in re:trospect

re:constitution
Fellowships 2025/2026



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Preface



Photo: Josef Fischnaller

At a time when democracies are facing increasing scepticism, an event such as the election in Hungary that saw Viktor Orbán's long-standing government voted out of office represents a significant moment. Despite challenging starting conditions, the opposition achieved its goal of winning the election and managed to secure a two-thirds majority in parliament. However, a return to the rule of law is no easy task, as the example of Poland also demonstrates.

These are issues of central importance to re:constitution. Immediately after the election, a public event on Hungary entitled *Hungary 2026: Elections, Institutions, Participation* was held in collaboration with the Centre for Social Sciences at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest. In addition, re:constitution's Rule of Law Conference on 15 and 16 September 2025 provided an opportunity for around 150 experts from academia, civil society, the media, and politics to exchange views on issues relating to the rule of law and democracy in Europe. A wide range of workshops explored the resilience of the judiciary and democracy, authoritarian tendencies, migration, and lawfare as well as the role of civil society, academia, and the media in defending the principles of the rule of law and strengthening democratic resilience.

At their meetings in Berlin and Athens and online, the Fellows also addressed issues relating to the development of democracy. Given the positive results, the structure of the Fellowship programme from the previous year was retained. In 2025/2026, there were once again a total of 15 Fellows, 10 in Track 1 (full-time for academics and practitioners) and 5 in Track 2 (part-time and exclusively for practitioners).

The Europe-wide networking achieved through conferences, Fellowships, and other activities continues to prove a successful model. This magazine provides insight into personal experiences, explains the details of the events, and, for the first time, also presents the Alumni Network. We hope you enjoy reading it!



Angelika Nußberger

Programme

What is it all About?

"re:constitution—Exchange and Analysis on Democracy and the Rule of Law in Europe" is a cross-border initiative that brings together actors from academia, civil society, public institutions, and other professions to advance democracy and the rule of law across Europe. By combining rigorous research, timely analysis, capacity building, and collaborative exchange, the programme seeks to generate knowledge and promote practical responses to current challenges. At a time when Europe continues to face multiple, interconnected crises, reinforcing the resilience of democratic governance and the rule of law is more important than ever. Sustained dialogue on the principles and values underpinning democratic societies remains essential, but meaningful progress also requires concrete efforts to strengthen institutions, legal frameworks, and democratic practices.

Against this background, re:constitution fosters evidence-based debate and transnational cooperation on questions concerning democracy, the rule of law, and the conditions necessary for their preservation and resilience. At its core is the development of a lasting European network of scholars and practitioners committed to addressing these challenges together. The re:constitution Fellows engage on a wide range of issues at the intersection of research and practice, developing and discussing solution-oriented approaches to strengthen the rule of law and democracy across Europe. Central to the programme is the cultivation of an interdisciplinary network that brings together scholars and practitioners from across the continent to foster exchange, collaboration, and innovative thinking.

re:constitution was founded in 2019 as a programme jointly run by Forum Transregionale Studien and Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and funded by Stiftung Mercator. Its three modules are as follows:

1. re:constitution Fellowships
2. re:constitution Alumni Network
3. re:constitution Analysis & Outreach

Each year, re:constitution selects up to 15 early- and mid-career researchers and practitioners whose work addresses questions related to the rule of law and democracy in Europe. The **Fellowship** enables participants to pursue independent research or a practice-oriented project over the course of one academic year. To accommodate different professional circumstances, five Fellowships are offered on a part-time basis, providing greater flexibility for practitioners alongside their ongoing professional commitments. Depending on the Fellowship format, participants spend three or six months at academic institutions and in practice-oriented host organisations across the EU and other European partner countries, fostering exchange between scholarship and professional practice. Throughout the programme, Fellows take part in a range of collaborative activities, including Fellows' Exchange Meetings, the online Fellow Talk series, and other opportunities for dialogue and peer learning. Their research findings are disseminated through various re:constitution publication formats. Fellow profiles and research outputs can be found on our website at https://www.reconstitution.eu/en/home.

Upon completing their Fellowship, participants become part of the re:constitution **Alumni Network**, a growing community dedicated to advancing dialogue and collaboration on issues concerning democracy and the rule of law. Building on the connections established during the Fellowship, the network provides a long-term platform for exchange among Alumni and Alumnae from diverse disciplines, sectors, and countries. The Alumni Network is designed to encourage sustained engagement beyond the Fellowship year, enabling its members to contribute to joint initiatives, share expertise, and help shape the network's future direction. Its activities and strategic development are coordinated by a Steering Committee, whose members are elected by the Alumni community.

The **Analysis & Outreach** component of re:constitution is managed by DRI. Through reports, policy analyses, infographics, and other digital publications, DRI contributes to informed public discussion on developments affecting the rule of law and democracy in Europe and provides accessible resources for

policymakers, journalists, and other interested parties.
A key element of this work is the Judiciary Hub, an interactive online platform offering up-to-date information on judicial systems and rule of law developments across all EU member states and several EU candidate countries. You may access it here: https://www.reconstitution.eu/en/research/judiciary-hub.

Throughout the Fellowship, participants also have the opportunity to contribute to DRI's analytical and outreach activities, further connecting their research with broader public and policy debates.

Established in 2023, the re:constitution **Advisory Board** provides strategic guidance for the programme and supports its development. Bringing together distinguished experts from academia and professional practice, the Board contributes diverse perspectives and expertise to the programme's ongoing evolution. It is chaired by Angelika Nußberger, director of the Academy for European Human Rights Protection.

Programme Partners

Forum Transregionale Studien

The Berlin-based Forum Transregionale Studien promotes cross-border research and cooperation. Transregional approaches connect and confront different disciplinary, regional, national, and local perspectives and experiences 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 programmes 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. It is based on the idea that people are active participants in public life, not subjects of their governments. Their work centres on analysis, reporting, and capacity-building. For this, DRI is guided by the democratic and human rights obligations enshrined in international law. Headquartered in Berlin, DRI has offices in Lebanon, Tunisia, Democratic Republic of Congo 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.

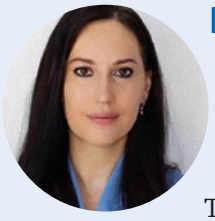
Meet the Advisory Board

The re:constitution Advisory Board is an independent body of international experts from academia and practice that advises the programme on strategic issues. The Advisory Board is responsible for the evaluation of Fellowship applications and provides guidance for the topical focus and the overall development of the programme.



Angelika Nußberger

Angelika Nußberger is a professor of international law, public law, and comparative law at the University of Cologne and founding director of the Academy for European Human Rights Protection, vice-president of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and member of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe and the Institute of International Law. She served as a judge at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) elected on behalf of Germany from January 2011 to December 2019 and as its vice-president from February 2017. She studied law and literature (German, Russian, and French) in Munich, Würzburg, Moscow, and Boston.



Fjoralba Caka

Fjoralba Caka is a professor of EU law and internal market at the Faculty of Law at the University of Tirana. She served as deputy minister of justice in Albania, with a portfolio covering the strategic framework on anti-corruption and rule of law reform and has been a negotiator for Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) with the European Commission. She is a board member of different NGOs and platforms, focusing on EU integration, rule of law, and the alignment of EU law in specific sectors. Fjoralba has a keen interest in the intersection of rule of law and the private sector, EU integration, and policy reform.



Alberto Alemanno

Alberto Alemanno is a Jean Monnet Professor of EU law at Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales Paris and, amongst other posts, a visiting professor at the College of Europe in Bruges where he teaches European democracy. He is the founder of The Good Lobby, a nonprofit committed to enhancing the advocacy capacity of civil society organisations within and across the EU. In addition to his extensive scholarly writings on EU law, risk regulation, public health, democratic innovation, and participatory deliberative democracy, Alberto is a regular contributor to leading newspapers and media, including *Le Monde*, *The Guardian*, and *Politico* and *BBC*, *Euronews*, and *Al-Jazeera*.



Monica Claes

Monica Claes is a professor of European and comparative constitutional law at the Law Faculty at Maastricht University. Her main areas of interest are European fundamental rights law, the relationship between European and national constitutional law, the development of a European constitutional space, common constitutional principles, and the concept of national constitutional identity. Monica is co-director of the Maastricht Centre for European Law and co-editor-in-chief of the *European Constitutional Law Review* (EuConst). She teaches constitutional law, European law, and European fundamental rights law.

Photos: Josef Fischnaller (Angelika Nußberger), private (all others)



Ramona Coman

Ramona Coman is a professor of political science at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), where she served as director (2014–2019) and president (2019–2023) of the Institut d'études européennes. She leads two European projects on dissensus over liberal democracy: RED SPINEL, a Horizon Europe project, and GEM-DIAMOND, a Marie Sklodowska-Curie Joint Doctorate Network that brings together 17 PhD students. She teaches courses on decision making in the EU as well as rule of law and mutual trust in global and European governance and a PhD seminar on political science at the ULB. Since 2023, Ramona has been a visiting professor at the College of Europe.



Sarah Ganty

Sarah Ganty is an assistant professor at Peking University's School of Transnational Law. She is also a senior researcher at the Central European University (CEU) and a J.S.D. candidate at Yale Law School in New Haven (degree expected in 2026). She is a recurrent visiting professor at LUISS Guido Carli Faculty of Law in Rome and contributes to the drafting of third-party interventions before the ECHR. Previously, she has held visiting professorships at the University of Hong Kong, CEU in Vienna, ULB, and the Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis in Brussels. She was also a re:constitution Fellow. In 2013, Sarah was called to the bar in Brussels, focusing on constitutional, administrative, and refugee and migration law.



Christophe Hillion

Christophe Hillion is professor of European law at the University of Oslo, research professor at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, and visiting professor at the College of Europe. His present research focuses on interactions between the EU and its European neighbours and on the defence of the rule of law and democracy in the EU, especially within the scope of the project "ENforcing the Rule Of Law—What can the European Union do to prevent rule of law deterioration from within?" (ENROL) that he co-directs and that is financed by the Norwegian Research Council. He regularly advises European governments and institutions on these topics.



Alexandra Kemmerer

Alexandra Kemmerer is senior research fellow and academic coordinator at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law in Heidelberg and head of the Institute's Berlin office, a forum for intellectual encounters inspired and informed by current legal scholarship. Alexandra has widely published as an academic and journalist, and her current research interests include international and European law and their histories and theories, histories of legal scholarship and its institutions, pasts and futures of public legal discourse as commons, transitional justice, and comparative constitutionalism.



Liam Nolan

Liam Nolan is an Irish journalist and the current Eastern Europe reporter for *RTÉ News,* Ireland's public service broadcaster. He has been based in Warsaw since 2022 and has reported widely throughout Central and Eastern Europe on the region's politics, rule of law issues, and the war in Ukraine and its impact on defence policy along NATO's eastern flank. Liam previously worked for *The Economist* in London as a staff video journalist and as executive producer for the *Financial Times* podcast unit.

Photos: Maurice Weiss/Ostkreuz (Alexandra Kemmerer), private (all others)



Emily O'Reilly

Emily O'Reilly was appointed as an ambassador to Open Government Partnership in 2025 and served as European Ombudsman from 2013 to 2025. She was awarded the Schwarzkopf Europe Award in 2017, the Prague European Summit Vision for Europe Award in 2018, and the University of Flensburg's Europa prize in 2020 in recognition of her work. From 2003 until 2013, Emily was the first female Ombudsman and Information Commissioner in Ireland and was additionally appointed Commissioner for Environmental Information in 2007. She is an award-winning former journalist, author, and political editor who has received international recognition. She has written three acclaimed books on Irish politics and media.



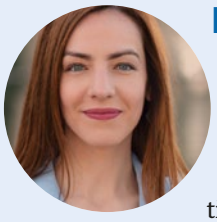
Márta Pardavi

Márta Pardavi is co-chair of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, a leading human rights NGO based in Budapest. She focuses on threats to the rule of law and civil society in Hungary and in the EU. She co-leads the Recharging Advocacy for Rights in Europe (RARE) programme, supporting human rights defenders to build stronger organisations and alliances for action on civic space and rule of law in the EU. Márta holds a law degree from ELTE Law School and an Executive Master of Public Administration from the Hertie School. She is a member of the Council of Europe's Expert Council on NGO law and serves on several international NGO boards.



Roman Petrov

Roman Petrov is a professor of law, Jean Monnet Chair in EU Law, and head of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. Roman is active in publishing and international research on EU law and EU external relations law, on approximation and harmonisation of legislation of third countries with the EU acquis, and on legal aspects of regional integration in the post-Soviet area.



Neus Vidal Martí

Neus Vidal Martí is a journalist and political scientist who specialises in access to information and media policies. She is the executive director of the Seek Initiative. Prior to this, she was in charge of monitoring violations of media freedom at the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom. Neus is an experienced conference host and panellist, and she is usually invited to speak on media freedom and journalism. She has taught journalism at several universities and holds degrees in journalism and political science and an investigative journalism Master's degree. She is currently pursuing a PhD in political science.

Photos: Etienne Ansotte, European Commission, wikicommons (Emily O'Reilly), Joanna Scheffel (Neus Nidal Martí), private (all others)

Meet the Team



Jakub Jaraczewski

As Research Coordinator, Jakub focuses on the crisis and recovery of the rule of law in Central and Eastern Europe. In the re:constitution programme, he collaborates with journalists and policymakers to improve public debate on the rule of law within the EU. His insights have appeared in leading media outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Economist*, *Politico*, *Euronews*, *Die Welt*, *El Pais*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and other significant European and global publications.

"Over the last year, at Democracy Reporting International, we have seen more engagement with re:constitution Fellows than ever before. Beyond our participation in exchange meetings and project events, we enlisted the help of former and current re:constitution Fellows for a deeper analysis of the Polish presidential election (with Maria Skóra); Hungarian parliamentary elections (with Edit Zgut-Przybylska); and on the rule of law conditionality in the next EU budget (with Jacquelyn Veraldi). Every time, these collaborations have been fruitful, smooth, and intellectually stimulating."



Arnisa Tepelija

As Rule of Law Officer for Research, Arnisa contributes to re:constitution projects, supporting research and coordination on initiatives related to the judiciary and fundamental rights across the EU, with a focus on Western European countries and accession countries. She has a PhD in comparative constitutional law from Central European University and publishes regularly on rule of law, judiciary, and fundamental rights.

"I am in awe of the participants in this Fellowship programme. Their originality, commitment to solutions, and ability to bridge rigorous theory with practical action are truly inspiring. They turn an abstract notion such as the rule of law into tangible steps to improve institutions and processes. The programme helps them build meaningful partnerships and turn their vision into lasting impact; it makes their project a vivid reality grounded in the principles of the rule of law and contributing to the rule of law."



Dennis Wenzl

As Programme & Outreach Coordinator, Dennis coordinates the implementation of projects on the rule of law and fundamental rights in the EU. He is also responsible for designing and implementing DRI's outreach strategies, monitoring developments among relevant international institutions and actors, and fundraising. Dennis previously worked in communications and public policy in Brussels after a traineeship in the Council of Europe's Democratic Governance Department. Dennis holds an MA in democracy studies and a BA in political science and German philology from the University of Regensburg.

"It is great to see how the Fellowship attracts more inspiring people every year. Their combined dedication, knowledge, and interest in strengthening the rule of law in Europe not only enriches our work at re:constitution but also gives me new hope for the future. Having followed the work and professional trajectory of several cohorts of Fellows, I can say with confidence that we are supporting the right people in our joint struggle for the rule of law."

Photos: Democracy Reporting International



Federica Lombardi

As Programme Assistant, Federica supports the projects on the rule of law and fundamental rights in the EU. She previously worked with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), supporting the implementation of projects aimed at promoting and protecting human rights across the OSCE region and at the EU Delegation to the UN in Geneva. Federica holds a European MA in human rights and democratisation from the Global Campus of Human Rights Europe and a BA in European law from Maastricht University.

"It's great to see the re:constitution network grow year by year with Fellows from such diverse academic and professional backgrounds. I firmly believe that many of the most pressing challenges facing democracy and the rule of law in Europe today can only be addressed by bringing together diverse voices and perspectives across disciplines and borders, so I am honoured to work on a project that helps create space for exactly that kind of exchange."



Albert Guasch Rafael

As Communications Coordinator, Albert leads communication strategies across global projects on the rule of law, digital policy, and online public discourse. He ensures a consistent brand presence across headquarters and country offices. Albert is a communications professional with over seven years' experience helping democracy-focused and mission-driven organisations increase their visibility and impact. Albert began his career as a journalist, and his work has appeared in *Foreign Policy*, *Euronews*, and *La Vanguardia*. He previously served as communications officer at Club de Madrid.

"What makes working on re:constitution so rewarding is watching young scholars and practitioners engage in debates our legal systems are only beginning to face. Their research and commentary advance current thinking on EU legal affairs. But what I love most is seeing a community grow larger and stronger each year, one with the potential to shape the future of European legal affairs."



Emilia Ochoa

As Communications Officer, Emilia is engaged in digital content creation and overseeing website and social media management. Her professional journey has encompassed a diverse range of roles from facilitating cultural and bilateral cooperation initiatives in different Mexican missions to delving into the world of science and publishing policy at the Springer Nature Group. She previously worked on internal and external communications and event coordination for the Beyond Fossil Fuels campaign, a part of Climate Action Network Europe.

"Courts and legal frameworks might seem abstract, but they shape daily lives and how we're governed, how rights are protected, and how justice is served. At re:constitution, we have a chance to help share the work of Fellows who are making these concepts real and relevant for everyone."

Photos: Democracy Reporting International



Sonya Zayneb Ouertani

As Academic Coordinator, Sonya oversees all steps within the Fellowship programme and the Alumni Network. She also works on the programme's overall strategic and conceptual development. She previously held various positions in international and German governmental institutions on rule of law promotion, democratisation, and peacebuilding in Africa, Asia, and Southeast Europe. Sonya holds an LLM in international human rights and humanitarian law and studied politics and public administration at Sciences Po Paris, the University of Konstanz, and the Balsillie School of International Affairs.

"I see my role as holding space for people to think critically together at a moment when that space is shrinking elsewhere in Europe. It is a great pleasure watching Fellows arrive as individual researchers and, over the course of time, start shaping the programme themselves. That transformation into a genuine community, one that keeps supporting and challenging each other long after the Fellowship ends, is what makes this work meaningful to me. In the end, defending the rule of law is a collective effort and so is this programme."



Julia Türtscher

As Programme Associate, Julia contributes to all of the activities within the framework of the Fellowship programme and the Alumni Network. 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). She studied cultural studies in Lüneburg, Frankfurt (Oder), Ankara, and Belfast. Her interests include critical migration and border studies and environmental humanities.

"Meeting a new Fellow cohort, learning about their diverse research topics and their development over time in exchange with the group is not only an enriching experience but also a real pleasure. With the growing Alumni Network, these exchanges between Fellows and Alumni are becoming more frequent and long lasting, and I look forward to continuing to create spaces that enable such encounters and critical debates."

Photos: private

Fellowship Roadmap





Illustration: Nadine Roßa

Democracy Reporting International's Look Back on the 2025/2026 Cohort of Fellows

Democracy Reporting International (DRI) once again joined the re:constitution programme this year, working with the 2025/2026 cohort of Fellows on the state of democracy and the rule of law in Europe. Across three meetings, DRI ran interactive sessions on the challenges facing the EU, its member states, and countries beyond by drawing on the cohort's range of disciplinary backgrounds.

The first Fellows' Exchange Meeting took place as usual in Berlin in September 2025. For this session, we decided to try something new. We invited **Maria Skóra**, visiting researcher at SWPS University in Warsaw, research fellow at the Institut für Europäische Politik, and policy fellow at Das Progressive Zentrum in Berlin, and, most importantly, re:constitution Fellow from the 2024/2025 cohort. Together with DRI's Research Coordinator, **Jakub Jaraczewski**, Maria ran a session on how to impact non-academic audiences, guiding the mostly academic cohort of Fellows towards solutions on how to reach policymakers, civil society, journalists, and other actors that academia doesn't encounter all that frequently. Maria's experience in working with diverse interlocutors, coupled with her familiarity with the re:constitution programme, contributed greatly to making this session exciting and informative.

In February 2026, during the second Fellows' Exchange Meeting, held online, DRI had its communications coordinator, **Albert Guasch Rafael**, deliver a session on communication with the media. The session was focused on providing the Fellows with tools and methods to translate their research into media content, with particular emphasis on social media and the press. Albert helped the Fellows explore ideas about planning their communications, setting concrete goals, and defining audiences, messaging, and channels. Two practical exercises tested the Fellows' abilities regarding media: crafting social media posts about their research and pitching op-eds to editors.

Our involvement in Fellows' Exchange Meetings ended in Athens in June 2026, where DRI's Programme & Outreach Coordinator, **Dennis Wenzl**, together with re:constituton Fellow, **Jacquelyn Veraldi** from the current 2025/2026 cohort, ran a training on advocacy and outreach. Working from case studies and exercises, the Fellows looked at how to present complex legal findings to policymakers and how to build coalitions around them and at the part narrative, timing, and persistence play in turning analysis into reform.

As in previous years, DRI also drew on the re:constitution Fellows for our work in analysing the rule of law in the EU. For the pivotal Hungarian parliamentary elections in April 2026, we partnered with a Fellow from the 2022/2023 cohort, **Edit Zgut-Przybylska**, who is an assistant professor in the Institute of Philosophy at the Polish Academy of Sciences and a research fellow at the CEU Democracy Institute. Edit provided us with invaluable insight into political platforms and scenarios for the elections and participated in a press briefing ahead of the vote and a webinar together with re:constitution Alumnus **Csaba Győry** from the 2019/2020 cohort and **Márta Pardavi**, co-chair of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, to discuss the aftermath of the dramatic vote.

Yet another close collaboration between DRI and re:constitution Fellows is taking place just as I write this. We once again tapped **Jacquelyn Veraldi** to help us examine the proposals for the rule of law conditionality in the upcoming EU budget. As part of this consultancy, Jacquelyn provided us with a bibliography of key writings on the topic and a detailed policy brief with recommendations aimed at EU institutions and member states as they negotiate the shape of the next Multiannual Financial Framework. She will moderate a discussion on the topic during our upcoming European Rule of Law Talks event in Brussels in September.

Suffice to say, it's been a busy year in our engagement with the Fellows. We're looking forward to the next cohort as the third phase of re:constitution begins, and we're excited for new ways to engage with the programme's participants!

Jakub Jaraczewski

Impressions



Above the rooftops of Copenhagen



Discussing research findings with colleagues in Cologne

Dublin and the Dublin City University







A short trip from Liverpool to Wales



A Fellows' Exchange Meeting underneath the Acropolis



Strasbourg: From traditional to modern



Mobility Phase in Oxford



Photos: Patrick Leisure (Copenhagen, Dublin, Athens), Andrii Nekoliak (Cologne), Mária Žuffová (Wales), Victor Ellenbroek (Oxford), Dukagjin Abdyli (Strasbourg)



Illustration: Nadine Roßa

Reflection by Dukagjin Abdyli, re:constitution Fellow 2025/2026

Joining the re:constitution Fellowship programme was more than an academic and professional milestone; it was an invitation into a vibrant, living European constitutional dialogue. Coming from Kosovo, my research centres on how constitutional courts operationalise European rule of law standards—moving beyond merely citing principles to genuinely integrating them into judicial practice. The Fellowship provided the perfect ecosystem to explore this dynamic.

A central highlight of my journey was the mobility phase at the ECHR in Strasbourg. Working amidst the Court's rich legal environment allowed me to bridge the gap between abstract European standards and their practical application. It transformed my perspective, proving that academic mobility does far more than offer quiet library time; it challenges underlying assumptions and contextualises local legal realities within broader European debates.

Equally enriching were our personal gatherings in Berlin and Athens. In fact, the Rule of Law Conference organised in Berlin in 2025 stands out as one of the best-organised conferences I have ever participated in. Throughout these gatherings, I was truly thrilled by the remarkable level of expertise, dedication, and synergy that the Fellows brought to the group. Our exchanges—whether debating judicial independence or discussing democratic resilience across legal traditions—showed that transitional democracies do not just absorb European norms; they actively shape them.



Photo: Dukagjin Abdyli

Looking ahead, this experience has profoundly influenced both my judicial work and academic career. It has reinforced my approach to teaching and research, ensuring I view constitutional adjudication as part of an interconnected European constitutional space. Above all, re:constitution has provided me with sharper comparative tools, lasting professional bonds, and a renewed commitment to defending the rule of law as a living, collective European project.

Dukagjin Abdyli, re:constitution Fellow 2025/2026

Reflection by Mária Žuffová, re:constitution Fellow 2025/2026

Joining the re:constitution Fellowship cohort was one of the most valuable experiences of my 2025/2026 academic year. From Fellows' Exchange Meetings in Berlin and Athens, the Rule of Law Conference in September, and mobility exchanges with the Forum for Human Rights, the University of Liverpool, and the Institute for Democracy to our regular online meetings where we presented our projects, the Fellowship offered countless opportunities to connect, exchange ideas, and learn. The programme provides both structure and resources that are often lacking for early-career researchers and practitioners, but at the same time, it gives its Fellows freedom to decide and pursue the directions that best align with their interests and goals.

Without the re:constitution Fellowship, my research on hostility and violence against journalists and its consequences would most likely not have been possible, certainly not on its current scale across seven European democracies. So, I am especially grateful for the opportunity to develop the project and discuss it. My fellow cohort members and re:constitution Alumna Neus Vidal Martí helped me sharpen the project's focus during our online seminars. Later, Vera Slavtcheva-Petkova and colleagues at the University of Liverpool's Centre for Digital Politics, Media, and Democracy provided invaluable advice on how to improve the research design and sampling strategy. I hope the project will make a meaningful contribution to debates on the protection of journalists and democratic resilience. My other two research exchanges were equally rewarding. More importantly, the collaborations they sparked did not end with the Fellowship. They continue today through joint project proposals, co-authored articles, workshops, and regular exchanges.



Photo: Mária Žuffová

The Fellowship changed how I think about my role as a researcher. A workshop by The Good Lobby, led by our fantastic colleague, Jacquelyn Veraldi, prompted me to reflect on the relationship between academic research and public engagement. Before academia, I worked in civic activism, but over time, those two parts of my professional life had drifted apart. The Fellowship reminded me that they can and should reinforce one another. The Fellowship strengthened my belief that researchers should not only produce knowledge but also consider how it can inform public debate, support practitioners, and help protect the rule of law.

Last but not least, even though we were working hard, we also made sure to have some fun. During my stay in Liverpool, I reunited with a close friend I hadn't seen for years, and we explored beautiful Welsh castles and the surrounding countryside. And in Athens, the re:constitution team organised what was easily the best guided tour I have ever taken. If you ever have the chance to join one of Planetwonk's Social and Political Walks, I highly recommend you do so.

Mária Žuffová, re:constitution Fellow 2025/2026

Dukagjin Abdyli Application of Rule of Law Standards by Constitutional Courts: A Comparative Analysis of CJEU, ECHR, and Venice Commission Influences



Dukagjin Abdyli is a distinguished legal expert specializing in European Law, Constitutional Law, and International Law. He holds a Doctor of Legal Sciences (Dr. iur.) degree from Karl Franzens University of Graz, where his research focused on the interaction between European and international legal frameworks. He also obtained an LLM in EU International Relations and European Economic Law from Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, which further enhanced his expertise in EU legal systems. Dukagjin has held key positions in Kosovo's public institutions, with a particular focus on constitutional and European integration processes. During his tenure at the Ministry of European Integration, he played a crucial role in the legal approximation process, ensuring the harmonization of Kosovo's legislation with the EU acquis. Currently, he serves as Deputy Chief Legal Advisor at the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Kosovo, where he provides legal analysis and contributes to the protection and enforcement of fundamental rights. He is also a committed academic, serving as a lecturer at the International Business College of Mitrovica (IBCM), where he teaches European Law, International Law, and International Trade Law. His academic and professional work reflects a strong commitment to the development of rule of law and democracy.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? My research examines how constitutional courts apply what we broadly call the rule of law in practice. While this concept is often invoked in political and legal discourse, its concrete meaning is actively shaped by European institutions such as the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and the Venice Commission through standards on judicial independence, fair trial guarantees, and fundamental rights. Specifically, I investigate how constitutional courts, particularly in Kosovo and Albania, use these European legal standards to protect democracy and judicial independence. I am interested in whether courts merely cite European principles as formal sources or genuinely integrate them into their reasoning and institutional practice. Because constitutional courts serve as the final arbiters of democracy, understanding how they operationalise these standards in politically

Photo: Foto Gagi

contested environments is vital for democratic resilience across the region.

Which events or publications inspired you recently? An event that deeply inspired me recently was the European Rule of Law Conference held in Berlin, organised by re:constitution. It was truly one of the best-organised conferences I have ever participated in. What made it particularly impactful was learning about the common strategies used by autocrats in modern history, essentially exposing the 'autocrat's handbook' deployed across various European countries. The discussions provided invaluable frameworks for identifying early signs of autocratic behaviour and subtle erosion of democratic norms. Understanding these patterns has significantly enriched my perspective on how constitutional courts can better recognise and resist anti-democratic pressures.

Transitional democracies do not simply absorb European norms passively; they actively contribute to shaping them.

What was your best re:constitution moment so far? While my research phase at the ECHR in Strasbourg was a big academic highlight, my best overall re:constitution moment has been the collective experience of our personal gatherings in Berlin and Athens. The level of expertise, dedication, and synergy within our cohort was thrilling. Engaging in high-level debates with fellow experts—whether discussing judicial independence or democratic resilience across legal traditions—highlighted the unique magic of the re:constitution community.

The re:constitution Alumni Network aims to promote a new and diverse generation of rule of law experts to collectively shape the rule of law field. What can or should be achieved, from your perspective? The Network should continue bridging the gap between theoretical constitutional standards and practical institutional reality. From my perspective, one of the key achievements of this Network is demonstrating that transitional democracies do not simply absorb European norms passively; they actively contribute to shaping them.
Moving forward, the Alumni Network can serve as a permanent, living platform for constitutional dialogue across Europe. By bringing together diverse perspectives, especially from the Western Balkans and transitional legal systems, we can ensure that local legal challenges enrich broader European debates on democratic backsliding. The Network can collectively act as a vital safeguard, offering comparative tools and mutual support to defend the rule of law as a shared, living European project.

What is your next project? My next project focuses on EU enlargement in the Western Balkans (WB6), examining why the EU must provide a clear, measured, and predictable accession roadmap for the region. I plan to analyse the systemic risks to the rule of law that emerge when accession timelines remain stagnant or uncertain. If the EU fails to offer a credible and predictable pathway, it leaves a strategic vacuum, creating fertile ground for geopolitical interference from external actors like Russia and China, who seek to exploit local vulnerabilities and weaken democratic standards.
A central question I will address is the role of financial levers and the extent to which EU funds dedicated to the WB6 should be strictly linked to rule of law conditionality. By combining constitutional theory with practical integration mechanisms, my work aims to demonstrate how robust financial incentives and clear strategic commitments can effectively safeguard democratic resilience across the Western Balkans.

York Albrecht Black Box Berlaymont: Administrative Coordination within the European Commission and the Nexus between the Rule of Law and the Single Market

York Albrecht is a research associate at Institut für Europäische Politik e.V. in Berlin. His main research interests are illiberalism and autocratization processes, comparative political economy, and democratic resilience. He holds an M.A. in Political Science and is member of the European Commission's Team EUROPE DIRECT Speaker Pool in Germany.



Photo: Marlene Pfau

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? My project brings two research interests together. First, the European Commission shifted focus in its enforcement and public communication of the rule of law. It now puts more emphasis on the relevance of the rule of law for businesses and economic growth and added a Single Market Dimension to its Annual Rule of law Report (ARoLR). Second, I am interested in the Commission's internal functioning and how administrative coordination affects policy output. The Commission's rule of law policy requires strong coordination between different Directorate-Generals. Hence, I try to look into the engine room of the Commission's rule of law policies. By using the ARoLR as a case study, I examine how different administrative units within the Commission coordinate in the production of the report.

How would you describe the current situation of democracy and the rule of law in Europe? Are we moving forwards or backwards? It would be great to give a positive assessment, however, political realities look dire. I see three major issues for democracy and the rule of law right now. First, the far right remains strong in many member states. Particularly worrying are trends in France and Germany. Their backsliding would have dire consequences for Europe as a whole. It would also be the litmus test for the resilience of the EU's own structures. For example, it remains an open question if and how rule of law conditionality would work in case of backsliding net contributors to the EU budget. Second, the rule of law crisis reached the EU level. Specifically, transparency and accountability of the Commission itself are regressing. The politicization of the rule of law, omnibus legislation and non-enforcement of EU law are worrying trends. Additionally, the role of the European Parliament changed considerably since the last mandate. Cooperation of centre-right and far-right actors and hostile rhetoric against CSOs affect the EP's capacity to protect the rule of law. Third, geopolitical pressures—autocratization in the United States, Russia's aggression

against Ukraine, economic crisis—remain high. They are contextual factors that affect democracy and the rule of law in Europe. In short: democracy and rule of law in Europe remain under serious stress. For all democracy defenders, it remains crucial in the years to come to, in Gramsci's words, combine the pessimism of the intellect with the optimism of the will.

After all, protecting democracy is a team effort.

How did your mobility phase at the European Policy Centre (EPC) in Brussels contribute to your research? The EPC was the perfect fit for my mobility phase due to its excellent network and reputation in Brussels. As my project relied on conducting semi-structured interviews, reaching out to potential interviewees was the biggest challenge. Receiving an EPC e-mail address helped immensely. Thanks to the EPC's location in the heart of the European Quarter in Brussels, I was able to conduct meetings easily. Furthermore, the network of colleagues was of great value to identify potential interviewees. Beyond my re:constitution project, the EPC offered me opportunities to contribute to analysis and media work on the Hungarian election in April 2026, present my project to interested colleagues, and attend other trainings and activities.

How can a diverse group of rule of law and democracy experts make a difference? The threats to democracy and the rule of law in Europe require legal, political, sociological, economic, and maybe even psychological expertise. No discipline can address all the pressing questions alone. As a political scientist working on the rule of law, I benefit tremendously from the work of colleagues in the legal field and in others. The re:constitution Network is the perfect platform for interdisciplinary collaboration. After all, protecting democracy is a team effort.

What is your next project? My next project will be pursuing a PhD at Université libre de Bruxelles and UCLouvain in a project on the role of courts in protecting liberal democracy in Europe. The project investigates the legal instruments designed to defend democratic regimes against internal threats in five EU member states. In my dissertation, I aim to explore the party-political pre-conditions of party bans. The project ties in greatly with my previous work at the intersection of politics and law and with the opportunities that re:constitution provided me with.

Hubert Bekisz When the Rule of Law Hits the Border Fence: Exploring the Role of Courts in Adjudicating Pushbacks

Hubert Bekisz is a PhD Researcher in Law at the European University Institute in Florence (EUI). His research interests include EU migration and asylum law, EU free movement law, and the judicial architecture of the European Union. Hubert's PhD project, under the supervision of Professor Urška Šadl, explores the implications of EU procedural harmonization in the field of asylum on national courts' adjudication of the right to an effective remedy. Hubert collaborates as a country expert with the ERC-funded Gatekeepers to International Refugee Law?—The Role of Courts in Shaping Access to Asylum (ACCESS) project, led by Professor Madalina Moraru at the University of Bologna. His earlier research collaborations included the ERC-funded Human Rights Nudge project, led by Professor Veronika Fikfak at the University of Copenhagen, and the Sapere Aude-funded Judging Under the Influence project at the University of Copenhagen and the EUI, headed by Professor Urška Šadl. Hubert holds a master's degree in Law from the University of Warsaw, an MA in European Interdisciplinary Studies from the College of Europe, and an LLM in Comparative, European and International Laws from the EUI.



How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? My project asks the following simple question: when politics fails the rule of law, can courts step in to uphold it, including for the benefit of those individuals at the margins of society? Specifically, I look at how Polish courts have dealt with cases concerning pushbacks and access to asylum at the Polish–Belarusian border. Beyond analysing what courts decide, I am interested in why they decide the way they do. In other words, I explore how judges navigate politically sensitive cases and how factors beyond legal doctrine may shape their approach. Ultimately, the project explores the role that courts can play in protecting rights and maintaining constitutional resilience in times of democratic and political pressure.

How did you come up with your re:constitution project? What inspired you to pursue this question? During my doctoral research, I became interested in what happens when rights encounter political realities at the border. The situation at the Polish–Belarusian border was a particularly striking example because asylum seekers' access to legal protection became deeply entangled with questions of national security and political contestation. What interested me the most was the position of the judges involved. Courts are often described as the last safeguard of rights, but that description can obscure how difficult it is for judges to perform this role in politically charged environments. I wanted to look beyond the formal legal framework and understand how judges respond to these pressures. The re:constitution project gave me the opportunity to approach this question empirically and to combine my legal research with socio-legal perspectives.

What made you apply to the programme? What did you get out of it? I was particularly attracted by the programme's combination of academic research, mobility, and the community of people working on related questions from very different perspectives. What I got out of it was, above all, a broader intellectual horizon. Discussions with other Fellows made me question some of my own assumptions and helped me see my research as part of larger debates about democratic resilience and institutional change. The Fellowship also gave me valuable opportunities to develop my project beyond doctrinal legal research and to build lasting connections with scholars across Europe. Looking back, the community created by the programme is what I value most.

What fascinates you the most about your work? What fascinates me the most is the gap between law as it is written and law as it works and is applied in practice. Legal rules can look clear and coherent on paper, but their meaning and impact often depend on the people and institutions applying them. I am particularly interested in the role of courts in this space. Judges are expected to apply the law independently, but they do so in environments shaped by political pressures, institutional constraints, and wider social debates. Understanding how they navigate these tensions (and when they choose to push back against them) raises questions that are not only about law but also about power, institutions, and democracy. That intersection is what keeps me interested in the research.

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Photo: private

What is your next project? Having defended my PhD in April 2026, my immediate project is to turn the dissertation into a book. The process will involve revisiting the research with some distance, sharpening its central argument, and thinking about how to make its findings relevant beyond the specific cases and legal questions that motivated my dissertation. More broadly, I would like to continue working at the intersection of EU law, migration, courts, and the rule of law. I am particularly interested in continuing to explore how legal institutions respond when fundamental rights become politically contested and what this can tell us about the resilience but also the limits of European democracy.

Victor Ellenbroek Rules Under Pressure: How Radical Right Populists Are Reshaping Europe's Parliaments



Photo: Elena Teagno, EUI

Victor Ellenbroek is a Lecturer and researcher at the University of Groningen. He is a political scientist interested in how politicians and citizens interact with institutional changes. Questions he is interested in include: What happens when voters are given greater choice in the elections? Are they likelier to vote, or do they stay home? Why did politicians extend the right to vote in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Why did politicians group into political parties? Why do legislators change the rules of order under which they operate, and what are the outcomes of these changes? He is holding a PhD from the European University Institute. Before that, he did his Bachelor's and Master's at Radboud University, in Nijmegen, Netherlands.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? Parliamentary business is governed by a thick rulebook about who gets to speak, who can put an issue on the agenda, how amendments are proposed, how governments are scrutinised, and when a vote can be demanded.
My research project studies how these rules change, particularly when parliaments come under political pressure, when polarisation increases, and, most recently, when radical right populist parties gain traction. I focus especially on the Dutch House of Representatives and ask how its rules of procedure have shaped opportunities available to parliamentary minorities over time.

How did you come up with your re:constitution project? My previous research focused mainly on electoral institutions and democratisation, particularly the extension of voting rights in the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries. In general, I am interested in democratic institutions that are called redistributive, meaning a set of rules that govern the distribution of a scarce resource, like parliamentary seats. Changes to such rules may benefit one party when, for example, it wins a higher vote and seat share than it otherwise would have, but this must always come at the expense of another party's or parties' share. Changes to these rules are thus never truly neutral and are always fiercely contested. I find it exciting to uncover who won and who lost when a reform actually happens. Legislative rules are similar, but they also regulate parliamentary speaking time. I became increasingly interested in what happens after elections, and investigating parliamentary rules seemed like the logical next step. My project is also inspired by contemporary debates about polarisation and democratic backsliding. When parliamentary politics becomes more confrontational and polarised, there is an understandable desire to make decision making more efficient or prevent obstruction. But measures designed to keep parliament functioning can also restrict the tools available to constructive or well-meaning opposition. I wanted to understand that tension historically.

When do procedural reforms strengthen democratic resilience and when do attempts to make parliaments more governable risk narrowing the space for legitimate opposition.

How did your mobility phase at the University of Oxford contribute to your research? At Oxford, I worked with Radoslaw Zubek on reconstructing the development of the rules of procedure of the Dutch House of Representatives. The biggest challenge was simply documenting which rules were in force at different points in time. Radoslaw already had extensive experience in gathering this sort of data for the UK, Irish, and Danish parliaments (https://parlrulesdata.org/). Together, we built a dataset for the Dutch parliament that allows us to trace parliamentary rules over a very long period and systematically identify provisions that strengthen either minorities or majorities. We presented our results at the European Political Science Society's annual meeting in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

How would you describe the current situation of democracy and the rule of law in Europe? I used to think that the rise of the radical right was an unfortunate but ultimately understandable and somewhat legitimate response to the mainstream's failure to address certain grievances and take accountability for the economic crisis, austerity, or participation in wars in the Middle East. I still think this may be part of the story. However, I now also think that we must recognize that we are up against a loosely cohesive, illiberal coalition of extreme right politicians, billionaires, and/or foreign states, Russia in particular, who are genuinely working towards ending democracy and the rule of law as we know it. The most recent and shocking example of this is the Ceuta incident, which is hard not to see as orchestrated to serve the far-right's narrative of Europe being overwhelmed by young men from Africa, following Anne Applebaum's analysis (https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/2026/08/ceuta-spain-far-right/688154/). We might find it hard to imagine that we have actual enemies who dare to stoop so low, but unfortunately, this seems to be the reality. We must call out this threat.

What is your next project? The next step is a more comparative approach to parliamentary minority rights. I am particularly interested in whether periods of political fragmentation and polarisation or the entry of anti-establishment parties systematically change the way parliaments regulate political conflict. The greater goal is to understand when procedural reforms strengthen democratic resilience and when attempts to make parliaments more governable risk narrowing the space for legitimate opposition.

Patrick Leisure Schools and Positive Obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights: What Implications for Democracy in Europe?



Patrick Leisure is a lawyer and researcher at the multi-disciplinary Judicial Studies Institute on the European Research Council-funded INFINITY project. He is currently a final-year PhD candidate at the Department of Constitutional Law and Political Science of Masaryk University Faculty of Law. His interdisciplinary project focuses on the intersection between schools and human rights in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights. A member of the New York bar, he holds a Juris Doctor from Boston University School of Law, an LL.M. in European Law from Université Panthéon-Assas, Paris-II, and a B.A. from College of William and Mary. His research interests lie in education law and policy, human rights, comparative law, and judicial studies. His work has been published or is forthcoming in peer-reviewed and American law reviews including Law & Policy, Human Rights Law Review, Common Market Law Review, the Stanford Journal of International Law, the Harvard International Law Journal, and the Nordic Journal of European Law. He co-teaches 'Human Rights in Europe' at Masaryk University, and he has worked or interned at the Czech Constitutional Court, the IRMCT in the Hague, and UNITAR in Geneva. He is a dual citizen of Czechia and the United States.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? Very broadly, my re:constitution project focuses on how the ECHR has used the concept of positive obligations in its case law concerning the rights of students in educational contexts. It uses the pioneering book by Gutmann called Democratic Education as a frame to think more deeply about the implications of a supranational court becoming increasingly involved in solving disputes concerning rights in educational spaces across diverse European education landscape(s).

What is your favourite place in Europe (off the beaten track)? Why? One of my favourite places in Europe, which is certainly off the beaten track, is a small village in the Charente region in France called Exideuil-sur-Vienne. It is where my wife and I got married, where we spent the COVID years, and where we usually spend a week or so each summer. In many ways, it is a little town where time stood still. But, if you really pay attention, you see small but important shifts in the world through the looking glass of a small village in France. Moreover, at first glance, it is not a place where the grand stories of European rule of law and democracy play out. Yet, if you look closely, you see the big challenges facing Europe playing out in a little place: economic stagnation, integration issues, (lack of) connectivity, changing climate, Brexit, populism, and more. Spending time in Exideuil, in addition to the peaceful lull of the Vienne river and the

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beautiful kingfishers that grace its banks, reveals hidden knock-on effects of conversations that happen elsewhere that remind me of the diversity of the spaces and places of European rule of law and democracy discussions.

How did your mobility phase at Dublin City University's Anti-Bullying Centre (ABC) contribute to your research? My mobility phase at the ABC in Dublin was a wonderfully formative experience. The interdisciplinary environment deepened my understanding of the possibilities of my project, not only for interdisciplinary research between law and education but also for bridging the academic and practice divides. Most fundamentally, my time in Dublin helped me to realise the extent to which my work as a lawyer speaks to those involved in educational policy and research and the impact that discussions across disciplinary boundaries can have. Oh, and I had a lot of laughs with the ABC team as well!

What was the best part of the re:constitution Fellowship thus far? For me, the best part of my re:constitution Fellowship has been spending time with the current and former Fellows in Berlin and Athens. Hearing about everyone's fascinating projects, cooking together, discussing different aspects of European rule of law and democracy, and experiencing the contagious effects of everyone's visions for how we can deepen our conversations surrounding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law was simply wonderful. By the same token, hearing the views of others with more experience in the room where it happens, in particular Angelika Nußberger during the first re:constitution meeting in Berlin, was fascinating and memorable, and these thoughts continue to stick with me and shape how I think about my own work.

The first re:constitution meeting in Berlin was fascinating and memorable, and these thoughts continue to stick with me and shape how I think about my own work.

What are your next projects? Processing and harnessing everything I have learned from the re:constitution Fellowship! In addition, I have applied for a grant to lead my own small research team. We will see if that comes to pass. At the Judicial Studies Institute, I am working with colleagues on finishing up an important article and a book project. Finally, I would like to publish my PhD thesis as a book. In the future, I would like to continue the work started during the re:constitution Fellowship and start an interdisciplinary institute that might be called something like the European Education Rights Institute. Stay tuned!

Benedetta Lobina Defending EU Values Through Strategic Litigation: An Assessment of New Avenues for Enforcement

Benedetta Lobina is a doctoral researcher and lecturer at the Sutherland School of Law, University College Dublin, and an adjunct assistant professor in law at Trinity College Dublin. She holds an LLM (Research) and MA in Legal Studies and Politics from the University of Aberdeen. Her doctoral thesis explored different varieties of rule of law violations across several EU Member States, building a taxonomy of rule of law crises and proposing an enforcement roadmap to best address these issues at EU level. Her broader research includes co-authored studies on topics such as judicial independence and freedom of expression (including on behalf of the European Parliament), and peer reviewed journal articles and online publications on a broad range of rule of law related topics, such as illiberal democracy; the impact of backsliding in Hungary and Poland on the EU's response to Russia's war of aggression; and the state of the rule of law in specific countries (Italy, Malta).

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? My project is about exploring how judicial remedies before the CJEU can be used most effectively in order to address violations of EU values in the member states. During my time at re:constitution, I specifically focused on infringement proceedings by looking at two aspects: how this mechanism has been used to date, including the procedural weaknesses that have emerged from this line of jurisprudence, and how to improve it.

I had the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone, which I definitely could not have done without re:constitution.

What made you apply to the programme? What did you get out of it? I applied to re:constitution after following the Network and the work of previous Fellows and Alumni for years, since the central mission of re:constitution is so close to my own research interest into rule of law and democratic backsliding. All the Alumni spoke very highly of the benefits of the programme, including the mobility phases and workshops and belonging to the Network itself, and I would absolutely agree that these unique aspects that only re:constitution provides were incredibly enriching for me and my research.

How did your mobility phase at RECLAIM contribute to your research? As someone who had never left academia before, my mobility phase at RECLAIM was one of the highlights for me, so working with an NGO was a very exciting challenge, which turned out to be extremely rewarding. Since I joined at such a momentous time right after the Hungarian elections and just when the CJEU pronounced its now famous ruling on the anti-LGBT propaganda case (C-769/22 Commission v Hungary, which RECLAIM played an active part in), I was inspired to publish pieces on these topics, while also learning about the inner workings of advocacy in Brussels. I also wrote legal opinions and briefings on anti-LGBTQI+ laws across various member states, which felt a lot more concrete and potentially impactful on the ground than my usual work, while also providing inspiration for my future research and teaching. I'm so glad I had the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone, which I definitely could not have done without re:constitution.

What was your best re:constitution moment so far? Besides my mobility phases, which were excellent, I also want to give a shout-out to the Fellows' Exchange Meetings. It was so nice to bring the cohort together in person and online at various stages. I felt like I was able to form long-lasting connections with likeminded individuals and perhaps future collaborators thanks to the time we spent together. Moreover, the meetings provided outstanding practical training on key aspects such as impact and media, which is so important at this stage of our career. It was also great to meet different partner organisations, scholars, and civil society representatives during these meetings, and we were lucky enough to be a part of the rule of law conference in Berlin, which was an excellent way to kick off the Fellowship. I've made so many amazing contacts thanks to re:constitution. I'm very grateful.



Photo: private

What is your next project? My next project will build on what I have started as part of my re:constitution Fellowship, expanding the core idea into a monograph that will look more holistically at EU judicial remedies in the area of values. I aim to provide a comprehensive assessment of the remedies used thus far, namely the preliminary ruling mechanism and annulment

actions (together with the aforementioned chapter on infringements that I have already been working on and workshopped in over the past year), as well as an assessment of potential avenues yet to be explored. I also wish to integrate some of the lessons learned during my mobility phases by looking at the actors involved in values litigation before the CJEU, understanding potential shortcomings, and making normative arguments for improvement. Overall, I simply hope to give concrete form to all the ideas and inspiration I have gained from my time in the Fellowship, which really says a lot about what a formative experience this was for me.

Yann Lorans Defending Democracy through EU Media Regulation: A Constitutional Appraisal



Photo: Marie-Lise Buisson

Yann Lorans is a Doctor of Law from Université Paris-Est and KU Leuven. He wrote a Ph.D thesis entitled "The Judge and the Legislator of the European Union: A Study of Collaborative Protection of Fundamental Rights" (Bruylant, forthcoming). The thesis focuses on the increasing role of the EU legislator in giving concrete expression to fundamental rights and on the evolving interactions between the CJEU and the EU legislator. Yann was a Visiting Doctoral Research at Lunds Universitets (2017) and at KU Leuven (2018-2019). He held a position as Lecturer at Université Paris-Est Créteil and has taught European and French public law in Université Paris-Panthéon Assas, SciencesPo Paris and KU Leuven. He was also a trainee at the Cabinet of Advocate General Bobek at the Court of Justice of the European Union (2016) and previously obtained an LLM from the College of Europe in Bruges (2015-2016). His current research critically examines the EU's attempt at actively defending democracy, with particular attention to media regulation. As a re:constitution Fellow, Yann pursued an internship at the Secretariat General of the European Commission (2025) and a research stay at NOVA School of Law (2026).

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? My project examines media regulation at the EU level in a context of growing threats to information integrity and journalistic work. I ask how far the EU can, or should, go to ensure media pluralism and freedom in practice. One of the most sensitive issues concerns the need to restrict certain fundamental rights, particularly freedom of expression and media freedom, when these rights are abused by actors who use democratic mechanisms and processes to undermine those

very same mechanisms and processes. This lies at the heart of the concept of militant democracy.
This concept highlights the paradox whereby allowing certain actors to exercise democratic rights for the purpose of weakening democracy may ultimately threaten democracy itself, making some restrictions necessary to protect it. This is particularly relevant in the case of certain Russian media outlets, which have exploited media freedom to disseminate Russian propaganda and disinformation. This has led to several decisions to suspend their broadcasts and activities within the EU.
At the same time, going too far in imposing such restrictions may also undermine the democratic foundations that these measures are intended to protect. The defence of democracy can therefore become a pretext for security-driven policies that place particularly severe restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms.

Have there been any (political) events in the last year that changed your view of your research topic? Several worrying developments concerning media freedom and pluralism have taken place in France, where I come from. A parliamentary debate concerning French public-service media has caused considerable controversy, with some decision makers gradually seeking to dismantle public broadcasting and delegitimise the essential work carried out by its journalists. Moreover, although media concentration has been increasing for several years, some media moguls are now seeking to control the entire chain through which public opinion is shaped, including in cultural sectors such as cinema and publishing. Their aim is to promote a reactionary and far-right ideology under the guise of a so-called 'cultural battle'. These developments are particularly worrying in the run-up to the 2027 elections. They have also encouraged me to investigate the methods through which illiberal, or even authoritarian, forces seek to influence public debate and public opinion.

What was the most surprising thing you learnt during your re:constitution Fellowship? As an academic, I have often worked in a professional environment that can be overly inward-looking and insufficiently interested in the knowledge produced by civil society. One of the strengths of the re:constitution programme is that it brings researchers together with members of various NGOs working towards shared objectives. One of the most important things I have learnt is therefore to engage more closely with the essential role played by civil society and to recognise its crucial contribution to the production of knowledge.

What fascinates you the most about your work? What fascinates me about being an academic is the freedom it provides to conduct ambitious and rigorous research and to share it with students, the research community and, ideally, society more broadly. This freedom is the reason I remain determined to pursue this career, despite the considerable difficulty of securing a stable position and the personal sacrifices that are sometimes required.

What is your next project? My next project will continue to focus on European media regulation, examining how these rules are intended to contribute to the emergence of a European society. Institutional, political, and judicial discourses increasingly invoke the idea that a European society is being built and must be defended. However, this discourse sometimes diverges from the actual effects of European action on society. There may be discrepancies between what the European institutions say, what the law claims to achieve, and what is effectively regulated in practice. I hope to examine these discrepancies in my future project.

One of the most important things I have learnt is therefore to engage more closely with the essential role played by civil society and to recognise its crucial contribution to the production of knowledge.

Giulia Marini Policing Solidarity? The Rising Criminalization of Civil Movements in Europe: A Case Study of the Palestine Solidarity Movement and the Erosion of Democratic Freedoms

Giulia holds an LL.M. in International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights from the Geneva Academy and an M.A. in Human Rights and Multi-level Governance from the University of Padua. She has experience in international advocacy, legal research, and strategic litigation. Her work focuses on leveraging international legal frameworks to advance accountability and justice in contexts of prolonged belligerent occupation, apartheid, and colonialism.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? My re:constitution project looked at how European governments have increasingly restricted solidarity with Palestine through measures such as protest bans, criminal investigations of activists, and legal or professional consequences for speaking out against the genocide in Gaza. Altogether, these measures have made it increasingly difficult for individuals and social movements to express solidarity with the Palestinian people and engage in legitimate political activism across Europe.
More specifically, I examined how counter-terrorism laws have been invoked to justify these measures and whether their application is compatible with fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and association. By comparing developments across several European countries, I found that this is not limited to isolated incidents but instead reflects a broader European trend.

Change begins when people organise, advocate, and refuse to remain silent.

How did you come up with your re:constitution project? What inspired you to pursue this question? Having spent many years working on human rights and accountability related to Palestine, my attention had been primarily focused on developments on the ground. The unprecedented global wave of solidarity with the Palestinian people since October 2023 shifted my attention to a different but closely connected issue. I was deeply inspired by the millions of people who mobilised across the world to call for an immediate ceasefire, an end to the genocide in Gaza, and accountability for violations of international law. At the same time, I was very alarmed by the response of many European governments to this unprecedented mass mobilisation. Peaceful protests, student activism, and other forms of solidarity with Palestine were increasingly treated as matters of domestic security. This made me realise that the Palestine exception was not only reflected in foreign policy and the persistent lack of accountability for Israel's violations of international law but also was shaping domestic policies affecting civil and political rights and the rule of law.
That realisation became the starting point for my research. I wanted to understand which legal and policy instruments European governments were relying on to justify restrictions on the Palestine Solidarity Movement and what these developments mean for the broader protection of fundamental civil and political rights and the rule of law in Europe.

What keeps you inspired? The power of collective action. I have been deeply inspired by the millions of people around the world who have mobilised in solidarity with Palestine. From university students organising peaceful encampments and demonstrations to dock workers refusing to handle arms shipments they believed could contribute to violations of international law, these acts have reinforced my belief that change begins when people organise, advocate, and refuse to remain silent.

That belief keeps me inspired, even when change does not come as quickly as we hope.

Have there been any political events in the last year that changed your view of your research topic? One development that significantly shaped my research project was the UK parliament's decision to designate Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation. Seeing a protest group being proscribed under counter-terrorism legislation prompted me to narrow my research and focus more specifically on how counter-terrorism laws are being used in relation to the Palestine Solidarity Movement. It reinforced my interest in understanding how legal frameworks intended to protect national security and public safety are being used to justify civic space and human rights across Europe.

What is your next project? I'm currently looking for the next chapter of my professional career, ideally in a role at the intersection of international human rights law, advocacy, and policy. This Fellowship gave me the opportunity to step back from the urgency of day-to-day human rights work and dedicate time to independent research. It allowed me to deepen my analytical skills and explore issues from a comparative perspective. I hope to bring these insights into my future work.

Andrii Nekoliak Unpacking the Politics of Constitutional Law Advice-Giving: The Venice Commission and Legal Change in Central and Eastern Europe

Andrii Nekoliak was Post-doctoral MEMOCRACY Researcher at the T.M.C. Asser Institute in the Hague — University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands) and the first Konrad Adenauer Junior Fellow at the University of Cologne (Germany). He holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Tartu (Estonia). Among other contributions, Andrii has published on Ukraine-related topics in edited volumes with Cambridge UP, Palgrave McMillan, and Hart-Bloomsbury. He also has an article on the politics of Ukraine's Constitutional Court in Review of Central and East European Law (Brill). His most recent research on how Ukraine punishes historical memory offences is set to appear in East European Politics and Societies. Apart from research, Andrii regularly contributes to Verfassungsblog.



Photo: private

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? The main task of the Venice Commission is to strengthen democracy by providing expert advice on constitutional matters. My project asks three straightforward questions: What is the structure and content of the legal reasoning in the Venice Commission's advisory opinions? What explains the variation in how opinion drafters respond to legislation under review? And under what conditions do they escalate their recommendations from less to more politically acute? To answer these questions, I adopted a systematic empirical approach by creating an original dataset of the Venice Commission's advisory opinions.

What are some of the most significant findings or discoveries you made during your research? What can you draw from them? One of the most significant findings concerns the influence of Eastern European states on the development of European constitutional advice. Supported by the re:constitution Fellowship, I compiled a new dataset on the Venice Commission's advisory opinions, with Ukraine and Moldova serving as the principal case studies. Over the period 2015–2025, requests regarding legislation from these two countries accounted for more than 17% of all Venice Commission opinions and approximately 56% of its opinions concerning Eastern Europe.

The influence is significant not only in terms of numbers. There are instances when Ukraine's and Moldova's domestic affairs have prompted the Venice Commission to revisit its conceptual approach to fundamental questions of democratic governance. One such example is the experiment with the so-called 'anti-oligarch' legislation, which led the Commission to thoroughly reflect on the undue influence of big money on the functioning of a constitutional democracy. While rooted in national contexts, the underlying issue is universal.

There is an implication for scholarship too. Much of the meta-narrative around Eastern European (arguably laggard) states is that they are perpetually striving to meet rule of law and democratic governance standards—some more successfully than others. Yet instead of simply recasting this meta-narrative, comparative law scholarship could aim to examine the variety of legal governance of constitutional democracies. For instance, under what conditions is the Venice Commission's advice most readily accepted or, conversely, resisted? How can the impact of constitutional advice be measured over time?

The re:constitution Fellowship confirmed that international mobility is about expanding perspectives.

What is your favourite place in Europe (off the beaten track)? Why? My favourite off-the-beaten-track destination is the Baltic region. The more time I spend there, the more fascinated I become by the societies there. Their history and remarkable transformation over the past three decades make them endlessly interesting to me. The Baltics suggest that some of Europe's most inspiring places are not necessarily its most famous ones.

re:constitution promotes research and mobility across borders. How important is this for your future professional development? The re:constitution Fellowship confirmed that international mobility is about expanding perspectives. During my mobility phase at the Academy for European Human Rights Protection in Cologne, I had the opportunity to discuss my research with scholars working in constitutional and international law. The exchanges with colleagues and Fellows from across Europe prepared me well for the next stage of my academic career. I hope to build on these connections and continue contributing to a European community of public law scholars.

What is your next project? This year, I was very humbled to be among the researchers awarded a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Postdoctoral Fellowship in the exceptionally competitive 2025 call. I keep working on the rationale for and the influences of the Council of Europe's expert governance on democracy making across Eastern Europe. The MSCA project will broaden this research agenda by exploring international legal authority in a more systematic and comparative way.

Olha Nykorak Constitutional Democracy and Its Capacity for Self-Preservation in a Multipolar World: The Concept of Defensive Democracy in Germany, Ukraine, and the Broader European Experience



Olha Nykorak has coordinated the Human Security Programme at the Heinrich Boell Foundation—Kyiv Office since September 2023. Her work focuses on promoting human security in Ukrainian and global discourse, raising the visibility of Ukraine's vision in European and transatlantic security debates, and engaging youth in European integration processes. She holds a PhD in Law. Previously, Olha was a research fellow at the College of Europe in Natolin and a visiting researcher at the University of Warsaw (Eastern European Studies Programme) and the University of Graz (Department of Foundations of Law). She studied international public law at the University of Tartu and completed a postgraduate programme in strategic communications at the Sympodium Institute. Olha has worked as a policy advisor to a member of the Ukrainian Parliament and as a project and programme manager at the Ukrainian Catholic University and Internews Baltia. She is an alumna of the German Marshall Fund's Policy Designers Network and the ReThink.CEE 2022 programme.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? The concept of militant (defensive) democracy is a form of constitutional safeguarding used in various jurisdictions worldwide, not least because of democratic backsliding. This concept is frequently perceived merely as a toolbox, the most restrictive instrument of which is the banning of political parties (for example, Batasuna in Spain or Refah Partisi in Turkey), while at the same time posing risks to political pluralism. However, the Ukrainian example is rather unique, as militant democracy may serve both as a toolbox against aggression and as a conceptual framework for democratic resilience and sustainability. To understand how different it is from, and what it has in common with, the well-known concept proposed by Karl Loewenstein in 1937, I studied the experience of the EU, where many instruments have been introduced in recent years, as well as Germany, where the doctrinal foundation is the most developed.

re:constitution promotes research and mobility across borders. How important is this for your future professional development? The topic of my PhD research was constitutional identity, and already

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then I realised the potential of constitutional law scholarship to be not only comparative, but also transnational. Research on identity, which is not only about othering but also about selfing, often emphasizes difference, but it is also about what is shared and what forms broader communities of belonging. re:constitution was perhaps the best possible opportunity to explore precisely this: that similar challenges to the rule of law exist regardless of borders or membership in supranational organizations. The latter is particularly important, because for Ukrainian constitutional law scholarship it is important not to be underrepresented or overlooked in the current academic and legal discourses. The opportunity to share my experience concerning the application of the Constitution under martial law, while also hearing first-hand explanations from Fellows and colleagues at the host institutions about the latest developments in particularly Hungary, Greece, Poland, Germany, and the EU more broadly is invaluable. Being there in person and being part of the host institutions' teams greatly broadens one's horizons.

I realised the potential of constitutional law scholarship to be not only comparative, but also transnational.

In your view, how can re:constitution and its Alumni Network make a difference? First and most importantly, re:constitution creates and, crucially, sustains a stable and continuous engagement with a diverse community. Many fellowships are intellectually enriching and provide valuable networks but once the fellowship ends, the connection tends to become weaker. Even as a Fellow, I constantly felt that we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us and serve as a support for the next cohorts. Given how different the organizations, countries, and even schools of thought that we represent are, it impresses how the discourse is neither unified nor monopolised by any single community. At the same time, it is vital to feel supported and to continue the discussion even under difficult political conditions in one's own country. The Alumni community also shapes a certain research and practical dynamic. This concerns topics discussed at conferences, the community's presence within host institutions and the seeding of particular ideas, as well as, more broadly, the habit of thinking more strategically and in the longer term. New or renewed formats beyond the academic/practitioner bubble also invigorate the domain in which the two-track approach works particularly well.

Have there been any (political) events in the last year that changed your view of your research topic? Ukraine is living in the context of war and, consequently, with a limited democratic toolkit. Many political processes are suspended, while constitutional checks and balances are weakened not only by martial law, but also by the president's party holding a parliamentary majority. This is why I was particularly influenced by the so-called "cardboard protests" in response to attempts to dismantle Ukraine's anti-corruption architecture. They re-emerged this year following an unjustified change of government, and in both cases forced the president and parliament to listen to the people despite the operational ineffectiveness of the Constitutional Court.

What is your next project? I am planning to start postdoctoral research focusing on constitutional mechanisms for preserving democracy in wartime, which constitute a component of constitutional safeguarding and are therefore closely related to my re:constitution project.

Meret Plucis Gendered Retirement—Women in the Shadows of Illiberal Constitutionalism



Meret Plucis completed her legal education at Humboldt University Berlin, Panthéon-Assas University in Paris (LLM), and the University of Amsterdam (LLM). Early on during her studies, she developed a focus on EU law. In her Master's thesis on the construction of motherhood in EU employment law, she began working with an interdisciplinary approach, combining language-focused methods and feminist legal theory. She has continued this interdisciplinary orientation in her doctoral research at Humboldt University, conducted within the DFG-funded research training group "DynamInt". Her PhD project is a discourse analysis of the role of the rule of law in EU integration narratives. With her re:constitution fellowship, she returns to a more applied angle: examining how gender equality is strategically reinterpreted in retirement and labor law, connecting constitutional theory with on-the-ground legal realities. Her professional and personal interests are centered around feminist issues.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? My project studies the more hidden ways in which illiberal actors undermine gender equality and hence democracy itself. Specifically, I study strategies in which illiberal actors use the language of pro-women to pursue illiberal ends, while formally signalling compliance with the very norms they are subverting. Rosalind Dixon termed this strategy 'abusive feminism' (the term is contestable but for the sake of simplicity, I am using it here as a convenient shorthand for this strategy).

My project studies the more hidden ways in which illiberal actors undermine gender equality and hence democracy itself.

I examine abusive feminism through the example of the pension reform enacted under Law and Justice party in Poland, which sent women five years earlier into retirement. It was marketed as a pro-women policy and as recognition for the double burden of care work.

On one level, the reform served direct institutional capture. Women make up roughly 60 percent of the Polish judiciary. The earlier retirement age pushed many of them off the bench, and so-called neo-judges then took their seats.

On another level, however, the reform also drove (older) women out of the public sphere. It made them economically more dependent, locked them into caregiving roles, and displaced them as equal citizens from democratic life. That is the more covert way the reform undermines democracy.

Have there been any (political) events in the last year that changed your view of your research topic? Of course, I did not enter this project thinking that working longer is better for women. However, just

Photo: DynamInt

how deeply complex a solution to these problems is only became clear to me this year, mainly in light of the austere, gender-blind labour-market reforms of the German Merz government.
Abusive feminism is so successful because it speaks to real problems. Women do actually face a double burden by being expected to succeed in paid work under unequal conditions while also performing most of the unpaid care work. Of course, this problem is not solved by sending women into early retirement without financial compensation. But it is also not solved by having women perform more paid work without addressing the problem of unpaid care. The question then is how to answer the problem abusive feminism exploits without reproducing the neoliberal structures that give rise to it.

How would you describe the current situation of democracy and the rule of law in Europe? Are we moving forwards or backwards? As you can probably tell from my earlier answers my outlook is rather bleak. On the one hand, during my time at the Helsinki Foundation in Warsaw, I experienced how hard it is to deal with illiberal legacies even after the party is voted out. On the other hand, I have already mentioned the austerity politics in countries like Germany. Without doubt, we are experiencing critical and very difficult geopolitical and economic situations. Yet the answer cannot be a policy directed against the people and in favour of only a small elite that is growing richer. No democracy will be able to sustain that in the long run, and the steadily rising polling numbers of parties like the AfD seem to reflect that.

What keeps you inspired? The exchange with many different people across borders and disciplines. That is exactly what re:constituton offers and what makes it so valuable to me.

What is your next project? I want to continue trying to deal with the problem abusive feminism exploits without reproducing the neoliberal structures that give rise to it and examine what a genuine alternative could look like and which conditions would have to be met for women to appear as equal citizens in modern democracies, with a focus on both Germany and the EU. But first I have to finish my PhD.

Marija Ristić Digital Evidence and Advocacy of Human Rights-Based Arms and Technology Treaties

Marija Ristić is an award-winning investigative journalist and human rights advocate, currently serving as Manager in Amnesty International's Crisis Response Programme, where she leads the Digital Verification Corps. In this role, she spearheads open-source digital investigations, harnessing technologies like photogrammetry, 3D modelling, geospatial mapping, and weapons analysis to document and expose human rights violations. Prior to joining Amnesty International, Marija led the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN). As Regional Director and Editor-in-Chief, Marija developed regional projects and oversaw editorial, operational, and fundraising efforts. Under her leadership, BIRN won numerous awards, including the European Press Prize, and expanded its digital rights and tech-focused programming across Central and South Europe. Additionally, Marija shares her expertise by teaching open-source research and evidence methods at Bard College Berlin. She is a graduate of Geneva Academy for International Humanitarian Law.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? My re:constitution project explores how the EU can ensure transparency and accountability as artificial intelligence becomes increasingly integrated into military technologies. Today, advances in AI, autonomous systems, long-endurance

drones, and sensor-based targeting are transforming how wars are fought, often faster than legal and regulatory frameworks can adapt. While much of the public debate focuses on the capabilities of these technologies, far less attention is paid to the companies that develop and supply them.

My research examines how existing European regulatory frameworks could be used to create greater transparency around the development, testing, deployment, and governance of AI-enabled military systems. I investigate whether instruments already available within the EU's legal and policy landscapes, such as corporate due diligence, sustainability reporting, and human rights frameworks, can help ensure that companies provide meaningful information about the risks and impacts of their technologies.

At its core, the project asks a simple question of how democratic societies can maintain oversight of increasingly complex military technologies without compromising security interests.

How did you come up with your re:constitution project? What inspired you to pursue this question? The idea for this project grew out of my work as a human rights researcher. When investigating violations of international humanitarian law, researchers often rely on physical traces left behind by military operations, such as weapon remnants, munition fragments, and technical components. These materials can help identify the type of weapon used, assess whether its use was lawful, and sometimes even trace it back to a manufacturer or supplier through serial numbers, procurement records, and trade data.

The growing integration of artificial intelligence into military technologies poses a new challenge. Unlike conventional weapons, the AI components that assist with target identification, decision making, and battlefield operations are often invisible to outside investigators. In many cases, information about these systems is not publicly available, either because it is protected as a matter of national security or because the technology itself leaves few visible traces. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult for researchers, journalists, and civil society organisations to understand how AI is being used in armed conflict and to assess its implications for compliance with international law.

Too often, researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and technologists work in separate silos, despite confronting many of the same challenges.

What made you apply to the programme? What did you get out of it? What initially drew me to the programme was the opportunity to pursue independent research on a topic that sits at the intersection of technology, conflict, human rights, and regulation. I also liked the collaboration between academia and practice. Too often, researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and technologists work in separate silos, despite confronting many of the same challenges. The Fellowship offered a rare space where these conversations could happen across disciplines and professional backgrounds. And that is also what I appreciated the most—the diversity of the people involved.

What inspires you? It may sound like a cliché, but what keeps me inspired is people. As a conflict researcher, I am often confronted with the worst of humanity: immense suffering, devastating violence, and situations where accountability can seem distant or even impossible. Yet often in these darkest moments,



Photo: private

you encounter people whose courage and determination are extraordinary. They refuse to give up despite enormous personal risks and despite the odds being stacked against them. For example, the women of Iran, who have continued to demand freedom and dignity despite the extraordinary risks they face.

What is your next project? My next project focuses on accountability for human rights violations committed during the protests in Iran in 2022 and 2026. The project will investigate how security forces were organised and deployed against peaceful protesters and identify patterns of repression and chains of command. Given the limited prospects for justice within Iran, the project will also examine how cases could be pursued before courts in other countries under the principle of universal jurisdiction, helping ensure that evidence gathered today can support accountability efforts in the future.

Łukasz Szoszkiewicz AI-Powered Monitoring: Integrating UN Human Rights Recommendations with EU Democracy and Rule of Law Standards

Łukasz Szoszkiewicz works at the intersection of technology policy and human rights advocacy. As Director of European Affairs for The Neurorights Foundation, he works to ensure that emerging technologies are developed within robust human rights frameworks. His interdisciplinary approach combines legal expertise with data science methodologies, including natural language processing, statistical analysis, and corpus linguistics. He recently completed a Fulbright fellowship at Columbia University's Neurotechnology Center, where he conducted research on mental privacy and neural speech decoding—work that informs contemporary policy discussions around brain-computer interfaces. In his academic life, he focuses on harnessing AI for human rights research, monitoring, and protection. Together with his team, he is developing a database of documents adopted by the UN treaty bodies and special procedures. In 2022, he co-founded SICSS-AMU/Law, the Summer Institute in Computational Social Sciences, which trains the next generation of young researchers at the intersection of social science and AI. His work addresses a critical challenge in our field—the gap between academic research, technology, and policy. Technologies like AI and neurotechnology are advancing rapidly, requiring human rights experts who can move effectively between scholarship and advocacy. This fellowship represents an opportunity to further strengthen that vital connection.



Photo: private

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? Every year, United Nations (UN) bodies issue thousands of recommendations telling governments, including every EU member state, how to strengthen human rights and the rule of law, reform courts, protect journalists, and prevent corruption. The UN's Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI) collects this remarkable record that has over 267,000 recommendations spanning two decades. During my Fellowship, I built UHRI+ (https://lszoszk.github.io/UnitedNations_recommendations), a free, open research layer on top of that corpus with full-text search, country profiles, and 20-year timelines of topics like judicial independence, cross-country comparison, and citable exports. In short, the UN has built an extraordinary institutional memory on human rights. My project helps researchers, NGOs, and journalists actually mine it.

What fascinates you the most about your work? What questions are on your mind right now? How and where will you be looking for answers? My path to human rights began with reporting. I spent roughly half of my university years abroad, including a gap year, student exchanges, and long stretches of backpacking and hitchhiking through China, Kosovo, Iran, the South Caucasus, Ukraine, and Turkey selling freelance reportages from the road. In the early days of social media and smartphones, I experienced first-hand how technology began shaping the exercise of rights: swapping tips online about crossing unstable regions, juggling VPNs, running into firewalls, and wiping photos from my devices. Technology as both an enabler and a chokepoint of rights has stayed with me ever since.

"Technology as both an enabler and a chokepoint of rights has stayed with me."

Today, what fascinates me most is putting AI to work for human rights. Generative AI lets me translate my expertise directly into software that solves problems I know intimately from research practice like finding documents, visualising data, and modelling topics. For the first time, a lawyer can build the tools they always wished existed, and the hardest part is not writing code, but rather identifying the right problem and specifying the right outcome, including benchmarks measuring this outcome. That is where domain expertise matters most. Currently I am focussing on which parts of human rights monitoring can genuinely be scaled with AI and which must remain irreducibly human. Feeding documents directly into popular genAI services invites hallucinations and non-reproducible results. Using large language models instead to write the programmes that do the analysis—deterministic, inspectable, and open source—makes the whole pipeline transparent and verifiable. I look for answers empirically by building, testing on real corpora, and handing the tools to researchers and NGOs.

What keeps you inspired? Experimenting with new AI models and watching how others use them. I closely follow people like Andrej Karpathy, Ethan Mollick, and Boris Cherny. On the human rights side, I deeply admire Bellingcat and HURIDOCS. I have a personal rule of dedicating one third of my time to experimentation with no defined goal. That freedom to explore what AI makes possible is where my projects come from, and each finished project inspires the next one.

The re:constitution Alumni Network aims to promote a new and diverse generation of rule of law experts to collectively shape the rule of law field. What can or should be achieved, from your perspective? We need to investigate and define how AI can be used to strengthen the rule of law. Anthropic, the company behind Claude, has recently created a team dedicated exactly to this topic, but that is a business-led initiative. We also need voices from outside that sector like from academia, NGOs, and public institutions. The rule of law in the age of AI should be shaped by various stakeholders, and for that, the actors at the forefront need competent partners to talk to. Building a generation of such people is exactly what this network can achieve.

What is your next project? I am going to keep building open tools for AI-assisted human rights monitoring: the UN Human Rights Database (https://lszoszk.github.io/generalcomments), the HUDOC Researcher (https://lszoszk.github.io/ECHR-Dashboard), and a Human Rights Council voting explorer (https://lszoszk.github.io/hrc-voting). They are all online, free of charge, and available to anyone. A dozen project folders on my laptop are still slightly too demanding for current AI models, but they will soon be feasible. Among them is a comparative search engine for case law of European constitutional courts.

Jacquelyn Veraldi External Threats to EU Constitutional Values

Jacquelyn Veraldi is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Central European University Democracy Institute (Budapest). Her research interests include EU constitutional values (in particular democracy and the rule of law) as constraints on and enablers of public and private power. She is also a Scholar at The Good Lobby. Jacquelyn holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge (Trinity College).



How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? My project is about the (legal) opportunities and risks related to using EU external relations law (sanctions, the anti-coercion instrument) to combat foreign interference. I see foreign interference as a democracy and rule of law problem and wanted to investigate how far external relations measures can go in addressing that problem. But in my research, I also found that the act of invoking these measures itself could raise rule of law problems, if not done carefully.

"This direct exposure to differing views makes us all reflect on and fine-tune our own notions of the rule of law."

How did you come up with your re:constitution project? What inspired you to pursue this question? Foreign interference has been on the EU agenda for some time now. But my idea to look at the legal toolkit available to the EU in the face of foreign interference started to take shape when American actors entered the scene rather explicitly with Musk getting involved in various member state elections, Trump threatening to punish the EU and the member states with tariffs for their digital rules, etc. At that point, their actions were not only interfering directly with democratic processes like the often-referenced actions of certain Russian and Chinese actors but also putting pressure on the rule of law, with the EC signalling on various occasions that it was putting EU–US trade considerations above the digital rulebook.

How would you describe the current situation of democracy and the rule of law in Europe? Are we moving forwards or backwards? It depends where we look. With a few exceptions, the general rule seems to be that democracy and the rule of law are under increased strain, and it's not just at the national level. The EU itself, foreign actors, and private actors are all playing a role here. The EU is rolling back protections via omnibus measures that are legally and democratically questionable, often in cooperation with private companies, while actors from abroad have been intervening and putting pressure on both elections and decision-making processes.

The re:constitution Alumni Network aims to promote a new and diverse generation of rule of law experts to collectively shape the rule of law field. What can or should be achieved, from your perspective? One particularly valuable thing that can be achieved by forming a group of such experts is to create a richer, more nuanced rule of law dialogue that

Photo: private

accounts for a plurality of approaches and perspectives. I like that the Network consists not only of people who seek to promote the EU's existing idea of the meaning and role of the rule of law but also of people with concerns about how that idea has been conceived and operationalised. This direct exposure to differing views makes us all reflect on and fine-tune our own notions of the rule of law. I think that this makes us better rule of law scholars and practitioners, which is ultimately good for the field.

What is your next project? After collaborating with civil society organisations on rule of law budget conditionality from a policy lens, I'm now looking at it from an academic angle. I'm also co-authoring a piece on the Commission v Hungary (Valeurs de l'Union) ruling and developing a book proposal on the relationship between private actors and Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union values.

Mária Žuffová The Cost of Being a Journalist: Investigating Hostility and Violence against Journalists across Seven European Democracies



Photo: European University Institute

Mária Žuffová is a Research Fellow at the European University Institute, where she has led or contributed to several projects (RESISTANCE, UNVEIL, BRRIDGE, and CMPF's Media Pluralism Monitor). She earned her PhD in political science from the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. In addition to the re:constitution Fellowship, she held the Electoral Integrity Project Fellowship and the Luis Moreno Visiting Fellowship. Her research broadly explores three areas: (1) media freedom, (2) transparency, and (3) gender, with these themes often intersecting in her work. Geographically, her research focuses primarily on Europe. Her work has been published in the European Political Science Review, the International Journal of Press/Politics, and the Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media, Journalism Practice, among others. Before pursuing her PhD, she worked as a civil society practitioner. She helped build digital tools to improve public service delivery and encourage interactions between bureaucrats and the public. She also worked internationally with organisations such as the Open Government Partnership and the Open Knowledge Foundation.

How would you explain your re:constitution project to a stranger? My project examines the extent and forms of hostility and violence journalists face while doing their job and how these experiences affect their personal and professional lives, especially if, as a result, journalists start to avoid certain topics, reduce

engagement with their audiences, and change to an outlet where they are less publicly exposed, etc. Towards that end, I surveyed over 400 journalists across seven European countries: Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United Kingdom. These individual experiences point to a broader question: What happens to democracy when those responsible for informing the public and holding those in power to account do so under threat? The safety of journalists is not only about protecting journalists as individuals but also about protecting democracy, which depends on access to independent information and accountability.

What are some of the most significant findings or discoveries you made during your research? What can you draw from them? The preliminary results from the surveys show that the most frequent perpetrators of hostility and violence against journalists are political actors. Relations between politicians and journalists have always been accompanied by mutual criticism, which is vital as a corrective mechanism for both professions. However, attacks by politicians against the media and journalists have shifted to ad hominem attacks, labelling media as fake media and journalists as enemies of the people without engaging with the facts the media and journalists pointed out. In such conditions, it is almost impossible for journalists to defend their professional reputation and refute disinformation and stay safe. For instance, one of my respondents had to leave her country and go into exile due to police violence and explicit threats against her child.

"What happens to democracy when those responsible for informing the public and holding those in power to account do so under threat?"

Which stages of your professional career have had the biggest impact on your work or your personal development so far? We can never know the alternative reality that didn't happen, but I would have to say that one thing that changed my professional path was the one-year MA programme in public policy at CEU in Budapest. If it weren't for that year, I would most likely be doing a different job today. My family could never have afforded to send me to study abroad as a self-paying student. The scholarship I was awarded opened opportunities I did not even know existed. It was a completely new educational experience. Professors talked with us as equals; they were curious about what we thought and did not approach teaching as a one-directional relationship.

What keeps you inspired? It's not what, but who, for me. My child. I admire his ability to be fully present in the moment. I keep asking myself how we lose the ability to be here and now only to spend so much time and money later in life on mindfulness literature and on courses trying to find our way back to something that was already inherently part of us as children. Whenever I am tired or feel a bit disheartened, I look at him and the way he shows up for every new day with curiosity, openness, and a smile. It reminds me to reconnect with that same sense of possibility. I learn from him every day.

What is your next project? In my new project, I focus on gender-based violence (GBV) against women active in public life, including politicians, journalists, human rights defenders, activists, and academics. Within this topic, I am particularly fascinated by the role of digital technologies and how they have facilitated the perpetuation of GBV. They exponentially expand the number of spaces in which social interaction takes place. An example of this expansion, which we can often observe and also relates to my work on hostility and violence against journalists, is when political actors, especially those representing right-wing parties and governments, condone, sometimes approve, or even incite violence against politically active women. The targeted women then receive a wave of threats and abusive messages from anonymous online users.

European Rule of Law Conference 2025

Public conference at Berlin Social Science Centre (WZB), hosted by re:constitution
15–16 September 2025, Berlin

"What is the state of democracy and the rule of law in Europe and how can we shape its future?"



• **Opening Panel "Is the World Ending As We Know It?"** with Thiago de Souza Amparo, Iryna Ivankiv, re:constitution Alumna Noémi Fanni Molnár, Renáta Uitz and moderated by Shona Murray



• **Closing Debate "Where do we go from here when democracy and rule of law can't be taken for granted?"** with Kalypso Nicolaïdis, Gabriel Toggenburg, re:constitution Alumna Anna Wójcik and moderated by re:constitution Advisory Board member & chair Angelika Nußberger

Photos: Rebecca Rütten (top), re:constitution (bottom)



• **Parallel Sessions**









• **Impressions**





• **Closing Remarks** by Csaba György, Spokesperson of the re:constitution Alumni Network Steering Committee





• **Democracy & Rule of Law Marketplace**

Photos: re:constitution (bottom left), Rebecca Rütten (all others)

1st Fellows' Exchange Meeting

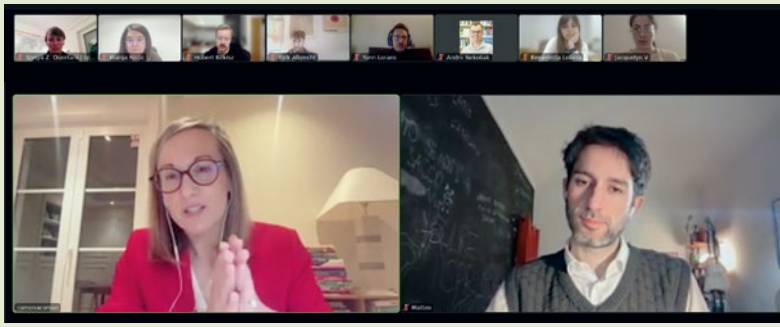
14-17 September 2025, in Berlin



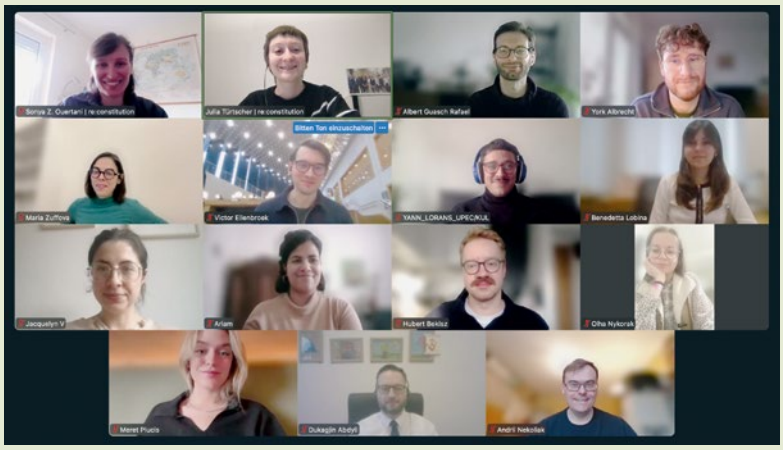
• **Cooking session** and getting to know each other

2nd Fellows' Exchange Meeting: "Law and Democracy in times of Contestation and Transformation"

11-12 February 2026 (online)



• **Fireside chat** with re:constitution Adivsory Board member Ramona Coman, moderated by re:constitution Alumnus Matteo Bonelli



• **Fellow Cohort 2025/2026**

Photos: re:constitution

3rd Fellows' Exchange Meeting:
"Democracy Beyond Symbolisms"

10–12 June 2026, in collaboration with the
University of Nicosia (UNIC)—Athens Branch, in Athens



• **Public Event** from "Athens to Brussels: Assessing the Rule of Law in Europe" with Thodoris Chondrogiannos, Stefanos Loukopoulos and Katerina Papanikolaou, moderated by Angelos Kaskanis



• **Panel** "Crossroads of Justice: Migration, Rule of Law and Democracy in Greece and beyond" with Konstantinos Farmakidis and Eleni Velivasaki, moderated by re:constitution Fellow Hubert Bekisz



• **Walking Tour** "The Athens Social and Political Walk" by Planetwonk

Photos: re:constitution

Other events





16 April 2026, Budapest
Academic Workshop "Hungary 2026: Elections Institutions, Participation", in collaboration with the Centre for Social Sciences at Eötvös Loránd University

11–12 June 2026, Athens
Alumni Network Meeting





Photos: Mariann Kovacs (top right), Taygeti Michalakea (center left), re:constitution (all others)

• **Talk** "The Political Economy of Liberal Constitutionalism: Current Challenges" by Michael Wilkinson





16 May 2025, Barcelona
Multidisciplinary workshop "Institutional Violence on the Basis of Gender: Reflections, Challenges and Proposals for Change", organised by re:constitution Alumnae Cristina Blasi Casagran and Colleen Boland

19 September 2025, Luxembourg
Workshop "Boosting rights protection by exploring synergies between EU fundamental rights law and UN human rights treaties", organised by re:constitution Alumnae Cecilia Rizcallah and Catherine Warin



21 November 2025, Palermo
Workshop "Migrants as a Sword or as a Shield? Instrumentalization of migration and hybrid threats through the prism of international and EU law", organised by re:constitution Alumni Aleksandra Ancite-Jepifánova and Francesco Luigi Gatta





23–24 May 2025, Washington DC
Policy workshop "Territorial (Dis)Integrity: Navigating Present Challenges in Transatlantic Relations. Exploring Trump's territorial policies, their implications for international law, and actionable response strategies", organised by re:constitution Alumni Felipe Hernández and Amélie Jaques-Apke



18 June 2025, Pisa, and
20 November 2025, Barcelona
Two events: "Disintegration. Secession. Accession" and "Refining EU Withdrawal and Membership after the Crisis Decades", organised by re:constitution Alumni Ylenia Maria Citino, Oliver Garner and Polly Ruth Polak

Photos: Maghweb (bottom left), Ylenia Maria Citino (center right), private (all others)

Meet the Alumni Network Steering Committee

The Steering Committee serves as the governing body of the Alumni Network and is elected by the whole network. It represents the interests of the Alumni and oversees the Network's activities and development. All decisions concerning the Alumni Network, including its activities, expenditures, and internal and external communications are taken by the Steering Committee.



Ylenia Maria Citino

Ylenia Maria Citino is an associate professor of public and constitutional law at eCampus University and also works as an adjunct professor at Luiss Guido Carli University in Rome and at the University of Luxembourg. She served as an expert lawyer for the National Council of Economy and Labour of Italy in 2025. Prior to this, Ylenia was a postdoc at Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa and at Luiss University. She is an alumna of the French École Nationale d'Administration (2012–2014) and has a honours law degree and a Master's degree in diplomatic studies.



Csaba Győry

Csaba Győry is an assistant professor of law at ELTE University's Centre for Law and Society and a researcher at the Institute for Legal Studies, CSS, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He previously worked at the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law and was a visiting lecturer at Manchester University School of Law. His research focuses on corporate crime, sentencing, criminal justice, and penal governance with a regional focus. Csaba serves on the executive board of the European Society of Criminology and as spokesperson of the Steering Committee.



László Detre

László Detre previously served as a law clerk and legal advisor at the Constitutional Court of Hungary, academic adviser to the re:constitution programme, and legal officer of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee's rule of law programme. Before joining Hungary's ministry of justice in June 2026, he was a salaried attorney at Karsai Dániel Law Office in Budapest. Since 2023, László has been a PhD candidate at the University of Cologne, researching the interpretation of the rule of law under EU law. He also worked as a junior research fellow at Eötvös Loránd University's (ELTE) Institute for Legal Studies at the Centre for Social Sciences (CSS) and as an assistant lecturer at ELTE.



Noémi Fanni Molnár

Noémi Fanni Molnár is a lawyer practicing in Budapest, Hungary. In collaboration with the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, K-Monitor, and the Street Lawyer Association, she specialises in fundamental rights litigation. Before being called to the bar, she studied law and criminology at ELTE and sociology at Corvinus University. She obtained her LLM in comparative constitutional law from Central European University. Currently, Noémi is a PhD candidate at the Center for Theory of Law and Society at ELTE. Her research interests include legal advocacy and strategic litigation.

Photos: Joanna Scheffel (Csaba Győry), private (all others)



Stefan Szwed

Stefan Szwed is a scholar of election observation at Columbia University's Harriman Institute. With over twenty years' experience in election observation and assistance, he has served on many missions with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights across the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia and worked with the UN, EU, and NGOs in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. Previously, he held research positions at Oxford University and Sciences Po Paris. His research focuses on European foreign policy, international institutions, and democratic transitions.



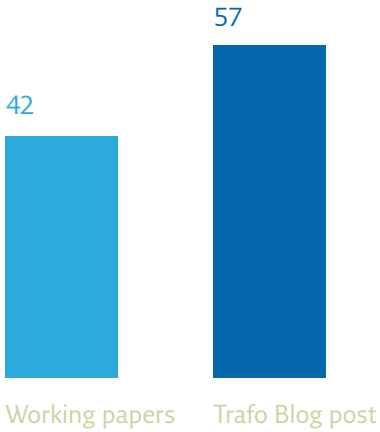
Catherine Warin

Catherine Warin is an adjunct associate professor at the University of Lille and a lawyer with the Luxembourg Bar. A graduate of École Normale Supérieure de Cachan and Sciences Po Paris, she holds a PhD in EU law from the University of Luxembourg. She specialises in EU and Luxembourg public law, focusing on fundamental and human rights, and represents clients before national, European, and UN bodies. Catherine co-founded the NGO Passerell and chairs the Migration Committee of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe.

Photos: private

Looking Back in Numbers

re:counting our Publications



Working papers and Trafo Blog posts, including contributions to the series 5in10, Rule of Law Reflections, Issues, and more

re:counting Fellow Mobility



Fellow mobility across cohorts, 2019–2026

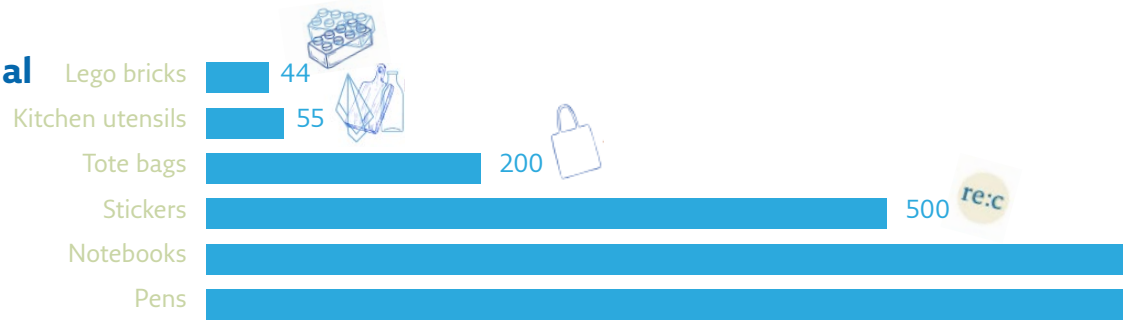
re:counting our Projects



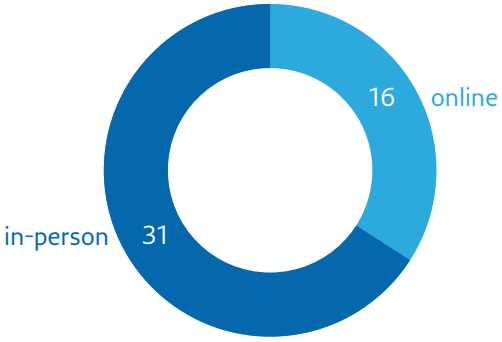
Words and concepts shaping re:constitution across the years. A collection of words from the 119 Project Titles since 2019. Can you spot some?

re:counting Material

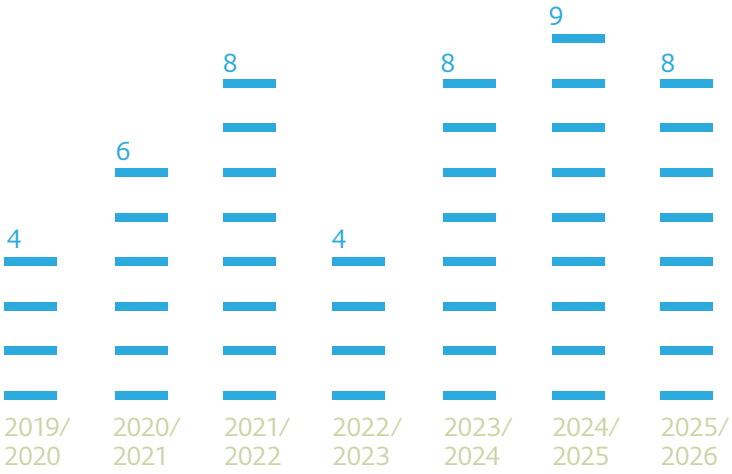
since 2019



re:counting our Events



Event formats



Events per fellowship year



p. 52: Fellow mobility map created with Flourish Studio
p. 53: Word cloud created with WordArt.com

Looking Ahead

With the successful conclusion of its second implementation phase (2023–2026), re:constitution has further consolidated its role as a European platform for interdisciplinary exchange on democracy and the rule of law.

Over the past years, the programme has evolved both structurally and substantively. The Fellowship has expanded beyond the EU to include participants from EU candidate countries, while the introduction of a part-time track has enabled a greater number of practitioners to participate alongside their professional responsibilities. These developments have broadened the range of perspectives represented within the programme and strengthened the exchange between academic research and professional practice. Interest in the Fellowship has continued to grow throughout the second phase, resulting in increasingly competitive selection rounds. Each year, the programme has brought together an outstanding cohort of early- and mid-career scholars and practitioners whose expertise, professional experience, and commitment have enriched the re:constitution community and contributed to high-quality research, dialogue, and collaboration across Europe.

The Alumni Network was established during the second implementation phase and has now become an active and dynamic part of the programme. Building on the initiative and engagement of its members, the Network has developed into a vibrant platform for cross-border collaboration and peer exchange. A growing number of Alumni-led initiatives are already underway, and additional collaborative activities are planned to further strengthen connections across disciplines, sectors, and countries.

At the same time, the Advisory Board has become firmly embedded in the programme's governance, providing strategic guidance and supporting the continued development of re:constitution through the diverse expertise and perspectives of its members.

As re:constitution enters its third implementation phase, the programme will continue to foster evidence-based analysis, interdisciplinary dialogue, and collaborative action in response to the evolving challenges facing democracy and the rule of law in Europe and beyond. The Fellowship will remain at the heart of these efforts, serving as a catalyst for innovative research and collaboration. Together with its Fellows, Alumni, Advisory Board and partner organisations, re:constitution will further expand opportunities for exchange and cooperation across Europe.

The coming year will mark the beginning of this new chapter with a range of exciting activities, including new Fellowship cohorts, expanded Alumni initiatives and strengthened analytical and outreach work. A particular highlight will be the re:constitution Rule of Law Conference 2027, which will bring together scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and members of the wider Network to discuss current developments and future directions for democracy and the rule of law in and around Europe.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all Fellows, Alumni, partners, host institutions, Advisory Board members, and supporters whose dedication has shaped the programme's success so far. We look forward to building on these achievements as re:constitution enters its third phase and continues to strengthen its growing European community.

re:constitution—Exchange and Analysis on
Democracy and the Rule of Law in Europe
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14193 Berlin

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