

Il progetto ESAF è coordinato dal Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale in collaborazione con la Facoltà di Giurisprudenza

**JM COURSE ‘Academic Freedom and Human Rights: European and International Perspectives’
ADVOCACY CASES
2022/2023**

Important! The course proposes four geopolitical areas: Post-Soviet States (Belarus, Ukraine and Russia); Iran; Afghanistan; Europe. The advocacy on individual cases on students and scholars can be conducted **ONLY** if there is the **necessary authorisation** of the detained person and/or her/his lawyer and family. This is why **work on specific individual cases can be conducted only in collaboration with organisations like Scholars at Risk**.

Individual cases are related to Belarus (students) and Iran (scholars) and are outlined below.

Students can also decide to work on advocacy research on ‘general cases’ related to the overall violation of academic freedom in the country, against institutions or ‘anonymised’ groups of students and/or scholars. These cases can be, for instance, The Baha’i academic community in Iran (scholars, students, staff), or attacks against Russian dissident scholars, the persecution of women scholars in Afghanistan, or cases on academic freedom violation in Poland or Hungary (or other European countries). They will collect and report cases (from the media, international report, through some focused interviews where possible) but they will be **bound to keep the full anonymity in their advocacy campaign and report, for safety reasons**.

Some key sources for advocacy research are:

Scholars at Risk Weekly Media Review: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/academic-freedom-media-review-archive/>

Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/>

Times Higher Education: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/>

Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/>

Magna Charta Observatory: <http://www.magna-charta.org/>

The course coordinators are happy to discuss alternative cases with students – such as Patrick Zaki in Egypt, or the Uyghur Scholars in China - as far as they are doable and in line with the course’s aims.

COUNTRY FOCUS – BELARUS (In collaboration with Scholars at Risk, and with Supolka - Belarus Association in Italy).

Detained students in Belarus

Case Summary: Starting in August 2020, authorities in Belarus have arrested a growing number of students in retaliation for their nonviolent participation in protests across the country over the re-election of President Alexander Lukashenko. Many of the protests were organized by students or took place at university campuses. Authorities arrested students during protests and targeted house raids of student leaders, including members of the Belarusian Students Association. Two of the many detained students are Maryja Rabkova of European Humanities University and Yahor Kanetski of Belarusian State University. SAR case page: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/detained-students-belarus/>

Most recent Belarus student case updates:

- (1) **Maryja Rabkova** – sentenced to 15-year prison.
- (2) **Yahor Kanetski** – Prosecution seeking a 2.5-year prison sentence.

In collaboration with Supolka, the Belarus Association in Italy.

The case of Mariya Rabkova is also followed by students in Canada, at Carleton University, Department of Law and Legal Studies. Their tutor, Prof. Melanie Adrian is happy to organise inter-class sessions (Melanie.Adrian@Carleton.ca).

Carleton University is planning an Advocacy Day in April 2023, which will host representatives of other advocacy courses to present their cases.

COUNTRY FOCUS – UKRAINE and RUSSIA (in collaboration with at-risk scholars at the University of Trento)

In the aftermath of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict several organizations like Scholars at Risk, national and European bodies have issued a call to universities to develop protection strategies for scholars who have to flow from Ukraine – due to the war – and from Russia – due to the authoritarian repression of dissident scholars and students. See for instance:

SAR US Call: [Solidarity with the people of Ukraine and Ukrainian higher education | Scholars at Risk](#)

SAR Europe Call: <https://sareurope.eu/sar-resources/inspireurope-ukraine-resources/>

European Union Call: https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/index_en

In the context of open opposition to the conflict, Russian scholars and students have been the subject of increasing repression from their universities and the Russian government. They have been detained, physically attacked and/or being forced to leave the country. See for instance:

T-Invariant: https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/index_en

Scholars at Risk : [Region: Russia | Scholars at Risk](#)

OVD-NGO: [No to war | ОБД-Инфо \(ovdinfo.org\)](#)

Persecution against academics and students often involve institutions among the most prestigious in Russia, like the HSE, with a loss of cultural and scientific capital:

[The Decline of HSE: Top Russian University Stifles Dissent Amid Ukraine War - The Moscow Times](#)

[La Russia senza fortocchki \(micromegaedizioni.net\)](#)

Times Higher Education: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/no-future-us-left-russia-say-fleeing-academics>

This case invites students to look at the violations of academic freedom in Ukraine and Russia within a single analytical framework, and in dialogue with the group working on Belarus: to outline the tradition of academic freedom in the country, its limitations in past and present time, and the impact of the war on members of higher education communities at home and in the diaspora. Students are also invited to conduct research and reflect on the national and EU policies with respect to Ukrainian and Russian scholars and students: their fruitfulness but also limitations and to raise awareness about the uncertain future they face in terms of continuing their research and study in the medium-long term.

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COUNTRY FOCUS – IRAN (in collaboration with Scholars At Risk and with visiting at-risk scholars)

Detained scholars in Iran

Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali

Case Summary: Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali is a scholar of disaster medicine who has been wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death. Dr. Djalali is an Iranian-born resident of Sweden, who teaches at universities in Italy and Belgium, and whose work involves frequent international scientific collaboration. Since his arrest in April 2016, Dr. Djalali has been refused medical care despite rapidly deteriorating health. *Primary advocacy goal:* Engaging EU, European, and US governments, HEIs, scientific and academic associations/organizations, awareness-raising to express concern about risk of execution and deteriorating health, telling the human side of his story. *Suggested advocacy actions:* Social media; #SaveAhmadreza; #FreeAhmadreza; Media (op-eds, press releases to journalists); Award nominations; Letters to US and EU governments; Other creative ways to raise awareness; Seminars based in Italy, Belgium, Sweden, and the US can take advantage of outreach to their governments, seeking that they engage with their Iranian counterparts to secure the immediate release of Djalali (please coordinate with SAR on this); Seminars in the US can reach out to Members of Congress to identify an advocate through the Defending Freedoms Project (connect with SAR if any MOCs express interest to move forward with next steps).

SAR case page: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/ahmadreza-djalali-iran/>

Dr. Niloufar Bayani

Case Summary: Niloufar Bayani is a researcher and conservationist, who was arrested in January 2018 on charges of espionage. On November 23, 2019, authorities convicted and sentenced Ms. Bayani to ten years in prison. Ms. Bayani is the program manager of the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation, a former McGill University research assistant and alum, a Columbia University alum, and former project consultant for UN Environment. On August 11, 2021, she was temporarily released from Evin Prison on medical grounds. She has since been returned to Evin Prison. *Primary advocacy goal:* Awareness-raising, telling the human side of the story and importance of Bayani's research. *Suggested advocacy actions:* Social media; #FreeNiloufarBayani, #anyhopefornature, #بیانی_نیلوفر, Media (op-ed, press releases to journalists); Outreach to environmental, scientific, climate organizations and associations to tweet, issue statements, or letters; Partner with environment, climate departments/organizations on campus to host events; Award nominations; Creative ways to bring more attention and awareness to case. IMPORTANT NOTE: No government outreach

SAR case page: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/niloufar-bayani-iran/>

The case of Niloufar Bayani is also followed by students in Canada, at Carleton University, Department of Law and Legal Studies. Their tutor, Prof. Melanie Adrian is happy to organise inter-class sessions (Melanie.Adrian@Carleton.ca).

Iranian Baha'i scholars and students

Additionally, and independently from SAR, we also invite students to consider the case of the **Iranian Baha'i community of scholars and students** who, due to their faith, have been traditionally denied the right to work/study in higher education in Iran. This discrimination has produced multiple effects: internal displacement and isolation, the framing of a large Baha'i diaspora of scholars and students, as well as the creation of a virtual and global Baha'i university.

Information on the Baha'i International Community here: <https://www.bic.org/about/about-us>

Information on the Baha's History of Higher Education here: <http://www.bihe.org/>

This case is relatively little known at national and international level, and students may want to raise awareness of the violations affecting Baha'i scholars and students by developing advocacy research and campaign. They will work in collaboration with a Baha'i scholar who will be visiting professor in Trento.

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COUNTRY FOCUS – AFGHANISTAN (in collaboration with UniTrento/visiting at-risk scholars/students, and journalists)

Since August 2021, with the Taliban takeover of the country, attacks against higher education communities have involved scholars and students across gender and ethnic divides. The outflow of university members has been significant, and it has involved Italy and Europe as well: this poses challenges in terms of resuming studies and research, re-building a community of scholars and learners in the diaspora, and in terms of the loss of capital from Afghanistan.

SAR call: https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/afghanistan_support/

Magna Charta Observatory: <http://www.magna-charta.org/news/afghan-scholars-progress-report>

Endangered Scholars Initiative: <https://www.endangeredscholarsworldwide.net/post/resources-available-for-afghan-students-scholars-and-others>

European Student Union: <https://esu-online.org/?news=support-afghan-students>

UNIRE: Unione Nazionale Italiana per Rifugiati ed Esuli: <https://www.dire.it/24-09-2021/670410-afghanistan-hasnain-unire-diamo-un-futuro-a-chi-e-in-italia/>

Students might want here to develop an advocacy research on the situation of Afghan scholars and students in Italy (and Europe), to collect information about the impact of the violation of academic freedom for Afghan universities, about national and European policies, and about the lived experience of exile in Italy. At-risk scholars and students living in Trento or Italy will interact with the working group.



COUNTRY FOCUS – EUROPE

Threats and violations of academic freedom also increasingly characterise Europe, in different ways. They can involve attacks against the autonomy of higher education institutions – like in the case of the Central European University in Hungary – of the freedom of research and its dissemination – like the case of Polish historians researching on the Holocaust

Attacks on academic freedom in Eastern Europe: <https://sciencebusiness.net/widening/news/academics-eastern-europe-warn-risks-academic-freedom>

Attacks on academic freedom in Hungary: <https://www.researchprofessionalnews.com/rr-news-europe-universities-2020-10-hungarian-law-violated-academic-freedom-eu-court-rules/>

Attacks against Polish historians: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-historians-under-attack-for-exploring-polands-role-in-the-holocaust>

Self-censorship in Finland and Europe: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0162243920978303>

Attacks on academic freedom in Northern Ireland: <https://srdefenders.org/attacks-against-human-rights-advocate-threaten-academic-freedom-in-northern-ireland-un-experts-press-release/>

The above are only some of the cases of attacks or limitation against academic freedom affecting contemporary Europe. Students will interact with the course coordinators to select one or more country case within Europe and discuss how to develop and advocacy research on the case.

