

REPORT ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND THE BOYCOTT CAMPAIGN WITHIN THE ESC

LEGAL ASPECTS

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This report addresses an aggressive campaign calling for a boycott of Israeli academics and their exclusion from ESC activities. It urges the Society to uphold its foundational values of academic freedom and non-discrimination in the future.

A group of Scholars calling itself "Criminologists for Palestine,"¹ supported by the BDS² movement known for its hostile tactics against Israel, has demanded an amendment to the ESC constitution, specifically Section 2,³ which outlines fundamental principles, including the prohibition of discrimination. Should such amendments be considered, it would raise serious concerns about the potential impact on academic freedom and the Society's commitment to non-discrimination, effectively imposing collective punishment on a diverse group of multidisciplinary researchers. This action jeopardizes the ESC's mission *to foster dialogue among members, including on contested issues.*⁴

This report begins by recounting incidents of harassment at recent ESC conferences involving Israeli scholars. It then exposed how the demand for a boycott, driven by organisations known for their hostility toward Israel rather than any genuine peace effort,

¹ See the agenda for the 2025 European Society of Criminology General Assembly.

An email dated **July 23, 2025**, and another sent by **Lior Volinz** on **August 3, 2025**, presented the website and the motion against Israeli scholars and institutions, stating: "In follow-up to our discussion, we are hereby sending the revised version of our motion (in PDF format). The same motion can also be viewed on our website: <https://criminologists4palestine.wordpress.com/>"

² The European Society of Criminology Conference in Athens Targeted by BDS. <https://israel-academia-monitor.com/2025/09/11/the-european-society-of-criminology-conference-in-athens-targeted-by-bds/> . 10.9.2025. BDS Movement. *Greek institutions say NO to European Society of Criminology's support for Israel's crimes against Palestinians.* BDS Movement. <https://bdsmovement.net/news/greek-institutions-say-no-european-society-criminology%E2%80%99s-support-israel%E2%80%99s-crimes-against->

³ **Section 2: Purpose:** The Society's objectives are as follows: a) To unite, within a single multidisciplinary and European framework, individuals engaged in research, teaching, or practice in the field of criminology. b) To promote criminological scholarship, research, education, and training, particularly within academic institutions. c) To encourage scholarly, scientific, and practical exchange and cooperation among criminologists, especially at the European and international levels. d) To provide a forum for the dissemination of criminological knowledge across Europe.

The term *criminology*, as used in this Constitution, encompasses all scholarly, scientific, and professional knowledge related to the explanation, prevention, control, and treatment of crime and delinquency, including the study of offenders and victims, the measurement and detection of crime, legislation and the practice of criminal law, as well as law enforcement, judicial, and correctional systems.

⁴ According to the statement of the Executive board of the ESC on the 31 of August 2025. <https://esc-eurocrim.org/v2/news/>

threatens to formalise discrimination within our society. Finally, we discuss how criminologists should address conflicts through the principles of restorative justice, transitional justice, and impartial scholarship, fostering dialogue rather than taking sides.

INCIDENTS AGAINST ISRAELI ACADEMICS AT THE ESC CONFERENCE IN BUCHAREST (2024) AND IN ATHENS (2025)

The attacks on Israeli academics were not isolated incidents but part of a coordinated effort to exclude them from the international academic community.

As noted, the aggressive campaign manifested in concrete incidents of harassment at recent ESC Conference. The following details the attacks on Israeli academics at the ESC Conference in Bucharest (2024) and Athens (2025). The first hostile action occurred during the 2024 European Society of Criminology (ESC) Conference in Bucharest, Romania. During this event, a group of five students, led by an Israeli postdoctoral researcher and joined by other individuals (partially identified in a letter submitted to the ESC on [date]), distributed flyers in and around the conference rooms where Israeli researchers were presenting.



They aimed to disrupt the sessions and spread political propaganda in the hallways. Some Israeli scholars have attempted to engage these individuals in dialogue, but their efforts have been met with hostility. As a result, formal letters of complaint were filed with the ESC.

If the Bucharest incident was troubling, the events that unfolded at the 2025 ESC Conference in Athens were far more aggressive and violent. This time, the same group was joined by the BDS organisation and its local supporters. Their campaign to disrupt the conference and intimidate its organisers began weeks before the event.

Before the event: Through petitions, coordinated letters, and a social media campaign, they sought to undermine the conference's credibility and pressure its leadership to exclude Israeli participants from the conference. Local partners, such as Panteion University and the Municipality of Athens, subsequently withdrew their support under pressure, effectively yielding to the intimidation campaign. Despite the ESC Executive Board's efforts to uphold the principles of academic freedom, protesters distributed flyers, disrupted lectures, and harassed attendees based on their nationality. The situation escalated to the point where police and security forces had to be deployed to protect the venue and its participants from the protestors. More than a dozen Israeli participants withdrew from the conference for fear of reprisals, and several panels were cancelled or altered because of persistent intimidation.

Day 1: Initial Disruptions: On Wednesday, September 3, during the opening ceremony, a protest outside the university gates occurred and was quickly dispersed by the police.

Day 2: Escalation of the Disruptions: On Thursday, September 4, the situation intensified. From early morning, protesters began entering sessions where Israeli scholars were scheduled to present. In some sessions, activists read statements asking for a boycott, taking time from the presentation of a scholar accompanied by a slide displayed on the screen that read "Genocide is a crime." This slide, which also appeared in several other sessions throughout the day, included a QR code that allowed attendees to instantly join the boycott. After one of these statements was read aloud, the session chair and several participants demonstratively walked out, leaving the speakers and part of the audience behind. Israeli lecturers filed complaints about this behavior, but the disruptions continued. During lunch, activists wearing keffiyehs and shirts stating "Genocide is murder" handed out flyers and gave speeches against Israel in the university courtyard. Later, in another session, several people again tried to read protest texts, but the Israelis present objected, and a conference steward stopped them. In another panel, a filmed confrontation occurred when protesters tried to disturb the panel again, with Israeli lecturers strongly objecting and the session chair and a steward backing the protesters' right to speak. The sense of threat and hostility became a pattern, and the Israeli participants communicated these concerns to the organisers and the conference president.

Day 3 : General Assembly and Aftermath: By Friday, September 5, Some participants expressed concerns about their safety and requested additional support from the organisers to ensure a secure environment. The Israeli Society of Criminology sent a letter demanding security for its members to the university. Later that day, during a session on October 7, security was present, and the session continued without any incidents. However, hostile rhetoric persisted throughout the rest of the conference. The most distressing episode occurred during the General Assembly on Friday, September 5. In an atmosphere charged with hostility and hatred, members of this group took turns calling for a boycott of Israeli participants, cheered on by sympathisers in the room. This scene left many Israeli attendees speechless and deeply traumatised. Many resolved not to

return to the conference site, shaken by the open hostility and intolerance displayed in what was meant to be a space for scholarly dialogue and debate.

To document these experiences, an **internal survey** was conducted among the Israeli participants registered for the ESC conference. The following testimonies reflect some of the comments received:

One respondent wrote: *"As the conference approached, I felt that focusing solely on academic topics seemed less relevant in the current context, and I regretted not proposing a discussion more meaningful to what is happening in Israel and Gaza."*

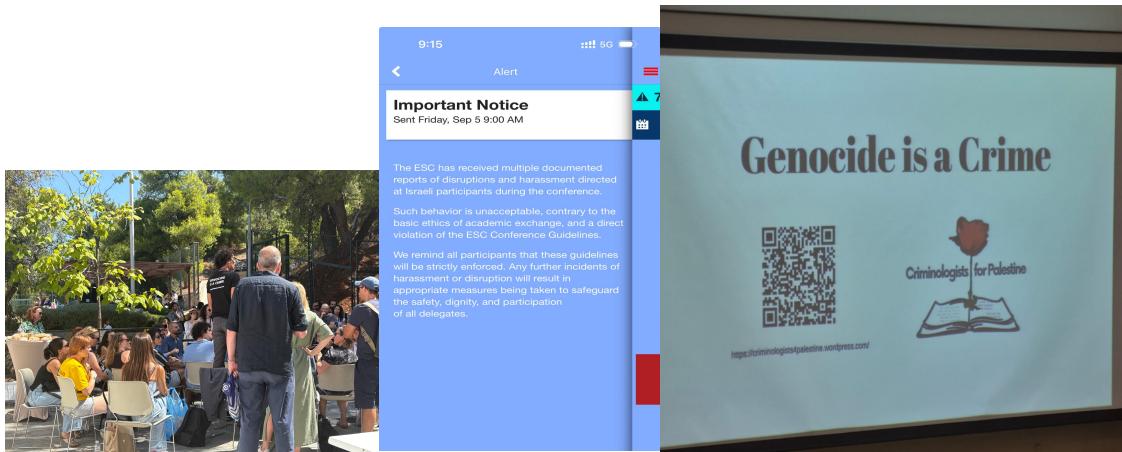
Another remarked: *"I felt uncomfortable — it didn't seem that people came to listen to me or that my presentation interested anyone."*

Similarly, another respondent said: *"A very unpleasant feeling accompanied me throughout the conference. Although there was no specific event directed at me, the atmosphere was very unpleasant, and in my session, two speakers inserted a slide about what is happening in Gaza, unrelated to the lecture, causing other lectures to be shortened"*

Others highlighted the broader context: *"..... I have encountered similar events at other conferences. In most cases, it is a very vocal minority that is supported by external activists. We need to identify and isolate them and convey a clear message to association presidents that they must not give a platform to protests calling for boycotts or creating hostility toward any country or academic institution."*

Another participant concluded: *"The chaos at the conference harmed not only me and other Israeli researchers but all participants, and it did nothing to advance the issues the protesters claim to defend."*

These testimonies illustrate the sense of distress, alienation, and disillusionment experienced by many participants. The Israeli academic community is heterogeneous and pluralistic, encompassing a wide range of political and ethical perspectives within its ranks. The collective punishment and exclusion inflicted on its members violate the very essence of academic freedom. The events in Bucharest and Athens transformed what should have been spaces for intellectual exchange into arenas of intimidation, undermining the ESC's mission to foster dialogue and understanding.



NATURE, AGENDA, AND LEGAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE BOYCOTT CAMPAIGN: NOT ONLY AN ATTACK ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM

These incidents, although deeply concerning, are not isolated. They reflect a broader, coordinated boycott campaign with significant legal and ethical ramifications, which we explore below.

This exclusionary goal has also been pursued in other sectors, notably the arts, music, and cultural institutions through similar coordinated efforts. The campaign was supported by BDS-linked groups⁵, including the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)⁶ and BDS Greece, which pressured the European Society of Criminology (ESC)⁷ to disinvite Israeli scholars, under threat of reputational damage to organisers. BDS is not a peace movement, but rather one that seeks to exclude and delegitimise Israel economically and academically. Its approach, based on collective punishment, undermines the principles of academic neutrality and open inquiry.

Legal aspects of boycott in European countries

Several European countries understand the danger of such visions and have condemned BDS and the boycott against Israeli institutions. Here are some examples:

⁵ <https://www.bdsmovement.net/search?keywords=esc>

⁶ <https://www.bdsmovement.net/pacbi>

⁷ European Society of Criminology (ESC). (2025, August 31). *Executive Board statement on the Athens conference and academic freedom*. ESC News.

<https://esc-eurocrim.org/v2/news/>

Germany: In May 2019, the Bundestag passed a non-binding resolution denouncing BDS as antisemitic, comparing its boycott calls to Nazi-era boycotts of Jews.⁸ The motion “firmly opposes” efforts to undermine Israel’s legitimacy and invokes Germany’s special responsibility to combat antisemitism⁹. It urges public bodies to withhold funding and facilities from BDS-linked groups. Israeli leaders welcomed this move and encouraged others to follow. Even before 2019, some Länder and cities, such as Bavaria and Munich, had already barred BDS activities.¹⁰

Austria (2020): In February 2020, Austria’s **National Council** unanimously condemned the BDS movement as a form of antisemitism and called for concrete action against it.¹¹ The resolution urges the federal government to “strongly condemn” BDS, including boycotts of Israeli products, artists, scientists, and athletes, denies state resources to groups questioning Israel’s right to exist, and reaffirms a zero-tolerance approach to antisemitism (including Israel-related forms). Although not a law, it sets a clear official policy against facilitating BDS.¹²

The United Kingdom (July 2023) enacted the *Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill*, which prohibits universities and municipalities from adopting foreign policy boycotts against Israel.¹³

Spain (2016) overturned local boycott measures and awarded damages to Israeli institutions excluded from public competitions.¹⁴

Besides legal actions against the BDS, there is also discrimination inside the academic world that European countries have prohibited. For example, the French legislation against discrimination in university settings was enacted in July 2025.¹⁵ This law

⁸ Germany designates BDS Israel boycott movement as anti-Semitic | Reuters , <https://www.reuters.com/article/technology/germany-designates-bds-israel-boycott-movement-as-anti-semitic-idUSL5N22T4OA/>

⁹ Anti-BDS Motion Passed by German Federal Parliament , <https://thinc-israel.org/articles/anti-bds-motion-passed-by-german-federal-parliament/>

¹⁰ Germany Bundestag. (2019, May 17). *Resolution designating the BDS movement as antisemitic*. Reuters World News. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/germany-designates-bds-israel-boycott-movement-as-anti-semitic-idUSKCN1SN1Z2/>. Seitz, A.. *Trend alert: European governments increasingly reject BDS movement goals, sentiments*. Associated Press. <https://www.juf.org/News/tmpl-juf-link.aspx?id=443618>

¹¹ Tol Staff, & Ahren, R. (2020, February 27). Austrian parliament unanimously passes condemnation of anti-Israel boycotts: Resolution on ‘Israel-related anti-Semitism, time of israel.

¹² Austrian Parliament. (2020, February). *Unanimous resolution condemning the BDS movement as antisemitic*. The Times of Israel.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/austrian-parliament-unanimously-passes-condemnation-of-anti-israel-boycotts/>

¹³ United Kingdom Government. (2023, July). *Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-public-bodies-banned-from-imposing-their-own-boycotts-against-foreign-countries>

¹⁴ Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA). (2016, January 6). *Spain compensates West Bank university for boycott exclusion*. <https://www.jta.org/2016/01/06/israel/spain-compensates-west-bank-university-for-boycott-exclusion>

¹⁵ République française. (2025, juillet). *Loi n° 2025-734 du 12 juillet 2025 relative à la lutte contre l’antisémitisme, le racisme et les discriminations dans l’enseignement supérieur* [Law on combating antisemitism, racism, and

reinforces the principle that universities bear a legal and ethical duty to prevent and respond to discrimination in all its forms, including discrimination based on nationality or origin. Silencing or excluding individuals based on their national or institutional identity is not protected political expression but a breach of equality and dignity.

At the European level, the Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA¹⁶ obliges all EU Member States to criminalise incitement to violence or hatred based on race, colour, religion, descent, or national or ethnic origin. Although not specific to higher education, it establishes a binding legal standard that requires public institutions to prevent and sanction discriminatory or hate-motivated conduct.

Within academia, this principle directly applies to boycotts targeting scholars based on nationality, which constitutes collective discrimination. Thus, academic boycotts against Israeli academics fall within the scope of behaviours the Framework Decision seeks to prohibit, reinforcing the ESC's duty to safeguard equality and academic freedom.

Academic boycotts targeting Israeli scholars or institutions constitute a form of discriminatory exclusion that is explicitly contrary to the spirit and purpose of such legislation and jurisprudence. European academic institutions, such as the ESC, should also oppose boycott practices that result in differential treatment or harassment of scholars because of their nationality or their perceived affiliation. Academic boycotts violate non-discrimination principles, threaten academic freedom, and contradict democratic values.

Defending Academic Integrity: The Legal and Ethical Imperative of Section 2 of the ESC Constitution

One of the main demands advanced by *Criminologists for Palestine* has been to amend the Statutes of the European Society of Criminology (ESC) in order to authorise or legitimise the exclusion of Israeli scholars and institutions. If such a proposal were accepted, it would **profoundly undermine the very foundations** upon which the ESC was built, its principles of respect, intellectual exchange, and academic integrity.

Academic boycotts directly contradict the ESC's founding principles and broader international human rights standards. **Section 2 of the ESC Statute** promotes respect for diversity, equality, and scientific collaboration free from discrimination. Similarly, the **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** and the **European Convention on Human Rights** recognise academic freedom and freedom of expression as fundamental pillars of

discrimination in higher education]. *Journal officiel de la République française*. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/loi/297444-lutte-contre-lantisemitisme-enseignement-superieur-loi-31-juillet-2025>

¹⁶ Council of the European Union. (2008, November 28). *Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law*. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 328/55.

democracy. Excluding or silencing scholars based on nationality or institutional affiliation is not merely a moral failure; it constitutes a violation of international legal norms that protect equality, freedom of research, and non-discrimination.

International legal standards clearly reinforce this. Measures that restrict access to academic spaces on grounds of nationality contravene¹⁷:

- **Article 13 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights**, which guarantees freedom of the arts and sciences
- **Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**, which protects the freedom indispensable for scientific research; and
- **established principles of non-discrimination in international law**, which prohibit collective penalties or adverse treatment based on identity or institutional affiliation.

These proposals violate legal and ethical principles.

Discrimination:

Boycotts targeting individuals based on their national origin or institutional affiliation amount to collective punishment and violate the principle of equality before the law. As demonstrated by *Shai Farber's qualitative study* on Israeli academics during the 2023–24 Israel-Hamas war, such practices translate into overt and covert exclusion from conferences, publications, and collaborations purely based on nationality, a pattern the author identifies as discriminatory and contrary to academic freedom¹⁸ (Farber, 2024).

Academic Freedom:

Every scholar has the right to pursue and disseminate knowledge free of intimidation or exclusion. As Professor Gert Weisskirchen, former OSCE Representative on Combating Antisemitism (2007), observed¹⁹, “Anti-Israel boycott motions are a morally reprehensible attack on academic freedom... counterproductive to all attempts to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the Middle East.” Similarly, Lawrence H. Summers, the former president of Harvard University, noted that singling out Israel alone constitutes a form of discrimination that is incompatible with the values of the academy.²⁰

¹⁷ European Jewish Lawyers Association (IJL). (2024, July). *The anti-Israeli academic boycotts: An international human rights law perspective* [Position paper]. Tel Aviv: International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists.

¹⁸ Farber, S. (2024). *The hidden boycott: Experiences of Israeli academics during the Israel-Hamas war*. *Israel Affairs*, 30(5), 1006–1024. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537121.2024.2394303>

¹⁹ Weisskirchen, G. (2007). *Statement on academic boycotts and antisemitism*. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). https://spme.org/campus-news-climate/personal-representative-of-the-chairman-in-office-of-the-osce-on-combating-antisemitism-denounces-british-university-union-call-for-anti-israel-boycott/3210/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

²⁰ Summers, L. H. (2015). *Academic freedom and antisemitism* (ISGAP Policy Paper Series No. 1). Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy. ISBN 978-1-940186-12-2

Dignity and Safety:

These measures “stigmatise, exclude, and intimidate,” violating personal dignity and freedom of expression. Farber (2024) documents the severe psychological and professional toll experienced by Israeli scholars under what he terms the *hidden boycott*, highlighting its erosion of trust and collegiality across the academic world. Farber describes the recollections of Israelis who were present during the event. This feeling was also shared by others we have met, who did not find the same atmosphere of peace that usually characterises ESC conferences.

Antisemitism:

Holding Israeli academics collectively responsible for state actions reflects an antisemitic pattern of group attribution. As the **International Jewish Lawyers (IJL) Position Paper** (2024)²¹ notes, such practices breach international non-discrimination law and the IHRA definition of antisemitism, which prohibits treating Jews or Israelis as a monolithic collective.

These legal and ethical principles strongly suggest that academic boycotts are incompatible with the values of open scholarship and violate human rights and institutional integrity. Academic freedom requires that all voices—Israeli, Palestinian, European, or otherwise—be equally heard. Boycotts, in contrast, substitute dialogue with exclusion, punishing individuals for their identity rather than engaging with their ideas.

As stated in its August 2025 statement, the ESC does not exclude participants based on nationality, ethnicity, institutional affiliation, religion, or country of origin. Any call to prohibit participation for such reasons is incompatible with its mission and the Constitution. The ESC promotes dialogue, rather than division. Its annual meetings are open forums where criminologists from all backgrounds can share knowledge and engage in respectful academic debate. This openness is central to the Society's identity and has been vital to its role in fostering an international community of scholars. For these reasons, the ESC Board firmly rejects all proposals to exclude participants on grounds unrelated to scientific exchange. Upholding inclusivity and academic freedom is a responsibility owed to members, to the broader criminological community, and to Society at large. The ESC Board reaffirms its commitment to freedom of opinion and expression, and to maintaining an environment grounded in mutual respect, understanding, and diversity. This freedom includes the obligation to ensure that every voice can be heard. Attempts to disrupt or silence contributions during meetings undermine these principles and fall outside protected expression. The Guidelines for Conference Participants set clear expectations of fairness, respect, and professionalism, and specify that any form of threatening behaviour, verbal or physical, as well as disorderly or disruptive conduct, will not be tolerated.

²¹ Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities. (2024, May 20). *The Israel Academy urges global academic institutions to stand against antisemitism and boycotts* [Open letter]. <https://www.academy.ac.il>

Building on these principles, and to ensure a stable and constructive future for the ESC, it is imperative to safeguard the core values set out in Section 2 of the ESC Constitution. Such acts of intimidation must be firmly rejected. Despite the difficulties and pressures encountered, the ESC must stand resolute and unwavering in its commitment to the founding principles of academic freedom, equality, and integrity.

It is worth recalling that the University of Warsaw, which will host the ESC conference next year, has a clear stance on this issue. Amid petitions calling for a boycott of Israeli academia, the university's leadership refused to join. It declared that violence, hatred, and discrimination have no place within the university, and that academia must remain a realm of open dialogue and safety. This approach serves as a model for how European institutions can safeguard academic integrity while keeping political polarisation out of the realm of learning.

THE ROLE OF CRIMINOLOGY CONFERENCES IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND TRANSITIONAL PRACTICES.

Criminology, particularly its traditions of restorative and transitional justice, offers a constructive framework for addressing conflict and harm through dialogue rather than division. Our field teaches that understanding and reconciliation come through communication, empathy, and shared responsibility, not exclusion. For instance, Academy scholars in transitional justice contribute by researching, critiquing, and developing the principles and practices of mechanisms such as truth commissions, reparations, and institutional reform, while bridging academic theory with on-the-ground experiences through collaboration with practitioners.

We propose that the ESC's Working Groups on Restorative Justice, Transitional Justice, and Victimology organise a formal academic forum to study and discuss the ethical, social, and institutional implications of academic boycotts. By engaging with this issue using academic tools, the ESC can transform hostility into understanding and reaffirm its role as a space for intellectual integrity and human connection.

Conclusion and Call to Action

The events in Athens constituted an attempt to assault academic freedom and the fundamental values that define the European Society of Criminology (ESC). The ESC now faces both moral and professional obligations: to reject exclusion, reaffirm its constitutional principles, and protect its members from intimidation.

The Athens conference highlighted the complexities and tensions that can arise when external pressures intersect with academic events, underscoring the need for robust safeguards to preserve scholarly dialogue. The campaign that targeted Israeli academics

was deliberately organised to delegitimise their participation and coerce exclusion — a strategy fundamentally opposed to the principles of free inquiry and non-discrimination. Such actions, both professional and emotional, are reputational.

Criminology as a discipline is founded on dialogue, inclusion, and the search for understanding — not silencing or segregation. Several institutions across Europe have taken a firm stance against academic boycotts and BDS-related discrimination. These examples should guide the ESC in its response, not intimidate it.

Therefore, we urge the European Society of Criminology to do the following:

- Formally and publicly reject any motion to boycott Israeli academic institutions or Israeli scholars, affirming that such actions will never be acceptable within the ESC.
- Reaffirms its commitment to academic freedom, equality, and inclusion, as enshrined in Section 2 of the ESC Constitution.
- Implement protective measures for conferences and members, including clear codes of conduct, security protocols, and swift responses to harassment or intimidation, as well as mechanisms to prevent the exclusion of scholars based on their nationality or institutional affiliation
- Establish clear protocols and take action to address disruptions during academic panels, particularly those that compromise the ability of Israeli scholars—or any participant—to present their work or feel safe. This includes reviewing the conduct of session chairs who contributed to such disturbances despite their role in fostering respectful and calm academic dialogue.
- Foster inclusive dialogue by creating discussion circles that bring together Israeli, Palestinian, and international scholars to advance understanding through research and exchange.

This report aims for the ESC to remain true to its principles, standing firm against pressure and protecting the values that make it a model of academic freedom and honesty. I

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