

HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM FOR THE NEW GENERATION¹

Inter University Centre Dubrovnik (<https://iuc.hr/>)

European Student Union (<https://esu-online.org/>)

Faculty of Political Science, Zagreb University (https://www.fpzg.unizg.hr/en/about_us)

Zagreb, Croatia

8 - 9 October 2026

Ulica Ivana Ljepušića 6, 10 000 Zagreb Croatia

Registration link: <https://forms.gle/G1tfsscNpNbyLCmD6>

Urgency

Universities have long served as guardians of democratic values, human rights, and academic freedom. Today, however, these values face growing challenges. Democratic backsliding, political polarization, digital transformation, social media, artificial intelligence, restrictions and pressures on academic freedom increasingly shape the environment in which students and academics learn, teach, and conduct research.

While much of the debate has focused on institutions and senior academic leadership, far less attention has been given to the perspectives of the next generation of scholars. How do students, doctoral candidates, and early-career academics experience these developments? What opportunities and responsibilities do they see for themselves in defending academic freedom? How can universities, student organizations, and public institutions better support them?

This symposium brings together students, young academics, university leaders, policymakers, and international experts to explore these questions. Through keynote lectures, panel discussions, interactive workshops, and breakout sessions, participants will examine both the challenges and the opportunities for safeguarding academic freedom in contemporary higher education.

¹ This symposium is the third in a series of activities on Academic Freedom, initiated by the Inter University Centre Dubrovnik (IUC). On October 10 2025 a first explorative workshop, focussing on the relevance of academic freedom for development, was organised at the premisses of the EU in Zagreb for an international group of diplomats and academics. (<https://iuc.hr/news/academic-freedom-for-national-and-regional-development>). On April 23 and 24 2026 a second workshop held in Dubrovnik was titled *Academic Freedom in Context: Trends in Threats and Coping Practices* (<https://iuc.hr/news/academic-freedom-is-globally-under-pressure>). A larger conference on the broader topic will be organized from September 22 to 24 2027 at the IUC in Dubrovnik.

DAY 1: Thursday, 8 October 2026

9.30 – 10.00 | Registration

10:00 - 10:20 Opening and Welcome

- *Dr. Višeslav Raos*, Vice-dean for Research, Infrastructure, and Finance (University of Zagreb)
- *Prof. Ivan Šimonović*, Director General, Inter-University Centre; Rapporteur UN Human Rights Committee
- *Daciana Pop*, President, European Students' Union (ESU)

10:20 - 10:55 Keynote 1 (+ Q&A)

How Academic Freedom Is Threatened – and How Resilience of Research Can Be Actively Strengthened

Dr. Christoph Kummel, Head of Division, Humanities and Social Sciences, DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

10:55 - 11:30 Keynote 2 (+ Q&A)

Academic Freedom from a Students' Perspective

Daciana Pop, President European Students Union (ESU)

11:30 - 12:00 Coffee Break & Networking

12:00 - 13:00 Plenary Discussion

Academic Freedom, Students Rights and the Future of European Higher Education

Participants:

Daciana Pop, President, European Students' Union (ESU)

Dr. Gazela Pudar Draško, Director at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade

Dr. Christoph Kummel, Head of Division, Humanities and Social Sciences, DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

Prof. Enes Kulenović, Faculty of Political Science University of Zagreb

Moderator: *Prof. Snježana Prijic-Samaržija*, Vice Chair IUC Council; former Rector, University of Rijeka

13:00 - 14:00 Lunch

14:00 - 15:00 Closed Breakout Sessions Round I:

Sharing Experiences and Perspectives

Students and Young Academics Respond to Contemporary Challenges

Chair: Lana Par, former ESU president



15:00 - 15:10 Short Break

15:10 - 16:10 Closed Breakout Sessions Round II

World Cafe on Imagining the Future

Strengthening Academic Freedom / Developing Repertoires for Action

Chair: Lana Par, former ESU president

16:10 - 16:40 Coffee Break

16:40 - 17:40 Roundtable

From Discussion to Action. Bringing Student Perspectives and Activism to Policy

Student Perspectives, Action and Activisme (including Q&A)

- *Branislav Bane Đorđević*, Student Activist Students Against the Authoritarian Regimes (STAV)
- *Doroteja Antić*, Activist Informal Group STAV
- *Gordan Kragić*, President of the Student Council of the University of Zagreb
- *Lana Par* (Break out session rapporteur, former ESU president)

Recommendations and Policy (including Q&A)

- Presentation and discussion of recommendations emerging from the breakout sessions.

Moderator: *Dr. Paul Stubbs*, Emeritus The Institute of Economics Zagreb

17:40 - 18:00 Closing Reflections

Prof. Gunn Elisabeth Birkelund, Chair of the IUC Executive Committee, Professor Emeritus University of Oslo, former Secretary General, The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters

20:00 | Symposium Dinner

DAY 2: Friday, 9 October 2026

9.00 – 9.30 | Registration

09:30 - 09:45 Opening and Welcome

- *Dr. Višeslav Raos*, Vice-dean for Research, Infrastructure, and Finance University of Zagreb
- *Prof. Wieger Bakker*, Deputy Director General, Inter-University Centre; Professor emeritus Utrecht University School of Governance
- *Daciana Pop*, President, European Students' Union (ESU)

09:45 - 10:15 Keynote 3 (+ Q&A)

Safeguarding Academic Freedom with the New Generation of Academics. Challenges and Opportunities for Students and Early-Career Scholars

Tiago Nogueira, Steering Committee Member Global Student Forum (GSF)

10:15 - 10:45 Keynote 4 (+ Q&A) (online)

Academic Freedom: Ideals and Realities

Prof. Liviu Matei, Head of the King's School of Education, Communication & Society (ESC), Kings College London, Vice-President Governing Council of Magna Charta Universitatum

10:45 - 11:20 Keynote 5 (+ Q&A)

Universities as Places of Democratic Resistance

Dr. Gazela Pudar Draško, Director at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade

11:20 - 11:40 Coffee Break

11:40 – 12.30 Stakeholders Roundtable

The Value of Academic Freedom: From Principles to Policies and Practices

- *Prof. Dr. Antonija Petričušić*, Centre Miko Tripalo and the Croatian Womans Network
- *Tiago Nogueira*, Steering Committee Member Global Student Forum (GSF)
- *Marin Capan*, Board Member of the European Youth Forum
- *Jovan Dražić*, Student Activist, University of Novi Sad
- *Anja Pitulić*, Activist Informal Group STAV

Moderator: *Prof. Dr. Wieger Bakker*, Deputy Director General Inter-University Centre; Professor emeritus Utrecht University School of Governance



12:30 - 13:10 Keynote 6 (+ Q&A) (online)

**How universities can protect and promote academic freedom: the EUA
Principles and Guidelines**

Dr. Monika Steinel, Dept. Secretary General European University Association
(EUA)

13:10 – 13.20 Conclusion and Synthesis

**Academic Freedom for the New Generation: Human Rights, Democracy
and Responsibilities**

Prof. Snježana Prijic-Samaržija, Vice Chair IUC Council; former Rector,
University of Rijeka

13.20 – 13.30 Closing remarks by the symposium organizers.

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