

Eurodoc Ambassador Programme for Values and Democracy in European Research and Higher Education – 2026 Edition (ValDem 2026)

Also across Europe, we are currently witnessing democratic backsliding and values such as academic freedom and institutional autonomy coming increasingly under threat. It is thus crucial that we as the academic community know how to get involved to actively strengthen and safeguard democracy, higher education, and research. In a mix of theoretical lectures and hands-on seminars, the “Eurodoc Ambassador Programme for Values and Democracy in European Research and Higher Education (ValDem)” enables academics to deepen their understanding of the role higher education and research play for democracies. The goal is to empower researchers to become ambassadors for democracy within their institutions, their research communities, as well as in society.



Launched successfully in 2025, the 2026 edition of the ValDem programme is an 8-week, two-part course that encompasses a total of 14 lectures and 4 seminar sessions. Part I situates research and higher education in Europe in a democratic context and explores the role and responsibilities of researchers and educators. Part II focuses on the institutional structures and addresses the role of democratic public authorities in providing frameworks for research and higher education institutions in Europe. The lectures will be given by experts providing the most recent insights into the different areas of concern both in terms of research and in terms of policy discussions. The small group seminars ensure that the ambassadors can articulate their own role regarding the democratic mission of higher education, reflect on tensions between the different expectations, and become part of a network of peers.

The programme is designed for academics from all disciplines and on all career levels, but emphatically invites early career researchers to participate. It requires no prior knowledge. *It is possible to just attend the lectures without the course work.*

Course registration:

- Registration for **Track 1 (full ambassador programme)** will close on **March 31st 2026**. Track 1 is limited to 80 persons to ensure the quality of the seminar sessions. Please register [here](#).
- Registration for **Track 2 (solely attending the lectures)** remains open until we reach a total of 260 registrations. Please register [here](#).

For Track 1 – To receive the ambassador certificate you need to fulfill the following:

- Attendance: lectures min. 50% IRT of each part; seminars min. 75% IRT with active participation
- Submission of written assignment and active participation in the online forum

The certificate will confirm the successful completion of the 2026 course. The ambassador status is valid for 1 year and can be renewed yearly by fulfilling minor follow up requirements to keep it current.

Information for Lecturers:

- Approximately 50 min online lecture plus 30 min discussion. The lecture will be recorded and made available on Eurodoc's online learning platform.
- Material to be provided: 1 article mandatory reading, suggestions for further reading, 2 page 'concept notes', 1-3 questions for discussions in the online forum.

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Date [times are CEST!]	Module and Description
13.04.2026 16:00-17.30 CEST	[0.1] Introduction
PART I – THE DEMOCRATIC MISSION OF RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION	
21.04.2026 16:00-19:00 CEST	[1.1] Higher Education and Civil Society The goal of this session is for participants to gain an understanding of the civic mission of HE, the role of HEIs in civil society, and the importance of civil society for democracies. What does it mean to view higher education as a public good in democracy? What is the role of the Council of Europe for connecting higher education and civil society? And what are the roles of the HEIs and higher education in protecting and developing the values of democracy in order to strengthen civil society?
21.04.2026 16:00-19:00 CEST	[1.2] Academic Governance and Representational Rights The session aims for participants to understand the role of academic governance and how it links to participatory democracy. Academic governance and representational rights of the academic community (students, researchers/academics, technical and administrative staff) are crucial to align the HEIs with the values of democracy. An introduction to different types of academic governance in Europe will make the importance of representational rights within higher education systems graspable.
Time frame 20.-22.04.26 3 hours	[Seminar 1] A: Monday, 20th 16.00 - 19.00 CEST B: Tuesday, 21st 9.00 -12.00 CEST C: Wednesday, 22nd 13.00 -16.00 CEST
23.04.2026 16:00-19:00 CEST	[1.3] Academic Freedom Academic freedom plays a fundamental role in promoting and protecting democratic principles and institutions. But what exactly is academic freedom? What is its scope and its limitations? This lecture outlines the role of academic freedom in the context of Europe: How and why it became one of the fundamental values in EHEA; the policies and structures in place to enable it; and why it is a central pillar of the relationship between academia and democracy.
Time frame 27.-29.04.26 3 hours	[Seminar 2] A: Monday, 27th 16.00 - 19.00 CEST B: Tuesday, 28th 9.00 -12.00 CEST C: Wednesday, 29th 13.00 -16.00 CEST
28.04.2026 16:00-17:30 CEST	[1.4] Higher Education in Europe: The Bologna Process and the EHEA Fundamental Values The lecture will outline the history, vision, and mission of the Bologna Process and of the EHEA fundamental values. It will zoom in on the connection between the Bologna process, the EHEA fundamental values, and democracy. How can the values be fully implemented, strengthened, and protected within EHEA?

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PART II – THE ROLE OF DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC AUTHORITIES FOR RESEARCH IN EUROPE	
04.05.2026 16:00-19:00 CEST	<p>[2.1] The ERA: Legislative Process</p> <p>The European Research Area (ERA) has the ambition to align research policies and programmes across the European countries in order to create “a single, borderless market for research, innovation and technology.” This lecture will provide an overview of the vision and the governance mechanism of the ERA: What is the role of the member states and other stakeholders in shaping this shared space? And how far have we come with improved mobility of and cooperation between researchers?</p>
04.05.2026 16:00-19:00 CEST	<p>[2.2] The ERA: Research Funding Policy</p> <p>A core element of a strong, functioning research sector is its funding. This lecture will look at the timelines, negotiation process, and conditions for allocating funding and how and where priorities are set: Who contributes to this process? How and why is funding allocated in a certain way? And how does this allocation of money go together with the vision of an ERA and the policies that are being developed and implemented.</p>
07.05.2026 16:00-19:00 CEST	<p>[2.3] Institutional Autonomy and Freedom of Science</p> <p>What is the connection between institutional autonomy and academic freedom? This lecture addresses the important role Institutional autonomy plays in keeping and ensuring a broad knowledge base and independent research and education for democratic societies. At the same time, public authorities are also required to take an active role in ensuring that HEIs can and do meet the multiple expectations and objectives of society and reflect and respect the values of the (democratic) society.</p>
07.05.2026 16:00-19:00 CEST	<p>[2.4] The ERA and the Democratic Values of the EU</p> <p>Though most often solely associated with the framework programme and research funding schemes, the policy work in the context of the ERA also strengthens the link between research, society, and democracy. This lecture will explore how the vision of the ERA connects to the EU’s vision of a democratic Europe.</p>
Time frame 11.-13.05.26 3 hours	<p>[Seminar 3] Public Hearings</p> <p>A: Monday, 11th 16.00 - 19.00 CEST B: Tuesday, 12th 9.00 -12.00 CEST C: Wednesday, 13th 13.00 -16.00 CEST</p>
18.05.26 16:00-19:00 CEST	<p>[2.5] UNESCO Open Science</p> <p>The goal of this session is for participants to gain an understanding of the role of UNESCO in advocating for equitable access to education, cultural participation, and the right to scientific advancement, especially in the context of HEIs and research. The UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science was adopted in 2021 in order to further transparency and improve accessibility to scientific progress and knowledge.</p>
18.05.26 16:00-19:00 CEST	<p>[2.6] The Council of Europe and Higher Education</p> <p>In this lecture, the participants will learn about the history of the Council of Europe and its role when it comes to HEIs, research, and education. We will look at the current major foci of the institution and go over its recommendations and declaration for HE (e.g. The Cultural Convention, The Lisbon Recommendation and the 2007 Recommendation). . It will specifically zoom in on the connection between the Council of Europe and the democratic mission of research and higher education.</p>

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Time frame 18.-20.05.26 3 hours	[Seminar 4] A: TBD B: Tuesday, 19th 9.00 -12.00 CEST C: Wednesday, 20th 13.00 -16.00 CEST
28.05.26 17:00-18:30 CEST	[0.2] Conclusion <i>17:00 CET Deadline for written assignment</i>

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- the role of higher education in and for democracies in Europe
- their own role as academics and citizens in Europe
- their own role and responsibilities in the higher education and research environment, as well as other stakeholders' roles and responsibilities
- the 'democratic mission' of higher education and the six EHEA fundamental values as formulated by the Council of Europe
- the legislative and governance context in which HEIs operate
- the key frameworks of the EU and the EHEA and the European Higher Education Policies, especially the democratic principles, and is familiar with the respective policy documents
- understands the difference of the global/European role of higher education and local contexts
- understands the current challenges higher education and research face

Skills: participants will be able to

- advocate more effectively for democratic principles and values-based higher education policies and governance
- analyse local circumstances and find local solutions and leverage point
- communicate EHEA values and principles effectively
- mobilise others to participate in advocacy and to develop solutions for local challenges

Values: participants will be more committed to

- democratic principles and the human rights
- academic freedom, academic integrity, and institutional autonomy
- diversity, intercultural dialog, respect, equity, and equality
- ethical standards and the elimination of discriminatory practices
- student and staff participation in higher education governance
- public responsibility for higher education and public responsibility of higher education
- respecting different practices that are grounded in fairness, democratic procedures, and the democratic rule of law

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The “Eurodoc Ambassador Programme for Values and Democracy in European Research and Higher Education (ValDem)” has been conceptualised by Pil Maria Saugmann and Hannah Schoch. The curriculum for the 2026 “Eurodoc Ambassador Programme for Values and Democracy in European Research and Higher Education (ValDem)” has been developed by Norbert Bencze, Pil Maria Saugmann and Hannah Schoch.

The course is organised and led by Norbert Bencze, Karl Kilbo Edlund, Margaux Introna, Anna Pavelieva, Pil Maria Saugmann, Karl Hendrik Storhaug Reinås, Hannah Schoch.

Pil Maria Saugmann

Pil Maria Saugmann is an advisory board member of the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc). She holds a PhD in theoretical physics from Stockholm University. Her current research centers on the role of higher education in society as well as research ethics and integrity in the light of digitalization. She represents Eurodoc in the Council of Europe’s conference of International NGOs and in the Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU). She is a member of the Bureau of CDEDU as a representative of the academic community. She represents researchers towards the European Union in the ERA Forum. She contributes to Eurodoc’s policy and advocacy work on a wide array of topics including academic freedom.

Hannah Schoch

Hannah Schoch was the secretary on the board of the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc) from 2022-2025. She contributes to Eurodoc’s policy and advocacy work on a wide array of topics including academic freedom and the democratic mission of higher education and research. She is currently finishing her PhD in American studies on narrative fiction and democracy and facilitates knowledge exchange between politics and science in Switzerland. She has experience in developing courses for and teaching at all levels (BA, MA, as well as further education courses for faculty) at university.

Norbert Bencze

Norbert Bencze is the Secretary at European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc) and a Presidential Commissioner responsible for the Ambassador System at the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Candidates (DOSZ). He completed his PhD in Applied Linguistics focused on educational development. Besides policy making processes, he participates in academic programme assessment as evaluation specialist of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. He is committed to the development of international communities and to equitable opportunities in academia.

Karl Kilbo Edlund

Karl Kilbo Edlund is the secretariat coordinator of the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc). He recently obtained his PhD in environmental and occupational epidemiology at the University of Gothenburg and combines his research with work as physician at Sahlgrenska University Hospital, Gothenburg. He contributes to Eurodoc’s advocacy work on various topics, with particular emphasis on doctoral training, quality assurance, sustainability, and the European Universities’ Initiative.

Karl Henrik Storhaug Reinås

Karl Henrik Storhaug Reinås is the president of the Association of Doctoral Organizations in Norway. He is in his third year of doing his PhD in Health Education at the University of Oslo, Norway, with an affiliation to the Centre for Person-centred Care at the Gothenburg University, Sweden. His PhD project focuses on exploring how the communication between patients and health care professionals can be used as a resource or tool to increase their health literacy, so the patient will be better able to cope with chronic illnesses and have a

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stronger agency in their own health trajectory and health care professionals can provide better support. Reinås is also part of the working group for mental health in Eurodoc and has done advocacy work in several years both to promote the interests of students and temporary researchers, in addition to being active in party politics for the Labour party in Norway.

Margaux Introna

Margaux Introna is a co-coordinator of the working group “Equitable Opportunities and Sustainable Research Cultures” of the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc). She is in her last months of her PhD in Space Science and Technology, specialising in Celestial Mechanics and Astrodynamics at the University of Trento (Italy). In addition to contributing to policy-related initiatives, she is involved in the assessment of academic programmes through ADI (Associazione Dottorandi e Dottori di Ricerca in Italia, the Italian Association of PhD Candidates and PhD Graduates). She is committed to fostering inclusive academic communities and promoting equitable opportunities in academia.

Anna Pavelieva

Anna Pavelieva is the External Communication Coordinator of the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc). She holds a PhD in Philology and is an Associate Professor at the Germanic Philology and Translation Department of the National University "Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic". At her university, she also serves as the International Relations Coordinator, where she is fully responsible for international cooperation, including double diploma programs, international agreements, academic exchanges, and guest lectures. Since 2021, she has been a member of the Expert Council of Young Scientists of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, contributing to the "Safe Society" section focused on cultural heritage and linguistics. Anna is an experienced English teacher and professional translator, currently serving as a simultaneous interpreter at the Ukrainian-Danish Youth House. Her scientific interests include linguistics, theory of translation, and literary studies.