

“Next Generation Europe”

Cres, 14 – 19 September 2025



Regaining new European and democratic momentum

The “**Cres Summer School**”, organised on the island of Cres (Croatia), will focus on the topic “*Defending democracy in turbulent times: challenges and opportunities. The European perspective*”.

Context:

The European Union (EU) is facing significant pressures, both internally and externally, that threaten its democratic values, unity, and resilience. From the rise of EU-critical political movements to external challenges posed by authoritarian regimes, democracy in Europe is under strain. The growing influence of populist movements, disinformation, and political fragmentation threatens the EU's cohesion and undermines its democratic foundation. While trust in the EU has increased in recent years, these challenges continue to fuel divisions and uncertainty, potentially weakening the Union's long-term unity. Additionally, the breakdown of transatlantic relations has introduced a new and serious security threat to both the EU and Europe as a whole.

These challenges require urgent action to reinforce the EU's core values – democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights – at both internal and external levels. The increasing geopolitical shifts and the rise of anti-democratic forces demand a stronger commitment to protecting these values within the EU, while also promoting them globally, particularly through the enlargement process. Furthermore, there is a pressing need to enhance the EU's security framework. As security and democracy of the Union are inextricably linked, strengthening the EU's defence capabilities and resilience will be crucial in safeguarding democratic principles, especially in light of external authoritarian pressure and the evolving global security environment.

The EU must actively defend democracy, ensuring that its founding principles continue to guide its future.

Aims of the “Cres Summer School”:

The aim is to support a new generation of young European experts, scholars, activists, and engaged citizens in their work for a new European togetherness. The interaction will provide young researchers and activists with knowledge, experience, and skills relevant to their professional careers and the future of Europe. Researchers and activists, starting from those that participated in the first edition of the Summer School in Cres in September 2022, organised in the framework of the “WB2EU project”, can form a vibrant network of enthusiastic young people and leaders able to meet political challenges, deepen the dialogue with decision-makers, and thus contribute to regaining a new European and democratic momentum.

The “Cres Summer School” will lead to

1. an increased understanding of Europeanisation and democratic developments among young researchers and activists,
2. new ties and networks between researchers, civic activists, and politicians,
3. new ways of influencing public debates through qualified, evidence-based, and yet politically engaged activities.

Target group:

- Max. 20 young researchers, active young civic activists, and engaged citizens

The participants (age max. 28 years) will be nominated by partner institutions (1 participant from each partner). Furthermore, decision-makers and stakeholders will be invited and engaged in dialogue with the young participants on the topic of Europeanisation and democratisation.

Working methods and approaches:

- Lectures, workshops with presentations, and discussions of research projects and forms of civic activism
- Developing scenarios and action plans regarding the future of Europe
- A specific dialogue format dedicated to the meetings with stakeholders
- Preparation of a joint op-ed and a series of YouTube videos

The "Cres Summer School" will include politicians, senior external experts, and researchers from the following institutions: the University of Rijeka, the Royal Elcano Institute, ÖGfE, oiip, IRMO, CAS SEE, the European Commission, ambassadors of an EU member state, and other relevant speakers.

The organising team of the "Cres Summer School", in charge of coordination, providing leadership, moderation, and workshop guidance for the "Cres Summer School", consists of Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO), *Senada Šelo Šabić*, Secretary General of the Austrian Society for European Politics (ÖGfE), *Paul Schmidt*, Senior Researcher at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (oiip), Co-Director of the Center of Advanced Studies Southeast Europe (CAS SEE), *Vedran Džihić*, and Research Associate and Project Manager at ÖGfE, *Susan Milford-Faber*.

Working language: English

Programme:

Sunday, 14 September: Arrival

Monday, 15 September: Opening Session – Welcome, Keynote Addresses & Discussion, Introduction to the Working Methods and Programme, Lunch, Creative Workshop 1, Dinner

Tuesday, 16 September: Plenary Inputs & Discussion, Lunch, Creative Workshop 2, Videos, Dinner

Wednesday, 17 September: Plenary Inputs & Discussion, Lunch, Videos, Exploring the Island, Dinner

Thursday, 18 September: Plenary Inputs & Discussion, Creative Workshop 3, Future of EU – Drafting and creating a joint op-ed of the "Next Generation Europe", Videos, Social Programme, Farewell Dinner

Friday, 19 September: Departure

Workshop topics:

Rule of law and justice | European values | Fundamental rights | Geopolitical shifts – war in Ukraine | Autocratisation vs. Democracy | Democratisation from below | The future of Europe – crosscutting perspectives

Venue: [Palace Moise, University of Rijeka](#), Zagrad 6, HR- 51557 Cres

Accommodation: [Hotel Kimen](#), Melin I br. 16 / Apartments Duomo, Melin V/11 – HR-51557 Cres / [Palace Moise, University of Rijeka](#), Zagrad 6, HR- 51557 Cres

Accommodation and board (except breakfast) will be covered by the organisers. **Travel costs** will be reimbursed by the organisers after the Summer School. For that purpose, invoices, tickets, and boarding passes are needed.

Contact & information: Susan Milford-Faber, susan.milford-faber@oegfe.at

About the network:

The network consists of 18 renowned think tanks, do-tanks, higher education institutes and policy centres from the countries that will be most decisive for the enlargement process in the upcoming years.

Project initiators	
Austria	Austrian Society for European Politics (ÖGfE), Vienna
Austria	Austrian Institute for International Affairs (oiip), Vienna
Croatia	Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO), Zagreb
Spain	Royal Institute Elcano, Madrid
Western Balkan countries & neighbourhood	
Albania	Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI), Tirana
BiH	University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Political Sciences
Kosovo	Change Experts Group, Pristina
Montenegro	Politikon Network (PIN), Podgorica
North Macedonia	EUROTHINK - Center for European Strategies, Skopje
Serbia	Foundation BFPE for a Responsible Society (BFPE), Belgrade
EU member countries	
Bulgaria	New Bulgarian University, Centre for European Refugees, Migration and Ethnic Studies (CERMES), Sofia
France	Centre International de Formation Européenne (CIFE), Nice
Germany	Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP), Berlin
Greece	Department of Political Science & International Relations, University of the Peloponnese, Corinth
Hungary	Andrássy University, Budapest
Italy	International Affairs Institute (IAI), Rome
Romania	GlobalFocus Center, Bucharest
Slovenia	Centre of International Relations (CIR) – University of Ljubljana

This network is based on the “WB2EU Network” that was established in October 2020 in the framework of the Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Networks Project “**Europeanisation meets democracy from below: The Western Balkans on the search for new European and democratic Momentum (WB2EU)**”, co-funded by the European Commission under its Erasmus+ Jean Monnet programme (project duration: 29.10.2020 – 28.10.2023). Further information: www.wb2eu.eu



Further information about the Summer Schools: <https://summerschool.oegfe.at/>

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