

**RECTORS' FORUM
OF SOUTHEAST EUROPE
AND WESTERN BALKANS**

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RECTORS' FORUM NEWSLETTER

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CALLS

Advancing Social Cohesion in the Face of Polarized Public Discourse	
	Call website
Deadline:	31. 3. 2026
Description:	This pilot project is expected to produce concrete, actionable outcomes that help better understand and address the drivers of political polarisation, while safeguarding freedom of expression and supporting balanced, evidence-based public debate. The results will contribute directly to the Democracy Shield and strengthen long-term social cohesion and democratic resilience. Expected impacts include: • A neutral, scientifically validated methodology for monitoring and analysing online political discourse and polarisation across a representative set of countries and languages, providing policymakers and stakeholders with reliable data and insights into how polarising narratives develop, spread and interact online. • Measurement of polarisation and related metrics, taking into account both online and offline aspects, with quantitative metrics and qualitative analyses. Production of relevant dashboards and a series of briefs/reports/overviews summarising these findings. • A set of advanced AI-powered tools and techniques for multilingual sentiment, discourse and network analysis, designed and tested to ensure transparency, neutrality and compliance with GDPR and the Digital Services Act, and adaptable for future research and policy needs. • Development and testing of evidence-based mitigation strategies and interventions that translate analytical findings into practical measures for countering polarisation online, while fully respecting freedom of speech and the diversity of political expression in the EU. This could feed into societal resilience building actions to be deployed in the future. Establish sustainable cross-sector and pan-European collaboration networks that bring together a wide variety of relevant players, creating a strong foundation for continuous and durable cooperation, knowledge-sharing, as well as policy support related to broader EU initiatives such as the Democracy Shield. In this regard, the funded project will be expected to facilitate discussions among key stakeholders to prepare the establishment of the common research framework. Scope: 1. Analysis and Monitoring Methodology and Innovative Tools for Understanding Polarisation A central theme of this pilot project is <u>the development of a neutral and scientifically sound approach to analysing political discourse and polarisation</u>. Proposals should outline how they will combine advanced sentiment, discourse and network analysis to map trends, narratives and influential actors that contribute to political polarisation across the EU. While the priority focus remains on EU Member States, the proposed methodology and its implementation may also examine candidate countries, e.g. those that exhibit vulnerabilities. The methodology must be demonstrably objective, covering a balanced spectrum of political viewpoints and ensuring that data collection and analysis are transparent, reliable and unbiased.

	2. European Regional Knowledge Exchange and Implementation Pathways for Social Cohesion The initiative includes a pan-EU conference in Month 3 of the project, designed to surface, validate, and cross-pollinate effective on-the-ground depolarisation and social cohesion initiatives, informing the project's methodology and tooling. From the outset of the action, this conference and the necessary preparations will run in parallel with the development of the Analysis and Monitoring Methodology and Innovative Tools for Understanding Polarisation. The conference will serve as the joint starting point for activities 1 and 2: actors from the field will present their ideas, and the initial concept of the methodology and tools will be presented and discussed with participants. It should also map already existing initiatives, tools and technologies to avoid duplication, create synergies and foster collaboration. 3. Collaboration and Practical Mitigation Strategies Equally important is the commitment to build cross-sector and cross-border partnerships that translate analytical insights into practical actions. Proposals should show how they will work and cooperate with relevant stakeholders to develop, test, and scale realistic mitigation strategies that counter harmful effects of polarisation without restricting open, democratic debate. Sharing lessons learned and best practices will help ensure that project results can also inform future EU policy and strengthen societal resilience across Member States.
Budget:	MAX: 785.000 EUR

RFCS-2026-Steel-Big tickets (RFCS-2026-BT-Steel)	
	Call website
Deadline:	6. 5. 2026
Description:	Under the Research Fund for Coal and Steel (RFCS), the European Commission funds research on: • New, sustainable and low-carbon steelmaking and finishing processes; • Advanced steel grades and applications; • The conservation of resources, protection of the environment and circular economy; • The management of workforce and working conditions. The call includes the following topics: 1. RFCS-2026-BT-Steel-CID - RFCS-2026-Steel-Big Tickets under the Clean Industrial Deal; 2. RFCS-2026-BT-Steel-SMAP - RFCS-2026-Steel-Big Tickets under the steel and metals action plan.
Budget:	MIN: 5.000.000 EUR; MAX: 25.000.000 EUR

European Defence Fund Research actions implemented via actual cost grants (EDF-2026-RA)	
	Call website
Deadline:	29. 9. 2026
Description:	This is a call for proposals for EU action grants in the field of collaborative defence research and development under the European Defence Fund (EDF). The following topics are available: • EDF-2026-RA-SIMTRAIN-MSAI - Modelling & simulation supported AI framework for military decision-making and training; • EDF-2026-RA-SENS-MSDT - Multidomain sensors demonstrator and test; • EDF-2026-RA-CYBER-QSTN - Quantum secured tactical networks; • EDF-2026-RA-MCBRN-DST - CBRN decontamination systems and technologies; • EDF-2026-RA-PROTMOB-FMLA - Future multirole light aircraft; • EDF-2026-RA-UWW-FUWN - Development and validation of models predicting flow-related underwater noise; • EDF-2026-RA-AIR-A4R - Autonomous and automatic air-to-air refuelling.
Budget:	MAX: 20.000.000 EUR

European Defence Fund Research actions in the form of a technological challenge implemented via lump sum grants (EDF-2026-LS-RA-CHALLENGE)	
	Call website
Deadline:	29. 9. 2026
Description:	This call aims to advance the targeted technologies by organising a technological challenge, where different research teams work towards a technological objective using a common testing environment set up for that purpose. The call covers the following topics: • EDF-2026-LS-RA-CHALLENGE-DIGIT-AISAP: AI-based tactical situational awareness using swarms of small robots and drones – Participation in a technological challenge • EDF-2026-LS-RA-CHALLENGE-DIGIT-AISAO: AI-based tactical situational awareness using swarms of small robots and drones – Organisation of a technological challenge
Budget:	MAX: 7.000.000 EUR

TENDER - Support study for the Report under Article 5 of Combined Transport Directive	
	Call website
Deadline:	23. 3. 2026
Description:	The study will provide data for a report that is a legal obligation for Commission to prepare. It is an update of two studies carried out in 2017. The Commission report is in the Commission Work Plan for 2026 and has been approved in principle by DG.
Budget:	MAX: 20.000 EUR

Spin-in EDF research actions implemented via lump sum grants (EDF-2026-LS-RA-SI)	
	Call website
Deadline:	29. 9. 2026
Description:	These actions support specific topics related to EU defence capability priorities. The following two topics are available: • EDF-2026-LS-RA-SI-ENERENV-NTFE: New turbofan engine - the aim of this call topic is to investigate the possibility to further develop a new turbofan engine in the range of approximately 25-35 kN, which meets all military requirements and is capable of operating on kerosene and sustainable aviation fuel (SAF); • EDF-2026-LS-RA-SI-UWW-CSBI: Layered critical seabed infrastructure protection - the objective of this call topic is to integrate knowledge, study and design, with focus on the underwater domain and on a real environment using a layered and scalable SoS capable to accomplish the critical seabed infrastructure protection (CSIP) missions.
Budget:	--

Mobility of individuals in the field of youth	
	Call website
Deadline:	1. 10. 2026
Description:	The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency's Erasmus+ programme invites proposals for the mobility of individuals in the field of youth. This supports the professional development of youth workers through non-formal and informal learning experiences in mobility activities. The following activities are supported: • professional development activities - may take the form of study visits and different types of assignments, networking and community building among youth workers taking part in the action, training courses supporting the development of competences, and seminars and workshops; • system development and outreach activities - complementary activities aimed at enhancing the impact of the mobility project on the field; • preparatory visits - to ensure high quality activities by facilitating and preparing administrative arrangements, building trust and understanding, and setting up a solid partnership between the organisations and people involved.
Budget:	--

EVENTS

NEB Facility 2026 call info day

Online, February 24, 2026

More information [here](#)

Online Info Session: Call for proposals Networks of Towns (CERV-2026-CITIZENS-TOWN-NT)

Online, February 26, 2026

More information [here](#)

Online Info Session: Call for Proposals “Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs” SMP-COSME-EYE-2026

Online, February 26, 2026

More information [here](#)

Stakeholder workshop on the revision of the Governance Regulation

Brussels/Online, March 03, 2026

More information [here](#)

AM Village 2026 – Advancing Additive Manufacturing for European Defence

Albacete (Španija), March 16 – 20, 2026

More information [here](#)

Digital Decade Strategic Workshop (2026)

Online, March 17, 2026

More information [here](#)

Transforming Permitting: IT and AI in Action

Brussels, March 18, 2026

More information [here](#)

European Climate Pact: Together in Action 2026

Brussels/Online, March 23 – 25, 2026

More information [here](#)

European Robotics Forum

Stavanger (Norveška), March 23 – 27, 2026

More information [here](#)

Scaling Renewable Fuels and Chemicals for a Resilient European Industry – From Scientific Creativity to Innovation

Brussels, March 26 – 27, 2026

More information [here](#)

PUBLISHED PLANS AND PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

- Energy: [Energy-efficient product legislation - Omnibus simplification](#)
- Justice and fundamental rights: [3rd Report on the implementation of the Directive on the fight against fraud to the Union's financial interests](#)
- Justice and fundamental rights: [Shareholder Rights Directive - evaluation and review](#)
- Digital economy and society: [Audiovisual media services - evaluation and update of EU rules](#)

PUBLICATIONS

- [STEM orientation in European higher education institutions: Analysis of institutional characteristics 2026](#)
- [Margins as canaries in the coal mine](#)
- [Tackling fraud in the RRF: Special report 06/2026](#)
- [Single programming document 2026-2028](#)
- [Assessing wage alignment with economic fundamentals across Italian regions: Evidence from a benchmarking analysis](#)
- [Evaluation of Directive \(EU\) 2018/1673 on the fight against money laundering by criminal law: Final report](#)
- [Why is Europe lagging behind in high tech sectors? The role of institutional and regulatory quality](#)
- [Money demand by non-financial corporations](#)
- [Harnessing strategic technologies for Europe's competitiveness: Empirical evidence from patents and productivity](#)
- [Recommendation paper on financing not linked to costs: ESF transnational network on simplification](#)
- [Second interim report for design and behavioural research study to create evidence-based, EU harmonised consumer waste sorting labels](#)
- [Opinion on towards a just green transition: Addressing structural inequities](#)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS

1. MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships at AI4DH (University of Ljubljana)

The European Centre of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence for Digital Humanities (AI4DH) at the University of Ljubljana invites excellent postdoctoral researchers to apply for Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellowships (MSCA-PF).

Join a vibrant, interdisciplinary research environment at the intersection of artificial intelligence and digital humanities, and develop an ambitious research project with strong institutional support.

Research Focus

We welcome project ideas in areas such as:

- NLP and AI for historical newspapers
- Large language models and knowledge integration
- Explainable and trustworthy AI
- AI tools for digital humanities and social sciences
- Data-driven research in less-resourced languages

Who Should Apply

- Researchers with a PhD and up to 8 years of research experience
- Applicants of any nationality who meet the MSCA mobility rules

How to Apply

Send us your CV and a short project idea to info@ai4dh.eu by 16 March 2026.

Shortlisted candidates will receive full institutional support, including:

- a two-day MSCA-PF Masterclass, and
- expert feedback on their proposal.

Take the next step in your postdoctoral career with AI4DH in Ljubljana. [More information](#).

2. ETH Postdoctoral Fellowships (Switzerland): [ETH Postdoctoral Fellowships – Grants Office | ETH Zurich](#)

3. JSPS Postdoctoral Fellowships for Research in Japan: [Postdoctoral Fellowships for Research in Japan](#)

4. Independent Research Fund Denmark (DFF) – international calls: [Current funding opportunities](#)

5. Villum Experiment Programme – Villum Foundation (Denmark): [Villum Experiment 2026 | Villum Fonden](#)

6. Research Council of Norway – calls for proposals: [Current calls for proposals - apply for funding](#)

7. 2026 International Joint Initiative for Research Harnessing Disruptive Technologies to Address Global Challenges (Canada + EU): [2026 International Joint Initiative for Research Harnessing Disruptive Technologies to Address Global Challenges](#)

8. EMBO: [Fellowships, grants and career support – Postdoctoral Fellowships – EMBO](#)