

the unconference for critical minds and radical futures

ALTSOU '24

Alternative State of the Union

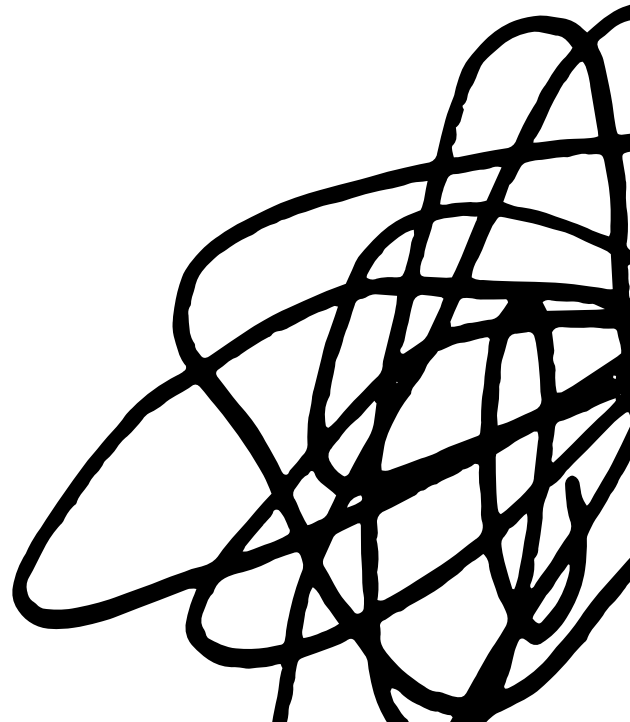
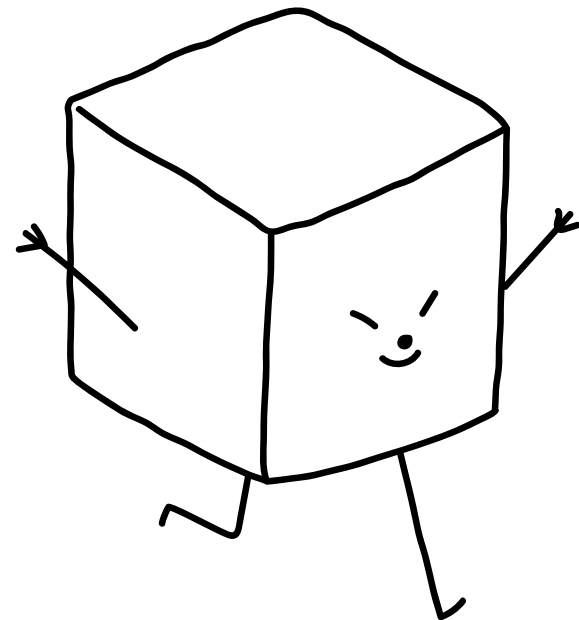
20, 21, 22 May 2024

Florence and online



Proceedings ALTSOU '24

AltSOU Taskforce, June 2024.



Alternative State of the Union

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Florence and online

This publication is a project by researchers at the European University Institute (EUI) who have undertaken the task of creating a counterpoint to the elitist and technocratic discussions dominating Neo-liberal academia.

The State of the Union conference, which serves as the initial focal point of our critique, perfectly encapsulates this dangerous and autocratic trend.

We believe another academia is possible!

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Proceedings

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Alternative State of the Union

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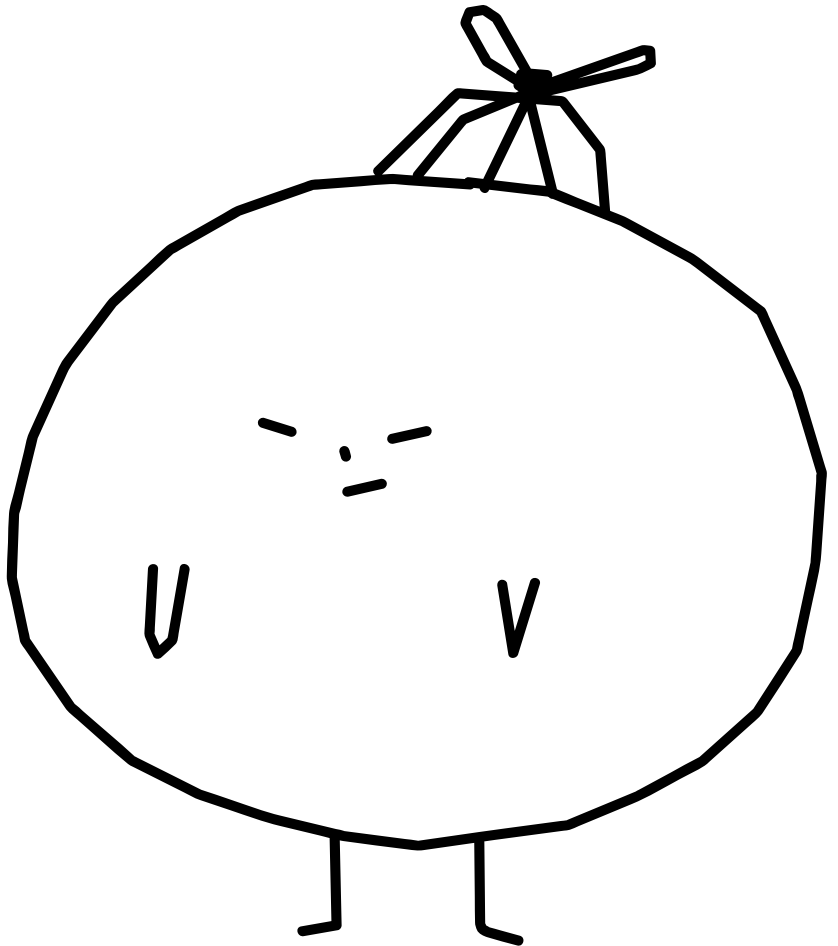
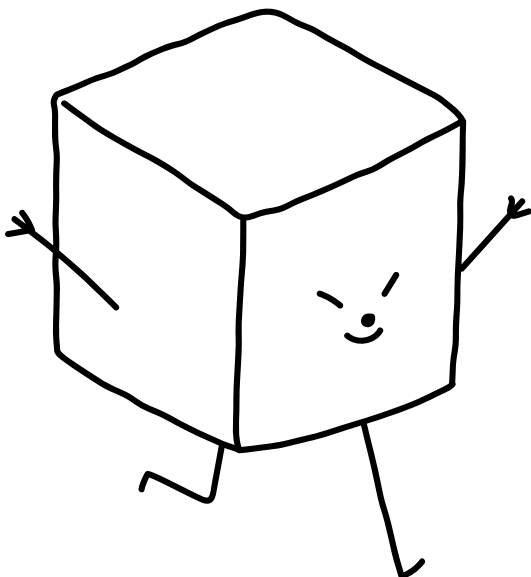
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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the proceedings of the Alternative State of the Union 2024 Unconference (AltSOU'24). The AltSOU'24 Coordinating Taskforce compiled this document to record our efforts and activities from the 2023-24 period and in the hope that it will be useful for future activists at the EUI.

This document goes through the precursors and preparations for the AltSOU'24 before describing the proceedings of the unconference event in May 2024. It will then elaborate upon corresponding events that were happening the same week as the AltSOU'24 before turning to the anticipated outcomes of the unconference.

Although the Alternative State of the Union originated as explicit opposition to, and protest against, the official State of the Union, it became an experiment in alternative conferencing, alternative networking, and alternative research. It is our hope that these experiments continue at the EUI into the future, and that researchers continue to push for a truly researcher-lead conference (or "un"conference) to become the flagship conference of the EUI.

In solidarity,
the AltSOU'24 taskforce

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SUMMARY

What is the AltSOU?

The AltSOU is a researcher-led (un)conference with a two-fold purpose. The AltSOU is a critique of the State of the Union (SOU) as an opaque and self-congratulatory event. The AltSOU is also a counterpoint to this "official" SOU to give voice to the young, the marginalised, and those often forgotten or silenced in debates about Europe.

In May 2024, after a pilot event in 2023 and a series of open events to conceptualise the (un)conference during the academic year, more than thirty guests and about two hundred participants discussed for three days: EU migration policies, antifascism, obstacles faced by scholars at risks from Palestine, attacks on academic freedom, and activism in academia.

AltSOU in context.

EUI researchers have criticised the SOU since its creation in 2013. The SOU promotes an uncritical understanding of what the European Union (EU) is and does. The conference is of no real relevance for most of the European University Institute (EUI) researchers, yet it strongly constrains access to campus and research activities. Police presence on campus is problematic per se and has led to harassment, racial profiling and violence against researchers. Demonstrations against the State of the Union and for grant equality took place in 2013, 2022 and 2023.

It is in this context that the AltSOU should be understood. A group of EUI researchers organised a pilot event in 2023 to show how other voices can be heard and reflect on what an alternative State of the Union could be. AltSOU'24 built upon this first experience and brought onto campus speakers and topics ignored by the official SOU.

The 2024 edition of the AltSOU was not just an (un)conference. AltSOU organisers and participants engaged in the encampment for Palestine taking place at the same time in the city centre of Florence. Demonstrations against the official SOU took place, to repeat previous concerns about the event and denounce the links between the SOU and companies and institutions funding genocide in Gaza.

AltSOU findings.

The purpose of AltSOU'24 was to platform those who can best perceive the flaws of Europe (the youth, the excluded, the racialised, etc.) and not necessarily to reach definitive answers.

The question of links between activism and academia was at the root of almost all the (un)conference events. The discussions demonstrated the legitimacy of being both an activist and an academic and the need for a reciprocal relationship between the two roles, as well as the importance of welcoming activists to academic events and bringing academic events into spaces of public activism.

AltSOU'24 included five events on the ever-burning topic of migration. These events constituted a lively dialogue between academics, activists and legal experts in the fields of humanitarian action and investigative journalism. We literally "performed" several different ways to understand the stakes, positionalities and privileges involved in acting for migrant rights as university members.

Spatial movement and role-play activities including a “power walk” and a “teach-in” allowed us to embody the power differentials, helplessness, and discomfort elicited by narratives of human suffering. We collectively formulated a profusion of questions centring on how the university could target discourse, provide alternatives, reimagine legal meaning, and challenge the State, the EU, and border regimes.

The role of the university in these struggles became clearer to us – the role of the university as a catalyst in the co-creation of spaces of relative mobility and freedom. Over three days, we explored the potential of a participatory “laboratory” of thought and action to overcome the unequal hierarchies of knowledge-sharing that academia tends to perpetuate.

Our event on Palestine and academia focused on issues at the intersection of academic production and the experience of being Palestinian, a refugee, and facing repression. Our speakers and participants were a diverse group that included Palestinians, scholars of Palestine, and activists working against genocide and for Palestinian liberation. Together, we discussed issues on a range of scales: from logistical issues like visas and health insurance, to navigating accusations of antisemitism, tackling the divisions within the so-called “leftist” university, and fighting repression and restriction of academic freedom.

We aimed to produce recommendations on ensuring academic freedom, protecting scholars-at-risk, and producing action points to more proactively support Palestinian refugees in Florence. This event was simultaneous to the inter-university encampment for Palestine and against genocide in Piazza Shireen Abu Akhleh (formerly Piazza San Marco) in Florence, and a very significant result was that we platformed their demands.

Our event on the continuity of the university’s fight against capitalism was a deep-dive into the historicity of our goals as the AltSoU. We explored the history of activism at the EUI, including the 2011-born Colletivo Prezzemolo and the 2013 “Festival of the Other Europe - It’s Capitalism, Stupid!” We discussed solidarity between EUI members and local Florentine and international movements over the years and previous attempts to counter the SOU, which were each met with significant repression.

We collectively considered what it means to be an activist-academic in the modern, neoliberal university. Our concerns were of the most practical nature: how algorithms affect platform-based labour and hence academic employment; how the interconnection between communal care and self-care plays out for academics, politically-skewed funding behind academic departments and projects, and the moral conundrums thrown up by working at a university as a critical theorist. An important outcome of this event was the shared feeling that we were building and contributing to a fount of collective experience of activism within and despite academia, a fount that would help us counter compliance and repression.

Our final session, a participatory co-designing of potential output, was a collective brainstorming session that aimed at processing our emotions and collectively comprehending the intellectual conclusions and realisations we had come to over the three days. Using a participatory assembly methodology, we brainstormed ideas to “discover” ideal outcomes, then worked to “develop” them, “define” them more concretely, and eventually listed ways to “deliver” on them. This was an exercise whose outcomes can fuel further events and panels or activist action plans in the future.

AltSOU Demands

Regarding the SOU, AltSOU'24 participants expressed two demands in their protests: abolition of the SOU and funding a researcher-led bottom-up conference.

AltSOU'24 also platformed the demands from the University of Florence (UniFi), the Scuola Normale Superiore (SNS) and the EUI on Palestine:

- Public statement for ceasefire and against Israel's invasion of Rafah;
- Disclosure of assets, disinvestment from, and cutting ties with, organisations complicit in genocide;
- Support for schools and universities in Gaza;
- Policies to protect the rights of students to research, and make legitimate protests in support of, Palestine.

PRESENTING THE ALTSOU

The idea of the Alternative State of the Union (AltSOU) was born in 2023, when a group of researchers decided to organize a pilot event that was meant to provide an alternative to the opaque, top-down, and elitist "State of the Union" conference organized by the EUI. This is not the first time such an event has been organized and we are grateful for all those that have come before us, such as the Colletivo Prezzomolo. They have nurtured the idea of the EUI as a space for serious, critical, and realistic discussions of what the European Union is and what it ought to be.

We question the usefulness of the State of the Union as an uncritical and self-congratulatory event, especially in an academic environment such as the EUI.

We, members of the EUI researcher body, believe that the role of academia is to question the status quo, to analyse, highlight, and criticize power, and to offer visions and enable discourses about possible futures. The EUI should not be a think tank for the EU and its elites, it should not be a place where Eurocentric, technocratic, and elitist positions are formed and strengthened. It should be a place for research excellence, a place for diverse opinions, and intense debate.

We want to be able to produce tangible critiques and alternatives. Consequently, we are introducing the Alternative State of the Union. A place that we hope may function as a counterpoint to the "official" State of the Union, giving voice to the youth, to the marginalized, and to those often forgotten or silenced in the debates about Europe. A space that will seriously engage in the questions most relevant to the future of Europe and the project of European integration, not for the sake of integration itself, but recalling the original mission of the EU, "to lay the foundations of an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe", and to unite a continent in peace and solidarity and play its role in creating a more just and peaceful world.

We believe that another world is possible.

The Alternative State of the Union is organised by the AltSoU'24 coordinating taskforce, composed of all the volunteers coordinating the (un)conference, and the AltSoU'24 participants' committee, composed of all stakeholders and interested parties in the (un)conference).

KEY FACTS & FIGURES ALTSOU



Participants per event (online/in person)**

- Sinking Europe, Thinking Migration: 43 (20/23)
- AltSOU Opening Ceremony: ~120 (in person only)
- Palestine & Academia: 59 (35/24)
- Antifascismo in Italia: ~60 (in person only)
- Political humanitarianism, Black Mediterranean & Border Violence: 20 (12/8)
- Beyond borders? Academic & Activist research at EU borders: 29 (12/17)
- We are not on the same boat: Power walk & reflexive lunch: 10 (in person only)
- Teach-in on de/coloniality & our Place in Europe: 11 (in person only)
- Intimately Material: Collective Reflexion: ~30 (in person only)
- Exposing Fortress Europe? The role of the University: 15 (4/11)
- It's (still) capitalism, stupid!: 37 (14/ 23)
- Concluding brainstorm: 10 (in person only)

118 Registered Participants through altsou.com website**

** Number of prior registrations via online form on altSOU website.
This number includes 68 EUI members for 50 non-EUI. Note that the many participants registered on the day via the attendance sheet are not included.

ACTIVISM AT EUI

EUI Researchers' Union (EUIRU)

The EUI Researchers' Union is a grassroots association representing PhD researchers at the European University Institute. It was founded in 2022 to provide a democratic forum for researchers to meet, discuss and take action to collectively address common challenges, and to especially tackle the issue of grant inadequacy and inequality among researchers at the EUI. Through taskforces and working groups, the EUIRU facilitates researcher activism and organisation on various issues.

Contact: researchersunion@eui.eu



Decolonising Initiative (DI)

Created in 2021, the Decolonising Initiative (DI) aims to improve knowledge-production and practice at the EUI by creating a safe space for counter-hegemonic epistemologies and challenging colonial privilege, narratives, and assumptions. It welcomes people of varying positionalities and opens conversations about colonial legacies and continuities at the EUI. It is led by researchers and is open to academic and administrative staff at the EUI. The DI hold a monthly meeting to coordinate sub-projects, take decisions, communicate, and collaborate with the wider community.

Contact: Decolonising@eui.eu.



Black History Month at the EUI (BHM)

Black History Month (BHM) at the EUI is an initiative that comes from researchers of African descent who believe in the need to make Black European history visible, to stimulate a reflection on the notion of race and to address the structural imbalances that continue to shape the experience of Black people in Europe. Since 2021, researchers and library staff have been organising BHM events and activities every February at the EUI.

Contact: decolonising@eui.eu.



LGBTQIA+ Society

The LGBTQIA+ Society is an informal social group dedicated to creating and expanding welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and friendly spaces of solidarity and self-help for the LGBTQIA+ community in and around the EUI.

Contact: lgbtq@eui.eu.



EUIRU Climate Action Working Group (EUIRU-CAWG)

One of the working groups of the EUIRU, the Climate Action Working Group, is comprised of researchers interested in pushing the EUI to follow the lead of other universities and adopt stringent climate policies in response to the climate crisis. The group has roughly three different foci: biodiversity on campus (night light, garden, etc.), on-campus sustainability (heating/cooling, etc.), mobility of the community (promotion of sustainable alternatives to planes, etc.).

Contact: researchersunion@eui.eu.

EUI Working Group on Palestine

The Working Group on Palestine aims to promote inclusivity, awareness and discussion in the EUI community about the situation in Palestine and other marginalised cases of slow violence, platform Palestinian voices and support the Palestinian people's call for BDS and the right to self-determination. We offer a safe space for scholars working on Palestine and similar cases of slow violence to present their work within the EUI, and we are developing a European Academic Network on Palestine.p

Contact: palestinewg@eui.eu.



Researcher Representatives (Reps)

As of the academic year 2021/2, there have been four Reps elected on a staggered biannual basis by each department every academic year. Reps are involved in governance bodies and decision-making committees and working groups at the EUI, but also work as a collective body in order to further the academic, welfare and social interests of their peers as a whole. There is a General Rep meeting once a month and a GenRep report once a year.

Contact: gen.repmail@eui.eu



Intersectional Inclusivity Coalition (IIC)

Representatives and active members of each of the above groups have created the Intersectional Inclusivity Collective (IIC). The ICC primarily aims at facilitating coordination, collaboration, and communication among and between the various groups and organisations active on campus and among the community.

OPPOSITION TO SOU

Since its first year in 2011, PhD researchers at the EUI have expressed significant discomfort with, and opposition to, the State of the Union conference (SOU).

The annual influx of suits and uniforms and the redirection of staff energy and attention is a disruption to researchers in the end-of-term period of deadlines, defences, conferences, workshops, lectures, and other academic events.

There is a general feeling that the SOU conference (in its current iteration) is of no real relevance or importance for most of the researchers at the EUI.

Even PhD researchers who research European policy, and who participate in the SOU, are afforded only limited participation in the elite-top-down, and performative high-political discussions and events that take place at the conference.

There is also a feeling that the SOU assumes and promotes a very specific, particular, and uncritical understanding of what the European Union (EU) is and does. This understanding of the EU may not tally with the experience, research, knowledge, and critiques of PhD researchers at the EUI, who, after all, are highly trained in rigorous scholarly critique and to be wary and self-critical of prima facie assumptions.



This discomfort and opposition has been expressed in a number of different ways over the years.

- In 2013, EUI researchers organised a counter-event, the Festival of the Other Europe, to offer an alternative vision of a Europe-wide research-based and researcher-relevant conference.
- In 2022, EUI researchers, through the Grant Inequality Initiative (later to become the EUI researchers' union), staged a protest at the Badia Fiesolana during the lunch-break of the SOU, both to highlight pressing concerns and inequalities within the EUI (including grant inadequacy and inequality), and to demonstrate opposition to the SOU in its current format.
- In 2023, EUI researchers organised the pilot Alternative State of the Union. PhD researchers knew they were discomfited and opposed to the SOU, but needed a space to give voice to this discomfort and opposition and come to a collective understanding and critique. They also experimented in designing and enacting an "alternative" conference. This was an attempt to explore what kind of "conference of Europe" researchers would be happy with, and so develop a positive critique, rather than a mere negative critique, of what the SOU was and what it could be.

The pilot AltSOU23 came about without much time to plan or organise, and with no money whatsoever, but some participatory discussion did take place and the bones of a formal critique and proposal for a better conference did emerge. However, before this experimental process of democratic deliberation and analysis could play out fully, the shocking incidents of the SOU 2023 interrupted us and demonstrated finally and fully the latent violence and suppressive nature of the official SOU.

On Thursday 4 May 2023, at the SOU conference taking place on the EUI campus (their campus), a group of Spanish grant-recipient PhD researchers sought an audience with the vice-president of Spain to discuss problems and irregularities with their grant conditions. While standing in the central cloister of the EUI, these researchers found themselves surrounded by uniformed and plain clothes political police, who interrogated them and photographed their identification cards (IDs), and repeatedly insisted that “this was neither the time nor place for protest”.

One of the researchers, a woman of a racialised background, was particularly targeted by the police. Although she had her state ID on her person, her EUI card was at her desk. A plainclothes police officer escorted her to her desk, photographed her EUI card, and radio-called someone confirming that she was entitled to be on campus. None of the other researchers present (of white-European background) received such police treatment once presenting their state IDs.

Members of the political section of the Italian State Police (*Polizia di Stato - Divisione Investigazioni Generali e Operazioni Speciali*) on the same day also temporarily removed a “Refugees Welcome” poster from a university notice board. This action was witnessed and video-recorded by PhD researchers. The video caused viral outrage online. These incidents gave visceral confirmation of the unsuitability of the EUI as a space and an institution for the hosting of what was now clearly a problematic annual event demonstrably hostile to the voices of EUI PhD researchers in their own institute (these incidents are discussed further in the SOU 2023 chapter).

To address the concerns of the researchers, the SOU scientific committee, the EUI president, and the EUI secretary general called a town hall meeting on Thursday 2 November 2023, at which administration, faculty, staff, researchers, and the wider EUI community were welcome to express their views, suggestions, and concerns.

Here, it became clear that a wider critique was emerging, not only of the SOU, but of what the SOU represented as a signifier of the broader trajectory of the EUI as an institution. This trajectory entailed a drift away from an emphasis on scientific and scholarly research and more towards policy analysis and policy formulation, and towards the world of policy-makers, interest groups, and lobby groups.

Although EUI policy-related activities tend to occur in the somewhat separate and independent Robert Schuman Centre (Villa Schifanoia) and the School of Transnational Governance (Palazzo Buontalenti), the SOU takes place in the core buildings of the EUI (Badia Fiesolana and Villa Salviati). The SOU interferes with the impression the EUI is a research university and not a policy centre, that the priorities are science and scholarship rather than policy concerns.

Whereas researchers do not seem to be opposed to the idea of a flagship "grand conference of Europe", there seems to be a consensus emerging that a more democratically organised, research-oriented, critical, and public conference would be more appropriate for the EUI. However, in order to create this, the SOU scientific committee would have to be replaced by a body more proportionally representative of the whole EUI community, and the orientation of the conference would have to shift from the influencers of policy to those influenced by policy.

When researchers call for the EUI to "Abolish the SOU", as they did a demonstration organised by the EUI Researchers' Union on Thursday 23 May 2023, they are not calling for simple eradication of the SOU. They are not even opposed to policy research as long as it is scholarly and critical.

They are calling for the reallocation of the significant skills, talents, abilities, and resources at the disposal of the EUI from the SOU towards a "bottom-up researcher and staff led conference". They are calling for the SOU to be rebuilt from the ground up in a democratic manner that represents the true interests, concerns, and attentions of the vibrant and talented community that makes up the EUI, and that fulfils the full potentials of this "university of (and for) Europe".



PILOT ALTSOU `23

The pilot Alternative State of the Union (Un)Conference was a researcher-led, bottom-up alternative to the "official" State of the Union 2023 that took place at the European University Institute on 28 April and 4 May 2023.

PhD researchers at the EUI wanted to "experiment with an alternative State of the Union 'unconference', where participants [could] discuss and deliberate in a more egalitarian format on what we regard as the most urgent issues facing Europe and the world today and what we can do about them". The pilot AltSOU23 was spearheaded by a taskforce formed by the EUI Researchers' Union General Assembly (EUIRU AltSOU23 Tf).

You can find an overview of the pilot AltSOU under <https://altsou.com/archive/>



STATEMENT BY PHD RESEARCHERS AT THE EUI AGAINST THE STATE OF THE UNION ON THE 4TH OF MAY 2023

We, a group of PhD researchers and members of the EUI Researchers' Union, hereby protest against the State of the Union, an annual conference of Europe's political elites that is held at our university every year.

This is a statement against the substance, spirit and presence of this congress in our workplace.

We also present a participatory event that we organised last week as an alternative to this.

What is the purpose of the State of the Union (SOU) and what does it represent to the body of EUI researchers?

The State of the Union is an opaque, top-down conference of European elites. We would like to know what purpose these debates on "how to build Europe" actually serve. What are the concrete outcomes of these debates and how do they influence policy? Why does the EUI, an institution that publicly emphasizes its commitment to diversity and representation, give a platform to guests who represent ideas and narratives that are reprehensible and have colonial roots?

We invite the Institute to respond to us with clear reasons, free of empty rhetoric. Can they do so? As members of the EUI, we protest against the idea of the SOU. Its presence on our campus makes us feel uncomfortable and complicit in the narratives produced by speakers who have publicly voiced racist, sexist, classist and xenophobic opinions. We are left with the impression that, even though this is our workplace, we don't belong here. We have to endure constant noise and nuisance in our working hours in the days prior to the event, and then we have to undergo a security check just to be able to reach the library or work on our thesis.

We want to be able to produce tangible critiques and alternatives.

The EUI constrains us to a straight and narrow path that does not equip us to do that. Events like the SOU reinforce the idea that our role as researchers is not to critically enquire into the realities of our world, but to craft self-serving narratives that address politicians and people in power.

The SOU is an expensive event and the EUI is already implementing budget cuts which directly impact researchers and their ability to produce 'good research'.

Why is the SOU here?

What was the purpose of the Alternative State of the Union (AltSOU)?

Our AltSOU began with an 'unkeynote' - an event where non-EU participants shared their reflexive experiences of Europe's presence in their lives. The garden does not look the same from the other side of the fence, and even though each person had a different story to tell, all of them pointed out the hypocrisy of the EU's rhetoric and its dehumanisation of people with the wrong passport and/or skin colour.

After that, we split into groups divided by theme. We had invited activists and actors from local rights groups such as Firenze Città Aperta, and a solidarity group that supports the workers' occupation of the ex-GKN factory in Florence. Together, we held group discussions on topics pertinent to the present day.

These included: "**Climate and Biodiversity Action**"; "**Fortress Europe, Fascism, and Anti-Immigration Activism and Legislation**"; and, "**International Labour Trade Unionism Resurgence**".

In each of these three groups, we brainstormed topics and ideas for discussion, and wrote them down on handwritten posters now hanging in our researcher-managed social club, Fiasco.

After lunch, we listened to a summary of what had been discussed by the other groups, and asked each other more questions: asking for clarifications, whether there were issues we may have omitted, and enumerating the (dis)connections we could find between all that had been raised.

Our goal was to arrive at a more reflexive and coherent idea of how to counter, and present an alternative to, the official State of the Union.

What conclusions did we arrive at as a result of the Alternative State of the Union?

We realised that as researchers conditioned by Eurocentric academic research systems, it is difficult for us to think about 'Europe' without reproducing politics of exclusion. There were many questions, such as "what makes a European?" and "who makes a European?", that we had never discussed with people around us.

The absence of such discussions plays into the hegemonic narrative that uses "European" as an empty signifier to justify excluding many while granting privileges such as 'freedom of movement' to a few.

Some of us began to re-evaluate the meaning of concepts such as "citizen", realising that it could actually be separated from xenophobic anti-immigration discourse and casual exclusionary language. It could even be a good concept!

In other words, we realised that certain ideals and values once had meaning before being overused by a political elite intent on division and powerplay.

The non-academic and non-hierarchical nature of the discussion at the AltSOU allowed for a freer

flow of discussion and an active debate where 'diversity' was not a stance but a reality that was listened to.

The EUI should be interested in building its so-called prestige by investing in critical academic research, including non-Eurocentric perspectives, rather than by inviting the political elite and representatives of private industries to discuss business strategies and Europe's global leadership in imperialistic terms.

We refuse to talk about a future where 'Europe' is a concept that has been appropriated for divisive and exclusionary purposes.

The EUI should be interested in building its so-called prestige by investing in critical academic research, including non-Eurocentric perspectives, rather than by inviting the political elite and representatives of private industries to discuss business strategies and Europe's global leadership in imperialistic terms.

It should build upon the potential offered by the most valuable resources it has at its disposal - its enthusiastic, curious, and questioning body of researchers, who have already shown willingness to engage in such a building process.

In 2013, the Collettivo Prezzemolo organised the event, "It's Capitalism, Stupid! The Festival of the Other Europe".

In 2022, the EUI Researchers' Union was born.

These are the first stones we bring to the edifice.

There will be others.

As researchers, we claim the freedom to redefine our values in critical, egalitarian dialogue with each other, and to build our ideas collaboratively in interaction with other human beings, from a variety of different perspectives and backgrounds.

STATE OF THE UNION 2023

At the official State of the Union Conference, a case of racial profiling, a case of police harassment, and a case of police infringement on academic freedom of speech took place on campus within the space of a few hours on Thursday 4 May 2023.

Police were only present on campus for the security of high-profile guests to the SOU, but their actions on 4 May demonstrated that researchers were to have their voices suppressed on their own campus, in their own university, by the Italian police who were invited onto the EUI campus for the duration of the SOU conference.

The EUI Researchers' Union drafted an open letter regarding the State of the Union 2023 at the EUI which ultimately received 573 signatures from around the world.



OPEN LETTER REGARDING THE STATE OF THE UNION 2023 AT THE EUI – 04 MAY 2023.

We, a group of PhD researchers and members of the EUI Researchers' Union, hereby protest against the State of the Union conference and the repressive security measures that were implemented on this occasion at the European University Institute.

We strongly condemn the racial profiling and the unprovoked, as well as repeated, harassment endured by our colleagues on campus today.

The European University Institute (EUI) and the State of the Union (SOU) claim to be spaces for the free and frank exchange of ideas. What happened today, however, clearly demonstrates that this space is limited to pre-sanctioned and pre-approved forms of expression only.

The EUI, an institution that publicly emphasizes its commitment to diversity and representation, gives a platform to guests who represent ideas and narratives that are reprehensible and have unapologetically colonial roots.

Furthermore, the EUI invites an overwhelming police presence onto the campus without being able to guarantee the safety of its own researchers. Researchers have raised the issue of safety on campus several times and this event is another example of how researchers have every right to claim that they do not feel safe or welcome at the EUI. Some days ago, Spanish grant recipients were informed that the Deputy Prime Minister of Spain was going to speak at one of the SOU sessions (“Responsible Artificial Intelligence: Can Europe be a Global Leader?”).

With this information, they thought that they could organize a small welcoming committee to hand her a report that a dedicated committee of researchers had prepared about their precarious conditions (low salary, difficulties accessing healthcare, etc.). The situation regarding recipients of the Spanish grant had also been previously discussed with the President of the EUI. When they heard that she was not coming in person, the action was called off.

Since some Spanish researchers were already on campus, and had already printed some A3 handheld posters (with the words ‘We demand a living wage and fair access to healthcare’), a small group of five Spanish grant recipients stood in a corner of the cloister. They did not shout or talk to the press. They were just standing quietly to the side.

Suddenly, a uniformed officer approached two of them, while another person in civilian clothes came and flashed his badge, asking them to identify themselves. Only one of the researchers identified themselves, the others did not want to.

Only one of the researchers identified themselves, the others did not want to. A non-EU researcher present asked to take a photograph of the plainclothes officer's badge to record the encounter, as it was increasingly uncomfortable. Following this, he grew hostile towards her and demanded to see her ID. She showed him her EUI ID, which he said was not enough. She offered to show him another scanned ID on her phone, but he said that was also not enough. She then asked to see the badge of his female colleague. The female colleague covered her badge with her arm when presenting it, obscuring the researcher's view of it and rendering it illegible.

The researcher told the plainclothes officer, "Okay, then I need to get my ID because I only have my phone and the EUI card with me," and he told her "I will go with you," to which she responded: "Okay, just wait; I need to find out what is happening with the rest of my colleagues."

He told her they could not wait, and grew ever more hostile as they walked up to her workspace in the library. While walking to her desk, he kept asking why she was being so reluctant and why she wanted to know who he was. According to him, this was regular procedure in the Italian Codice Penale, and he expressed his surprise that - if she had been in other EU countries - such procedure was new to her.

Upon arriving at her workspace, she showed him her MAE card (a type of ID provided by the Italian Foreign Ministry to members of international organizations such as the EUI). He took photographs of it, saying to his police partner on the phone "Yes, she works here," which affirmed that they did not believe her when she had said so earlier and presented her EUI card (which includes photo identification).

He then asked her about this "protest," to which she replied that there had been no protest, in any strict sense of the word. He insisted that she answer further, saying that he needed to know because he was from the DIGOS (Divisione Investigazioni Generali e Operazioni Speciali), and asking her if she knew what DIGOS meant. She replied she did not. The officer explained to her that it is the branch of the Italian State Police that monitors "protests". She then explained why we researchers were fighting for grant equality, especially researchers receiving the Spanish grant and she even offered to provide him with a copy of the Spanish Grant Report compiled earlier this year, submitted to and read by the President of the EUI.

The officer told her he understood and empathized with the demands but this (the SOU at Badia Fiesolana) was certainly not the place to discuss them, to which she responded "I believe it is when we have politicians that might care."

The officer repeated 5 times in a timespan of 3 minutes that it was not the place; she responded that "we have freedom of expression" and asked why he was insisting that this was not the place. His language and demeanor clearly communicated an aggressive and intimidatory attitude, and he kept dodging the question.

Also today, a group of four Italian State Police officers removed a poster from the communal noticeboard in the EUI canteen, with intent to confiscate it, but then quickly reattached it. They were filmed and photographed in this process by an EUI researcher and it was witnessed by others.

This poster featured a large “Refugees Welcome” graphic, and called EU and Italian refugee and migration law and policy into question. This comes after several other posters in the run up to the SOU, as well as other posters and leaflets critical of events or problems at the EUI, such as those advertising the Alternative State of the Union, had been removed.

All this speaks to the problematic nature of an event like the State of the Union being organized and hosted by the EUI.

Not only does it disrupt researchers’ work, it also creates a hostile environment and unsafe working conditions.

Our campus should be a safe space for all researchers, no matter their citizenship or the colour of their skin.

It should not be a place where expressing oneself - or even simply existing - can lead to discrimination, racial profiling, and police harassment and intimidation.

We stand in solidarity with the impact this has had on the wellbeing of one of our colleagues, and demand an explanation from the EUI executive and administration, as well as reparation for the impact on our colleague’s mental health and her sense of wellbeing, belonging, and safety on campus.

We demand an explanation for the excessive and aggressive police presence on our campus.

Additionally, we expect this to be an incentive for the EUI to engage in dialogue with the researchers about their thoughts on events such as the SOU.

Signed,
The EUI Researchers’ Union Board

You can access the Open Letter under the following link:

<https://openletter.earth/open-letter-regarding-the-state-of-the-union-2023-at-the-eui-04-may-2023-ecfb504b>

Or by scanning this QR Code:



ALTSOU `24 TASKFORCE

In the summer of 2023, politically active members of the EUI researcher body came together to form the Intersectional Inclusivity Collective (IIC).

These researchers were involved in in the EUI Researchers' Union, the Decolonising Initiative, the Climate Justice Action Working Group, the LGBTQIA+ Society, the Palestinian Working Group, the informal Women's Day (8 March) coordination committee, the ORTO/Community Garden, and the Fiasco Social Club committee.

This collective formed to acknowledge the need for a more inclusive EUI and to act as bottom-up counterweight to the newly-established, top-down EUI EDI office. It was also formed in acknowledgement of the need for an intersectional approach to the various causes, campaigns, and demands we were agitating for in the EUI and beyond and to coordinate between our respective actions and campaigns.

The IIC took the initiative from the EUI Researchers' Union to form an AltSOU'24 Taskforce to plan, coordinate, organise, and facilitate the Alternative State of the Union (Un)Conference 2024.

The planning and organisation of the AltSOU24 was to be bottom-up and horizontal in internal organisation, and was to be as open and inclusive as possible.

To this end, two bodies were formed:

The AltSOU Participants' Committee, including all stakeholders, participants, interested parties, and volunteers

The AltSOU Coordinating Taskforce, which would take initiative and coordinate the actions and developments of the AltSOU24. The Taskforce was to be accountable to the Committee.

The AltSOU'24 was to be organised in a series of "cycles":

- The Launch cycle (establishing the taskforce, committee and publicising the launch of the AltSOU24).
- The planning cycle (brainstorming the content and format of the AltSOU and building the programme).
- The discussion cycle (a series of meetings, workshops, and events, including the discursive events leading up to, and within the three days of the unconference)
- The action cycle (the unconference/festival event in May 2024, protest action at the SOU, participation in the Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh student protest encampment, further action beyond the AltSOU)

UNCONFERENCE MODEL

“Unconferences” are participant-driven meetings that diverge from the traditional conference model. The unconference idea gained popularity in the tech industry and among computer scientists and software programmers through the 1980s and 1990s and has spread as an idea into other professional, scholarly, activist, and community spheres where informal communication and relationship-building is highly encouraged.

Unconferences are typically characterised by:

Being participant-led: Unlike traditional conferences with pre-scheduled speakers and sessions, unconferences rely on attendees to propose and lead sessions. This allows for a more dynamic and flexible agenda, tailored to the interests and expertise of the participants.

Fostering a collaborative environment: Sessions are often discussions, workshops, or collaborative problem-solving activities rather than one-way presentations. This encourages active participation and engagement from all attendees. The aspiration is to get participants to work together on a mutually pressing or beneficial question, rather than focus on feedback for individual work.

Fluid agendas: The schedule is created on the spot, typically at the beginning of the event. Participants propose topics they are interested in discussing, and a collective process determines the final agenda. This allows the event to be highly relevant and responsive to the participants' needs.

Utilisation of Open Space Technology (OST): Many unconferences utilize a method called Open Space Technology (OST), which emphasizes self-organization and the “law of two feet”—the idea that participants should move between sessions as they choose, ensuring they are always in a place where they can contribute or learn the most.

Diverse formats: Sessions can take various formats, such as roundtable discussions, brainstorming sessions, workshops, hackathons, or informal talks. This variety helps cater to different learning styles and preferences.

An egalitarian approach: There is often no formal distinction between speakers and attendees. Everyone is encouraged to contribute, share knowledge, and learn from each other, creating a more egalitarian and inclusive environment.

Although the Alternative State of the Union 2024 could be considered more of a “curated unconference” than a full unconference, the aspiration to depart from the traditional academic conference was there, with an emphasis on discussion, variety of formats, collaboration, and egalitarianism. The AltSOU Taskforce wanted the unconference to be relevant to participants, and there was an extensive period of over six months where organisers brainstormed different formats and crowdsourced event ideas.

It was hoped that experimentation in interactive formats would encourage higher engagement and participation than in more traditional conference formats, and that the opportunities for relationship-building and interacting would be enhanced, with the potential for increased collaboration in the future.

The unconference idea is new for many and can be challenging in particular for those socialised and conditioned in the mainstream academic world. These events are necessary experimental and risk failing in their aims, as lack of a fixed agenda or the comfort of familiarity can lead discussions to go stale. Unconference facilitators need skill and experience to ensure events are safe for risk-taking, honesty, and keep to principles of equity, diversity, and inclusivity.

PRESS RELEASE 19.04.2024

Radical Response to State of the Union Conference 2024 at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy

PhD researchers at the European University Institute (EUI) launched the programme for the Alternative State of the Union 2024 (AltSOU'24) on Friday the 19th of April 2024. The AltSoU, a determined critique of the elite-oriented State of the Union conference held annually at the EUI, returns this year as an “unconference for critical minds and radical futures”. The organisers of AltSOU'24 (20th - 22nd May 2024) invite scholars, journalists and activists to join them online and in-person on the EUI campus, to debate the urgent need for members of universities to actively engage with such burning issues as migration, Palestine, antifascism, de-colonialism and capitalism.

“If you want to talk about the future of Europe, talk to those who are building it: the people,” argued the small but purposeful group of EUI researchers who last year organised AltSOU 2023. The sentiment this year remains the same, but our protest against neoliberal academia is now joined by voices from Australia, Cuba, Germany, France, Brazil, Ireland, Poland, the UK and all over Italy. During AltSOU'24 (20th-22nd May 2024), we hope to break open the black box of university-centred academia, and encourage academics, activists, and all politically-involved people to take a long hard look at their own positions. We hope to join forces and concretely engage with those working for human rights, migrant rights, workers' rights and against genocide, in Europe and beyond.

As emphasised in the AltSOU 2023 final statement: “There can be no conversation on the future of Europe without non-Europeans and those marginalised by and within Europe participating.” AltSoU 2024 is a resolute attempt to reach for democracy in Europe. We want to platform those who can best perceive the flaws of Europe: the youth, the excluded, the racialised, the people affected by policy rather than the policy-makers. We do not have the answers, nor do we represent the people. What we do have is the will to drive this urgent reality home with members of a university.

Our end result will be an action plan and statement: we want our internal conversation to actively interact with wider discussions on how to respect and truly guarantee democratic and human rights, irrespective of national and class identity.

The goal of the AltSoU is to wake ourselves up, we tired, disillusioned, world-weary people, and help us put our brains together for the purpose of positive change. Our programme includes: lively roundtables where questions, rather than status, are currency; a “power walk” through which we shall visualise our privileges; a teach-in on decoloniality; and many a relaxing yet stimulating social evening spent in good company, mulling over good ideas and meaningful actions to come.

PRESS RELEASE 12.05.2024

Alternative State of the Union Unconference to take place next week at the European University Institute

The AltSoU task force (the Alternative State of the Union) – in collaboration with the EUI Researchers' Union, the Decolonising Initiative, the Legal and Political Theory WG, the Queer and Feminist WG, the WG on Palestine and many others – would like to invite you to the Alternative State of the Union (un)conference, 20-22 May 2024 at the European University Institute in Florence and Online.

What is the AltSOU'24?

The AltSoU is an independent grassroots initiative led by PhD researchers at the EUI who believe that the role of academia is to question the status quo and to analyse, highlight, and criticise power. Our series of events revolve around experiential testimony, horizontal and egalitarian discourse, and on the impact - rather than the design - of European policy, practice, and legislation.

The AltSoU'24 is a resolute attempt to reach for democracy in Europe. We want to platform those who can best perceive the flaws of Europe: the youth, the excluded, the racialised, the people affected by policy rather than the policy-makers. We do not have the answers, nor do we represent the people. What we do have is the will to drive this urgent reality home with members of a university.

The goal of the AltSoU'24 is to wake ourselves up, we tired, disillusioned, world-weary people, and help us put our brains together for the purpose of positive change. Our programme includes: lively roundtables where questions, rather than status, are currency; a "power walk" through which we shall visualise our privileges; a teach-in on decoloniality; and many a relaxing yet stimulating social evening spent in good company, mulling over good ideas and meaningful actions to come.

We want to be able to produce tangible critiques and alternatives.



We believe that another world is possible.

DESIGN

The graphic design for programme and the stylistic theme for promotional material was designed by Pari @lomo_design_.

FINANCE & SUPPORT

AltSOU'24 was organised with an overall budget of €5,759.33 (€4,600 from institutional funding and €1,159.33 from alternative sources).

Details of EUI institutional funding (estimates)

The EUI Department of History ¹	€500
The EUI Communications Service ²	€2,000
Prof. Nicolas Guilhot's EUI research budget ³	€1,700
Prof Loïc Azoulai's EUI research budget ⁴	€400 (estimate)
TOTAL	€4,600

¹ The EUI Department of History allocated a budget of €500 to reimburse approved transport, accommodation, and lunch costs for invited guest speakers.

² The EUI Communications Service allocated a budget of €2,000 to reimburse approved transport and accommodation costs for invited guest speakers.

³ Professor Nicolas Guilhot's (Dept of History) allocated €1,700 of his departmental research budget to reimburse travel and accommodation costs for guest speakers of the events "Political humanitarianism, the Black Mediterranean and border violence" and "Beyond borders? Academic and activist research at EU borders".

⁴ Professor Loïc Azoulai's (Dept of Law) allocated some money in his departmental research budget to reimburse travel and accommodation costs for guest speakers of the event "Sinking Europe, thinking migration: the law in theory and practice".

Details of alternative funding

Leftover proceeds from the pilot AltSOU23 BBQ ⁵	€33.50
Fiasco Social Club fundraiser (19 April 2024)	€190
Online donations ⁶	€505.91
Cash donations during and after the AltSOU'24	€429.92
TOTAL	€1,159.33

⁵ BBQ organised by the EUIRU Climate Justice Action Working Group and the EUI Vegan Society.

⁶ online donation to altSOU collected through the Open Collective crowdfunding platform (<https://opencollective.com/eui-researchers-union/projects/altsou-2024>). Full online donation before platform commission: €540.

Other forms of support

- The EUI department of history researcher representatives provided a Zoom account for the European Launch of the PWO Report, "Workers in all but pay, name, and conditions".
- Rooms and hybrid facilities were made available by the EUI to the AltSOU Taskforce in their capacity as EUI PhD researchers.

PRE-CONFERENCE EVENT CYCLE

The first events that were planned under the framework of the *AltSOU`24* happened prior to the main conference that took place from 20-22 May 2024. The idea was to create an environment of engagement and continuous discussion, which would lead up to the *AltSOU`24* Conference.

BRAINSTORM PLANNING SESSION

16:00, Thursday 26 October 2023, Seminar Room 3, Badia Fiesolana.

Event Report: During this first event, EUI researchers brainstormed events they could organise as part of the *AltSOU* around the theme of “Migration and the European Union”. It was an opportunity to discuss which actors and partners we wanted invite to the *AltSOU*, the voices we wanted hear at our events, and the questions we wanted to raise.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DIGNITY INITIATIVE

16:00, Thursday 26 October 2023, Seminar Room 3, Badia Fiesolana.

Event Report: This event occurred together with the Brainstorming and Planning Session. For this brainstorming and discussion event, we welcomed Garance Foglizzo, who was doing a tour of the EU to promote the Dignity Initiative, a European Citizens’ Initiative that campaigns for the dignified reception of asylum seekers in the EU.

Garance was also meeting with local organisations and migrants, and documenting migration policies around the EU. She shared her experiences with us, something very useful in feeding our discussions, both on migration policies and on the difficulties faced by citizens who wish to get involved and work for migrant rights in the EU.

For more information on the Dignity Initiative visit:

(https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/initiatives/details/2023/000002_en).



EUROPEAN LAUNCH OF THE PWO REPORT, “WORKERS IN ALL BUT PAY, NAME, AND CONDITIONS”.

19:00-21:00, Monday 29 April 2024, Sala del Capitolo, Badia Fiesolana & online

Abstract: In 2023, the Postgraduate Researchers’ Organisation (PWO) of Ireland commissioned its branch at the European University Institute (EUI) to issue a survey and compile a report on instances of employee status for PhD researchers across the European Research Area (ERA): Eoghan Hussey and Rory O’Sullivan, “Workers in all but name, pay, and conditions: the employment model for PhD Researchers, its status and implementation across European countries” (February 2024).

This report, thanks to the support of the USI and SIPTU was published and launched in Ireland on 14 February 2024 to promote and support the PWO demand for employee status for PhD researchers. Given the Europe-wide relevance of the contents, findings, and conclusions of this report, the Researchers’ Union at the EUI (EUIRU) have offered to host a European launch at the EUI and online, to which all PhD researcher representative unions, organisations, associations, and collectives are invited to send delegates and participate. Other interested parties are welcome to observe. This launch event is organised as part of the programme for the AltSoU’24.

Guests:

PWO - Postgraduate Workers' Organisation (Ireland);
EUIRU - European University Institute Researchers' Union (EUI);
PNN - Promovendi Netwerk Netherlands (Netherlands);
ADI - Associazione Dottorandi e Dottori di Ricerca in Italia (Italy);
ESU - European Students' Union (Europe);
FJI-Precarios - Federacion de Jovenes Investigadores (Spain);
CEU Students’ Protest Group (Austria/Private);
CEU Students’ Union (Austria/Private);
EURODOC - European Council of Doctoral Candidates & Junior Researchers (EU);
ABIC - Associação dos Bolseiros de Investigação Científica (Portugal); Leibnitz PhD Network (Germany);
ASM - actionuni der Schweizer Mittelbau (Switzerland);
LJZA - Latvijas Jauno zinātnieku apvienība (Latvia)

Event Report: On Monday, 29 April 2024, from 19:00 to 21:00 CET at the European University Institute (EUI) and online, delegate members of at least twelve different PhD researcher representative organisations, associations, unions, and collectives met for the European launch of the Postgraduate Workers’ Organisation (PWO) of Ireland report “Workers in all but name, pay, and conditions” (February 2024) and to discuss future Europe-wide action on the issues raised in that report (Report available here: <https://pwo.ie/our-policies/>).

This meeting was hosted by the EUI Researchers’ Union (EUIRU) and by the EUI History Department Researcher Representatives. The meeting was also part of the programme for the Alternative State of the Union (un)conference 2024.

After a welcome by the EUIRU, an introduction to the AltSOU'24, and an introduction by a member of the PWO executive, a PWO EUI branch member presented the report. The delegates then discussed their response to the report and their positions on employee status for PhD researchers. The outcome of this discussion was the following resolution, which was later circulated for endorsement by PhD researcher representative organisations, associations, unions, and collectives:

“Having considered the PWO report ‘Workers in all but name, pay, and conditions’ (February 2024) and discussed our long-standing common aspiration for salaried employee status for PhD researchers, we, the undersigned PhD researcher representative organisations, associations, unions, and collectives, would advise and encourage our members, and other PhD researchers, to join the EURODOC Research Careers and Working Conditions Working Group (<https://www.eurodoc.net/wg/employment-conditions-and-welfare-wg>) in order to prioritise and further advance the cause of salaried employee status for all PhD researchers across the European Research Area.”

As at 29 May 2024, this resolution has been endorsed by:

- Promovendi Netwerk Nederland (PNN): PhD Candidate Network Netherlands (<https://hetpnn.nl/en/>); NETHERLANDS.
- Federación de Jóvenes Investigadoras (FJI Precarios): Federation of Young (precarious) Researchers (<https://fji.precarios.org/>); SPAIN.
- actionuni der Schweizer Mittelbau (ASM): Swiss Scientific Midlevel Staff Union (<http://www.actionuni.ch/>); SWITZERLAND.
- associazione dottorandi e dottori di ricerca in Italia (ADI): Association of doctoral researchers in Italy (<https://dottorato.it/>); ITALY.
- EUI Researchers’ Union (EUIRU): (<https://www.euiresunion.com/>); ITALY/EUROPE.
- European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (EURODOC); (<https://www.eurodoc.net/>); EUROPE
- Associação dos Bolseiros de Investigação Científica (ABIC): Portuguese association of grant-holding researchers (<https://abic-online.org/>); PORTUGAL.

The meeting also encouraged all PhD researchers to join the EURODOC Research Careers and Working Conditions Working Group This Working Group is open to all interested parties, not just members of EURODOC-affiliated organisations. For organisations and associations that, for some reason or another, are not recognised as unions in their jurisdiction or cannot affiliate with EURODOC, this is an opportunity to collaborate on a European level and promote the cause of salaried employee status.

The secretary, Milan coordinator, and Florence coordinator of the Associazione dottorandi e dottori di ricerca in Italia (ADI), or Association of Doctoral Researchers in Italy (<https://dottorato.it/>), were present in-person at the European Launch of the PWO report “Workers in all but name, pay, and conditions” (February 2024) on 29 April 2024 in Sala del Capitolo.

Afterwards, we discussed the prospect of the EUI Researchers’ Union's affiliation with the ADI. This is possible due to the recent rebranding from the “Association of Italian Doctoral Researchers” to the “Association of Doctoral Researchers in Italy”. They offered the EUIRU affiliation through the ADI Florence branch or affiliation as its own branch (EUIRU – ADI EUI).

PRICEY SILENCE! ARE THE EU VALUES AT STAKE IN THE SOUTHERN NEIGH-BOURHOOD?

10:00-12:00, Tuesday 14 May 2024, Sala del Capitolo, Badia Fiesolana & online

Guests:

Abbas Sibai (Policy Leader Fellow, STG)

Louis Blin (Visiting Fellow, Robert Schuman Centre)

Nicholas Milanese (Visiting Fellow, STG)

Elena Asciutti (Coordinator for External Relations, EUI)

Event Description: This talk will discuss the EU's approach to the Southern Neighborhood, focusing on Lebanon and Gaza, where pressing geopolitical dynamics impact stability, security, and prosperity.

Against economic crises, political instability, and humanitarian concerns, this talk aims to assess whether the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) adequately reflects its values and interests in promoting positive change. Panelists will offer diverse perspectives and actionable recommendations and provide insights into geopolitical factors shaping the ENP's trajectory. The talk will invite attendees from policymaking, academia, and development practice to explore innovative strategies for EU-civil society collaboration and discuss practical solutions tailored to the region's needs.

Event Report: The session "Pricey Silence! Are The EU Values at Stake in the Southern Neighbourhood?" was convened to explore the current state and future of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as it approaches its 20th anniversary. The event aimed to assess whether EU values are at risk in the Southern Neighbourhood and discuss strategies for effective collaboration between the EU and its neighbouring regions.

Session Highlights: Abbas Sibai started the session with a comprehensive overview of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). He traced the evolution of the ENP since its inception in 2004, its core principles, and the 2015 revision aimed at enhancing cooperation. He highlighted the current challenges, such as conflicts, instability, and migration, facing the ENP and set the stage for discussing potential future scenarios and uncertainties.

He also presented his Policy Brief, "Beyond Rhetoric: Rethinking EU's Response to Lebanon's Crisis Amidst Regional Uncertainty," which assessed the EU's strategic engagement with Lebanon.

Context and Background

On May 2, 2024, President Von der Leyen declared, "My visit today is a strong testimony of the EU's continued support of Lebanon and its people. The €1 billion until 2027 will provide much-needed assistance to the people of Lebanon and contribute to its security and stability." This financial pledge underscores the European Union's (EU) commitment to Lebanon amidst its ongoing crises

Key Areas of Focus

The EU's strategy emphasizes several critical areas to address Lebanon's multifaceted challenges:

Security and Stability:

- The EU's financial commitment aims to bolster Lebanon's security infrastructure.
- Efforts are directed towards enhancing law enforcement capabilities and judicial reforms to maintain public order and safety.

Governance and Political Stability:

- The EU promotes political dialogue and inclusive governance.
- Supporting anti-corruption measures and institutional reforms is critical to fostering transparency and accountability.

Economic Growth and Development:

- Initiatives to stimulate economic recovery include support for SMEs, job creation programs, and investment in critical infrastructure.
- The EU also focuses on reforms in the financial sector to restore confidence and stability in the banking system.

Migration and Humanitarian Assistance:

- Lebanon hosts a significant number of refugees, mainly from Syria. The EU provides humanitarian aid and supports programs for refugee integration and social cohesion.
- Addressing migration issues involves coordinated efforts to manage and support displaced populations effectively.

Dialogue and Social Cohesion:

- The EU facilitates intercommunal dialogue to bridge divides and promote national unity.
- Cultural and educational exchanges are encouraged to foster mutual understanding and cooperation among diverse communities.

Conclusion

While the EU's financial pledge is a significant commitment, addressing Lebanon's complex challenges requires a comprehensive and sustained approach. The ENP Strategic Plan 2020-2024 provides a robust framework for EU-Lebanon engagement, but the urgency of Lebanon's situation demands enhanced and coordinated efforts. Security, governance, economic growth, migration, and dialogue remain critical areas for intervention. The EU's strategic engagement is vital for Lebanon's stability, prosperity, regional peace, and resilience.

Recommendations

1. Enhanced Financial Support: Additional funding and resources should be mobilized to address the scale of Lebanon's economic and humanitarian needs.
2. Strengthened Governance Initiatives**: Intensify support for governance reforms and anti-corruption measures to build a transparent and accountable political system.
3. Economic Diversification: Promote economic Diversification through support for emerging sectors and innovation to create sustainable growth.
4. Regional Cooperation: Foster regional cooperation to address cross-border challenges and enhance collective security.
5. Inclusive Policy Dialogue: Ensure that all segments of Lebanese society, including marginalized communities, are included in policy dialogues to foster social cohesion and national unity.

By addressing these recommendations, the EU can play a pivotal role in supporting Lebanon through its current crises and paving the way for a stable and prosperous future.

Keynote Speakers

Louis Blin, a seasoned diplomat, provided an in-depth analysis of the geopolitical factors influencing the ENP. He discussed the impact of the war in Ukraine, internal EU debates, and competition from global actors like China and Russia. Dr. Blin emphasized the importance of a strategic approach to navigating these uncertainties while enhancing collaboration with civil society.

Elena Asciutti shared her extensive experience managing EU-civil society collaborations, particularly in Lebanon. She highlighted effective stakeholder engagement and program management strategies, focusing on economic recovery and social cohesion. Dr Asciutti also provided vital takeaways from her international cooperation and policy analysis work, underscoring the importance of tailored partnerships and flexibility.

Niccolò Milanese, co-founder of European Alternatives, advocated for a more inclusive and participatory approach to the ENP. He stressed the need to integrate the voices of independent civil society across the Mediterranean into EU decision-making processes. Dr. Milanese also highlighted the role of youth mobility and intergenerational collaboration in fostering democracy, equality, and transnational cooperation.

Discussion and Audience Q&A

The session featured an engaging discussion among the speakers and a Q&A session with the audience. In-person and online participants posed insightful questions about the ENP's future, the role of civil society, and strategies for addressing current challenges in the Southern Neighbourhood.

Abbas Sibai concluded the session by summarizing the key points discussed. He reiterated the importance of actionable solutions tailored to the contexts of Lebanon and Gaza and emphasised the crucial role of continued EU-civil society collaboration. Mr. Sibai encouraged participants to engage in follow-up actions and explore suggested resources and initiatives for fostering a more secure, prosperous, and sustainable Southern Neighbourhood. He also encouraged the audience to participate in the Alternative State of the Union 2024 Unconference (AltSOU'24).



Key Takeaways

1. Importance of Tailored Partnerships: The ENP's success hinges on its ability to tailor partnerships to each partner country's specific needs and aspirations.
2. Civil Society Engagement: Deepening engagement with civil society is essential for fostering positive change and addressing challenges in the Southern Neighbourhood.
3. Geopolitical Awareness: The EU must remain agile and strategic in navigating geopolitical uncertainties and competition from global actors.
4. Youth and Intergenerational Collaboration: Promoting youth mobility and intergenerational collaboration can enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of the ENP.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Civil Society Collaboration: Enhance support for civil society organizations to build resilient communities and economies in the Southern Neighbourhood.
 2. Adopt Flexible Approaches: Ensure the ENP remains flexible and adaptive to the evolving geopolitical landscape and specific regional contexts.
- Promote Inclusive Decision-Making: Integrate diverse perspectives from civil society into EU policy-making processes to foster a more inclusive and participatory ENP.
4. Focus on Long-Term Goals: Balance short-term crisis management with long-term strategic goals to ensure the ENP's relevance and effectiveness.

Conclusion

The session "Pricey Silence! Are The EU Values at Stake in the Southern Neighbourhood?" provided a valuable platform for discussing the current state and future of the ENP. It underscored the importance of continued EU-civil society collaboration and strategic, flexible approaches to addressing the challenges and opportunities in the Southern Neighbourhood. The event concluded with a call to action for stakeholders to engage in meaningful follow-up initiatives and contribute to the ENP's ongoing development and adaptation.

ALTSOU CONFERENCE 20-22 MAY

Following the successful planning phase and several great events that were part of the pre-Conference Event Cycle, the *Alternative State of the Union* Conference took place over the course of three-days in several locations on the EUI campus and occasional visits to Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh. The *AltSOU* Conference took place against the backdrop of increasing student and researcher activism not only at EUI, but across the World.

In 2024 we have seen students, researchers, and faculty partake in countless protests, encampments, and other forms direct action, in solidarity with the Palestinian fight against apartheid and settler colonialism.

At the same time, there is an increasingly authoritarian tendency that we observe within neo-liberal academia, to shut down and repress counter-hegemonic discourses. As we have previously said, we believe that the role of academia is to question the status quo and to analyse, highlight, and criticise power. We must offer visions and enable discourses about possible futures.

ALTSOU '24 OPENING CEREMONY

13:45-14:15, Monday 20 May 2024, Loggia terrace, Villa Schifanoia.

Speakers:

The *AltSOU* Taskforce

Elena Casamiglia (Researcher Representative SOU`24 Scientific Committee)

Arturo (Student Unification & Activist Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh Encampment)

Aida (PhD Researcher SNS & Activist Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh Encampment)

Patrizia Nanz (President EUI)

Introductory Remarks by the *AltSOU`24* Taskforce

Welcome!...

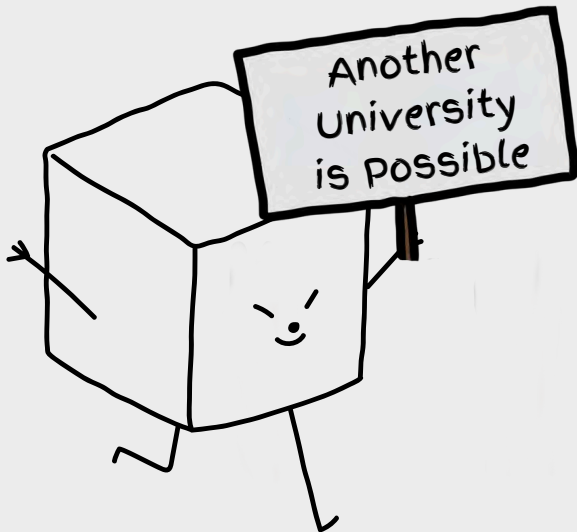
We are going to start this opening ceremony that includes interventions from the *altsou* task force and fellow researchers and the EUI president as well as our colleagues from the university you Florence and Scuola Normale Superiore.

The *AltSoU* is an independent grassroots initiative led by EUI researchers. It aims at bringing forth key social and political issues we feel are ill-discussed at the State of the Union.

We believe in the potential of a democratic forum that dispenses with spokespeople and hierarchies, rather focusing on the voices of those affected by policy rather than policymakers.

We believe that the university is a space to produce tangible critiques and alternatives and disrupt the status quo.

We believe that academics and scholars have a responsibility towards civil society and the political sphere.



We believe that another academia is possible.

We insist that another world is possible.

In 2013, a group of politically active researchers at the EUI formed the Collettivo Prezzemolo (which means in English "the Parsley collective") and hosted a "Festival of the Other Europe – (subtitled) It's capitalism, stupid!" to highlight topics and concerns that they thought were not being discussed appropriately at the official State of the Union Conference, hosted annually at the EUI since 2011.

In 2023, a researcher had the idea of inviting back the speakers and members of the Prezzemolo Collective, for a ten-year anniversary event, perhaps to be called:

The *Alternative State of the Union*,

since we felt the issues and concerns of ten years ago still had relevance, and in fact, were even more relevant now. The elected board of the newly-formed EUI Researchers' Union got wind of this idea, and a small taskforce with no budget and a limited timeframe was convened to bring this idea into effect.

The product was the pilot Alternative State of the Union unconference 2023, a day-long participatory discussion in the Library Garden covering the wide-ranging, but pressing, themes of:

Climate Crisis, Biodiversity Crisis, Fortress Europe, Fascism, Immigration, and Trade Unionism, and wider Labour Organisation.

All of these forgotten or invisibilised themes of the official State of the Union, which we yet believe are essential for our collective future in Europe and in the world.

We finished the day by drafting a collective statement calling for the EUI to prioritise investment of time, money, and resources into critical academic research, and in increasing engagement with non-eurocentric and marginalised perspectives.

We were therefore dismayed by the scandalous events at the official State of the Union 2023, with uniformed officers removing a poster bearing the slogan "Refugees Welcome", and plainclothes political police surveilling and racially profiling researchers on campus, creating a hostile environment.

After our successful pilot, planning began for a larger un-conference representing and engaging with a wider grouping than the EUI community alone. The initiative was transferred from the Researchers' Union to the Intersectional Inclusivity Collective, a grouping of politically- and community-engaged researchers from the Researchers' Union, the Decolonising Initiative, the Climate Action Working Group, the LGBTQIA+ Society, the Queer and Feminist Working Group, the Orto, The Legal and Political Theory WG, and individually active community members. The collective formed a new taskforce, which is delighted to present to you today the Alternative State of the Union Unconference 2024!

The Alternative state of the union is a fundamentally collective and bottom-up initiative and proposition. In defining the contours of this edition, we reunited in a room and drafted our ideas on what such a meeting about what the "State of Europe" means to us. If we, as researchers at the European university institute, were to discuss the future of Europe as a political project, it cannot be confined to a top-down perspective which overlooks what is happening outside the ivory tower. We believe that the public debate must start from the perspective of those who experience policies rather than those who make them. We want to be a counterpoint to the often insular and elitist discussions of academia, giving voice to the youth, to the marginalised, and to those forgotten or silenced in the debates in and about Europe.

We speak about the un-conference, where the un- stands of unsettling the commonly held conception of what a conference and academia is or should be. With the AltSOU we wish to create an un-conference that we as researchers shape from the very beginning. A space for us to gather and reflect on our role as researchers and academics, to engage with and archive our immanent and intersectional critique of the EUI and neo-liberal academia more broadly.



We believe that the role of academia is to question the status quo and to analyse, highlight, and criticise power.

We must offer visions and enable discourses about possible futures. The university should be a place for research excellency, as well as a place for diverse opinions and intense debate. It should not be content functioning as a think tank for the EU and its elites. It should not be a place where eurocentric, technocratic, and elitist positions are formed and strengthened.

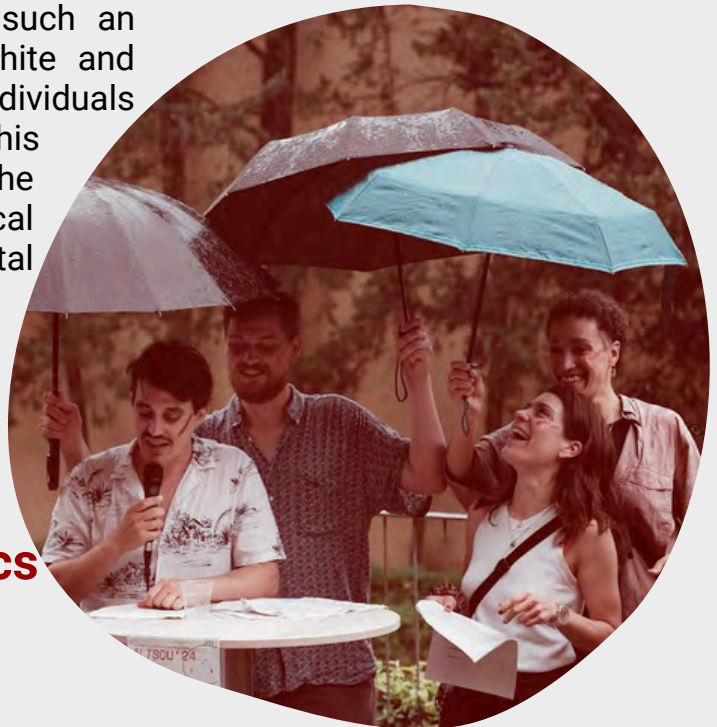
For too long this critical role of University has been shackled by invocations of individualism and the increasing fragmentation and isolation of students and faculty.

This fragmentation of discourse into individual critiques is incapable of addressing the structural injustices that exist within our Universities, and most importantly the systemic and oppressive nature of the eurocentric knowledge system that is perpetuated by Western Academia.

The critique that would come out of such an individualised University would be a white and bland milquetoast critique, just like the individuals that dominate our academic landscape. This would at best maintain the status quo, the antithesis of the University as a critical space that can play a crucial role in societal change.

During the coming three days we will discuss the topics of migration, borders, Palestine, antifascism, de-colonialism and capitalism. All of which converge into asking us:

What is our role as academics and what is the role of the university, in society?



The calls for the University as a space for engaged and critical discussions that are able to inform societal transformations ring hollow when we do not address the systemic and structural issues of the University as an institution.

It misses the fundamental point of intersectional oppressions.

We will now be joined by Elena, a fellow researcher who sat on the official State of the Union conference scientific committee, and who will share her experience as a researcher in organising the SOU.

State of the Union Conference Testimonial and Critique by the SOU scientific committee researcher representative.

Hi! My name is Elena, and I am a second-year researcher here at the law department, and this year I was researchers' representative in the State of the Union scientific committee. I have prepared a short speech that I would like to read. I hope that sharing my experience will help the scientific committee members to understand what, in my opinion didn't go well.

When I was offered to join the scientific committee of the State of the Union as a representative of researchers, I knew I was entering a challenging situation. After long reflection I decided to accept for two main reasons:

First, I am convinced that it is crucial for academics to occasionally step out of their bubble and engage with civil society, practitioners, activists, and policy makers. I also know that many students and researchers here at the EUI are interested in careers within European and national governments and institutions and it is important to provide them with opportunities to connect with these organisations if there is a chance to do so.

Second, I was informed that this year the scientific committee was genuinely striving to engage with researchers and change the format of the conference to align with their requests and expectations.

Therefore, I accepted. And, to respond to some petty rumours I have heard, I want to emphasize that I did it for free. [laughter].

I have to admit that it took me a while to realise that the promises made at the beginning were largely empty words. Together with the Reps (EUI researcher representatives) at the beginning of October, I prepared a survey to gather researchers' opinions on the conference. I presented to the committee the results, which were met with enthusiasm. I also happily attended the town hall meeting in October. At that time, everyone in the committee seemed to be open to change and asked me to be an active part of it. However, after some time, I started to understand that things were not changing at all. It's been very frustrating to realise and experience first-hand three main issues that in my view make the conference dysfunctional, and perhaps even detrimental to the interests of the EUI as an academic institution and community.

First: politicians are often invited as speakers not for substantive reasons relating to the topic of the panel, but for the sole purpose of gaining their favour. [Applause]. This practice jeopardises the autonomy and the quality of the research we conduct. It also triggers a vicious cycle. As the EUI invites a politician for political purposes, it immediately opens the door to requests from other politicians, especially given it is funded by not one, but multiple political institutions. I can bring in my own experience here. When I was setting up my panel, I was pushed to invite very specific people as speakers, and to have the managing director of the European Stability Mechanism, Former Minister of Finance of Luxemburg to provide opening remarks. Even though none of these speakers were experts in the topics addressed in my panel. I managed to push back on the additional panellists, and while I couldn't say no to the opening remarks, in the end, the opening remarks were mysteriously cancelled without anyone informing me.

This leads me to my second issue. The scientific committee claim to be willing to increase the involvement of researchers in the organisation of the conference. Well, as the researchers' representative, I was not treated as a peer to the other committee members. When I sent my panel proposal to the secretary, my email

was silently circulated among the other members for review without keeping me in the loop. I was completely excluded from the conversation. I wanted to proceed with organisation, and start sending out invitations to the speakers, but no one replied to my emails for three weeks. I managed to get answers only by repeatedly calling one person over the phone. This person informed me that that someone had comments about my panel proposal. I then reached out to this person, who tried to revolutionise my panel.



It took me more than one month to defend my work, and gain their approval, which I didn't even know I needed, and probably I didn't. At one point, we were so late in organisation because of these delays that I thought I would not be able to organise the panel in time. And this is only part of the story. I found all of this extremely disrespectful of my time and my professionalism. I do not like to think of the amount of time I wasted on playing these games that I could have invested in my research. This is behaviour I would not have expected from professors and fellow researchers.



Lastly, and more generally, I had the impression that the conference is exploited to pursue personal interests as opposed to the interests of the community as a whole.

It has been a tough experience. However, I am not convinced that this conference cannot continue in its current form. I don't fully agree with those claiming that because of all this, the conference should be cancelled. My view is rather that we should join forces to address its many structural problems.

This way, we can reclaim and harness resources that can be critical for the development of our community. Thank you.

Context of the AltSOU – the Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh encampment, Florentine and EUI activism – by members of the EUI Working Group on Palestine.

When I first got to EUI, almost three years ago, there was no work on Palestine happening, and there were no Palestinian scholars in any of the programmes at EUI and actually there are still no Palestinian scholars at EUI and there is still very little work on Palestine being done. I myself came here to do research on Palestine and this stopped me from being able to do my research and its part of this vicious circle where if no work is being done on Palestine and there are no Palestinian scholars then other Palestinian scholars and people who work on Palestine aren't going to apply to EUI and it just stays like this.

When I first went to the Law Department to try to formalise our Working Group on Palestine I was told there was insufficient interest in this topic and there was no need to formalise it as an official Working Group. Fast forward to November, after the October seventh attacks, we were hosting the most well-attended law working group event.

There is some interest in Palestine at the EUI. Just a little bit! Fast forward to April, we hosted an event to put forward a petition, because back in November we had called for the EUI to call for some kind of ceasefire and nothing was done.



In November we put forward this petition with four demands; we gathered over two hundred signatures; and there was no official acknowledgement or response from the administration; and then this morning I woke up in an encampment that we had set up in Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh (formerly Piazza San Marco).

There has been growing momentum and the four points of our petition have become the four demands in our list of common demands between the researchers and students of the EUI, UniFi, and SNS. We've been joined by students from Polimoda, from American universities in town like Georgetown, Stanford, NYU Florence, and even local highschoolers. There was one high school student who encouraged her class to join us and she was almost suspended for it. So this just goes to show how tense these things are.

We are trying to bring Palestine forward as a topic to take away the taboo from it. We have four basic demands. I'll go through them one more time:

The first one is to make a call for an end to genocide, to apartheid, to occupation; a call for ceasefire: we welcome that the Academic Council made a call for ceasefire after we started our encampment a few days ago, finally, but, they still referred to a "crisis in the middle-east". This is not accurate and its borderline racist.

It's not a crisis in the Middle East, it's a crisis in Rafah, it's a crisis in Gaza, and we can say those words.

It's important to be specific. In a university that prides itself on international law and politics we need to be very specific.

That's what we do here.

The second point is BDS. Part of the reason why this is all part of the Alternative State of the Union is because we're protesting the actual State of the Union. The State of the Union is funded by and partnered with companies like Bertelsmann, Meta, and Microsoft, which are officially on the boycott list. These are companies which are helping to train IDF soldiers in Gaza, which are helping to create surveillance software, which are censoring any speech on, or support of, Palestine on their online platforms, and which are in explicit solidarity, in terms of funding and relationships with, the state of Israel. So, we need to boycott those companies. Our Alternative State of the Union stands as a critique of the official State of the Union in that sense too.



Our third point is stop scholasticide. We're very lucky to be here in this beautiful villa, at Schifanoia, but we should be aware that They're trying to stay on their feet. The University of Palestine is having Zoom meetings to just stay as an institution. So, it's our responsibility with our beautiful villas and all of our infrastructure and our libraries and our resources and our money to support

right now in Gaza there are no universities at all. They've all been bombed completely. There are no schools anymore.

scholars at risk, students in need, in Gaza, and to work together with the University of Florence and the Scuole Normale and the other schools in Florence to bring about a real Firenze Città Aperta to welcome people.

We are told that there is no funding for scholars at risk here but then there is a lot of funding for the State of the Union and for these Villas and for other things, so I find that a little hard to believe.

Our fourth and last point is to protect academic freedom. Our camp at Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh was accused of anti-Semitism just a few days ago by the Unione Associazioni Italia-Israele, and this is coming after several claims of anti-Semitism made here at the EUI by colleagues. I'm Jewish and this is absurd. It's getting to the point where we need to say that anti-Zionism is not the same as anti-Semitism. We need to refute that, we need our university to protect our academic freedom of speech and to protect people working on Palestine whether they are Jewish, Israeli, Palestinian, Arabic, Islamic, from all positionalities. Thank you.

Both the encampment in town and Saturday's demonstration of the Collettivo di Fabbrica show how all the lively struggles currently happening in Florence and beyond are highly connected. Ex-GKN workers are joining the camp and students, pro-Palestinians, feminists, and trans activists supported the protest the ex-GKN workers organised. We are very proud that the EUI now has been, and is, a part of this and stands in solidarity with these struggles. Moreover, we are extremely grateful for all the activists and speakers joining us at the alternative State of the Union.

Today, lunch was prepared by Atomic Falafel, who support the encampment in town. Tonight, many activists are joining us in the encampment, and now we leave the floor to Aida and Arturo. Aida is a Scuole Normale researcher, and Arturo is a UniFi student.

Statement on the Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh encampment by two student activists from the University of Florence and the Scuole Normale Superioire.

(Aida Kappa): Thank you very much, I really appreciate this invitation, it is very important for me to have taken a step out of my own studies and research and now coming (back into academia but in another manner, coming back from the encampment; I think)



that our mobilisation right now comes from a feeling of urgency, given that the situation in Rafah, in Gaza, is getting worse and worse every day and we feel that we cannot allow, as members of the academic community, our institutions to remain silent before the ongoing genocide upon the Palestinian population, before the scholasticide fostered by the Israeli government and its army, and especially, that we cannot allow our knowledge, our research, our technology, our funding be used for warfare, rather than being a tool for emancipation and education. [applause]. Also, as members of the Scuola Normale Superiore, we joined this coordinated encampment, joining of course the call from the campuses in the United States and joining the many campuses in Europe and in Italy that have answered that call.

The whole academic community from the grassroots is rising to ask for a stop to this attack and this genocide upon the Palestinian population. In the Scuola Normale Superiore we already had an ongoing mobilisation and a process leading to some dialogue with our institution, which is great, which is a good example, but we need further steps taken. In March, we had our Academic Senate approve a motion calling for ceasefire, but we want more direct and constructive steps taken. In relation to the demands that we made, together with our peers in the encampment, we have some specific demands and steps for our academic senate related to disclosure. SNS claims that it has no agreements with Israel. We want the institution to at least prove it and to search for the forms by which SNS could be, even indirectly, complicit in genocide. This is a very important aspect so that we do not get lost into too many technicalities that obscure our demands and requests.

We ask our institution for the inclusion of a civic clause within the university statute that mandates an effective, transparent, binding, and shared control system for evaluating the use made of research and of collaborations between the university and the war industry. So this is all to give you some ideas if you want also bring them here to the EUI.

We are asking for the creation of an ethical evaluation committee including student representatives to evaluate the use of research with the aim of preventing potential war and military use of our research and technology. We call for this committee to assess agreements with universities, institutional bodies, and industries that may be implicated in the violation of international law. These are the demands that came from the encampment, and that further our steps in our dialogue with SNS.

Let me just finish by saying I very much agree that academia is inherently political, that it has to be political, and it must maintain its role in the political and social world.

(Arturo Gambassi): [translated from the Italian]

Hello everyone. Firstly, thank you. It is important for me, for us, to be here.

The most beautiful thing is that our encounter is not only about the intellectual exchange, but the material experience of our shared struggle with the EUI researchers. What is happening in the encampment at Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh since 14 May is an important signal of how academia, knowledge-production, science, and critique without action does not help anybody, nor does it help society.

For this reason, I want to briefly tell you about what we are doing within the University of Florence to remove from our university the logic of war, to divest from investment in war, and especially in this historical moment, to divest from Israel. Tomorrow the Academic Senate of the University of Florence will sit and we will present a motion, in which we ask for the creation of a commission to evaluate all the agreements currently existing with Israeli universities, and to cancel or suspend agreements with Israeli universities that are not actively trying to put an end to the genocide and the tragic events taking place now in Gaza and in Rafah. We will also ask the rector of the University of Florence to cut ties with Med-Or, a foundation belonging to Leonardo SpA, the biggest arms manufacturer in Italy, and one of the biggest in Europe, which is currently producing weapons being used in by Israel in Gaza.

A lot of people think we want to boycott research, knowledge, and dialogue. This is not true. Actually, we think that continuing to have research, knowledge, and dialogue is more important now than ever.

What we want is to boycott those spaces where critical research, knowledge, and dialogue are characterised totally by the logics of colonialism and apartheid. As Aida already said:

knowledge and research are never neutral. They are always political, & it is how they are used that makes them political.



We cannot escape from this. This is why we and our colleagues at the EUI and SNS ask that the knowledge we produce in the universities not be shared with Israel, a state that is currently committing genocide upon people only guilty of being Palestinians.

The rector of UniFi accuses us of not being open to dialogue and discussion. On the contrary. She and the other Italian university rectors are the ones not open to dialogue, and in this they contrast significantly from the EUI President, who stands as a positive example of willingness to dialogue and discussion with her students and researchers.

Finally, to be in the encampment on Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh (formerly San Marco) for us is a way to fight what makes us feel powerless and detached. Support for the genocide in Gaza, and the asymmetrical war against the Palestinian population is part of an enormous machine producing a long chain reaching from Palestine to us. A link of this chain passes through our lecture halls, our classrooms, our working spaces, and is making us feel completely impotent in this period of history. We must identify these links in the chain that is holding Palestinian people and people who are pro-Palestine down and work to break them, each and every link in that chain, and thereby destroy the chain. In this effort, we in Florence are united with our peers and comrades in cities around Italy, Europe, and the world, following the example of students in the United States of America

Address by the EUI President.

(Patrizia): Thank you all for your words. I would like to open the Alternative State of the Union and I would like to thank the organisers, and all the participants, and the community for all their dedication to making this conference happen. I am really honoured to be opening this Alternative State of the Union of 2024. I am very much looking forward also to your dedication and to the discussions, and to witness what I hope will follow from them. Your initiative will serve us as an example of a meaningful exchange of pressing societal matters and of how self-organisation can work. The Alternative State of the Union exemplifies the essence of research universities as spaces for reflection, for asking difficult questions, and for challenging assumptions that many take for granted. I'm eager to witness the impact of these discussions on our campus and hopefully, on society. I am happy to see in your programme that you have not only been able to invite distinguished researchers from other universities, but also highly recognised personalities from civil society.

Allow me to share some personal reflections. In the last few days, episodes of my professional life came to mind. In 1992, before even coming to the EUI as a PhD candidate, I was a trainee at a publishing house in Frankfurt. I was shocked to see Germans setting the homes of asylum seekers on fire in towns and cities across the country. Determined to make a difference I decided to organise a conference, just like you do, to challenge the prevailing narrative and highlight the reality that Germany was, and indeed, is today, a migration country.



This was not the official language of Germany then. With no funds whatsoever, and together with young colleagues from the same publishing house, I did some fundraising, and invited speakers from other countries with more progressive views on migration. We mobilised national newspapers, and the attendance was so big that in the end we had to have the conference transmitted via video to two other larger rooms.

I wanted to make this concrete, so in the end I wanted to have an impact by inviting politicians, and with the help of Daniel Cohn-Bendit, we managed to change the asylum law of Germany. This experience of organising this conference, but also of collective empowerment, was very transformative for me. In 2002, after having been a PhD researcher here, I delivered an inaugural lecture at the University of Bremen and I'm very happy that Ulrike Liebert is here to join us, the response of a colleague of mine, a professor even younger than me was: "you obviously want to change the world. The thing is, we are only here to describe it. We are scholars". [laughter]. So, I spent a large part of my career trying to prove them wrong. Trying to demonstrate that social sciences and humanities research can be both transformative and rigorous. That aiming for change is not just the business of activists, but the duty of independent social science and humanities. As Director of the Institute for Sustainable Research in Potsdam until 2021 I worked, therefore, on a methodology for transdisciplinary and transformative research.

For example, my research also involved working in Lusatia/Lausitz, a region crossing over Brandenburg and Saxony, south of Berlin, where right-wing populism has been on the rise for many years. So we hosted several dialogues between young coal miners, who were about to lose their jobs, and activists from Fridays for Future and Last Generation. These were very difficult discussions about what are the real questions at stake. For example, we found that the real issue was not about climate versus jobs – that’s a false narrative – but about the type of economy needed for this region to be a more just and sustainable one. This experience was transformative for the participants, and also for myself. Holding the space, in such controversial matters, can be really exhausting but we realised that it stayed a safe space, and this is what I am hoping for in all difficult matters.



Today, I am immensely proud to witness your commitment to self-organising this conference, as well as engaging in peaceful protest on San Marco Square (I know it has another name, but I can’t recall it). A collaborative effort with other Tuscan universities, and we heard Aida and Arturo speak before (and I was very happy to hear you).

Interestingly, you have succeeded in what the EUI has tried to do for decades. The EUI has tried for decades to root this institute – which is regarded as an ivory tower up in the hills – within the city of Florence and Tuscany. The lively collaboration amongst students demonstrates the vibrant relationships across different universities of the region. And you have succeeded in making the professors of different academic units and departments discuss essential questions across the “silos”.

So with my team we then published our research which accompanied these dialogues before and after, and also drafted recommendations for the German and regional governments, challenging them in dialogues as well. So drafting recommendations and policy briefings are not enough, we challenged them directly in dialogues. In my view (and I think Max already said this), universities serve as a catalyst for transformation together, in my view, with relevant societal actors. When traditional avenues for change falter, universities emerge as “third spaces” for critical reflection and collaboration. I would be very happy to see this in Florence, Tuscany, and regions across Europe. A concrete idea would be to start a city lab working on pressing matters. Let’s see if and how this could pan out.

At the heart of these endeavours are the students and researchers whose passion and dedication drive societal transformation and progress forward

Researchers should indeed take centre stage at universities and I’m proud of you for leading by example.

Your conference signifies a desire for deep and honest conversation about what truly matters, thereby also challenging institutions. If I were a researcher at the EUI right now today, I would be exactly where you are, and I would be doing what you are doing here today. I remember an essay of mine I wrote after the Iraq war on Hannah Arendt and her essay on the lies and truth about the Vietnam war. What she calls for is that citizens are responsible themselves for creating meaningful public debate. That is what you are doing, so in this sense, I would be here with you on the Alternative State of the Union.

I see this conference as an integral part of the life of the institute. In closing, I would like to express my gratitude once again for all of your participation and dedication and organisation of this conference. I have full confidence that the discussions you have will inspire us all and propel us forward. Thank you.

AltSOU principles and practicalities by the AltSOU taskforce.

On a concluding note, we want to once again thank every one of you for being here, for supporting us, and for contributing to making the altSOU happen. But at the same time we can't forget about the RULES, folks.

Since its first edition last year, this unconference has been guided by democratic and participatory principles. That means that we all come here as one, and our voices are equally valid. We invite you to speak your mind, share your perspectives and experiences, but do not forget about the others. Listen and try to understand, even if you disagree. Do not interrupt others when they speak. And when you speak, be mindful of the time, the space and your positionality.

Let's make altSOU a safe, welcoming and inclusive space where we not only debate important issues, but also collaboratively try to find solutions and open new dialogues. We would also be grateful if you could help us preserve the memory of this event, by sharing your notes, doodles, mindmaps, and pictures with us, as a testimony of this event and an inspiration for the next editions of altSOU in the future.



SINKING EUROPE, THINKING MIGRATION: THE LAW IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

10:00-12:00, Monday 20 May 2024, Sala Triaria, Villa Schifanoia and online.

Guests:

Martina Flamini (Ufficio del Massimario in Corte di Cassazione),
Chiara Favilli (UniFi), Françoise Blum (Navire Avenir),
Romain Lanneau (Statewatch),
SOS Méditerranée, Tineke Strik (European Parliament)

Abstract: The European Union seems to be determined to contain migration at any cost, including the high chance of being complicit in the death at sea of people attempting to access Europe, and of fundamental rights breaches at its borders. A growing number of regulations and legislative proposals aim at creating major obstacles to prevent people on the move from enjoying their fundamental rights. Additionally, internal regulations continue to separate people depending on the basis of social, cultural and ethnic faultlines. While theorizing migration law as racist and postcolonial seems quite straightforward, forging practices of resistance becomes more and more arduous due to the political landscape. The roundtable provides a platform for a critical discussion on the multifaceted challenges and complexities surrounding the legal framework of migration in the European Union (EU). Drawing on diverse perspectives from civil society, policymaking, activists and practitioners, the roundtable will delve into these matters through a collaborative dialogue. The hope is that through lively exchanges among the participants, innovative strategies of resistance and creative policy proposals can be imagined.

Event report: This event kicked off the Monday session of the AltSOU with a diverse panel of political, judicial, and academic points of view on migration in Europe today. The speakers were asked to reflect on three key questions: what is the state of European migration law in their field? How is the law used in their field in relation to migration policies: is it an instrument of study, of application, of contestation? Finally, what do migration law and the current migration regime reveal about Europe today?

These questions led the discussions from the shortcomings of the New Pact on Migration recently voted by the European Parliament to the need to develop data protection law to react to the increase of reliance on technologies to manage migration in Europe. Another important perspective was given by Associations such as SOS Méditerranée and Navire Avenir to explain how EU law and agencies such as Frontex do not provide for possibilities to save migrants at sea, how civil society instead steps in such as the project for a European maritime flag, and how EU law needs to be reshaped in order to support, instead of put obstacles to those projects. Finally, we talked about the responsibility of national judges to find remedies in migration law which respect the fundamental rights of the migrants, and the struggle of asylum seekers in Europe and secondary movement in a territory without borders.

PALESTINE AND ACADEMIA: PROTECTING ACADEMIC FREEDOM & PALESTINIAN SCHOLARS AT RISK

14:30-17:30, Monday 20 May 2024, Sala Triaria, Villa Schifanoia and online.

Guests:

Arees Bishara (Tel Aviv University),
Maria Chiara Rioli (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia),
Federica Stagni (Scuola Normale Superiore & SESAMO),
Jairo Flores-Funez (Texas Tech University),
Anna Younes (Graduate Institute),
Malaka Shaikh (University of St Andrews)
Karem Rohana (Activist based in Florence)

Abstract: The EUI Working Group on Palestine and the Legal and Political Theory WG present a joint two-part event, which will focus on the obstacles and repression faced by both Palestinian refugees and scholars working on Palestine.

In the first part, we will explore and discuss diverse obstacles faced by Palestinian refugees locally in Florence, and comparatively in other contexts more broadly. Our speakers will share their perspectives and experience on approaching logistical issues such as visas, health insurance, discrimination - as well as navigating claims of antisemitism in doing work on Palestine. We will have a participatory open discussion, in which the aim will be to collectively discuss how to aggregate and account for these issues, so that we might produce action points to more proactively support Palestinian refugees to our local community in Florence, and to join our European University Institute.

After a short break we will then focus on the more academic dimension and explore the difficulties and outright repression scholars working on Palestine face. Western universities often embrace anti- "cancel culture" narratives to justify their failure to combat racist, sexist, colonial, or homophobic speech on campus. Their response is however diametrically opposite when it comes to anti-racist researchers and professors,

who find their voices suppressed by censorship and layoff threats. In Europe, just like racism itself, the problem continues to be ignored and hidden from the (white) public eye. Yet, that is the modus operandi of its academic institutions, especially regarding anti-Zionism.

The recent developments in Israel's genocidal colonial project have intensified that institutional persecution and shed light on how academic freedom is often limited to those who speak within the current hegemonic frame, while others must fear consequences to their career and lives.



In the second part of our joint event, we invite all to break the myth of the “leftist university”. We welcome persons who have experienced said persecution to discuss academic repression and the fallacy of cancel culture in a world where most universities (and especially those in the Global North) are willingly furthering the status quo and actively impeding radical emancipatory critique. We will conclude, with recommendations on how to ensure academic freedom and how to protect scholars working counter-hegemonic projects such as the important work being done on Palestine.

Event Report:

This event organised by the EUI Working Group on Palestine occurred in the context and midst of the students of Florence solidarity encampment protest for Gaza taking place at Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh (ex San Marco) from May 15-25th 2024. The encampment adopted four demands, adapted from a Petition for an Inclusive & Anti-Apartheid EUI launched by the Working Group on Palestine on the occasion of its roundtable on the ICJ Israel v. South Africa case.

This event was intended to collectively deliberate and gather knowledge on two of these encampment demands made to the governing bodies of the various universities of Florence.

The first half of the event was spent discussing the diverse obstacles faced by Palestinian refugees locally in Florence, and comparatively in other contexts more broadly. Our speakers shared their perspectives and experience on approaching logistical issues therein such as visas, health insurance, and discrimination.

The aim was to produce action points to more proactively support Palestinian refugees

to our local community in Florence, and specifically to support our universities in welcoming Palestinian scholars at risk. An in-depth presentation was given by the President of SeSaMO (the Society for Studies on the Middle East), which actively seeks to protect academic freedom and support scholars at risk in Italy on the subject of Palestine. More information can be found on their work here - <https://www.sesamoitalia.it/focus-palestina/>.



The second half of the event was dedicated to the question of academic freedom in the context of researching around Palestine, and navigating claims of antisemitism that inevitably arise therein. Our speakers shared how some of them had faced judicial litigation and professional setbacks, such as being arbitrarily fired from their academic positions - all based on exaggerated claims of antisemitism in the context of their work on Palestine. There were long discussions on whether antisemitism should be defined by academic institutions in order to adjudicate such claims, and if so, according to which definition. Some of the speakers suggested ‘anti-jewish racism’ was a better framework

than 'antisemitism', and that existing university anti-discrimination or anti-racist policies may be preferable to adopting an additional definition. Existing definitions of antisemitism such as the IHRA and Jerusalem Declaration were critiqued. Professor Jairo Fúnez-Flores gave a presentation on 'the Palestine Exception to Academic Freedom', which can be read in full here: <https://jairofunez.substack.com/p/the-palestine-exception-to-academic?r=1ukfra>.

The event and discussions therein set the groundwork for the Palestine Demands Symposium for a Toscana Aperta (<https://altsou.com/event/protect-academic-freedom-the-right-to-protest-anti-zionism-anti-semitism/>) between EUI, the University of Florence and the Scuola Normale Superiore which took place in June 2024 with one workshop hosted by each of the universities respectively. The aim of this Symposium was to continue the work of gathering and harmonising knowledge on each of the four demands in support of Gaza, which while eventually accepted by each of our universities, remain to be implemented according to detailed knowledge and in coordination with each university in the region towards creating a Toscana Aperta against scholasticide.

ANTIFASCISMO IN ITALIA: A TALK WITH LOCAL ACTIVISTS

18:00-20:00, Monday 20 May 2024, Fiasco Social Club, Badia Fiesolana.

Guests:

Daria (Intersexioni),
Marco (Love My Way),
Roberto (Collettivo di Fabbrica GKN),
Non Una di Meno

Abstract: L'estrema destra avanza in Europa. Stiamo assistendo al ritorno della politica autoritaria e alla repressione strisciante dei movimenti sociali e dei dissidenti politici. Negli ultimi mesi, il dibattito italiano ha ruotato attorno al fascismo e all'antifascismo, dato che l'Italia ha il suo primo governo di estrema destra dal 1945. Poiché le pratiche fasciste non vengono mai presentate completamente come tali, abbiamo invitato gruppi di attivisti fiorentini che possano raccontare alla comunità dell'IUE la loro esperienza come oggetto di queste politiche repressive. L'obiettivo dell'evento è quello di parlare di ciò che sta accadendo in Italia con l'estrema destra al potere (nella politica e nel discorso politico, nei media e anche nelle strade) e di come resistere. L'evento è completamente bilingue (italiano e inglese), con interpretazione dal vivo.

The far right is on the rise in Europe. We are witnessing the return of authoritarian politics and slithering repression of social movements and political dissidents. In recent months, the Italian debate has revolved around fascism and antifascism, even more so since Italy had its first extreme-right government since 1945. As fascist practices are never fully presented as such, we invited Florentine activist groups who can tell the EUI community about their experience as object of these repressive policies. The aim of the event is to talk about what is happening in Italy with the extreme right in power (in politics and political discourse, in the media, and also in the streets) and how to resist. The event is fully bilingual (Italian and English), with live interpretation.

Event Report:

The event *Antifascismo in Italia* brought together representatives from various grassroots organisations across the Florentine scene to discuss whether the current state of Italian politics resembled last century's Italian (and international) disaster: Fascism.

Two questions were asked to the guest speakers who represented four different Tuscan associations:

What is happening in Italy now? What are the fascist, far-right practices that we can observe?

How do you organise your struggles in Florence? Do you see yourselves as groups that are also anti-fascist? What does it mean for you and for connecting the different movements and struggles?

In her introductory speech, Isola pointed out the fact that Italy's current PM and her party have fascist roots coming from the Italian Social Movement (MSI), a neo-fascist party founded in 1972. Since Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi) never acknowledged its history and never distanced itself from MSI, PM Giorgia Meloni and prominent members of FI such as Ignazio La Russa, current President of the Senate, argue that 'extremists are elsewhere in Italy' and that 'all 20th century regimes have been bad'. Underscoring their reticence to celebrate 25 April, the festive day dedicated to partisan Resistance in Italy, or their refusal to explicitly say that they are 'anti-fascists', Isola presented the audience with the current dilemma in Italian memory politics through a central question for discussion: Is the fascist vs. Antifascist, as the Italian cabinet publicly claims, an outdated debate.

Isola proceeded to explain that Giorgia Meloni explicitly refuses to call herself anti-fascist. She brought to the table an instance from March of the present year, in which Meloni was asked if she would celebrate 25 April and if she considered herself an anti-fascist. The PM's reply did not lack *gogliardia* since she claimed she would not respond to provoke journalists, so they would continue saying that she was a dangerous fascist. She continued claiming that in that in Italy the extremists are elsewhere, not in Fdi.



Isola proceeded to explain that Giorgia Meloni explicitly refuses to call herself anti-fascist. She brought to the table an instance from March of the present year, in which Meloni was asked if she would celebrate 25 April and if she considered herself an anti-fascist. The PM's reply did not lack *gogliardia* since she claimed she would not respond to provoke journalists, so they would continue saying that she was a dangerous fascist. She continued claiming that in Italy the extremists are elsewhere, not in Fdi.

This debate over fascism and anti-fascism is cleverly played by Fratelli D'Italia, in order to make anti-fascist movements and left parties seem obsessed with this 'outdated' distinction, and blind to current issues in Italian society. This game is helping Meloni to then promote clearly fascist policies, under the disguise that they cannot be labelled as such.

However, what matters is the substance, and as the associations' testimonies proved, practice shows that Meloni's policies look fondly at the 1920s and at Mussolini's practices.

Intersexioni:

Daria described the situation at the Ospedale di Careggi in Florence, where the government has sent inspectors alleging misuse of drugs for underage transitions. This resulted in preventing access to gender affirming care to minors, in the best and most advanced hospital in Italy in this matter. Daria warned of the neo-pathologisation danger such kind of inspection bear by enforcing new, highly ideologised (and therefore transphobic) protocols.



Daria explained how difficult it is to separate between alt-right policies and the previous ones.

She gave examples of policies that were dreadful for queer people also under government that were supposed to be more progressive. Daria sees no difference in the discriminatory nature of the criteria applied to trans people compared to other discrimination.

For that reason, she prefers the concept of authoritarianism instead of the one of fascism, because it captures better the centrality of controlling people's bodies in state policies.

Love My Way:

Marco explained the work Love My Way does on the Florentine territory. In its activist endeavours, the association tries to support the queer community in the city and the region, with "sportelli d'ascolto" (listening points) that can offer to people legal and psychological support.



He also underlined that the Florentine groups (**Non una di meno, Intersexioni, Collettivo di Fabbrica, Love my way**) are united in their respective protests. All of them join the protest organised by the others, showing that one's battle is everyone's.

Marco disagreed with Daria on the use of the word authoritarianism only, saying that he truly believes this government is bringing back fascist practices in the way protests are repressed and in the way the LGBTQIA* group is treated.

Given how structural violence towards queer folks is (economic, physical, and verbal), Marco considers the current turn in Italian politics as fascism.

His position offers a counterpoint to Daria, as Marco draws on the victims' experience and the organisation of resistance networks more than the policies to build his argument.

Non una di meno Firenze:

Non una di meno started by describing the listening point they have created and run to support women who suffer gender-based violence and seek legal and psychological help in the Florentine territory. Non una di meno then commented both national and local policies.

At national level, Non una di meno stressed the government's fixation on corporeality in their policies and denounced the lack of access to abortion and the fact that the government does not engage with prevention of violences.

So-called 'Pro-Life' organisations receive direct or indirect institutional support, which complicates access to safe and legal abortion practices in ways that endanger women lives.

Moreover, Italy lacks functioning policies in line with the Istanbul convention regarding Prevention and Protection measures and focuses excessively on the subsequent pillars Prosecution and Coordination.

This constitutes a negligence they attribute the government's political stance. At local level, Non una di meno criticises Florence's Council slogans and its spaces dedicated to women such as the 'Casa delle Donne', where male violence towards women is overlooked. They consider this a way to prevent women's autonomous organisation outside their institutional reach. Thus, such pinkwashing not only hinders violent patriarchal culture but seeks to prevent feminist mobilisations.

Non una di meno's representatives shared Marco's use of the word 'fascism' instead of authoritarianism and stressed the government's fixation on corporeality in their policies.

Collettivo di Fabbrica GKN:

Roberto agreed with Marco on the shared struggles, saying that, despite being from different generations, Collettivo di Fabbrica felt the closeness and support from every other association present in their fight. He agreed on the use of 'fascism' instead of authoritarianism, as it describes better the current state of politics and provided an inter-generational perspective highlighting the connecting points between everyone's struggles.



Regarding the Collettivo di Fabbrica, Roberto's speech revolved around workers' organisation, particularly their struggle in the GKN factory. Since they seek to organise their own workplace into a cooperatively owned project proposing an ecological form of re-industrialisation, they face resistance from the same actors as the rest of speakers.

Conclusion: Julia Kaiser (sociologist who worked with the Collettivo di Fabbrica): Julia talked about the specificity of the Collettivo di Fabbrica's case as one of the few ones proposing forms of green reindustrialisation in Europe as opposed to the far-right monopolisation of this discourse. From a sociological point of view, GKN is a rarity as it achieves what has not been possible anywhere else: a working-class politicisation that leaves no one behind and unites students, feminists, LGBTQ+ people, etc. The fact that people from other European countries are taking notes is already telling of how much of a vanguard this is given current times.

Julià Gomez Reig (EUI): The event ended up taking more time than the initially expected due to the difficulties of simultaneous interpretation. Thus, Julià wrapped up with a short intervention pointing two main aspects. First, on the need to think present-time historically, stressing the importance of remembrance as a public device of regulation to prevent fascism from coming back. Secondly, on the fact that nothing is inevitable, and that it all depends on our intervention in the public sphere to pull the social body against the current turn, so we can get back our present and future.

Julia's intervention was shortened the day of the event due to time constraints. Here's the full contribution she had prepared and accepted to share with us.

Julia Kaiser's contribution: **GKN as an (implicit) antifascist strategy.** The Collettivo di Fabbrica has anti-fascist roots and is explicitly anti-fascist. I think the struggle of the GKN workers is also anti-fascist in another sense. While the right-wings try to respond to people's concerns and fears with division and marginalization, the Collettivo has developed a policy of convergence. A convergence of the interests of workers and social movements. In my opinion, this strategy is the most sustainable solution to counter the rise of the right-wing forces. Let me describe what I mean by this.

What kind of times are we living in? What fears am I talking about?

We are living in times of increasing ecological crisis, which is more and more affecting all areas of society.

Ecological sustainability is the real, or at least proclaimed, justification for a fundamental shift in the economy. What can this mean? For example, certain

industries are being transformed, such as the automotive industry. Electric cars are built, and it is argued that this is better for the environment. As a result, many workers lose their jobs because less labour is needed.



What happens within an unequal capitalist society when such fundamental changes are tackled? People are afraid or people are defending themselves. The right-wings are excellent at channelling this fear, anger and resistance.

When we as sociologists conduct interviews in the automotive industry, the current mood often sounds like this: "Greta Thunberg and her friends are to blame for me losing my job!" "The ecological crisis is just a green fairy tale!" Or in Meloni's words: "Greta Thunberg's ideology will lead us to lose thousands of companies and millions of jobs in Europe" (two years ago at a forum of right-wing parties in Spain). In sociology, we talk about the fact that conservative class politics currently dominate in trade unions: the existing should be kept. Cars should continue to be produced, and those who demand the most radical break with the status quo become enemies, such as Greta Thunberg. Right-wing forces, with their racism and blindness to the ecological crisis, can connect very well to conservative class politics.

What did the workers from GKN do? They have not taken the path of conservative class politics.

They have developed a transformative, anti-fascist and ecological alternative.



They explicitly joined forces with climate activists right from the start. They joined climate strikes with thousands of thousands of people. They argued right from the start, that those, who fight for a social and ecological world cannot be their enemy. The enemy can only be a capitalist system, in which companies relocate jobs with the aim of maximising

profits and those political forces who are not willing to give a social and ecological future to a factory that has machines, workers and a great ecological plan.

The **Politics of Convergence** is an alternative to the right-wing politics of hate and division:

- The social basis of the right be weakened, if we succeed in creating a socio-ecological mass mobilisation that is also based in the working class.
- The GKN struggle can be a blueprint for how such a policy of ecological class politics can be actively developed.
- To make it concrete: Dismissals in the automotive industry are a moment that is ideal for right-wing and anti-ecological ideas to flourish.
- GKN has shown that a struggle against dismissals in the automotive industry can also lead to a socio-ecological mass mobilization.

The great thing is that by actively coming together, the power resources of both, the climate movement and the labour movement are strengthened! Only through broad social alliances does the trade union movement as a whole have a chance in the medium term to counteract plant closures or at least drive up the costs of redundancies.

The climate movement also only has a chance of substantial success if it expands its social base immensely, especially in the factories. Only social majorities and strikes can really ensure that investments are made in sustainable infrastructures etc.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the Collettivo di Fabbrica is not only anti-fascist, but also internationalist struggle. The struggle has led to the formation of alliances between industrial workers and climate activists even in other countries like in Germany. Contrary to any logic of “My Firm First”, the Collettivo has tried from the beginning to support their colleagues in other countries in their defence struggles. They have also encouraged them to join forces with the climate movement instead of isolating themselves and blame ecological activists for the dismissal. After the GKN occupation, colleagues in Zwickau (Saxony, eastern Germany) were also informed that production was to be relocated, they immediately declared their solidarity and sent a great video. They also offered to come to Germany to support the fight. As a result, the climate movement in

Zwickau inspired by the politics of convergence here in Firenze, approached the workers and smaller joint actions were organised: Here, too, they demonstrated together for an ecological alternative production in Zwickau.

I would like to emphasise what this means for a region like Zwickau. In Zwickau are regular Nazi marches. Left-wingers and Greens are sometimes subjected to open violence on the streets. There are right-wing works council lists that are trying to gain power. The fact that GKN Florenz has initiated an alliance between some progressive players from the GKN plant in Zwickau and climate activists, and has thus encouraged people who otherwise hardly dare to express themselves politically, is a small, anti-fascist glimmer of hope.

BEYOND BORDERS? ACADEMIC AND ACTIVIST RESEARCH AT EU BORDERS

11:00-12:30, Tuesday 21 May 2024, Sala Triaria, Villa Schifanoia and online.

Guests:

Federico Alagna (Scuola Normale Superiore),
Kamila Fiałkowska (University of Warsaw and Badaczki i Badacze na Granicy),
Giulia Fabini (University of Bologna),
Martina Tazzioli (University of Bologna).

Abstract: This roundtable focuses on borders and calls for a dialogue that brings empirical, conceptual and philosophical perspectives together. While Frontex has increased its workforce to control the external borders next to national border guards, it is also becoming increasingly normal to encounter border controls within the Schengen area itself. External and internal borders of the European Union (EU) are spaces of daily violence and illegal pushbacks, but also of daily resistance from those on the move and their supporters.

How do we tell the story of this resurgence of borders in Europe?

Have they always been so present, or are they just more visible?

What is our role as researchers and/or activists doing research at/on borders?

This roundtable invites speakers to share their experiences - as academics and/or activists - at the internal and external borders of the EU.

Through a roundtable format, the event aims at:

- Sharing field experiences about the situation at particular borders in Europe
- Discussing the changing nature of borders and of (re/de)-bordering practices and their effect on people on the move and locals
- Reflecting collectively on more critical understandings of borders and migration
- Discussing how it is possible to navigate political engagements within academic institutions

Event report: With the second panel of the day, we continued the discussion on European border regimes with a room full of attendees (with more participating online). We invited each of the speakers to share their 10-minute presentations. Martina Tazzioli discussed new digital methods of border control in the Schengen area which raise novel problems around ensuring individual privacy and basic human rights of people on the move. She also stressed the role of the academic community in developing better methodologies for tracing border violence, in both digital and non-digital modes. Kamila Fiałkowska presented the situation of the ongoing humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, drawing on the conclusion that attitudes towards people on the move in Europe have not changed since 2015, and in some cases even got more hostile, with Poland being a great illustration for that. Federico Alagna argued that two simultaneous processes occur on the European borders: increased physical “rebordering” and social “othering” of the incoming people. He emphasized that researchers have a responsibility to think critically about the borders and what is happening to people who cross them. Giulia Fabini stressed that researchers should constantly reflect on the political implications of their research, and whether it is not resulting in more harm than good, to both people on the move and our individual wellbeing. The presentations were followed by a Q&A and discussion with the audience.

WE ARE NOT ON THE SAME BOAT: POWER WALK AND REFLEXIVE LUNCH

12:30-14:00, Tuesday 21 May 2024, Gardens, Villa Schifanoia

Guests:

Carla Vitantonio (International Humanitarian Studies Association)

Abstract: This simple and participatory exercise allows a physical and direct experience of power differences in a group. The setting of reference will be that of migration. Every participant will be given a role and it's important that everyone seriously tries to embody the character they are assigned. The facilitator will then give instructions, and everyone will act according to their character. Spatial movement will show differences between people. At the end of the exercise, we will do a moment of defusing, debriefing, collective reflection.

Event Report: Before lunch, we gathered in the loggia of Villa Schifanoia. Carla handed us out small pieces of paper with a “role” or “character” we had to embody. Then, she read a series of statements related to the daily life or different challenges that our character could face (for example: looking for work in the city, attending a religious ceremony, travelling to a Western capital). If our character could fulfill the task, we would give one step forward; if not, a step back; if we weren't sure, we would not move. At the end of the exercise, every character was in a different position. Then, we had lunch sitting outside while we discussed some ideas and feelings that emerged during the exercise, mostly on privilege and positionality.

TEACH-IN ON (DE)COLONIALITY AND OUR PLACE IN EUROPE

14:00-15:30, Tuesday 21 May 2024, Loggia terrace, Villa Schifanoia

Guests:

Carla Vitantonio (International Humanitarian Studies Association)

Abstract: In this session Carla Vitantonio would like to invite participants to build together a reflection on coloniality in our own systems and cultures. Assuming that most of us come from different places, located at variable distance from the mainstream European culture (system, society, model, whatever), and from this unique perspective each one will contribute to the session, following Haraway's inspiration (1988, 2016) and creating a temporary web of kin. For this purpose, Carla will give a short theoretical introduction based on the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2000, 2007), and embodied by their own experience of queer, stigmatized woman, migrant and daughter of migrants.

EXPOSING FORTRESS EUROPE? THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY

18:15-19:15, Tuesday 21 May 2024 Sala del Capitolo, Badia Fiesolana and online

Guests:

José Bautista (Fundación perCausa)

Abstract: Our goal during this summative session on Migration is to plan direct involvement, as university members, in the fight against the migration control industry and the externalisation of EU border controls. With the help of an independent investigative journalist from Spain, we shall discuss how migration control mechanisms are sustained by political fear-mongering and public spending, maintained through EU regulations, and promoted by academia. In line with the 2024 EU New Pact on Migration and Asylum, democratic governments with connections to authoritarian regimes, universities, corporations and large NGOs work together to support a model based on detention, deportation and externalisation. We shall also revisit questions and perspectives explored during our roundtable on Political Humanitarianism, the Mediterranean and Border Violence, with the practical purpose of creating an action plan that university members can use, in collaboration with activists, journalists, and members of civil society, to work towards alternatives to these models.

Event Report: Even though this was the last session of the day, the attendants were full of energy! In fact, we started a couple of minutes before it was scheduled. José Bautista presented his organization (PorCausa) and their work on migration journalism and research, including a report that was released on the same day in the Washington Post. José explained how PorCausa combines research and narrative to try to change public discourse on migration. He then posed some questions on how journalists and academics could collaborate and why it is necessary to join forces.

For instance, according to him academic researchers have more chances to access sources and people that would be vetoed to journalists; journalists live under the tyranny of “breaking news” so they have no time or capacity to elaborate theories, etc. The conversation was engaging, and we enjoyed it so much that went half an hour over what was scheduled, just because we were excited.] and in other media outlets.

Questions raised and discussed before and during the event included:



Questions on the migration control industry: How is today’s migration control industry sustained by political fearmongering, maintained by the EU and promoted by academia? Who profits from this? What are the connections between the industry of migration control and the political and economic elites? Is there a connection between the anti-migration discourse and the securitization of borders and mobility?

Questions on the externalisation of border controls: How is the EU Migration Pact’s model of the externalisation of border controls, sustained by allegedly democratic governments, universities, corporations and even large NGOs? How can invisible borders be made visible by bridging the gap between journalism and academic research to improve our societies during such a critical period in history?

Questions of creating critical dialogue between journalists and academics: Why are so many people tired of discussing/reading/listening to very important discussions on topics such as migration and climate change, and how can we change this? Academic research and investigative journalism: are we so different? As academics, have you talked to journalists and what was your experience like? How can you, as a journalist, focus on certain things when the media outlet doesn’t want you to? How can you change the angle of what you write once your investigation is already underway - or is that not how it works? Do you, as academics, have the freedom to change to a different place once the work is underway? Do you have exclusivity - can you collaborate and publish with other universities? Can younger academics and journalists advise on government policy vis-à-vis immigration etc. - does your Por Causa community do that type of thing? Your slide says “academic research and investigative journalism - same obsession when it comes to migrations”, which I found very interesting. How can this academic-journalistic teamwork work in terms of talking about migration, specifically? Would we ever be able to create an action plan for this? Are there steps we can follow to do this?

INTIMATELY MATERIAL: COLLECTIVE REFLECTION ON THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF ACADEMIA.

15:30-17:30, Tuesday 21 May 2024 Sala del Capitolo, Badia Fiesolana and online

Abstract: The workshop is a collaborative effort of two conferences happening at the same time this year at EUI: "Intimately Material: Violence, Social Reproduction, & Queerness in Transition", organised by the EUI Queer and Feminist Working Group and the "Alternative State of the Union 2024 Unconference".

In the workshop, we will interrogate the place of academia and the participants' lived experiences of doing research. By collectively writing "sick notes", we want to discuss themes related to the material conditions of doing research, such as job uncertainty, capitalistic approaches to research, academic mobility, and social reproduction. Our conclusions will be turned into a collective statement expressing our own experienced materialities and ideas of change.

IT'S STILL CAPITALISM, STUPID!

09:00-13:00, 22 May 2024, Sala del Consiglio, Villa Salviati and online

Guests:

Daniela Chironi (Scuola Normale Superiore),
Eraldo Souza Dos Santos (Université Panthéon-Sorbonne),
Jessica Whyte (University of New South Wales),
Lorenzo Zamponi (Scuola Normale Superiore),
Lorenzo Cini (University College Cork),
Veronika Zablotsky (Freie Universität Berlin)



Abstract: In 2013, the Collettivo Prezzemolo, a group of politically engaged PhD researchers and PostDocs at the EUI, organised the "Festival of the other Europe – It's capitalism, stupid!". This event can be regarded as the precursor to the Alternative State of the Union (un)conference, which held a pilot event in May last year. Eleven years on from the original "Festival of the other Europe", we are inviting alumna members of the Collettivo Prezzemolo, as well as other activist-academics, to lead a horizontal discussion entitled "It's (still) capitalism, stupid!", picking up on the themes and topics of the conversation (policing, surveillance, civil society, radical democracy, nationalism, austerity, etc), especially when it comes to social movements, how the economic situation is influencing the political situation at present, and how we as activist-academics can respond with a progressive or radical agenda that can give hope in a period of poly-crisis. We will also be discussing what it means to be an activist-academic.

Event Script:

Introductory round (names, pronouns, occupation, activism, feelings today – reveal only what comfortable with). Self-introductions only. Outline of schedule. Asked attendees if there were any particular points or issues they would like to see raised and if they would like to see something come out of the discussion.

Part One: EUI activism, past and present

What was the Colletivo Prezzemollo? (Daniela Chironi)

What was the Festival of the other Europe – It's capitalism, stupid, event? (Lorenzo Zamponi)

What is the EUI Researchers' Union? (Thomas Porsborg Sørensen, Max K. Reymann)

What is the Alternative State of the Union? (Who spoke here)

Short break

Part Two: Why is it (still) capitalism, stupid? Do you think it is (still) capitalism?

Jessica Whyte

Lorenzo Cini

Open Discussion

Part Three: What is it to be an activist-academic in the modern, neo-liberal university? Would you call yourself an activist-academic?

Eraldo Souza dos Santos

Open discussion

Conclusion: Cool-down, breathing exercises. Roundtable on feelings and positive take-aways from the session and the past few days. Roundtable on what we would have maybe liked to see discussed that we could not fit in. Roundtable on what we would like to see into the future.

Event Report: Daniela Chironi and Lorenzo Zamponi outlined how the Colletivo Prezzemolo was a part of, and a response to, the post-2011 moment (Arab Spring, Occupy, anti-Austerity, etc). Researchers away from home wanted to be an active part in the building of solidarity links between different struggles and different regions. They tried protesting the State of the Union one year, and faced significant resistance and penalisation from the institute. The next year, instead of protesting, they held a conference (Festival of the Other Europe), touching on topics prescient to the post-2011 moment.

Jessica Whyte discussed the influence of neo-liberal thinkers on contemporary conceptions of human rights, and how this in turn influenced how international NGOs operate, and how international bodies and alliances intervened in countries and regions. The neo-liberal conception of "freedom" (freedom of choice, freedom of commerce, etc), as applied through the Washington Consensus, was assumed to be a pacifying force. This is now demonstrably untrue, as global instability heightens and the ties that bind state-military-capitalism together multiply and tighten even more.

Lorenzo Cini discussed how algorithms are reshaping the exploitation of labour-power. Capitalism's tendency to lower the cost of labour through wage reduction has been amplified to the point of "super-exploitation", where workers are paid below the cost of subsistence, and increased amounts of productive labour-time is unremunerated or rendered "invisible".

Application of algorithms to work-on-demand and crowdwork business models drives, and renders more efficient, such invisibilisation. Take a work-on-demand food courier working for an online app: waiting time, travel time, unavoidable delays, and compulsory breaks is unpaid. Take a crowdwork participant (employment by subtask): time searching for work-tasks, client communications, tool and maintenance costs are not covered by the pay-by-complete-task model. The non-recognition and non-reward of invisibilised labour generates extra surplus-value is increasingly exploitative, and is depriving people of a living wage.



The discussion moved to how to build connections and collectives of experience to resist and struggle against the exploitations of capitalism. The question of collective care and self-care arose, and the need for “individual freedom of choice” for disabled people. It was pointed out that the individual and the community are not mutually exclusive and also the there is care chosen “from above”, where decisions are made for you, and care chosen “from below”, where decisions are made with you.

Eraldo Souza dos Santos presented the below list of answers to the questions, “what is it to be an activist-academic in the modern, neo-liberal university?” and “would you call yourself an activist-academic?” and elaborated upon each.

The apparent contradictions of resisting and opposing the neo-liberal university while employed and active within was discussed. Unfortunately, the conversation was interrupted by time running out and the room had to be vacated for another event.

Q: “What is it to be an activist-academic in the modern, neo-liberal university? Would you call yourself an activist-academic?”

1. If my hair gets (too) long, I am an activist.
2. You are not, you *cannot* be, rigorous enough if you are an activist, especially if you study activism (Comte: “One cannot be actor and spectator at the same time”).
3. But in many contexts, you are reduced to your identity/ies, and your research is supposed to be (mainly, only) about your identity/ies (“What is Black, what is Brazilian, what is queer... about your research agenda?”).
4. In the job market and other competitive settings, stigma prevails.
5. If you organize to improve these conditions, you contribute to such stigma.
6. You have no alternative, comrade: You have access to fewer opportunities in academia as an underrepresented scholar both if your identity and your research align and do not align.
7. When and where activism is well seen, your identity/ies must be directly related to your activism.
8. But please consider our donors (even if students love your classes)!
9. But please don’t indoctrinate our students!
10. Mentoring underrepresented students is fundamental but difficult (unpaid labor, secondary traumatization...).
11. In general, (self-)censorship is encouraged.
12. Adjuncting having all that in view.



FIASCO SOCIAL CLUB

The AltSOU Taskforce are enormously grateful to the managers of Fiasco Social Club, a community social club run by volunteers open every weeknight from 18:30 onwards for all members of the European University Institute. Without the use of this space, it would have been much more difficult to organise the AltSOU'24 and we are enormously appreciative of the support and accommodations extended to us by the Fiasco managers.

Friday 19 April 2024: 18:30-20:00 – AltSOU'24 programme launch; Eight 'till late – Karaoke and AltSOU fundraising party.

Monday 20 May 2024: 18:00-20:00 – Antifascismo in Italia roundtable discussion; Eight 'till late – AltSoU aperitivo and opening party.

Tuesday 21 May 2024: 18:00-20:00 – gathering in Fiasco Social Club before moving as a group to the Student Encampment at Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh (formerly Piazza San Marco) for an evening of action and discussion.

See the collective demands of the students and researchers of the EUI, SNS, and UniFi on the AltSOU website: <https://altsou.com/we-ask-demands-from-the-students-encampment-for-palestine-in-florence/>.

Wednesday 22 May 2024: 17:00-19:00 – Fiasco moved to the Library Garden for a Final AltSOU'24 Aperitivo with softdrinks, beers, and spritzes to aid the discussions at the participatory brainstorming session concluding the AltSOU

19:00-late – back in the cellar for a well-deserved cool-down, sharing a drink, some thoughts, and discuss possible follow-ups, and just to relax and unwind after an intense (but hopefully stimulating and fruitful!) few days!



CONCLUDING ALTSOU '24: COLLECTIVE REFLECTION & BRAIN-STORMING

17:00-19:00, Wednesday 22 May 2024, Library Garden, Badia Fiesolana

Guests:

All participants, guests, and attendees of the AltSOU'24

Event Report: First, there was a check-in on everyone's emotions and feelings after an intense few days. Then, we went through each event, reporting on what happened, what went well, what we could do to make a better panel or event in the future. We then embarked on a co-design exercise, to figure out what we, collectively, would have liked to see emerge from the AltSOU. We brainstormed to "discover" what we would have liked to see, we then brainstormed to "develop" these ideas, "define" them further, and then worked out how we might "deliver" on these ideas. The sheets we used to jot down some of the ideas that emerge are copied below.

We also brought Fiasco Social Club to the Library Garden, so we could enjoy a cool drink in the evening sun as we wrapped up the three-day conference and discussed the future.



USER-CENTRED



Archive?
ALT SOU 2015
to look for
photos or bullet points
participants

Obstacles

When? let time for
2nd edition

DISCOVER

ALT SOU '24 OUTPUT

* US - we all learned south
* EU community still
needs to be reminded
What is wrong with SOU

more that
situation
next year

reach beyond
ALT (other
universities)

Pictures? Statements?
Jobs? Summaries?
Inkl. Meeting?

Forum in introduction of
committee to lead
activities is usually done

Space for links to come
together

Goals

Connect w/ local
Univ (Uni F. @ SASO)
@Newcom @altso @high school
@Non-Academics

Bring-up introduction of EUZ
supported by EUZ
- dialogue - acknowledge
- dialogue - perform support

Touchpoints

archives
Library
HAEU
website
report

CRAZY &

Thank you
notes to all
speakers

IDEATION

Print pictures of
ALT SOU and ALT SOU
around the world with a
quote

Archive:

- FAST!
- photos & short
briefs of each
panel
- put on the website
- content gathering
(photos + short texts)
- video of the opening
ceremony put online
- long insta and twitter live

DEVELOP

ALT SOU '24 OUTPUT

ALT SOU 2025
* think about the speakers
early
* cooperate with other univ's
* involve new people in
organization

ARCHIVE

Thank Speakers

- organization
"Wordbar" should be
shared too

How might we... (overcome x problem)

- People join events -
- spend time
- Money (BLESST!)
- different funds / timings / policy
- Communication w/ public

Planning in cooperation with the Workshop schedule so that more people (in multiple parts) could join

DEFINE

ALT SOU '24 OUTPUT

So that... (Reach y goal)

- Remember lead - events

ARCHIVE
INSTITUTIONAL
MEETINGS

MOVIE

DELIVER

Event & speakers

ALT SOU '24 OUTPUT!

REPORT on SITE

END OF JUNE

ALT SOU '25

BESIDES ALTSOU´24

As previously mentioned, the *AltSOU´24* took place against the background of increasing student and researcher activism globally, as well as at EUI. During the same week the incredible Conference of the Queer and Feminist Studies Working Group titled “Intimately material: Violence, social reproduction and queerness in transition” took place.

Just a little over a week before the *AltSOU´24* Conference in May, students and researchers from the University of Florence, the Scuola Normale Superiore, and the European University Institute decided to occupy Piazza San Marco in the historical city center of Florence. Many of the *AltSOU´24* Taskforce Members, and others involved in student and researcher activism at EUI were involved in the encampment and created strong and invaluable bonds of solidarity and networks of care with students and researchers from other institutions.

Finally, student and researcher activism at EUI, has continuously advocated for grant equality among researchers, employment status and equal benefits, and finally, the abolition of the SOU. The protest actions during the State of the Union 2024 must be understood within this broader context.

CONFERENCE BY QUEER & FEMINIST STUDIES WG INTIMATELY MATERIAL : VIOLENCE, SOCIAL REPRODUCTION AND QUEERNESS IN TRANSITION

20-21 May 2024, Badia Fiesolana

Simultaneously with the *AltSOU24*, the EUI Queer and Feminist Studies Working Group (Q&FSWG) hosted the conference: *Intimately Material: violence, social reproduction, and queerness in transition* (20-21 May 2024). The Q&FSWG and the *AltSOU* Taskforce decided to co-host the event “Intimately Material: collective reflection on the material conditions of academia” in acknowledgement of our shared and intersecting causes and concerns, and in solidarity as researcher-organised (un)conferences at the EUI.

The abstract of the conference:

While the end of the 20th century saw a resurgence of socialist politics in developing countries, especially in Latin America, other global events told a different story. The collapse of the socialist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe, the war in Yugoslavia, and the transition of China’s socialist-oriented economy to one with strong capitalist characteristics challenged the continued relevance and viability of Marxist thought.

Simultaneously, the rise of neoliberal identity politics in Europe and the US has turned the economic and symbolic oppression of LGBTQ+ people, women, migrants, and people of colour into free-standing and self-contained cultural matters.

In the 21st century, this transformation has extended beyond the US and Western Europe. It has obscured that various forms of oppression are intimately tied to political and economic processes that shape people's lives. Furthermore, it turned said forms of oppression into tools for political gain, exacerbating global inequalities and reinforcing a neoliberalist hegemony.

The programme is available [here](https://gender.eui.eu/conference-intimately-material-20-21-may-2024-programme/):



<https://gender.eui.eu/conference-intimately-material-20-21-may-2024-programme/>

PIAZZA SHIREEN ABU AKLEH

On the 15th of May 2024 in Florence on the anniversary of the Nakba, students, researchers, and workers from the European University Institute, the University of Florence, and the Scuola Normale Superiore launched the encampment for Palestine in Piazza San Marco, renaming it Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh, in living memory of the American-Palestinian Journalist killed in the Occupied Palestinian Territories by the IDF.

This action is part of a transnational and intersectional movement led by students and we are incredibly proud of the fact that it came about as an inter-university cooperation.



"History is the diaries of weapons, written on our dead bodies."

**Don't Write History as Poetry
-Mahmoud Darwish**

Shireen Abu Akleh was a Palestinian-American journalist who worked for 25 years as a reporter for Al Jazeera before she was shot dead on 11 May 2022 by Israeli Defence Forces while wearing a blue press vest and covering a raid on the Jenin refugee camp in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.



THE FOUR DEMANDS

We, EUI Researchers, together with Students & Researchers from the University of Florence (UniFi) & the Scuola Normale Superiore (SNS), sent these demands to our Institutions on the 15th of May.

STOP GENOCIDE, OCCUPATION & APARTHEID

We demand a public statement from EUI, which calls for a ceasefire and a stop to the ongoing invasion of Rafah, the genocide in Gaza, the occupation of Palestine, and the apartheid regime of Israel!

STOP SCHOLASTICIDE: SUPPORT SCHOOLS & UNIS IN GAZA

There are no more universities in Gaza - students of all ages and displaced scholars need the support of our universities' infrastructure and funding. Florence must become and open city to host and support education and research in gaza in any way possible.

BOYCOTT, DIVEST & SANCTION

Our Universities must disclose their assets and ties with any organization complicit in genocide and subsequently pause or terminate such relationships through a transparent and participatory process.

PROTECT ACADEMIC FREEDOM & THE RIGHT TO PROTEST.

ANTI-ZIONISM ≠ ANTI- SEMITISM

We demand that the EUI enacts policies to protect the rights of Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and pro-Palestinian students and researchers to research on, and make legitimate protests in support of, Palestine. Criticism of the state of Israel and the nationalist project of zionism must not be silenced by false accusations of anti-semitism.



DEMANDS LETTER TO EUI GOVERNANCE BY THE MEMBERS OF THE EUI COMMUNITY GATHERED IN PIAZZA SHIREEN ABU AKLEH (FORMERLY PIAZZA SAN MARCO)

Dear EUI Governance,

We are EUI researchers joined together with students from the various Universities of Florence. The genocide of the Palestinian people continues still today as Israel invades Rafah, the last safe the last safe refuge for over one million and a half people.

In light of this catastrophe, we must act. Inspired by the student encampments launched across American universities the past week, and in solidarity with all students who have been occupying their universities in other cities across Italy, we are encamped in Piazza San Marco, renamed Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh, because of the urgency of the situation in Rafah. We will stay encamped until each of our respective universities (EUI, UniFi & SNS) address our joint demands.

This letter is addressed directly on behalf of the wider EUI Community, through the EUI Researchers' Union & Working Group on Palestine, to the entirety of the EUI Governance. In April 2024, we had already communicated a Petition For an Inclusive & Anti-Apartheid EUI to you, having received over 200 signatures from within our community, which has not yet received any official acknowledgement or response. We know that the Executive Committee created a task force to include Palestinian Scholars at Risk, but there has been no transparency as to the progress of this work. On May 15th, the Academic Council released a statement finally calling for a ceasefire, which we welcome, but we are embarrassed that the EUI still cannot refer with specificity to the ongoing invasion of Rafah, the genocide in Gaza, the occupation of Palestine, and the apartheid regime of Israel.

In light of this context, we are writing this letter because we demand more action, more quickly and more transparently. We are advancing three basic requests:

- 1. The creation of a dedicated task force, composed of professors & other representatives of the academic community, and committed to negotiating the following four demands presented in this document in detail; in a clear timeframe; with tangible and actionable outcomes.**
- 2. The creation of a position within the EUI administration dedicated to investigating its assets, agreements and relationships, to ensure that EUI is fully informed in complying with the BDS movement in full, and to then disclose the findings publicly to the aforementioned task force and to the wider EUI community.**



3. That the updated work of the aforementioned points is periodically shared with the EUI community with full transparency, even if still in progress, so we can know that the demands stated in this letter are being acknowledged and responded to.

From:

the EUI Researchers, together with the Students of the Florence Universities
Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh - May 15th, 2024.

Appendix 1

Please find below our four demands in more detail:

1) Silence is complicity: stop genocide, occupation & apartheid!

We demand a public statement from the academic senates and councils of each of our respective universities which recognise and call for a ceasefire, and an end to Israel's invasion of Rafah, as well as to genocide, occupation and apartheid - which are the underlying infrastructures on which the ongoing invasion of Rafah is based: without the dismantlement of this legal bureaucratic inequality, the long-lasting peace and right to self-determination of the Palestinian people cannot be ensured. These statements by our universities must be unequivocal and specific: it cannot simply refer to a 'humanitarian crisis in the Middle East', but rather make narrow mention of Palestine, Gaza and Rafah.

In the context of the humanitarian emergency imposed on Palestinians, especially in Gaza, the call for an immediate ceasefire and end to the genocide, occupation and apartheid is urgent. As state institutions, universities have a public duty to clearly position themselves against anyone committing or aiding in war crimes or crimes against humanity, genocide, apartheid, as well as the context of illegal settlements.

The Palestinians' human rights and internationally recognized right to return must be upheld. Anybody experiencing direct physical harm and/or psychological trauma has a legitimate right to resist the perpetrator/s.

Access to basic needs must be provided at all costs, for example, infrastructure for food, medical care, hygiene, drinking water, energy supplies, and shelter, as has been called for by the UNRWA. Being universities of Florence, we have a responsibility to hold the Italian government to account to support the UNRWA and other humanitarian aid, as well as to cease its own relationships with organisations complicit in the ongoing genocide.

2) Boycott, Divest, Sanction: stop the arms trade with Israel and all military exploitation of academic research!

Our Florentine universities, each in their respective relationships, must disclose their assets, divest from, and cut ties with any organisation complicit in genocide. All political and economic means available must be utilized to end the apartheid, genocide and occupation. Our universities should be especially concerned in investigating that their research and funding does not fall complicit to dual use for military purpose.

The European University Institute can comply with BDS by:

Creating a position within the EUI administration dedicated to investigating its assets, agreements and relationships, to ensure that EUI is fully informed in complying with the BDS movement in full, and to then disclose the findings publicly to the aforementioned task force and to the wider EUI community;

Investigating into & transparently disclosing its assets and relationships and hiring practices, including direct and indirect investments, donations and grants (e.g. for research exchanges, teaching opportunities and staff positions, existing scholarships and partnerships with events such as the State of the Union);

Boycott of the Horizon Europe EU research fund, of which 1/5 is granted towards Israeli academic institutions used in research in the security and defense industries for the development of weapons, including drones used in Gaza and Pegasus surveillance spyware. The EU-Israel Association Agreement should be suspended in the face of Israel's genocide;

Boycott the ECPR Council until it releases a statement condemning Israel's killings of civilians in Palestine, both in Gaza and the West Bank, and demanding an immediate ceasefire, similar to those issued in light of the previous violations of human rights on behalf of academics in Europe and beyond;

Investigate into how the European Journal of International Law, hosted by EUI, was able to organise a symposium with the Israeli Defense Forces, and thus providing a legitimating platform to an occupying military force implicated in violation of international law;

Boycott Meta Platforms and Microsoft Corporation by stopping their partnerships in events and funding organized at EUI, like the State of the Union conference happening between 23-25 May 2024, as well as the Academic Scholarships Programme on Innovation Research & Expertise (ASPIRE). Meta Platforms is censoring the pro-Palestinian content on their platforms, while Microsoft Corporation is participating in development of surveillance services used for the oppression of Palestine people, such as border control software, provision of cloud services and military software, AI, programming, computing courses for IDF soldiers, supporting services for the illegal settlements in occupied Palestine;

g) Boycott Bertelsmann, another partner of the EUI's State of the Union (2024), who has stated that they condemn the Hamas attacks and anti-semitism in Germany, without also condemning the invasion of Rafah and the ongoing genocide perpetrated by Israel; as well as repressing people's right to protest by further conflating anti-semitism and anti-Zionism. Further, Bertelsmann has declared the unwavering support for the State of Israel through funds, investments and public statements.



3) Stop scholasticide: support schools & universities in Gaza!

There are no more universities or schools in Gaza: students of all ages and displaced scholars need the support of our universities' infrastructure and funding. Florence must become an open city to host and support education and research in Gaza in any way possible.

Palestinian universities and schools have been destroyed, preventing thousands of young Palestinians from enjoying the basic right to education; universities must do their utmost to support programs that accommodate students, researchers and displaced scholars under conditions of danger and discrimination, such as Scholars at Risk, and take other concrete actions that support the continuation of education and research activities in Palestine. Universities in Florence could provide zoom links and digital resources, physical spaces of their campuses, access to their libraries and services, funding etc.

Each university's 'scholars at risk' initiatives must be issued through a public call, and make a concerted effort to include, support & fund Palestinian scholars to undertake research and study programmes across the board (e.g. Traineeships / Bachelor's / Masters / PhD / Postdoc / Fellowships / Staff positions / administrative positions). Scholars at risk programmes must also reflect on logistical questions and obstacles such as visas, costs, residency permits, health care, supporting families - and also ensure that this funding is granted to those most in need through a transparent application process, ideally including Palestinian perspectives and that of our respective groups working around Palestine.

Finally, there are Palestinians already in Florence who could use our support, access to our programmes, campuses, services, and more financial aid - as well as help in navigating their own logistical obstacles such as residency rights and health care.

4) Protect academic freedom & the right to protest: anti-zionism ≠ anti-semitism!

We demand our universities enact policies to protect the rights of Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and pro-Palestinian students to research on, and make legitimate protests in support of, Palestine and against the occupation, genocide and apartheid - as well as critiques of the Israeli state.

Our universities should adopt an anti-Zionist definition of antisemitism, inspired by others such as the Jerusalem Declaration definition on antisemitism, which builds on the IHRA definition, but clarifies that the critique of Israel is not per se antisemitic.

The Jerusalem Declaration is however imperfect - it has been critiqued as 'orientalist', and does not address the core problem of the IHRA definition: the silencing and erasure of Palestine and Palestinians. A definition of antisemitism is important to distinguish between actual cases of antisemitism and instances when accusations of antisemitism are instrumentalised and levied against those working on Palestine.

This definition is a matter of Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity, and should be drafted by each respective university community in a diverse participatory manner, which speaks to

the intersectional identity and power dynamics which play into who can speak on Palestine, without facing arbitrary accusations of antisemitism or repercussions to their jobs, positions, or reputations.

Expressing criticism against the state of Israel or against Zionism do not constitute anti-Semitism; institutional definitions of anti-Semitism must be changed so that they cannot be used to censor and punish those who bring criticism to the state of Israel and Zionism as a settler-colonial project; universities must protect the academic freedom of their researchers, as well as the right of all of their members - staff, admin and students alike - to express their opinions, to assemble, to demonstrate and to protest. This is all the more important in the context of increasing police violence being used across Italian cities and beyond to censor and attack peaceful protests in solidarity with Gaza.

We, the students and scholars of the joint universities of Florence, stand together on the anniversary of the Nakba at our encampment in Piazza San Marco, renamed Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh, until these demands are not only heard by each of our universities' academic senates and councils, but until we are assured that action will be concretely taken to translate these demands into tangible and meaningful policies and effects.

Appendix 2:

As an appendix, we end by stating our firm support for the Giovani Palestinesi Italia (GPI) in their demands:

1) To Italian universities, through and in the context of the CRUI, to denounce the Israeli military aggression on the population of the Gaza Strip as well as express solidarity with the Palestinian population by providing assistance with all possible means to support the university communities and all those affected;

2) To Italian universities, through the CRUI, the immediate termination of all university agreements with universities and companies located in Israel and the total boycott of the Israeli academic system, strong arm of the colonial occupation apparatus and fundamental basis of support for the political-political complex Israeli military in the Occupied Palestinian Territories;

3) To the Italian Government, through the MUR, the immediate termination of the Cooperation Agreement in the field of Industrial, Scientific and Technological Research and Development between the Government of the Italian Republic and the Government of the State of Israel of 2000, so that it is limited to the minimum the complicity of the Italian.



PROTEST AT THE SOU 24 MAY 2024

On Friday 24 May 2024, a group of mostly EUI researchers made their way from the encampment at Piazza Shireen Abu Akleh to Piazza della Signoria, right hands painted red, bearing Palestinian flags and pro-Palestinian banners and posters, to protest the complicity of the SOU in the ongoing alleged genocide (as being legally tested at time of writing in international courts) in Gaza. There they staged a “die-in”. Rising with a shout of “Free Palestine”, they made their way back to camp, covering their mouths with red-painted hands, and chanting slogans and demands once they departed.

Shortly afterwards, three activists from the camp interrupted an SOU event inside the Palazzo Vecchio, reading out a statement and a poem before being escorted out of the building by EUI security.



Statement: I am a Palestinian-European

I am a Palestinian-European.

You all must realise that the movement supporting Palestine is greater than you here organising this shameful State of the Union.

While you are talking about Europe: we are here to remind you that Palestine and its entire population are severely suffering and have been for decades.

The state of this union is one of genocide, silence, ignorance, and complicity in the mass murder of civilians. The European Union is supporting Israel in its crimes against humanity and its genocide against my people.

The State of the Union conference is funded by companies complicit in occupation (Meta, Microsoft, Bertelsmann, etc). Shame on them. None of this is more important than the lives at stake: the Gazans and Palestinians are more important than showy, superficial meetings.

HOLD ONTO YOUR HUMANITY!

Join the collective for the defence of the oppressed.

White flag turned red (Siobhán and Eoghan 22 May 2024)

Flag of peace, not of surrender,
Flag of ceasefire, flag of hope.
Flag of future. Cut down.
White flag turned red.

She was fleeing, with her grandson,
White flag clasped in desperate hand.
Shot. Both. Hands embracing.
White flag turned red.

Clouds of dark smoke, rising, billowing.
Five men emerge, hands in the air.
Shots fire. Five men fall.
White flag turned red.

Clutching her toddler, mother clambering,
Amid dead bodies, white flag aloft.
Israeli soldiers, bullets firing.
White flag turned red.

Tanks firing, shells exploding.
White flag emerging from the ruins.
Destruction relentless, tanks keep rolling.
White flag turned red.

Child running, fleeing from soldiers,
White flag dragging on the ground.
Father watching, soldiers oncoming.
White flag turned red.

One hundred deaths – one hundred murders
Under the white flag – flag of peace.
When white flags cannot save you:
White flags turn red.

White dove takes off, flying higher,
Heading for the clear blue sky.
Shots fire. Bird is falling.
White dove turned red.



EUIRU PROTEST: “ABOLISH THE SOU”

On Thursday 23 May 2024 at 13:30, the EUI Researchers’ Union staged a protest in the lower cloister and the lower loggia of the Badia Fiesolana at the EUI. There were two demands:

1. Abolish the SOU
2. The EUI shall instead give its full support for a bottom-up, researcher- and staff-led, conference

The protest was also in support of Palestine, the Union releasing the following statement to its members in advance of the protest:

We demand that the EUI abolishes, or withdraws from, the State of the Union and that the EUI fully supports the organisation of an annual bottom-up researcher-and-staff led (un)conference. The State of the Union takes place in our working spaces and has already put colleagues at risk. It is an opaque top-down event funded by Meta Platforms, which censors pro-Palestinian voices, Microsoft Corporation and Bertelsmann which actively support Israel Defence Forces (IDF). It also provides a platform to their representatives, such as Rima Alaily, Microsoft’s Corporate Vice President and Deputy General Counsel, Marco Pancini, Meta’s Head of EU Affairs, and Daniela Schwarzer, Member of the Executive Board of Bertelsmann Stiftung.



In contrast, the AltSoU is a bottom-up conference which brought together, this year, more than 200 persons and 30 speakers.

Statements were read and speeches given.

Chants regarding the occupations of Palestinian West Bank and the permanent siege of Palestinian Gaza were shouted, including:

**“From Fiesole to Palestine,
occupation is a crime”**

**“From the river to the sea, Palestine
will be free”**

“Free, free, Palestine!”

Chants and slogans regarding the SOU and the EUI were also shouted, including:

“Abolish the SOU!”

“Security, police, and ID controls: this is not a conference but a big joke”

“Migrants welcome, cops go away, this is our campus, we don’t want you to stay”

“Equal Job Equal Pay”



ALTSOU ´ 24 TRACES

The AltSOU24 Taskforce are looking to cement the legacy of the 2024 Alternative State of the Union through gathering the quotes, thoughts, daydreams, impressions, doodles, designs, and comments of people who participated and engaged in and with the unconference.

If you are interested in helping us compile and share the intellectual and material traces of the AltSOU, perhaps by drafting a blog post or article, please let us know!

This is only the beginning! Critical minds and radical futures will remain and grow! Email us your notes, doodles, drawings, and designs (info@altsou.com) or message us with the hashtag #AltSOUtraces on Twitter/X @altSoU_ or on Instagram @altsou.unconference.





What are the practical challenges that Mediterranean faces in rescue missions now? Were they different before the EU government?

WHAT ARE THE FOUNDATIONS OF BORDER VIOLENCE AND EUROPEAN STATES? E.G. SOCIOLOGY/HIS

HOW ARE MISSIONS IN THE MED. SEA AND COOPERATIVE OCCASION BETWEEN DIFF. INT. ASSOCIATIONS?

HOW HAS THE HUMANITARIAN DISCOURSE (IN THE CONTEXT OF DISPLACEMENT / BORDER CONTROL) BEEN AFFECTED BY EITHER MORE "INTEGRATED APPROACHES", WHILE HUMANITARIANISM IS INSERTED INTO DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY DISCOURSES?

TO BEPPE: How has your own professionalism impacted your work both as a manager and as a political activist?

TO BEPPE: DID YOU NOTICE CHANGES / TRENDS IN THE PUBLIC OPINION AND PUBLIC ATTITUDE ON BORDERS & BORDER CONTROL?



"This is my first time in such a concentrated space of Pro-Palestinian academic intellectuals, students, professors, and amazing people. It was absolutely amazing to hear so many perspectives, studies, and reports from so many people all talking about the same topic but from so many angles and while it was very specific and full and detailed, it was not too difficult to remain and follow everything that was said due to the quality and clarity of the talented speakers and as well as the well organised space and time dedicated to the Q&As"

"The success of this unconference shows the strength of collective work!"

"I commend you all, you inspire me and the world, you beautiful revolutionaries!"

"This is the first time I felt part of a community @ EUI. Thank you for this!"

How do you feel?

"I feel hope for this world"

"Amazed... that this is happening... and at the EUI?!"

"Grateful we need more spaces like this to vent about the EU."

"I feel grateful and very happy that this is happening. Great job!"

"Inspired and optimistic about the future of the EUI. Thanks for sharing the space with such amazing colleagues"

"Inspired for material change & collective Resistance"

"We are conditioned to think that colonialism is a phenomenon of past, but colonialism is still on nowadays"

"I liked the question format of the first Tuesday session. Great to see academics and activists in conversation"

What should EUI do?

“EUI should comply with the encampment’s demands!”

“The EUI seems determined to delay, neglect, and outsource crises...”

“Less events about the EU”

What is missing?

“Maybe more time to take breaks and refresh our brains for discussion”

“Great session - I really liked the concept but some speakers didn’t have a chance to speak”

“Time!”

“Join efforts with local unis! It was lovely to see them @ the opening ceremony”

“invite Latin American scholars”

“Do this more often please”





Alternative State of the Union
20, 21, 22 May 2024
Florence and online