

## CONFERENCES AND REPORTS

“EUROPEAN LAW UNBOUND – WHAT KIND  
OF EUROPE CAN WE REACH FOR?”

ELU-S Inaugural Conference, Faculty of Law, Charles University,  
Prague, 25-27 September 2025

The newly founded **European Law Unbound Society (ELU-S)** held its inaugural annual conference at the Faculty of Law of Charles University in Prague from 25 to 27 September 2025. Conceived as a welcoming agora for European law in Europe, the meeting joined scholars and practitioners across generations and methods. The programme’s design made the Society’s ethos visible from the outset. It favoured plural conversations, gave room to doctrinal craft as well as critical inquiry, and treated European law as a set of shared problems rather than separate silos. Registrations exceeded seven hundred and the rooms filled quickly, yet the tone remained collegial and focused.

The conference opened on Thursday with welcome remarks at the Law Faculty by distinguished guests. Former European Commissioner and now Vice-rector of Charles University **Věra Jourová** delivered the keynote on the rule of law as a value to be promoted and protected in the Union. Her argument set the frame for a meeting that would test both ideals and institutions. **Martin Dvořák**, Minister for European Affairs of the Czech Republic, then welcomed the audience on behalf of the host country. The afternoon carried the discussion forward through the first major debate, chaired by **Jan Komárek**, on democracy and the rule of law in Europe and on the kind of legal architecture that can sustain both. **Thu Nguyen**, Advocate General **Maciej Szpunar**, **Antoine Vauchez** and **Joseph H. H. Weiler** confronted the practical tension between maintaining democratic legitimacy and keeping the Union governable in a period of permanent stress.

A hallmark of the programme was the way plenaries conversed with hands-on formats. On the first day, Joseph H. H. Weiler and **Tamara Čapeta** led a packed workshop on teaching EU law. Rather than revisiting a curriculum by checklist, the session asked what must be taught to keep analytical depth in an era of platforms and rapid legal change. It suggested ways to combine doctrinal mastery with comparison, digital materials and problem-based learning so that students encounter European law as a living technique. Friday began with a breakfast roundtable on new journals, blogs and venues, chaired by **Joanna Mendes** with **Daniel Sarmiento**, **Dimitri Spieker**, **Klaas Eller** and **Harm Schepel**. The conversation moved beyond publicity to the infrastructure of scholarship: how pre-print culture, collaborative blogs and open-access models are altering peer review, timeliness and the public reach of legal argument.

Friday’s second plenary, chaired by **Daniela Caruso**, examined private law in the age of big data. **Mateja Durović**, **David Elischer**, **Katharina Pistor** and **Lyn Tjon Soei Len** explored how datafication changes the grammar of justice in private law. They discussed contractual asymmetries created by opaque personalisation, the fit of tort and product-safety standards for learning systems, the promise and limits of collective redress, and the reach of European enforcement against firms that operate through technical architectures rather than through traditional relationships with consumers. The analysis linked technical design to legal design and showed how private law has become a site where constitutional values are negotiated.

The remainder of Friday unfolded across parallel sessions that demonstrated range without losing coherence. An interactive exercise titled Red Teaming European AI Governance stress-tested the Union’s AI rulebook and the Council of Europe’s treaty through adversarial scenarios.

Participants designed ways to exploit loopholes and weak interfaces and then proposed countermeasures, which led to a rare exchange between lawyers and technically minded regulators. Other rooms hosted thematic conversations that drew out underexplored fields. A session on colonialism and the EU legal order examined the afterlives of empire in trade preferences, development financing and external action. The panel on EU law and the city asked how housing, mobility and public procurement place municipal policies in direct contact with internal market and state aid disciplines. A discussion on space law separated aspiration from capability by analysing procurement, liability and security in the emerging European space economy. Strategic climate litigation was approached with an eye to separation of powers and to the risk that courtroom successes can provoke political backlash or administrative evasion. Defending EU journalism in the disinformation era focused on editorial independence, ownership transparency and procedural safeguards under the European Media Freedom Act and anti SLAPP instruments. A conversation on sports legislation returned to free movement, competition law and governance in professional leagues, while a panel on the drift toward illiberal constitutionalism in East Central Europe considered judicial capture, media concentration and the effect of conditionality instruments on national politics.

Panels throughout the conference also foregrounded new scholarship. Author-meets readers sessions engaged books on constitutional review in Western as well as Central and Eastern Europe, on EU values in investment law, and on sustainability in EU migration law. A methods debate under the title *Controversies over Methods in EU Law* examined when doctrinal analysis must give way to history, sociology or political economy, and when quantitative evidence clarifies rather than obscures legal judgement. A further session under the title *The Utopia of Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law* set out a productive dispute about the reach and limits of European values when confronted by strategic litigation, emergency measures and geopolitical constraint. Across these rooms the same leitmotif reappeared: European law not only builds a legal Europe, it chooses among Europes.

The programme extended well beyond constitutional staples. Banking and monetary governance appeared in sessions that traced the legal architecture of money, debated prudential regulation and mapped monetary hierarchy in the Union's financial constitution. Competition, private and consumer law received sustained attention alongside civil procedure and case management, with discussion of the way procedural design shapes substantive outcomes. Sectoral and regulatory themes ranged from energy and the green transition to hybrid administrative bodies, the enforcement of the Digital Markets Act and the Digital Services Act, and the evolving contours of European competences. What unified this breadth was a shared set of analytical problems: institutional design, accountability and the distribution of power across public and private actors.

Saturday offered a short side programme in the form of a walking tour titled *European Law Re-situated: A Walk in Prague* with **Hans Kelsen** and **Eric Stein**. The tour stitched together sites around the Faculty and the city centre in order to place ideas back into streets and buildings. The main scholarly work of the day then turned to enlargement, to social and economic constitutionalism after a decade of crises, and to the problem of resilience without resignation. A lunch roundtable on gender-based misconduct in academia, chaired by **Gráinne de Búrca**, addressed reporting, prevention and institutional responsibility and gave the conference an ethical focus that matched its academic ambition.

Two further plenaries shaped the intellectual arc of the meeting. The debate on sustainability, social justice and democracy, chaired by the co-president of ELU-S **Marija Bartl** with contributions from **Christina Eckes**, **Stephen Humphreys**, **Beate Sjøfjell** and **Marie Petersmann**, interrogated whether the Union can reach climate goals while deepening fairness and participation rather than trading one value for another. The closing plenary on old legacies and new geopolitics returned the audience to the external frame and featured **Diamond Ashiagbor**, **Anu Bradford**, **Vlad Perju** and **Veronika Bílková**. It considered how European law mediates between open markets and strategic

autonomy, how it speaks to security and defence, and how it can project the rule of law abroad without losing credibility at home.

Innovation in format ran through the three days. Already mentioned Red Teaming European AI Governance revived the craft of adversarial analysis for public law and regulation. Another signature session, Visualising the Legal Architecture of Money, applied collaborative cartography to the legal foundations of Europe's monetary and financial system. Participants mapped monetary authority, balance-sheet law, collateral and property, and debated how drawings can reveal institutional interdependencies that text alone hides. Roundtables on militant democracy, on out-of-court dispute resolution in the digital environment and on the university's role between activism and autonomy made the conference reflexive about the conditions under which legal knowledge is produced and circulated.

From a community-building perspective, the organisers succeeded in creating a genuinely pan-European meeting space. The programme placed widely recognised figures on shared stages without turning the event into a parade of names. The strength lay in the conversations. That strength was amplified by the host's active academic presence. Charles University was represented on the plenary stage by personalities such as David Elischer or Veronika Bílková and in the programme design by Jan Komárek, while colleagues appeared across panels in private law, civil procedure and public law. The international organising committee brought together Marija Bartl, Daniela Caruso and Joseph H. H. Weiler with **Candida Leone** and **Martijn van den Brink**. The local organisation was led by **Michal Říha**, whose team drew on a large cohort of student volunteers for registration, room management and guidance. The result was an event that combined scholarly ambition with careful execution and that offered a model for future annual meetings.

The logistics deserve explicit recognition. The central location of the Faculty, a reliable live-stream setup and a disciplined timetable allowed popular sessions to run without disruption. A reception on the opening evening and lunch roundtables on subsequent days created time for informal exchange and for new collaborations. By the time the closing plenary concluded, the meeting had achieved more than a well-filled schedule. It had shown that European law can be convened as a common project when formats are varied and when the audience is trusted with real problems rather than kept to safe themes. If the measure of a first edition is whether it both convenes and catalyses, the ELU-S conference in Prague did both and set a demanding benchmark for the Society's future gatherings.

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