

Report from the International Forum

"The democratic revolutions of 1989 in popular culture and art"



The International Forum "The democratic revolutions of 1989 in popular culture and art" took place from February 14 until February 18, 2022.

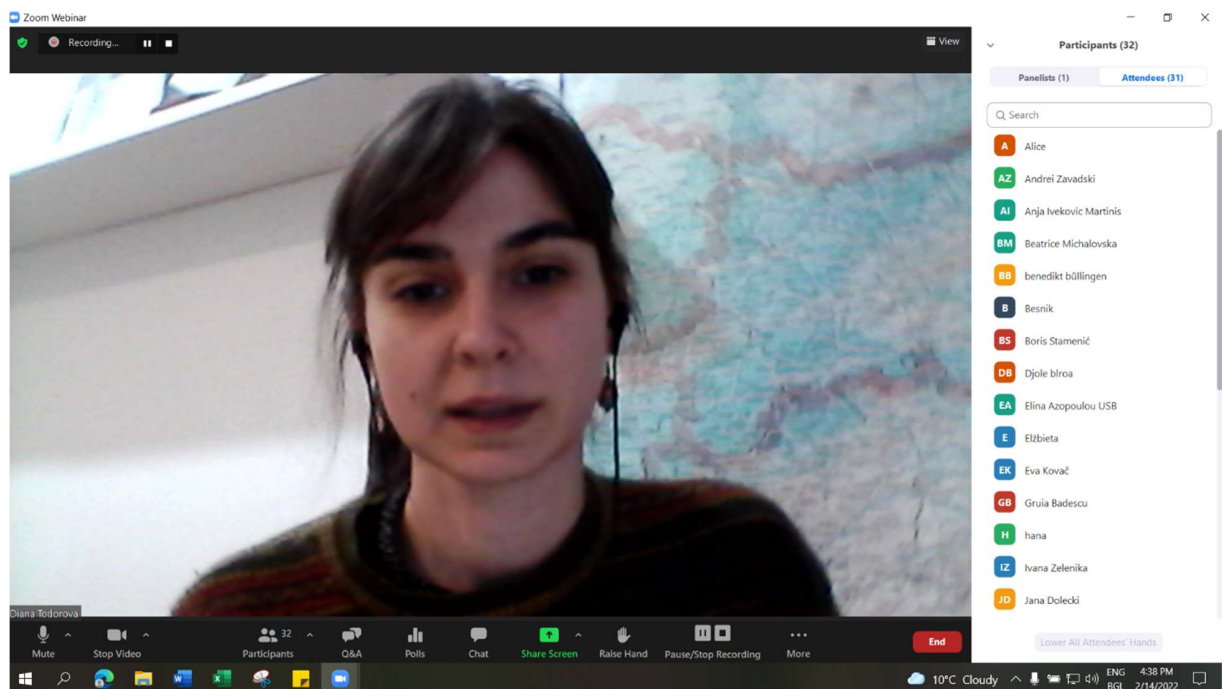
The event was organized in a hybrid format with its first four sessions taking place on Zoom on February 14 and 15, and the last session happening in person in Vienna, Austria, on February 17, while also being streamed on Zoom for the participants of the Forum.

The International Forum was organized in the scope of the project "Reshaping the image of democratic revolutions 1989: European contemporary perspectives and forgotten lessons from the past". The project is co-financed by the European Union through the program "Europe for Citizens".

76 people from 24 different countries registered for the Forum via the call for participants that was published at the beginning of January 2022.

The program for the event was created in close cooperation between Documenta – Centre for dealing with the past and Blockfrei – Verein für Kultur und Kommunikation with the help of other organizations from the project's consortium.

The Forum was opened with the introductory session „How did 1989 change Europe?“ on February 14 (16:00 h – 17:00 h (CET)). This session served as a general introduction to the topic. Diana Todorova, Documenta, the coordinator of the project, briefly presented the project, its main ideas, activities, and results.



After the presentation, there was a screening of the educational film "How did 1989 change Europe?", one of the project's results. The film collects personal memories of the period of democratic changes that took place in 1989 and the transition to democracy and a free-market economy that followed in the 1990s. It is designed for use both in formal and informal education. You can watch the film with subtitles in English Croatian or Romanian using this link [Educational film "How did 1989 change Europe?" - YouTube](#)

The film is a product of the discussions held at the International Spring Forum (16th -18th June 2021) which focused on 5 key topics:

- Living in divided Europe before 1989
- The democratic revolutions of 1989
- Living in transition
- The legacy of the democratic changes
- The future of Europe

After the screening of the film, Todorova made a short overview of several artistic interpretations of the democratic changes of 1989. In her presentation she focused on three examples of the connection between politics, art, 1989, East and West:

- Wall of oil barrels / the Iron curtain.

This art installation was made by the artistic duo Christo and Jeanne-Claude. In 1956 Christo had fled his native Bulgaria —then a repressive Soviet client state. On the night of June 27, 1962, Jeanne-Claude and Christo began assembling their first major outdoor project: an obstacle on a narrow street in Paris's Latin Quarter created from 89 oil barrels. It stretched from one end of the street to the other, completely blocking the street for pedestrian and vehicle traffic for the eight hours it stood in place. Unsurprisingly, given its title and Christo's dramatic past, some read it as a comment on the Berlin Wall, which was built less than a year before. In that sense, the work was a powerful political statement.

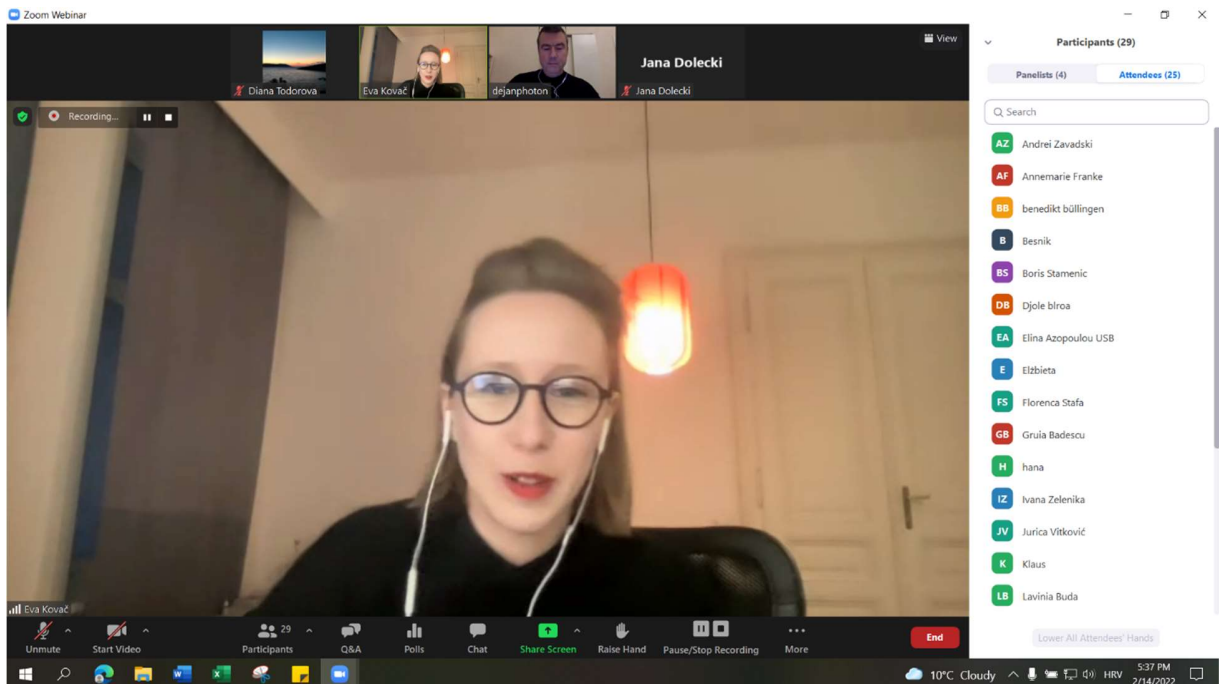
- The singing revolution

Estonia's path towards independence was paved by music, which played a decisive role in fostering and encouraging hope and unity. This is probably best epitomized in the nonviolent independence movement known more widely as "The singing revolution." Between 1987 and 1991 Estonians gathered in mass demonstrations, which included singing national songs that were forbidden under the Soviet Union. Through multiple festivals and demonstrations, tens of thousands of people came together and sang. Around 300,000 people gathered at a song festival in Tallinn in September 1988, which also witnessed the first open call for the restoration of independence.

- My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love

This graffiti painting by Dmitri Vrubel on the eastern side Berlin wall was painted in 1990. It has become one of the best-known pieces of Berlin wall graffiti art. The painting depicts Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker in a socialist fraternal kiss, reproducing a photograph taken in 1979 during the 30th-anniversary celebration of the foundation of the German Democratic Republic. This graffiti painting is sometimes referred to as the Fraternal Kiss. In March 2009, the painting, along with others, was erased from the wall to allow the original artists to repaint them with more durable paints. Vrubel was commissioned to repaint the piece, donating the €3000 fee he was paid to a social art project.

The second session of the Forum „1989 and photography: democratic revolutions through the lenses” took place 17:30 h - 19:00 h (CET) the same day, also on Zoom. Eva Kovač, Blockfrei, was the moderator of the session which introduced the topic of the relationship between politics and photography at the end of the 1980s and the 1990s.



In the first part of the session, Kovač led a conversation with Dejan Sluga, a curator from Slovenia. Sluga graduated „ Art History and Sociology of Culture” at Ljubljana University. In 2003 he established the Photon Association, Gallery, and later Center for Contemporary Photography. Kovač and Sluga were discussing the exhibition “Solace of Memory - How we survived communism and even laughed”.

The project was inspired by the book „How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed“ by Croatian writer Slavenka Drakulić, from whom the exhibition also borrowed the title of the project. The exhibition was inspired by the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall. It doesn't focus on key historical events and important political figures but offers an insight into everyday life and presents some of the contradictions of the social systems that built on a utopian vision of the future. To revisit the “family albums” of the former socialist countries, the exhibition presented some important photographers from the CEE region, who documented life in Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the second part of the session Jana Dolečki, Blockfrei, introduced the work of photographer Mirko Krizanovic. He was born in former Yugoslavia and from 1969 was living in Germany. Krizanovic documented the democratic transitions of the late 1980s and the 1990s in different European countries.

In January Dolečki made an audio interview with Krizanovic in which he describes his personal and professional experience of 1989. Combining the audio recording in German and adding the photographs Krizanovic took during the democratic transitions in Europe together with subtitles in English, Jana Dolečki created a short video. During the session, there was a screening of the video which gives inside on the role of photography in the historical developments at the end of the 1980s and the 1990s.

After the screening of the video, Kovač discussed Krizanovic's experience with Dejan Sluga and then opened the floor for questions from the participants of the Forum.

The International Forum continued the next day, February 15. **The third session „Teaching revolutions: educational challenges and correlations“** (16:00 h - 17:00 h (CET) gave the participants of the Forum an opportunity to compare the challenges of teaching about the democratic revolutions in Europe.



The session was opened by Diana Todorova, Documenta, who made a short overview of the Seminar for history educators (September 22-26, 2021) which was organized in Thessaloniki, Greece, in the scope of the project. Todorova also presented some of the challenges that the educators who took part in the Seminar listed during the discussions in Thessaloniki – lack of didactic materials; lack of consensus in society and politics regarding 1989; subjective teaching; curricula's restrictions, etc.

After this introduction to the topic, Gruia Badescu, CRIDL, commented on the current challenges of teaching about 1989 in Romania. After that Badescu presented the workshops which CRIDL organized in the scope of the project in Romania using the results of the project – the educational film „How did 1989 change Europe?“ and the manual with didactic materials „1989: a lesson from the past“.

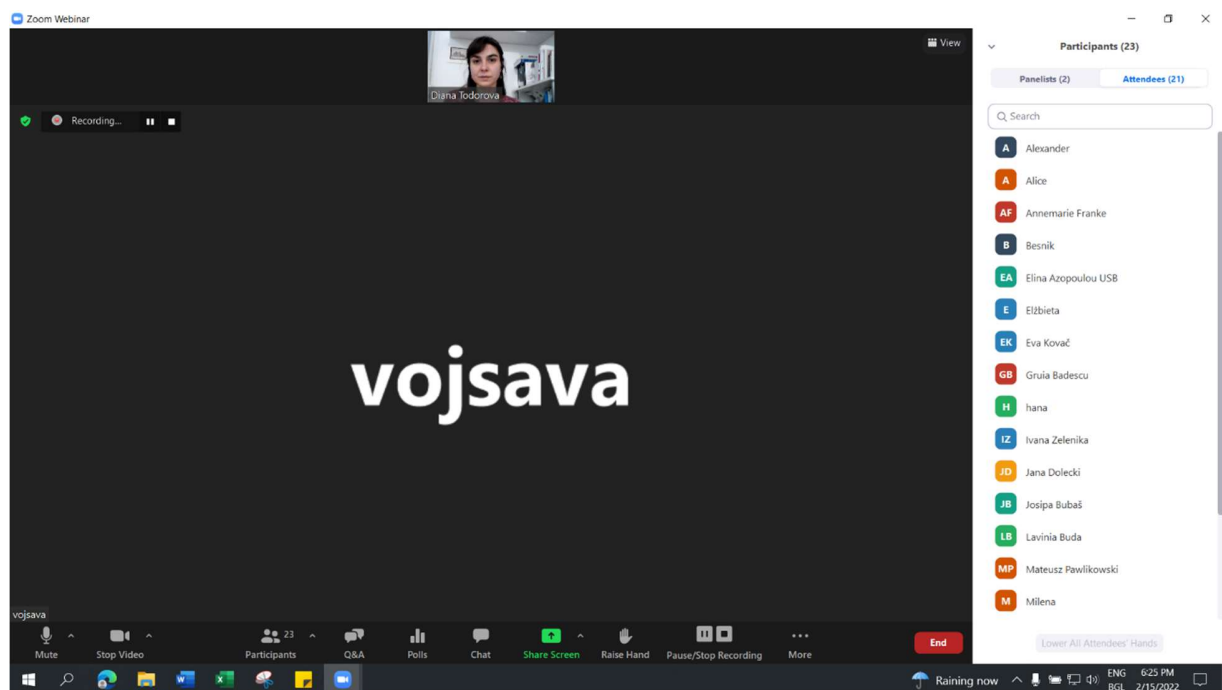
The manual with didactic materials was then presented in detail by Tena Banjeglav, Documenta. Banjeglav holds a Master's degree in History from the University of Zagreb and is in charge of Documenta's educational program. The manual „1989: a lesson from the past“ can be found on this link [Manual “1989: a lesson from the past” - Kultura sjećanja \(documenta.hr\)](https://www.documenta.hr/en/manual-1989-a-lesson-from-the-past)

Elzbieta Moczarska, The Kazimierz and Zofia Moczarscy Foundation, joined the discussion as well. In 2014 Moczarska established the The Kazimierz and Zofia Moczarscy Foundation which has several youth history clubs in different cities in Poland. Moczarska commented on the importance of 1989 in the culture of remembrance in Poland and shared her experience of working with youth on the topic of the democratic transitions in Europe.

In the discussion that followed the speakers exchanged perspectives on the teaching methods and activities that can be used on the topic of democratic changes.

The fourth session of the International Forum, „1989 and mass media: the revolution was televised“ (17:30 h - 19:00 h (CET) was the last session for the day. In her presentation, Diana Todorova, who was working as a TV journalist before joining Documenta and has a Bachelor’s degree in Journalism, explored the social and political impact of television during the democratic changes of 1989 in different European countries. The participants of the Forum were presented with selected TV archives from Poland, Croatia, Romania, Germany, and other countries.

The presentation focused on TV broadcasting practices in the former Eastern block before the democratic changes and then examined the role of television in the historical developments regarding the fall of the Berlin wall and the downfall of Nicolae Ceausescu. During her presentation Todorova also listed examples of the transformation that was taking place in television in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, and Romania as the totalitarian regimes were falling apart. After the presentation, there was a discussion with the participants of the Forum who shared their opinions on the role of mass media in the democratic changes in Europe.



On February 16 members of the project's consortium traveled to Vienna, Austria, to take part in the final fifth session of the International Forum.

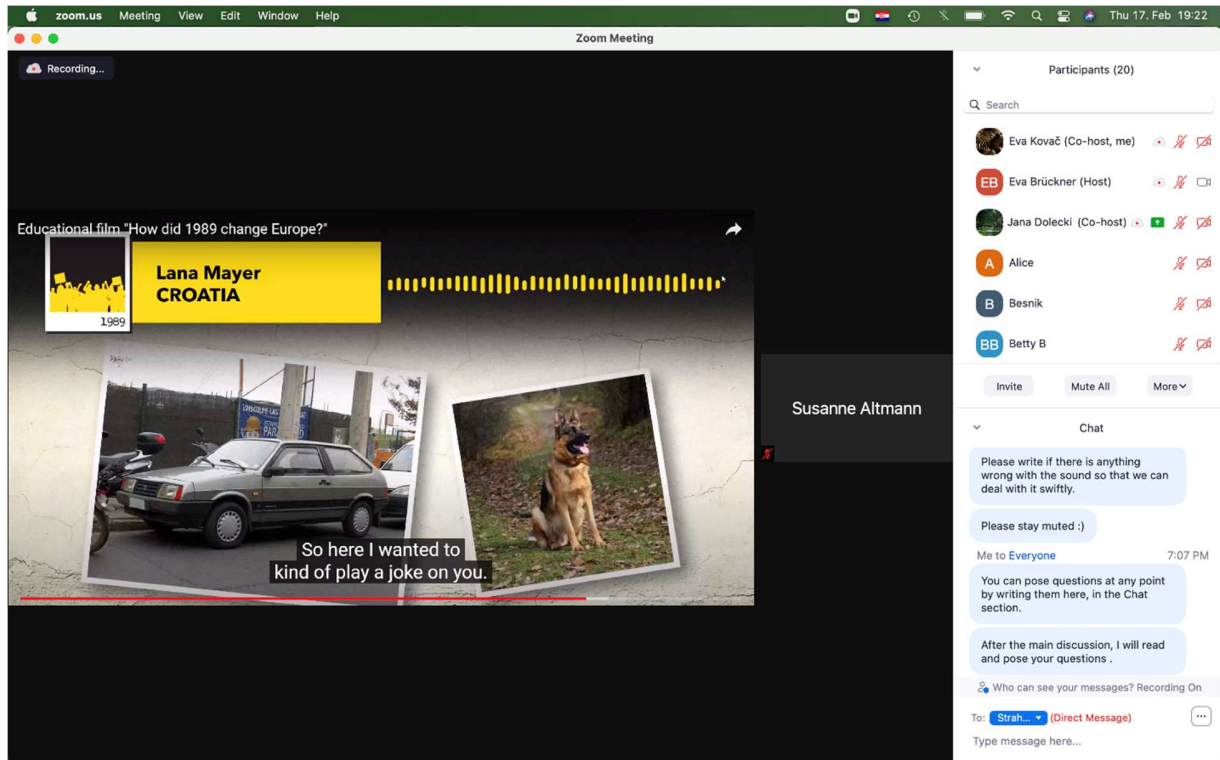
On February 17, Diana Todorova, Blockfrei, Gruia Badescu, CRIDL, Annemarie Franke, ENRS, and Jana Dolečki, Blockfrei met in person for the final partner meeting of the project and were joined online by representatives of the other organizations on the project - Aarhus Universitet, United Societies of Balkans, Hipmont and Tartu Ülikool. The hybrid format enabled partners who were not able to travel to Vienna to take part in the final evaluation of the project.

The fifth session of the Forum “The democratic revolutions of 1989 in art and everyday life” (19:00 h - 21:00 h (CET) was organized in person in Vienna in the format of public discussion and was streamed on Zoom for the participants of the International Forum.



Jana Dolečki, Blockfrei, moderated the discussion which brought together Boris Ondrejčka, art professional; Robert Misik, journalist; Diana Todorova, Documenta, journalist; Gruija Badescu, CRIDL, a Zukunftskolleg Research Fellow at the University of Konstanz and Elzbieta Moczarska, The Kazimierz and Zofia Moczarscy Foundation, civil society educator.

At the beginning of the discussion, there was another screening of the educational film „How did 1989 change Europe?“ for the guests of the discussion in Depot – Kunst und Diskussion which hosted the discussion.



After each of the panelists shared their personal experience of 1989, Robert Misik described the political situation in Austria in 1989 and talked about the significance of the Pan-European Picnic focusing on misconceptions about the event.

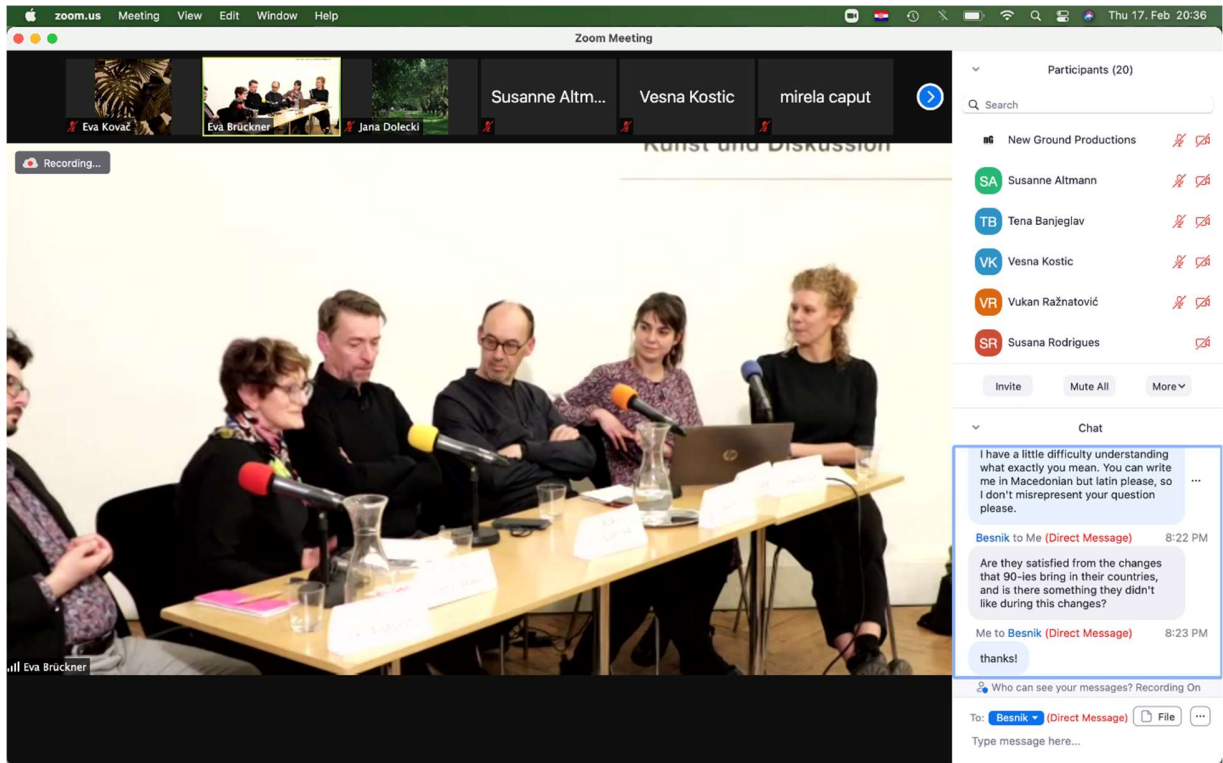
After that Boris Ondreička shared his pre-1989 experience of being a young punk musician in Slovakia.

Gruia Badescu contributed to the discussion with remarks on how public space in Bucharest commemorates the democratic revolution in Romania.

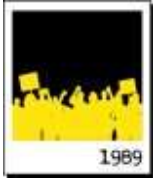
Elzbieta Moczarska shared her perspective on 1989 and the place this year occupies in literature, film, and art.

Diana Todorova talked about how 1989 transformed everyday life and the cultural scene in Bulgaria where she was born.

After that Dolečki opened the floor for questions from the audience in Vienna and on Zoom.



With the end of the discussion the program of the International Forum was completed and on February 18 members of the project's consortium left Vienna.



**Reshaping the Image of
Democratic Revolutions 1989:**
European contemporary Perspectives
and forgotten Lessons from the Past

The International Forum is part of the project “Reshaping the image of democratic revolutions 1989: European contemporary perspectives and forgotten lessons from the past”. The project seeks to remind European citizens about the democratic revolutions 1989-1990 as a period of arduous struggles for pluralistic democracy and peaceful coexistence in Europe with the aim to strengthen the contemporary commitment of the European citizens to the preservation of democratic pluralism and democratic institutions.

Follow us on Instagram: [@reshaping1989](https://www.instagram.com/reshaping1989)

The project is co-financed by the European Union through the program “Europe for Citizens”.



Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union