

9:00

Opening Remarks

9:15

Opening Panel

Rule of Law at a Crossroads — Current Trends and Challenges

As security pressures mount, defence spending surges, and member states adapt to a climate of permanent emergency, difficult questions emerge about democratic oversight, executive power and legal accountability. At the same time, negotiations on the EU's next long-term budget are intensifying, while geopolitical considerations increasingly risk overshadowing or weakening the conditionality mechanisms designed to safeguard rule of law standards. Enlargement, too, has returned to the centre of the European agenda. Taking place immediately after the President of the European Commission's State of the Union address, this opening panel sets the scene for the conference.

SPEAKERS

- Oleksandra Matviichuk — Chairwoman, Centre for Civil Liberties, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate
- Thijs Berman — Executive Director, European Partnership for Democracy
- Thu Nguyen — Acting Co-Director, Jacques Delors Centre, Hertie School

MODERATOR

- Oliver Grimm — Brussels Correspondent, Die Presse

11:15

Morning Session A • Roundtable

Who Watches Europe's Rearmament? Democratic and Judicial Oversight in the CSDP After Readiness 2030

As the EU and its Member States mobilise unprecedented resources for defence purposes, questions arise as to the sufficiency of democratic and judicial oversight in this area. As part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is amongst the EU policy fields with the least parliamentary and judicial oversight. With the strategic defence initiative 'Readiness 2030', one can observe an expansion of EU involvement in defence financing without a corresponding expansion of democratic and rule of law mechanisms. This roundtable centres on how it can be ensured that the EU itself does not leave the rule of law and democracy by the wayside.

SPEAKERS

- Emilio de Capitani — Former Legal Advisor, LIBE Committee, European Parliament
- Kolja Raube — Associate Professor, KU Leuven
- León Castellanos-Jankiewicz — Senior Researcher, Asser Institute for International & European Law

MODERATORS

- Jacquelyn Veraldi — Postdoctoral Researcher, CEU Democracy Institute
- Marius Ghincea — Postdoctoral Researcher, ETH Zurich

11:15

Morning Session B • Roundtable

Syncing Rule of Law Reporting and Enlargement

As EU enlargement is balancing on the intersection between the fast-paced security agenda and slower merit-based accession process, the rule of law has become a central yardstick for accession. This makes it crucial to effectively measure progress made on the rule of law in enlargement countries and integrate them into EU tools. In this session, we will discuss concrete recommendations formulated in previous gatherings and analyse their potential for implementation, centring on how to strengthen the leverage of the Rule of Law Report.

SPEAKERS

- Anamarija Velinovska — Project Manager & Researcher, Centre for EU Integration, Institute for Democracy
- Viktoriia Melnyk — Head of International Relations and European Integration, Centre of Policy and Legal Reform
- Jelena Pejić Nikić — Senior Researcher, Belgrade Centre for Security Policy

MODERATOR

- Eric Maurice — Policy Analyst, European Politics and Institutions, European Policy Centre



14:00

Afternoon Session A - Structured Scenario Walk**Protecting the Public Purse — Rule of Law Conditionality in the Next EU Budget**

Nearly five years after the Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation came into force, the verdict is sobering. The mechanism has been activated once, enforcement has been slow and opaque. As the EU now negotiates a €2 trillion budget for 2028–2034, the question is not whether to have conditionality, but whether Europe has the political courage to make it work. This workshop brings together civil society, journalists, academics and EU policymakers to debate what an effective, transparent and politically durable conditionality mechanism should look like in the next MFF.

SPEAKERS

- Krzysztof Pleśniak — Senior Legal Counsellor, Head of Unit, Council of the European Union
- Annemie Turtelboom — Member/Dean of Chamber II, European Court of Auditors
- Sophie In't Veld — Volt Europe, Former MEP
- Kati Cseres — Associate Professor of Law, University of Amsterdam

MODERATOR

- Jacquelyn Veraldi — Postdoctoral Researcher, CEU Democracy Institute

14:00

Afternoon Session B - Panel and Scenario Exercise**Who Protects the Rule of Law When AI Goes Wrong?**

The rapid advent of AI poses a serious challenge to the rule of law in Europe. Not only corporations but also public authorities at both the EU and Member State levels increasingly rely on AI when discharging their functions. The session will explore the pathways to protecting the rule of law in the age of AI, featuring a discussion of the unique challenges AI poses for European democracies, alongside an interactive exercise inviting participants to brainstorm solutions to a fictional problem.

SPEAKERS

- Alice Hamilton — Project Manager, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
- Michèle Dubrocard — Legal Officer, Policy & Legislative Consultation Unit, European Data Protection Supervisor
- Luise Quaritsch — Policy Fellow, EU Democracy, Institut Jacques Delors
- Itxaso Domínguez de Olazábal — Policy Advisor, European Digital Rights

MODERATOR

- Valentina Golunova — Assistant Professor of Digital Democracy, Maastricht University

16:15

Closing Panel - Fishbowl**Building a Stronger Rule of Law Framework in Europe**

The day's discussions will have examined the rule of law from different angles: the resilience of EU instruments, pressures within member states, the implications of enlargement and budget negotiations, and the impact of tech, security, competitiveness and deregulation agendas. This closing panel brings these strands together and looks ahead to the second half of the EU institutional mandate, discussing how the EU can move from diagnosis to credible, consistent and effective action.

SPEAKER

- Ana Gallego Torres — Director-General, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission

MODERATOR

- Johannes Greubel — Head of the Transnationalisation Programme and Connecting Europe Project Leader, European Policy Centre

17:45

Closing Remarks

18:00

Reception