



**A World without Rules? The Responsibility of International Law Scholars
in Times of Fatigue
(Call for Papers)**

I. Concept

Recent years have witnessed flagrant and frequent violations of fundamental tenets of international law, including the prohibition of aggression, respect for state sovereignty, and the immunity of heads of State. Some of these violations have been committed by permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, i.e. by States entrusted with particular responsibility for upholding the international legal order. This disregard for core norms represents a serious pathology: things are beyond bad, and doubts are growing about the authority and efficacy of international law itself.

From a theoretical perspective, international law (and its scholars) appears to be in conflict with itself, struggling to articulate a shared and compelling rationale against a “world without rules”. Often, disagreement does not (only) concern the specific illegality of certain acts but also the appraisal of the gravity of the pathology and its reverberation for the essence and scope of contemporary international law.

For some, international law is a decaying institution that loses ground to the rule of the strongest. For others, reports of international law’s demise are exaggerated: despite current turmoil, international law remains deeply embedded in the daily life of States and peoples, so it will weather the storm, displaying resilience through adaptation and mutation as required. Another viewpoint holds that present events expose the longstanding flaws of an overly sovereigntist world order – flaws that present an opportunity to reimagine a fairer, more inclusive system of international law. Yet, another view discerns a paradigmatic *changement de garde*: the end of the “old” liberal international order (with its one-size-fits-all assumptions) and the rise of a “new” post-liberal order presumably attuned to a multipolar world.

The whirlwind buffeting the international order tests the confidence, and even the conscience, of many of us. The ensuing pathology speaks directly to each of us as citizens and scholars: it affects the law we grew up with and routinely teach our students. All this causes a deep sense of fatigue: anxiety about the future coupled with frustration that our expertise and repeated appeals are doomed to fall on deaf ears.

In such a dystopian scenario, the ethical question of what the responsibility of international law scholars is, should not be left aside. What more (if anything) should we do to defend the fundamental values and norms we hold dear? Should we become more activist in our work – engaging in public advocacy, writing open letters, joining demonstrations, or leveraging media platforms – to stand against the erosion of legal norms? Rather than merely asking, “What is to be done?” should we not each ask “What more am I to do?” Should we translate critical insight into *praxis*, as theorised by Bernard Harcourt, through concrete actions and proposals to reconstruct the damaged or destroyed house of international law? Or, should we simply “keep calm and carry on” and confide in the resilience and adaptability of international law?

II. Ambit and Structure of the Workshop

The proposed workshop is organised by the Coordinating Committee of the IGILTP (<https://igiltp.wordpress.com/>), with a managing committee composed by Andrea Carcano (Chair), Kevin Crow, and Kostia Gorobets. It is an opportunity to reflect on either or both of the described topics, namely: (1) the gravity and significance of the above-described pathology for the essence and scope of international law; and the (2) possible treatments to it, focusing on the identification of the role (or possible roles) and responsibility of international law scholars in this regard.

The Coordinating Committee welcomes papers addressing either or both of those topics’ issues for a Pre-Conference Workshop to be held in Malaga just before the beginning of the Annual Conference of the European Society of International Law. The aim is to organise two panels with three presenters each, tentatively divided along the two topics of reflection proposed above.

III. Submission Procedure and Criteria

Abstracts no longer than 500 words together with a short author bio (no longer than 250 words containing name, affiliation, email and phone contact details, whether they are an ESIL

member, and relevant publications) should be submitted **by 12pm (CEST) 15 April 2026** to the attention of the managing committee at the following email address: esilig.legaltheory@gmail.com. No late submissions will be considered. The abstracts will be assessed on the basis of the following three criteria:

1. Coherence with the concept of this Call;
2. Originality and thoroughness of the proposed analysis;
3. Diversity criteria, in accordance with the ESIL Statement of Principles Diversity, Equality and Inclusion and ESIL Guidelines for the Diversity of Conference and Panel Speakers.

The IGILTP managing committee will review the abstracts and finalise the proposed format. Successful applicants will be notified no later than **17 May 2026**. Successful applicants are required to submit a 1000-word summary of their presentation two weeks before the workshop in order to facilitate dialogue and feedback among the participants. After the workshop, publication options will be discussed with the authors of the draft papers.

N.B. The Interest Group is unable to provide funding for travel and accommodation. Selected speakers will be expected to bear the costs of their own travel and accommodation. Some **ESIL Travel Grants** and **ESIL Carers' Grants** will be available to offer partial financial support to speakers who have exhausted other potential sources of funding.

Please visit the **ESIL Annual Conference website** for all relevant information about the event.

All participants, including speakers and chairs, at ESIL Interest Group workshops are required to register and are warmly invited to attend the whole Annual Conference.

Detailed information will follow on the registration options including information on preferential fees for ESIL Members and the option to register to attend the pre-ESIL Annual Conference workshops only.

Selected speakers should indicate their interest in being considered for the ESIL Early-Career Scholar Prize, if they meet the **eligibility conditions** as stated on the ESIL website. **The ESIL Secretariat must be informed of all selected speakers who wish to be considered for the Prize before 30 April.**

IV. Closing Event of the IGILTP

Last but not least, the Coordinating Committee wishes to inform all the readers of this call that we are organising a closing event to be held after the two panels of the workshop. This event will be held in the form of a *group session* designed to create space to reflect on how the themes of responsibility, fatigue, and crisis in international law affect us both as individual legal professionals and as members of the college of international lawyers. More specifically, the session will take the form of a semi-structured discussion that invites all participants to think through and, if they wish, share how the current state of international law shapes our work as researchers, teachers, and practitioners.

In the *group session*, participants will be invited to reflect on the *affective aspects* of international law: how does it feel to practice international law in these rule-less times? What can we do about the experiential aspects of professional fatigue? And do we even need to reflect on the emotional life of international law at all?

The group session will be open to all ESIL conference participants, without the need for additional registration.