

Training School Report

Vienna 9th and 10th of February 2026

Introduction

As part of the OPEN-COST Action: ‘Rising nationalisms, shifting geopolitics and the future of European higher education/research openness’ (CA22121) in collaboration with the ‘Antigender-Politics Action’ (CA2314), a two-day Training School was organised by Andrea Peto and Benoît Josset at the Central European University in Vienna the 9th and 10th of February 2026.

The aim of this training school was to bring together PhD students, postdoctoral researchers and early-career researchers to discuss ways of building resilience within the academic community, particularly in the context of studying anti-gender policies and mobilisations in Central and Eastern European (CEE) and North-Eastern European (NME) countries. Whilst the programme was primarily aimed at early-career researchers and academics, it was also open to university staff and faculty; academic administrators and leadership; and advocates for academic freedom.

Objectives of the Training School

This training school, entitled ‘Increasing Resilience for Young Researchers of Anti-Gender Politics and Mobilizations in CCE and NME Countries’ had several objectives. Its main aim was to bring together researchers and PhD students from twenty different countries and various disciplines, all with an interest in gender studies and academic resilience in Europe, against a backdrop marked by the rise of the far right and nationalism. Beyond this networking initiative, the objective was to propose ideas and presentations aimed at strengthening academic resilience and safeguarding in regards of the political changes currently taking place in Europe. It also hoped to foster dialogue among participants to exchange solutions and create a safe and collaborative space for researchers, activists and PhD students who may have been subjected to harassment or repression due to their research on antigender politics or the far right in Europe.

Program and Sessions

The two-day Training School consisted of a series of presentations followed by discussions and social breaks to encourage more informal exchanges.

Program of the presentations:

On academic freedom: a challenging concept - Ece Cihan Ertem, University of Vienna (February 9, 2026)

On self-censorship: What is self-censorship, and how to subvert it? - Anita Lunic, University of Split (February 9, 2026)

Cybersecurity Strategies in Political Research : An Analysis of Methods and Recommended Practices. - Benoit Josset, Rennes University (February 9, 2026)

Studying the far right as a feminist - Dr. Estelle Delaine, Rennes 2 University (February 9, 2026)

On psychological resilience: Why mental health of academic matters and what to do about it? Fanni Toth, Sigmund Freud University (February 9, 2026)

Research on the far right: consequences and precautions - Bernhard Weidinger, Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DÖW) (February 10, 2026)

What to do when hired and fired as an academic? - Otilia Torda, Equilibrium Consulting (February 10, 2026)

What can academics learn from safety training for journalists? - Karolina Farska, Safe Journalism Platform ICJK (February 10, 2026)

Weaving networks of solidarity in academia:Key takeaways from the Serbian case? - Jelena Kleut, Free University Novi Sad (February 10, 2026)

What can Trade Unions do for you? - Rafaella Schwarzmueller (February 10, 2026)

Key Outcomes

This Training School enabled participants, particularly early-career researchers and PhD students, to develop a better understanding of the precautions required when studying sensitive topics, such as the far right in Europe, and when conducting fieldwork in contexts that may pose risks to their personal safety.

The diversity of speakers and perspectives made the programme highly valuable for all participants, regardless of their country of origin or specific research focus. Through the legal (Otilia Torda's presentation), digital (Benoit Josset's presentation), psychological (Fanni Toth's presentation), academic and journalistic (Karolina Farska's presentation) tools presented, participants gained practical insights into the different strategies available to protect themselves within the academic environment, particularly in a context marked by the resurgence of anti-gender politics, nationalism and illiberalism in Europe.

The Training School also provided important opportunities for networking and exchange among researchers from different countries working on similar topics. Beyond academic discussions, the event contributed to creating a safe and supportive space for participants who may have experienced challenges related to their research topics or academic positions, particularly in the case of politically sensitive or contested fields such as gender studies.

Conclusion

Overall, this Training School co-hosted by the OPEN Action and the Antigender-Politics Action successfully met its objectives by providing participants with both theoretical insights and practical tools to navigate the challenges associated with researching sensitive topics in contemporary Europe and building academic resilience.

Beyond its academic contribution, the Training School also played a key role in building connections between researchers facing similar challenges across different national contexts. In doing so, it reinforced the importance of collective reflection and mutual support in addressing the growing pressures on academic freedom.

The issues raised during these two days highlight the need for continued initiatives of this kind, which not only equip researchers with concrete skills, but also contribute to sustaining

an inclusive and supportive academic environment despite the rise of nationalism and the restriction of academic freedom across European countries.