

New DiSP ECR Series

A.Y. 2026-2027 | Semester I

The new ECR Seminars are held regularly in both semesters, and they provide a forum for the presentation of work in progress, be it by members of the PhD community, Postdoctoral fellows, or invited speakers, as well as an opportunity to discuss academic and administrative matters of mutual concern.

Thursday 15 October 2026, 12:30 – 14:00 | Room S02, basement of the Luiss Residence, Via Lisbona, 5

Nicolas Soto, PhD Candidate

“Political Finance Transparency in Europe: Assessing Cross-National Variation in Legal Frameworks and Practices”

Abstract: While the literature has identified key determinants shaping the adoption of political finance regulatory frameworks, it has paid little attention to variation in their de facto implementation, or to the relationship between the two. This work introduces an original dataset measuring political finance transparency across 39 countries —the EU-27, accession states, and neighbouring countries— and uses it to describe legal commitments and their actual implementation, to test hypotheses on legal reform, and to model cross-national variation in de facto transparency. The results confirm the role of historical background and political traditions in explaining regulatory comprehensiveness and show a robust association between regulatory comprehensiveness and digital disclosure practices. Substantial variation in de facto transparency at comparable levels of legal stringency, however, points to a more nuanced relationship between law and practice. Case analysis of six countries suggests administrative fragmentation, weak oversight-body independence, and insufficient monitoring capacity hinder the translation of rules into transparency.

Mark Andreas Felix, PhD Candidate

“Climate Dependency; or: the Construction of Climate Oppression and Domination”

Abstract: This paper demonstrates the existence of “climate dependency”, a structural process inherent to anthropogenic climate change that systematically renders agents and groups of agents dependent on others for the fulfilment of their central needs. Climate dependency emerges from the interaction between climate impact processes and structures belonging to other structural systems such as capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. I argue that the specific characteristics of climate dependency inherently carry the threat of various forms of structural oppression and domination, and as such is properly classified as a structural climate injustice. It holds these characteristics qua being a form of unjust structural dependency, a concept the paper retrieves and systematises from the feminist and disability literature. The paper demonstrates the practical and analytical relevancy of the concept of climate dependency for the analysis of power and subordination within climate change by applying it to two cases: the Falepili-Union Treaty between Tuvalu and Australia, and the Iñupiat’s efforts to adapt to climate change.

Thursday 29 October 2026, 12:30 – 14:00 | Room S02, basement of the Luiss Residence, Via Lisbona, 5

Guest lecture: Simone Tholens, John Cabot University & European University Institute

"Liminality in global security: Consultants and contractors as informal brokers"

Abstract: International relations scholarship has long struggled to capture the informal practices that structure global security politics. This paper argues that informality operates through a distinctive modality of strategic intimacy, enacted under conditions of liminality - a simultaneous inside/outside, public/private, and visible/invisible positioning that renders such actors difficult to classify within conventional analytical categories. Drawing on the concept of liminality from anthropology and social theory, the paper develops a framework for understanding how informal brokers navigate structural ambiguity to exert political influence. The paper focuses empirically on consultancies and contractors in Western stabilization programs, as well as the use of informal peace mediators, examining how these actors operate in the interstices of formal institutional structures and local contexts. By theorizing informality not as residual or exceptional, but as a patterned field of practice structured along three recurring boundaries (public/private, inside/outside, visible/invisible), the paper demonstrates how consultants and contractors have become quintessential global actors precisely because of their capacity to move seamlessly between established analytical categories while remaining epistemically opaque. The analysis reveals how strategic intimacy functions as both a mechanism of authority and a source of persistent accountability gaps in global security governance, challenging disciplinary assumptions about the distinction between formal and informal spheres.

Thursday 5 November 2026, 12:30 – 14:00 | Room S02, basement of the Luiss Residence, Via Lisbona, 5

Puck Overhaart, Visiting PhD Candidate (Radboud University Nijmegen)

"The Guardian that Guides? Commission-Member State Interactions in the Implementation and Enforcement of EU Migration and Asylum Law"

Abstract: The constraining dissensus that has emerged from the ongoing politicisation of the EU has led to growing contestation of the norms underlying European integration and cooperation. Challenging both compliance and enforcement, member states are more eager to question, contest, or reject supranational involvement in their domestic affairs. Responding to this development, the European Commission has put more emphasis on the diplomatic and informal handling of non-compliance in its exercise of its role as 'guardian of the treaties'. Additionally, more attention is paid to prevention, in the form of close collaboration with member states in the implementation of EU legislation into national law. From a constructivist perspective, and using document analysis and semi-structured interviews with both Commission and member state officials, I aim to unpack and understand the informal day-to-day implementation work of the Commission. In doing so, I focus on how the Commission's role as 'guardian of the treaties' is constructed and put into practice in the implementation of arguably one of the EU's most politicised policies: the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Jair Santos, Postdoctoral Research Fellow

“Politics and religion in Brazil: a historical perspective”

Abstract: Unlike many Western societies, where secularization has weakened the public role of religion, religion continues to play a significant role in Brazilian social and political life. This conference will examine the relationship between religion and politics in Brazil through three historical moments: the establishment of the Republic in 1889; the nationalist dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas in the 1930s; and the period of redemocratization following the military dictatorship of 1964-1985. By comparing these periods, the conference will show how religious ideas, institutions, and actors have interacted with political power, shaped political identities and choices, and adapted to changing political regimes. It will seek to identify both continuities and transformations in the role of religion within Brazilian public life, highlighting its enduring significance in the country's history.

Maximilian Kunte, PhD Candidate

“Eastern Slavic Orthodox Identity and Church Division in Germany”

Abstract: Research on the Eastern Slavic Orthodox diaspora has focused on the Russian Orthodox Church to the detriment of wider diaspora. The war in Ukraine has rendered this monolithic view of the Eastern Slavic Orthodox diaspora untenable. The expanding Ukrainian Orthodox diaspora, the rupture between the Russian and Ukrainian Churches, and increased contact between Churches outside their canonical territory warrant further research. This study investigates the broader Eastern Slavic Orthodox diaspora in Germany through ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Ukrainian Orthodox, Orthodox Ukrainian, and Russian Orthodox Churches and communities. This approach addresses the following research question: how are the ecclesiastical divisions within the Eastern Slavic Orthodox tradition reflected in the lived religion of Eastern Slavic Orthodox believers in Germany? The goal of this research project is to identify the differences in the Eastern Slavic Orthodox tradition, the roots of these differences, and create an ethnographic profile of the new Eastern Slavic Orthodox diaspora in Germany, which includes the new Ukrainian Orthodox population. In an era in which church allegiance has been overtly politicised this research offers a ground-level account of how ordinary believers navigate, resist, and reproduce these divisions in their daily religious lives.

Thursday 12 November 2026, 12:30 – 14:00 | Room S02, basement of the Luiss Residence, Via Lisbona, 5

Ludovica Marciano, PhD Candidate

“Political Culture, Territorial Inequalities, and Policy Choices: A Comparative Study of Governing Elites in Italy and Spain”

Abstract: Analysing the political culture that underlies policy choices helps to clarify the process by which politics leads to policies. This project investigates how elite political culture, rooted in distinct territorial and historical trajectories, shapes policy choices concerning territorial inequality, focusing on Italy and Spain since the 2008 financial crisis. Despite facing similar structural pressures, the two countries have pursued different policy trajectories in addressing inequality. This project argues that the divergence cannot be fully explained by economic or institutional factors alone: it is also shaped by the distinct political cultures of national and territorial elites, which mediate how territorial

inequality is politically framed, legitimised, and contested. The project adopts a mixed-methods, elite-focused, discursive-institutionalist design. A quantitative phase provides a contextual baseline of regional inequality and growth indicators using Eurostat and OECD data. A qualitative phase then focuses on critical policy junctures in each country where territorial inequality was explicitly contested, combining discourse analysis of policy documents and parliamentary debates with semi-structured elite interviews. Interviews serve as a process-tracing tool to reconstruct the causal link between elite political culture and policy choices. By shifting the study of political culture from mass attitudes to elite decision-making, the project contributes an original theoretical framework to comparative politics and territorial politics research.

Jasmin Hagemann, PhD Candidate

“Does Psychology Underlie Political Belief System Endorsement? Systematic Investigation of Ideological Asymmetries Across Contexts”

Abstract: Contemporary models of political ideology often emphasize individual-level, needs-based explanations for why citizens align with the political left or right. However, recent critiques have questioned both the empirical robustness and causal interpretation of broad ideological asymmetry claims. This dissertation develops a context-embedded framework of ideological asymmetries that asks which psychological orientations reliably distinguish left from right, how robust these differences are, and under what conditions they become politically consequential. Rather than centering abstract motivational needs, it focuses on dispositions toward hierarchy, authority, and system legitimacy as proximate drivers of ideological alignment. Study 1 uses data from the Psychology of Political Behavior Studies (PPBS), comprising 28,166 U.S. respondents across multiple election cycles and a forthcoming cross-national sample spanning ten countries (approximately 1,100 respondents per country). It establishes baseline ideological asymmetries for theoretically central constructs, maps a high-dimensional psychological profile to identify the strongest and most robust correlates of ideology, evaluates cross-national generalizability and contextual scope conditions, and disaggregates key constructs into facets to improve construct validity. Study 2 employs a randomized information-treatment experiment to test whether ethnocultural, economic, and technological threat frames strengthen the ideological relevance of pre-existing dispositions. Together, the studies clarify when psychological differences become politically structuring across diverse political contexts.

Thursday 19 November 2026, 12:30 – 14:00 | Room S02, basement of the Luiss Residence, Via Lisbona, 5

Fiammetta Sacconi, PhD Candidate

“Solidarity with Future Persons: Reassessing Reciprocity in Light of the Intergenerational Challenge”

Abstract: References about future generations abound in public discourse, reflecting growing concerns about the long-term consequences of present choices. Such debates are commonly framed in terms of intergenerational justice and call for treating future generations' needs and interests as normative constraints on present decision-making, with the aim of ensuring that

present actions do not harm – if they do not benefit – the future. But how can we justify these constraints? And what are their normative basis? To answer these questions, I rely on a conception of justice as reciprocity, while addressing its structural limitations, especially the ‘non-reciprocity problem’. The latter arises because the conditions under which reciprocity motivates present agents to accept constraints on their own advantage are absent in the intergenerational context. Thus, I argue that ‘solidarity with future persons’ better describes present agents’ dispositions to accept future-oriented constraints for the sake of sustaining a system of fair social cooperation regulated by reciprocity. Rather than defending reciprocity against the non-reciprocity challenge, or abandoning it altogether, the project seeks to integrate justice as reciprocity with an account of solidarity that remains faithful to the core commitments of reciprocity while addressing its intergenerational limitations.

Sara Arezes, PhD Candidate

“(Re)Imagining the European Federation: A Congruence Analysis of Europarty Principles and Federal(ist) Governance Alternatives”

Abstract: Though theoretically ill-suited for ‘coming-together’ unions, the German federal state has become the archetype for the future of European integration. Indeed, the active advocacy for parliamentary federalism - rooted in a fusion of powers - is understood as an intuitive route for MEPs, seeking their institution’s empowerment. This study interrogates such preference by analysing the ideational fit between two competing models of governance - the fusion of powers versus the separation of powers - and the normative foundations of Europarties. Methodologically, it utilizes Congruence Analysis. First, using Fabbrini’s (2025) framework, the project looks at the dimensions of sovereignty-management, democratic legitimacy and accountability in both models. Based on these dimensions, a Deductive Thematic Analysis is conducted on Europarty primary documents and position-takings in the European Parliament to extract their core principles. Third, a Compatibility Mapping evaluates the congruence between these Europarty principles and the governance models. Following the theoretical phase, the final stage deploys scenario-based, semi-structured interviews with members of the Spinelli Group. By confronting these actors with the concrete trade-offs inherent to each institutional design, this research evaluates whether MEPs stick to transnational party coherence (acquired via socialization and consolidated through path dependency), retreat to defending national interests (in a rational-choice reflex) or exhibit cognitive dissonance. Crucially, the interaction between Europarty affiliation and Member-State-specific variables will be tested – namely population size, economic performance, historically challenged sovereignty and distinctive cultural features, building upon Fabbrini (2025). This research revives the substantive discussion on alternative modes of federal(ist) governance and contributes to the study of MEP behaviour in scenarios of irreversible reform, when party orientation clashes with national interests.

Thursday 10 December 2026, 12:30 – 14:00 | Room S02, basement of the Luiss Residence, Via Lisbona, 5

Sara de Martino, PhD Candidate

“More than politics: the gendered fate of Eva Perón’s corpse”

Abstract: In 1955, shortly after the military coup in Argentina, the body of Eva Perón was stolen and hidden in Italy for nearly two decades in an attempt to erase her political legacy. As this post-mortem odyssey has traditionally been examined as a strictly political strategy, the project aims to reinterpret this historical episode as a phenomenon in which political repression and gender control are intertwined. Indeed, if the theft and concealment have traditionally been interpreted as symbolic acts aimed at “de-Peronizing” Argentina, this study proposes a reinterpretation of the story, focusing on her gender dimension, questioning the extent to which the decision to hide Evita’s body was also motivated by this aspect. The research project argues that the concealment of the corpse aimed not only to erase an emblem of Peronism, but also to neutralize a form of female power perceived as deeply destabilizing in a context marked by machismo. Based on a multidisciplinary approach, bridging political science, history and gender studies, the research wants to fill a gap by inserting the case of Eva Perón into the debate on corporeality, political memory, and the posthumous power of women in contemporary history.

Benedetto Matricini, PhD Candidate

“The Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges: Anarchist Rituals, Utopia and Praxis in Italy”

Abstract: In the 1970s and 1980s, sociologists formulated hyper-rationalistic theories to purify social movements of their stigmatic association with irrationalism. Consequently, cognition and emotion were initially neglected or, at best, viewed with great suspicion. The “cultural turn” in social movement theory has partially rectified this tendency by viewing social movements as knowledge producers that challenge dominant cultural codes. Nonetheless, tensions persist between the ideological foundations that provide social movements with a source of collective identity and the instrumental framing of particular social issues that are relevant in a certain moment. Drawing from microsociology and social and cultural anthropology, this project addresses these tensions by analyzing symbolic artifacts and cultural products as incubators of broader, more stable structures of meaning that are deployed and emotionally charged during ephemeral moments of political action. The Italian anarchist movement represents a particularly suitable case study for this purpose. On the one hand, its resurgence, despite its organizational characteristics and limited political opportunities, defies the underlying assumptions of the resource mobilization and political process traditions. On the other hand, its reliance on recognizable symbols and repertoires of contention enables a closer inspection of knowledge production as a distinctive site of contestation that produces lasting social and emotional bonds.