



5 March 2025

### Message by the Board of the European Society of International Law

We, members of the Board of the European Society of International Law, share the concerns expressed in the letter addressed to us on 26 February 2025 about the decision by the Freie Universität Berlin - the site of ESIL's next annual conference - not to allow an event with Francesca Albanese and Eyal Weizman to be held on campus. We reiterate the concerns expressed by the ESIL President on 26 February 2025 about the need to uphold academic freedom and open debate.

In response to these events, the Society's President has been in close contact with the Programme Chairs of the 2025 Annual Conference, Professors Heike Krieger and Helmut Aust, who are deeply committed to academic freedom and open debate and to upholding ESIL's [Code of Conduct](#) during the Conference. The Board has met with some of the authors of the open letter and discussed concerns about restrictions on academic freedom with a number of academics working in German academia.

Based on these ongoing consultations, we reaffirm our commitment to organise the Annual Conference at FU Berlin, precisely to foster and enable academic discussion on difficult and pressing questions in international law.

We believe that the Annual Conference programme will enable such academic discussion. The Programme Committee tasked to select the themes and speakers and chairs for the 2025 Annual Conference has been working since 2022 to put together a diverse programme that enables scholarly engagement across a range of identities, experiences, and ideas. Representatives of ESIL's Diversity Advisory Body and the Society's Early-Career Network have been involved throughout this process. Drawing on submissions received by January 2025, agora speakers will be chosen in March 2025 based on originality, innovation, and diversity, as outlined in the Call for Papers. We unequivocally guarantee that political pressure will not influence selection. In collaboration with the Programme Chairs, we will support necessary visas and travel authorisation for all speakers at the Annual Conference.

Since mid-February 2025, the Board and the Programme Committee have explored ways to enable the Conference to debate the issues at the heart of the FU Berlin's decision. To illustrate, the Programme Committee is deliberating on two specific proposals: one is to focus the traditional 'current issues' panel of the Conference on international-law-related aspects of the situation in Gaza; another is to have a special, open panel debate on *'Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibility'*.

These measures notwithstanding, we are conscious of the limits of our powers as a Society. ESIL events - whether in Berlin or elsewhere - have to be held in accordance with national rules, including those governing academic freedom. The ESIL Board and Programme Committee will insist that the Berlin conference, like all ESIL events, upholds the highest standards of rigorous academic debate, free from external constraints.

Our members' vocal expression of concern about academic freedom shows the strength of our Society. Together, we are committed to engaging in an ongoing, open, and constructive dialogue in the preparation of a meaningful and inclusive conference. We will continue to follow the developments in Germany closely.

On behalf of the Board of the European Society of International Law,

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