a media law focused practice. He has defended publishers, writers, newspapers and journalists against large businesses, motivated government actions and powerful private organizations. He graduated from the National Law School of India University, Bangalore, India and holds an Advanced LLM in European and International



Human Rights Law from Leiden University in the Netherlands.

He is also a widely published writer.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger?

I would hold up a newspaper and ask in whose interest it would be if the front page were not published at all or replaced with an advertisement or

a pleasant landscape. That selection of politicians, big businesses, cultural figures, and maybe religious actors are precisely the people who have an outsized impact on our society. They are the ones who should be reported on

freely and fearlessly. SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) are legal actions that silence journalists and activists from speaking about those powerful people. While some of these legal actions are valid, many use legal and procedural principles strategically to make it too expensive or difficult to report on them. Ultimately, newspapers or magazines are less likely to publish something that might anger someone rich and powerful. So, the solution is to set up laws that prevent an abuse of the system. This is what the EU is attempting with its Anti-SLAPP Directive. How effective it is at meeting that end is debatable, but it is an interesting intervention and will likely have an impact on global lawmaking on this topic.

Which stages of your professional career had the biggest impact on your work or your personal development so far?

I have spent over a dozen years as a practicing lawyer in India and this has shaped me formatively. The practice of law has a very powerful way of showing one, through the visible example of litigants, that there are almost always two sides to an issue. None of the phenomena we study as academics exist in a silo.

My heroes are grassroots activists, people who have spent decades working on a single issue (...).

How did your 'mobility phase' at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg contribute to your research? It was an eye-opening opportunity for me to work in an international court system as an insider with a view on how decision-making takes place. My focus was on the law of Articles 10 and 11 and the new

forms they are taking in the digital age. Equally important as looking at the law was understanding the processes by which the ECtHR reaches decisions. It reminded me that multilateral institutions function on a keen appreciation of mutual acceptability and difference.

What keeps you inspired? Heroes. My heroes are grassroots activists, people who have spent decades working on a single issue to protect something that is culturally or ecologically valuable. Some of them become world famous, like Wangari Maathai or Medha Patkar, but many are nameless and faceless—and it is their namelessness and facelessness that makes them truly heroic in my opinion.

What is your next project? I'm interested in working on issues of public participation in the environmental movement in India—both within the framework of environmental law as well as at a political and artistic level. Environmental movements have vastly different scopes and content in the Global North and the Global South, but increasingly these movements are becoming interconnected. In the late Anthropocene, this is an issue that connects democracy to challenges on the scale of species survival. The mainstreaming of these movements and issues through reportage, media coverage, and art is a critical part of this historic process. I wonder how this era will be perceived when we look back on it in fifty years.

Silvia Steininger Let's Talk About the Rule of Law: Court Communication in the European Rule of Law Crisis

Silvia Steininger is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Hertie School, Centre for Fundamental Rights in Berlin as well as a Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute of Comparative Public Law and International Law in Heidelberg. She completed a PhD at the Faculty of Law, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, supervised by Professor Armin von Bogdandy. She holds graduate degrees in public international law (University of Amsterdam) and political science (University of Heidelberg) and lectures human rights and public international law in universities in Germany, France, and Denmark. In her PhD project, she investigated the consequences of state backlash upon the institutional resilience of the European and Inter-American human rights regimes.



Previous research stays led her to the European University Institute, the Department for the Execution of ECHR Judgments in Strasbourg, iCourts Centre of Excellence for International Courts Copenhagen, and the Centre for Fundamental

Rights at the Hertie School. She publishes widely on matter of human rights, courts, international institutions, investment law and arbitration.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger?

Who actually reads CJEU judgments? In my re:constitution project I explore how courts communicate what the rule of law is—outside of judgments. The rule of law is a very fuzzy concept, in contrast to democracy or human rights, and many nonexperts do not understand what it means. The CJEU, the ECtHR, and domestic constitutional courts have developed a rich jurisprudence on the rule of law, but for nonexperts, it is difficult to understand those judgments.

They are very lengthy, complicated, and written in highly technical language. This is particularly problematic in the so-called rule of law crisis, when a high number of cases against Hungary and Poland are being brought to

Strasbourg and Luxembourg. This is why the CJEU and the ECtHR have developed a range of tools, from press releases to videos, that attempt to explain what the rule of law is in innovative ways. In my re:constitution project, I examined those new communication outputs from an interdisciplinary perspective, combining socio-legal and linguistic methods.

I am in awe of the diversity of my [fellow] cohort and how everyone brought a different facet of the rule of law to life.

How did you come up with your re:constitution project? What inspired you to pursue this question?

The first inspiration came from a practical experience, which is why I am a great fan of facilitating engagement between academia and practice. In 2018, at the start of my PhD, I was a visiting researcher at the Council of Europe, in the Department

for the Execution of Judgements of the ECtHR, to gain additional practical insights into my PhD. I shared an office with a communication professional of the department who was a trained journalist. This happened while Russia refused to contribute financially to the Council of Europe, which posed a huge strain on the institution. My colleague really showed me how crucial good communication work is for an international organisation, especially in times when we have authoritarian and populist actors mobilising against them. This problem becomes particularly acute in the rule of law crisis, where it is almost impossible for my nonexpert family and friends to understand what the CJEU (and the ECtHR) judgments on Hungary and Poland mean. This really motivated me to dig deeper. As I found out, improving the communication of courts with the public is a topic very much on the mind of not just academics, but judges, communication professionals, journalists, and civil society groups.

In what way did the various encounters with the other re:constitution Fellows in your cohort impact your thinking, your research or other areas of your professional life? I am in awe of the diversity of my cohort and how everyone brought a different facet of the rule of law to life. I learnt a lot from everyone, but particularly from those who came from a practical background in journalism, media, or civil society. Their resilience and

quick thinking inspired not only my project but also how I will engage as an academic in science communication and build bridges between academia and practice in the future.

What is your favourite place in Europe (off the beaten track)? Everyone should visit Transylvania in Romania. It is a magnificent region with strong influences from the Hungarian and German minorities living there. It is beautiful in every season and has charming and lively towns buzzing with cultural life, amazing food (even for vegetarians!), the most stunning nature for hiking and skiing, and volcanic lakes for swimming. It is easily accessible, even with budget airlines, and there is also a train from Budapest to Bucharest for climate-conscious travel! :)

What is your next project? After recently finishing my PhD, I have started a new position as a postdoctoral researcher at the Hertie School's Centre for Fundamental Rights and relocated to Berlin. I am incredibly excited about this new job, teaching international law to a diverse student body, and pushing my research further, including by, hopefully, publishing my PhD on backlash and the resilience of regional human rights regimes as a monograph!

Teresa Violante Managing Conflicts of Authority between National Constitutional Courts and the European Court of Justice: A Weak Judicial Review Proposal

Teresa Violante is a Research Fellow and a PhD Candidate at Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg and a Visiting Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law in Heidelberg. She holds a graduate degree in law (University of

Coimbra) and a European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratization (University of Padova), and lectures on fundamental rights and constitutional law. In her PhD project, she investigates weak judicial review by European constitutional courts, understood as the mechanisms that these

courts have developed to soften the authority of their rulings near the political branches. She publishes widely on matters of comparative constitutional law and European law. She is also the Director of the Institute for the Global Rule of Law of the European Public Law Organization.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger?

European constitutional courts have developed tools and mechanisms to soften the authority of their rulings to make them more ‘bearable’ by the legislature. There are several reasons for this, such as respecting the legislature’s margin of decision and legal security. I realised that some of these tools have increasingly been applied to engage the national constitutional order with EU law, especially in critical interactions between national constitutional courts and the CJEU. Moreover, the issue of whether and when the CJEU should be open to limiting the effects of its decisions is relevant in this context.



Which events or publications inspired you recently?

I recently read an excellent book by Aurélie Dianara Andry, *Social Europe, the Road not Taken*, that adds to the literature on how the Western-European left dreamt of and discussed a non-neoliberal Europe, and what might have been possible. When social democracy seems to become mere imagination in the European toolbox, it is essential to recall that the present might have been different and that there are no inevitabilities for the future.

(...) it is essential to recall that the present might have been different and that there are no inevitabilities for the future.

What was the most surprising thing you learned [in the re:constitution fellowship programme]?

It was learning about Aleksandra Jolkina’s project on the EU-Belarus border crisis. Although the topic was not unfamiliar to me, the graphic descriptions of how asylum

seekers are treated at the border and of the pushbacks at the hands of EU countries were very shocking.

How would you describe the current situation of democracy and the rule of law in Europe? Are we moving forward or backwards?

It’s challenging to make a qualitative assessment. Some factors seem to indicate a deterioration: the several reports of police violence against protestors in France; the continuing pushbacks against migrants in Greece and other EU Member States; and the outcome of the European Parliament Pegasus Committee showing that some countries, like Hungary and Poland, employ generalised surveillance as a standardised mechanism, while other states also accept it, although to a different degree and scale. We need to remain vigilant and critical.

What is your next project? I will finish my dissertation and work on some pending publications. After that, I plan to continue teaching and researching.

Edit Zgut-Przybylska Informal Exercise of Power in Hybrid Authoritarian Regimes: Undermining Democracy beneath the Radar of the EU

Edit Zgut-Przybylska is a visiting fellow at CEU Democracy Institute. She received a PhD in Sociology from GSSR at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology (IFIS) in the Polish Academy of Sciences. She holds an MA in Political Science from ELTE TÁTK and graduated as a journalist at Bálint György Journalism Academy. She is a researcher at the European Studies Unit at IFIS, her research interest covers informality and populism in power in the context of democratic backsliding. She is the Vice-Chair of Amnesty International in Hungary and a guest lecturer at the



Foreign Service Institute of the US State Department. She previously worked at Political Capital Research

Institute and prior to that, she was a journalist at various media outlets in Hungary.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? I do comparative research on informal governmental power in Hungary and Poland. I look at the power relations between the state, the government, and society—relations that are often coercive or at least have a chilling effect. The Orban and Kaczynski regimes are tilting the playing field with clientelist corruption and economic coercion. The misuse of public funds, media capture, and the political and economic monopolisation of the state are all negatively impacting the fairness of elections. I map informal distortions and explain why the EU could not put an end to this. I argue that the EU still fails to recognise informal power. Capturing the media in an uncoded, informal way was ignored by the EU Commission and the Council. This is a linchpin of every autocracy: to control the mindset of the electorate and cement its clientelist network in a corrupt setting.

How did your ‘mobility phases’ at Unhack Democracy and CEU DI contribute to your research? I had a twofold goal. First, I wanted to discuss my key findings

in the de- and re-democratisation group led by Andreas Schedler at the CEU DI. I was working with the most excellent scholars in the field, including Andras Bozoki, who inspired my work along the way. Informal power varies across regions, so—secondly—I also wanted to look beyond Central Eastern Europe. I teamed up with my great colleague, Melani Barlai (from Unhack Democracy) to design a workshop on the topic. We created coalitions across disciplines, sectors, and countries. Our event brought together 30 colleagues from Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, Austria, and Georgia and I am looking forward to continuing to work with them in the future.

How would you describe the current situation of democracy and the rule of law in Europe? Are we moving forward or backwards? Robust data tells us that we are moving backward. According to Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), post-communist countries such as Hungary have returned to electoral autocracy and Eastern Europe has overall regressed to the pre-1990

level. The quality of democracy is also deteriorating in countries like Greece. But the post-communist region is particularly problematic because it is a hotbed of informal distortions that are even more difficult to identify than formal deteriorations of democracy. Amid the global poly-crises and Russia's war against Ukraine, political actors are more incentivised to use marginalised groups' legitimate grievances to further their distortive and anti-democratic electoral strategies. Suffering from the economic implications of the war and the global pandemic, marginalised groups are becoming more vulnerable to economic coercion and other forms of manipulation. A notorious example is the Hungarian Roma minority, which is intimidated into supporting the regime. This is not only undermining the fairness of the election but raises a question: can we even talk about free elections?

How can a diverse group of rule of law and democracy experts make a difference? In Central Eastern Europe, the space for independent media is shrinking. The Hungarian and Polish public TV media spread disinformation to undermine the opposition and the decisions of the CJEU. Rule of law and democracy experts play an extremely important role in this ecosystem

This is why I believe in the power of cross-sectoral collaboration, like the re:constitution Fellowship.

to inform citizens about systemic corruption and the violation of EU law. Studying informal power is also a challenge in terms of data collection; those who are intimidated are not always willing to speak, even under anonymity. Bringing in complementary knowledge helps to overcome these challenges. This is why I believe in the power of cross-sectoral collaboration, like the re:constitution Fellowship.

What is your next project? Currently, I am engaged in three publication projects. First, I am finally turning my Polish–Hungarian comparison of informal power into a book. Second, I am shifting my focus to Romania and will coauthor a Palgrave book chapter entitled “Institutional Consolidation in Romania—between formal and informal norms”. I wear numerous hats; I love to be inspired and challenged by ideas circulating in and cross-pollinating different fields. This is why I am currently also working with the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism on a book called *Russia's Influence on Europe's Far Right*. In my free time, I help protect human rights as the vice-chair of Amnesty International Hungary. Restoring democracy needs all the help it can get, so I do this where it is possible.

Looking ahead

While the past academic year that we revisit in this magazine was characterised by the programme's successful transition to its second project phase, we can now really start to carve out an impactful re:constitution 2.0 to advance the rule of law in the European Union.

The Fellowships continue on successfully and remain based on the Fellows' collaboration and exchange through mobility across Europe. The upcoming cohorts will be more diverse, as we introduce part-time Fellowships in a new second track. They will enable practitioners from think tanks and non-governmental organisations, public authorities, and freelance journalists to better combine their Fellowship commitments with other tasks.

We are keen to stay connected with the Fellows once they have completed their Fellowship cycle and are building a re:constitution alumni network to that end. The network structure will be an ideal framework for continuous engagement across borders, disciplines, and backgrounds. This is based on the shared understanding that collective action is much more impactful than solitary endeavours. Developing and implementing the alumni network will be a multistep process, starting with a co-creative phase with the alumni in 2023. The growing network will offer a common platform to enable the re:constitution alumni to jointly shape debates about the ongoing challenges to democratic principles and rule of law backsliding and to contribute to developing solutions at the European level.

There will also be significant changes to the governance structure of the re:constitution programme. In 2023, we will appoint a new Advisory Board, which will be chaired by Prof. Angelika Nußberger. The new board will strategically guide re:constitution 2.0 programme development so that we can together ensure a sustainable future for the programme.

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