

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

# THE FUTURE OF EU ENLARGEMENTS:

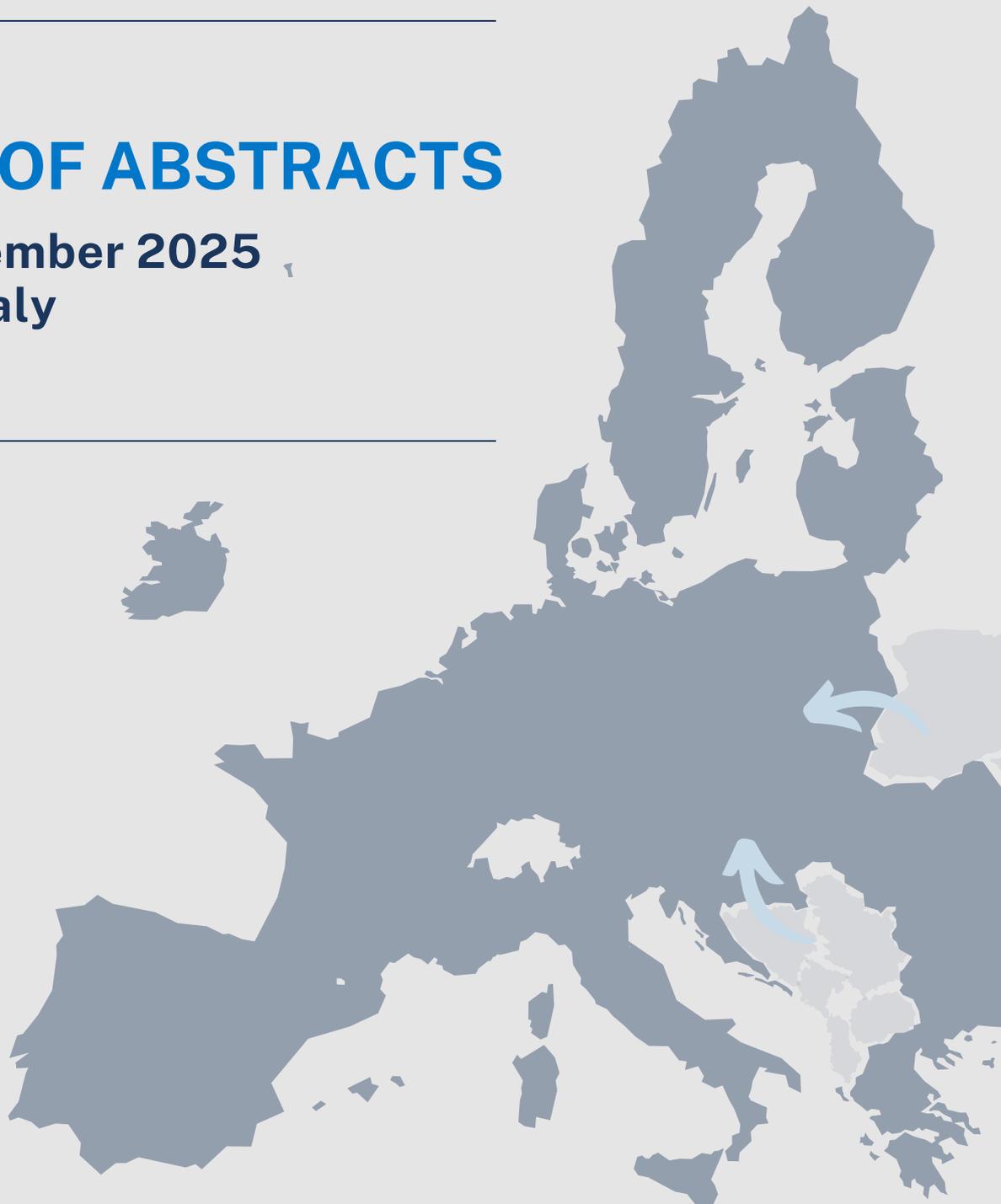
CHALLENGING ILLIBERAL TRENDS  
AND DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

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## BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

6-7 November 2025  
Rome, Italy

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# **THE FUTURE OF EU ENLARGEMENTS:**

**CHALLENGING ILLIBERAL TRENDS  
AND DEMOCRACY SUPPORT**

**Polish Academy of Sciences  
Scientific Centre in Rome**

**6-7 November 2025**

## Conference Venue:

Polish Academy of Sciences – Scientific Centre in Rome  
Vicolo Doria 2, int. 6, 00187 Rome, Italia

## Organising Partners:

Polish Academy of Sciences – Scientific Centre in Rome  
Institute of European Studies, Jagiellonian University in Kraków  
Future Democracy Lab, Excellence Initiative of the Jagiellonian University  
Faculty of International and Political Studies of the Jagiellonian University  
Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, University of Warsaw  
University of Foggia



Rome  
Scientific Center



Faculty of International  
and Political Studies  
of the Jagiellonian  
University in Kraków



## Scientific and Organising Committee:

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Dr. Małgorzata Fijał  
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Agnieszka Stefaniak-Hrycko  
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## **Introduction**

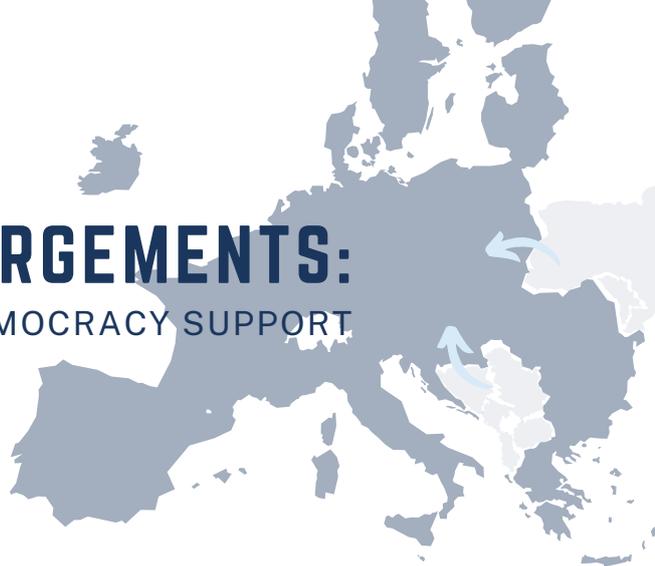
In the context of Poland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2025, the Polish Academy of Sciences in Rome, in collaboration with the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University, the Future Democracy Lab operating within the Faculty of International and Political Studies of the JU (Excellence Initiative of the JU), the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies of the University of Warsaw, and the University of Foggia organise an International Conference entitled "The Future of EU Enlargements: Challenging Illiberal Trends and Democracy Support". This international event will provide forum for the multidisciplinary reflections on future of the EU enlargement with particular emphasis on key dimensions and legacies of Poland's leadership within the EU.

The conference aims to provide an interdisciplinary platform for scholars, experts, and practitioners, reflect on one of the most pressing challenges facing contemporary Europe: the future of EU enlargement in the context of rising illiberal trends and global challenges. As the enlargement process remains vital for ensuring stability, security, and prosperity across the continent, it is increasingly threatened by geopolitical competition, declining trust in democratic institutions, and the spread of authoritarianism and disinformation. This event will examine how the EU can uphold its commitment to promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in aspiring member states while addressing these multifaceted threats.

# THE FUTURE OF EU ENLARGEMENTS:

CHALLENGING ILLIBERAL TRENDS AND DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

Rome, Polish Academy of Sciences, Vicolo Doria 2  
6-7 November 2025



## PROGRAMME

6 NOVEMBER 2025

13:30 - 14:00 **Welcome Coffee**

14:00 - 14:30 **OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE / WELCOMING ADDRESSES**

**Agnieszka Stefaniak-Hrycko** - Director of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Rome

**Krzysztof Koźbiał** - Vice-Dean for Human Resources and Finance of the Faculty of International and Political Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków

**Agnieszka Bieńczyk-Missala** - Vice-Dean for International Cooperation of the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies of the University of Warsaw

**Magdalena Góra** - Future Democracy Lab. Strategic Programme Excellence Initiative at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków

**Daniele Stasi** - University of Foggia

14:30 - 15:45 **SESSION I**

**ITALIAN POLITICS AND EU ENLARGEMENT: INTERESTS, CHALLENGES, AND INFLUENCE**

Chair: Daniele Stasi

14:30 - 14:45 **Matteo Bonomi** (Istituto Affari Internazionali, IAI)

*Varieties of Enlargement: Italy's Differential Approach under the Meloni Government*

14:45 - 15:00 **Krzysztof Strzałka** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)

*Italy and the Western Balkans' Involvement in European Defence: a Strategic Opportunity for the EU*

15:00 - 15:15 **Goran Lošić** (Sapienza University of Rome)

*Italian Politics on EU Enlargement: The Case of Serbia (2009-2014)*

15:15 - 15:30 **Małgorzata Fijał** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków / Polish Academy of Sciences in Rome)

*Italian Civil Society and Democracy Support in the EU's Neighbourhood*

15:30 - 15:45 **Discussion with Q&A**

# THE FUTURE OF EU ENLARGEMENTS:

CHALLENGING ILLIBERAL TRENDS AND DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

PROGRAMME - 6 NOVEMBER 2025



15:45 - 17:00

## SESSION II

### EU ENLARGEMENT IN A TURBULENT ERA: DEMOCRACY, DISINFORMATION AND STRATEGIC INFLUENCE

Chair: Magdalena Góra

15:45 - 16:00

**Daniele Stasi** (University of Foggia)

*The Rule of Law Versus 'Rule of the Nation': An Examination of Illiberal Democracy*

16:00 - 16:15

**Alberto Batinti** (Sapienza University of Rome)

*Widening the Union, Deepening Democracy? EU Enlargements and the Shaping of Democratic Governance*

16:15 - 16:30

**Dominika Harasimiuk** (University of Warsaw)

*EU Enlargement in the Age of Disinformation: Big Tech, Geopolitics, and the Struggle for European Values*

16:30 - 16:45

**Róża Różańska** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)

*Strategic Diplomacy in an Illiberal Age: Reframing EU Enlargement through Soft Power and Cross-Sector Partnerships*

16:45 - 17:00

Discussion with Q&A

17:00 - 17:30

Coffee Break

17:30 - 18:45

## SESSION III

### THE WESTERN BALKANS ON THE ROAD TO THE EU: BETWEEN ENLARGEMENT FATIGUE AND NEW HOPES

Chair: Vadym Zheltovskyy

17:30 - 17:45

**Spasimir Domaradzki** (University of Warsaw)

*When the EU Turns Bad. The EU and the 2024 Elections Campaigns in North Macedonia*

17:45 - 18:00

**Krzysztof Koźbiał** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)

*Western Balkans in the Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic*

18:00 - 18:15

**Natasza Styczyńska** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)

*Serbia's EU Integration: Understanding the Dynamics of Pre-Enlargement Fatigue*

18:15 - 18:30

**Luigi Pigna** (Sapienza University of Rome)

*From Pact to Deal: Western Balkans on the Path to EU Membership Amid Migration and Climate Challenges*

18:30 - 18:45

Discussion with Q&A

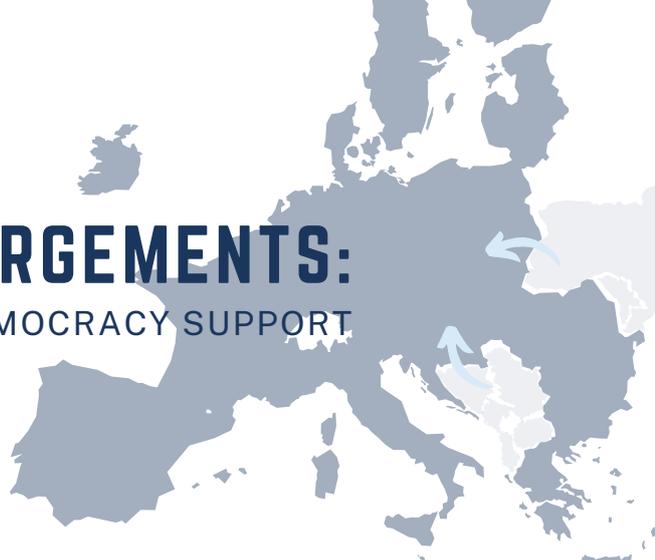
19:30

Dinner

# THE FUTURE OF EU ENLARGEMENTS:

CHALLENGING ILLIBERAL TRENDS AND DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

Rome, Polish Academy of Sciences, Vicolo Doria 2  
6-7 November 2025



## PROGRAMME

7 NOVEMBER 2025

- 9:00 - 10:15**      **SESSION IV**
- RULE OF LAW, POPULISM AND CONTESTATION OF INTEGRATION: CHALLENGES TO EU ENLARGEMENT FROM A CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE**  
Chair: Małgorzata Fijał
- 9:00 - 9:15**      **Piero Gambale** (LUISS University / Italian Chamber of Deputies)  
**Maciej Serowaniec** (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń)  
*Accountability, Representativeness and the Rule of Law under Illiberal Pressure: Challenges for EU Enlargement Policy from a Central and Eastern European Perspective*
- 9:15 - 9:30**      **Magdalena Góra, Volodymyr Posviatenko** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)  
*New Kids on the Block? New Actors and Patterns of Contestation of the New Eastern Enlargement in Polish Public Sphere*
- 9:30 - 9:45**      **József Dúró** (Corvinus University of Budapest)  
*Populists in Government. Lessons from the Experience of Hungary*
- 9:45 - 10:00**      **Jakub Krupa** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)  
*Who Speaks Against the Europe Union? A Study of Polish Party Manifestos (2001–2023)*
- 10:00 - 10:15**      **Discussion with Q&A**
- 10:15 - 10:45**      **Coffee Break**

# THE FUTURE OF EU ENLARGEMENTS:

CHALLENGING ILLIBERAL TRENDS AND DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

PROGRAMME - 7 NOVEMBER 2025



10:45 - 12:00

## SESSION V

### GEOPOLITICS OF ENLARGEMENT: TRANSATLANTIC DYNAMICS, ILLIBERAL TRENDS, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Chair: Agnieszka Bieńczyk-Missala

10:45 - 11:00

**Ewelina Waśko-Owsiejczuk** (University of Białystok)

*„America First” and EU Enlargement: Transatlantic Rivalry as a Challenge to Democracy Support in Candidate Countries*

11:00 - 11:15

**Tomasz Soroka** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)

*Canada’s Strategic Reorientation: The E.U. as Canada’s Key Democratic Ally Amidst the U.S. Volatility*

11:15 - 11:30

**Antonluca Lecce** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)

*EU Enlargement Package 2024: Normative Integration and Geopolitical Strategy in fieri*

11:30 - 11:45

**Filip Białobrzewski** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)

*European Integration as a Catalyst for Illiberalism? The Role of Migration and Climate Narratives in the Rise of Right-Wing Parties in the EU*

11:45 - 12:00

**Discussion with Q&A**

12:00 - 13:15

## SESSION VI

### EU ENLARGEMENT AND UKRAINE: CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND MIGRATION PERSPECTIVES

Chair: Spasimir Domaradzki

12:00 - 12:15

**Vadym Zheltovskyy** (University of Warsaw)

*The Agency of Verkhovna Rada in the European Integration of Ukraine*

12:15 - 12:30

**Halyna Dovhan** (University of Trento)

*Impact of the EU Enlargement on the Reform of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine*

12:30 - 12:45

**Joshua Losinger** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków / University of Deusto)

*Moving Forward: Ukraine’s Position at the European Court of Human Rights in the Context of EU Accession*

12:45 - 13:00

**Wiktoria Koklina, Tomasz Zduńczyk** (Polish Young Diplomats Forum)

*From Maidan to Membership: the Prospects and Challenges of Ukraine's Integration into the UE*

13:00 - 13:15

**Discussion with Q&A**

13:15 - 14:15

**Lunch Break**

# THE FUTURE OF EU ENLARGEMENTS:

CHALLENGING ILLIBERAL TRENDS AND DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

PROGRAMME - 7 NOVEMBER 2025



14:15 - 15:15

## SESSION VII

### THE FUTURE OF EU ENLARGEMENT AND DEMOCRACY IN THE EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD AND BEYOND

Chair: Krzysztof Koźbiał

14:15 - 14:30

**Olesia Kryvenko** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)

*What is the Future of the Eastern Partnership?*

14:30 - 14:45

**Eliso Chinchaladze** (Caucasus University)

*The Limits of the European Union's Democratic Conditionality: Case Study Analysis of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova*

14:45 - 15:00

**Nicholas Zalewski, Zaruhi Margaryan, Chiara Ferro** (University of Naples Federico II)

*EU Enlargement: Challenges In Russia's Neighborhood And In The Balkans*

15:00 - 15:15

Discussion with Q&A

15:15 - 15:30

Closing Remarks



Rome  
Scientific Center



**Matteo Bonomi**

Istituto Affari Internazionali

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## ***Varieties of Enlargement: Italy's Differential Approach under the Meloni Government***

### **ABSTRACT**

This contribution examines the differentiated approach of Giorgia Meloni's government to the European Union's ongoing and prospective enlargement processes, highlighting how domestic political constraints, economic interests, and transatlantic alignments shape Italian positions. In the Western Balkans, Italy under Meloni has pursued a pragmatic strategy grounded in bilateral relations and economic engagement, framed by security concerns and reinforced by its Atlanticist orientation. This stance has been politically uncontroversial, as the anticipated economic benefits are broadly shared across the governing coalition. By contrast, Italy's position toward Moldova and Georgia has been more cautious and reluctant. Here, Meloni's stance reflects the need to balance her coalition partners in the League, whose illiberal leanings and affinities with pro-Russian actors could otherwise undermine Italy's position. The most proactive engagement has been directed toward Ukraine, where Meloni has leveraged the EU as a multilateral platform to reinforce Italy's transatlantic bond with Washington. While this position opens both opportunities and risks for Italian economic sectors—particularly agriculture—the broader foreign policy orientation has remained firmly pro-Kyiv, though not without latent contestation within the ruling coalition. Taken together, these cases suggest that the Meloni government's approach to EU enlargement is not uniform but varies across regions, depending on the interplay of coalition management, economic calculations, and Italy's embeddedness in the transatlantic partnership.

### **BIO**

Matteo Bonomi (Ph.D.) is senior fellow in the "EU, politics and institutions" programme at Istituto Affari Internazionali. His work focuses on European integration and EU enlargement policy. He has been an expert or consultant for a number of institutes, think tanks, foundations, and public agencies across Europe. He has published academic and policy papers on various aspects of EU differentiated integration, Western Balkan-EU relations, and the political economy of EU enlargement. He holds a PhD in "Politics, Human Rights and Sustainability" from the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna in Pisa, Italy.

**Krzysztof Strzałka**

Jagiellonian University in Kraków

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## ***Italy and the Western Balkans' Involvement in European Defence: A Strategic Opportunity for the EU***

### **ABSTRACT**

Italy's strategic goal in the wider Mediterranean region, of which the Western Balkans are a part, is to ensure multifaceted security for itself and for the EU. This has resulted in Rome's very intensive efforts and promotion of the Western Balkan countries' membership of the EU between 2026 and 2027. Continuing and protecting the efforts of the enlargement policy in the region from elements of instability and the ambitions of external powers is therefore a priority for both Italy and the EU, and this strategy can no longer be based on an uncertain and typically European 'wait and see' approach. The key to truly secure enlargement to the Western Balkans is significant engagement in the European defence and security agenda. As early as 2024, the Union signed strategic partnerships for security and defence with Albania and North Macedonia, which primarily enable cooperation between the partners and the European Defence Agency (EDA). This opportunity is particularly important in light of the recently adopted EU plan to rearm Europe and the White Paper on European defence until 2030. These documents emphasise the need to strengthen border protection, ensure military mobility and develop industrial capabilities, in which the Western Balkans region can be included, even though it does not occupy a clearly central place in the document. Neutralising the influence of China and Russia in the region will also be an important issue. This makes the contribution of the Western Balkans to European security urgent and realistic. Greater involvement in European peacekeeping missions, support for Ukraine and joint border management, as well as logistical support through EU-funded projects, may therefore prove crucial. The region is also interesting in terms of its defence infrastructure, which needs to be adapted to European strategy. Serbia plays an important role in this context. Normalising EU relations with Serbia and revitalising the enlargement process for the entire region are therefore key to focusing the region's efforts and potential on achieving EU objectives. It will be necessary to align Italian and EU policies and priorities by rethinking and reshaping the dynamics of enlargement, which has so far proved ineffective in the context of a common defence strategy.

### **BIO**

Krzysztof Strzałka PhD is a political scientist, historian and career diplomat. He received a Master's degree in history and post-graduate diploma in management and business from the Jagiellonian University. He studied law at the same university and graduated (MA) in international relations from the "La Sapienza" University of Rome. He holds a PhD in humanities (1999). He has been assistant professor at the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University since 2005. At the same time, from 2000, he was employed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a career diplomat. In the diplomatic service, he served, among others, in the Polish Embassy in Rome, Consul General in Milan and deputy director and head of the Department of Public and Cultural Diplomacy. From 2018 to 2023, he served as Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the Slovak Republic. Since 2024, he has been minister plenipotentiary in the Strategy Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Main areas of interest: EU and NATO policy in the Mediterranean; Foreign, security and European policy of Italy; Diplomacy and international policy of the Holy See; Religious freedom and religion in international relations; Public and cultural diplomacy and soft power.

**Goran Lošić**

Sapienza University of Rome

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### ***Italian Politics on EU Enlargement: The Case of Serbia (2009-2014)***

#### **ABSTRACT**

The paper discusses the relationship between the Italian foreign policy and the EU enlargement regarding Serbia. The object of analysis is Italy's government rhetoric towards Belgrade. Notably, in 2009, Italy and Serbia signed a strategic partnership. Serbia then applied for EU membership and, in 2014, initiated accession negotiations at the political level. The study reconstructs Farnesina's acting as a relational phenomenon among internal regional factors and international crises. Moreover, the work concentrates on the Belgrade-Priština dialogue. Furthermore, the article addresses the topic, examining the context of geopolitical and geostrategic issues, which include the impact and competition of great powers to maintain their sphere of influence in the Western Balkans. As a qualitative methodology tool, the work utilizes oral semi-structured interviews with Vuk Jeremić, former Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs; Ambassador Ferdinando Nelli Feroci, former Permanent Representative of Italy to the European Union; Sanda Rašković Ivić, former Serbian Ambassador to Italy; and Jovan Ratković, Foreign Policy Advisor to Serbian President Boris Tadić. Finally, the article examines Serbia as a security policy dossier for the EU and regional stability in Southeast Europe, drawing on neorealism as an international relations theory. The study will be divided into two parts. First, it provides a contextual framework with the conceptual and theoretical background (New Intergovernmentalism in European Integration and EU Governance, soft power theory, and the rationalist enlargement theory). The second part will examine the evolution, dynamics, and key features of Italy's foreign policy towards Serbia, as well as Italy's role as a founding member of the Central European Initiative (CEI). The work aims to apply EU governance and enlargement theory, combined with Nye's soft power theory and international relations theory, to examine the relations between Rome and Belgrade.

#### **BIO**

Goran Lošić is a PhD candidate in Political Studies at the Sapienza University of Rome. His research focuses on the foreign policy of Italy and Germany towards Serbia following the fall of Milošević. Lošić holds a degree in Sociology from the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade and a Degree in Political Science (International Relations) from the University of Trieste. He was an Erasmus student in Bremen and completed his traineeship in Brussels. In April 2025, Lošić concluded PhD Visiting (six months) period at the Humboldt University in Berlin. He participated at scientific international conferences in Rome, Algiers, and Dubrovnik. Goran Lošić published scientific works in Italy and Serbia.

**Małgorzata Fijał**

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## ***Italian Civil Society and Democracy Support in the EU's Neighbourhood***

### **ABSTRACT**

The paper looks at how Italian civil society organisations (CSOs) contribute to the promotion of democracy in the EU's neighbourhood, focusing in particular on regions such as the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, and the Southern Mediterranean. While EU and national institutions are often seen as the main drivers of democracy support abroad, national civil society actors – including NGOs, foundations and advocacy networks – play a key but often overlooked role. Based on a combination of policy analysis and case study material, including interviews with practitioners, the paper explores the different ways in which Italian CSOs engage in democracy-related work: from civic education and electoral support to capacity building and cross-border partnerships. It also considers some of the constraints they face – such as funding challenges, political sensitivities, and limited visibility in EU-level policymaking. The paper argues that a more consistent inclusion of national civil society actors in EU democracy support efforts would strengthen the Union's engagement in its neighbourhood and help build more resilient democratic institutions.

### **BIO**

Małgorzata Maria Fijał is a researcher at the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University, where she is involved in the Horizon Europe research project “REDIRECT: The REpresentative Disconnect – Diagnosis and Strategies for RECTification.” She has previously worked on the Horizon Europe projects “SHAPEDEM-EU: Rethinking and Reshaping the EU's Democracy Support in its Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood” and “RECLAIM – Reclaiming Liberal Democracy in the Postfactual Age.” She is also currently affiliated with the Polish Academy of Sciences in Rome, where she actively promotes Polish scholarship abroad. She holds a PhD in the humanities, specialising in cultural and religious studies, from the Jagiellonian University, and a double master's degree with distinction in European Studies from the Jagiellonian University and the University of Padua. A six-time recipient of Erasmus and Erasmus+ scholarships, she has undertaken study placements in Perugia, Palermo, Bari, Padua, and Rome. She is also a recipient of the Polish Ministry of Education and Science scholarship for outstanding young researchers (2022–2025). Her research interests focus on contemporary Italian culture and politics, as well as the identity dynamics and socio-cultural dimensions of nationalism and populism.

**Daniele Stasi**

University of Foggia

daniele.stasi@unifg.it

## ***The Rule of Law Versus 'Rule of the Nation': An Examination of Illiberal Democracy***

### **ABSTRACT**

Scholars remain divided regarding the efficacy of the terms 'illiberal democracy' and 'sovereignty' in characterizing the illiberal tendencies observed in the Visegrad region. In my discourse, I shall present reflections on the incongruence of these categories, which may be supplanted by the notion of national-populism, emphasizing historical traits associated with the post-communist legacy that undermine the principle of legal equality among citizens and the separation of powers, thus facilitating somehow a return to a premodern form of governance that implies, beneath the facade of the national interest, the arbitrary exercise of authority.

### **BIO**

Daniele Stasi is a full professor of History of Political Thought at the University of Foggia. Political concepts from the 19th and 20th centuries are his primary areas of study, with an emphasis on the connection between state structures and the concept of nation. He has been a visiting professor and scholar at numerous universities (Harvard, London School of Economics, University of Warsaw, Federal University of Fortaleza, University of Aberdeen, Max Planck Institute in Frankfurt). His latest works are *Faces of Authoritarian Populism* (ed. B. Majtényi) (2024); «Polonia Restituta». *Nazionalismo e riconquista della sovranità polacca* (2022); *Liberalismo e idea di nazione in Pasquale Stanislao Mancini* (2019).

**Alberto Batinti**

Sapienza University of Rome

alberto.batinti@uniroma1.it

## ***Widening the Union, Deepening Democracy? EU Enlargements and the Shaping of Democratic Governance***

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper shows data documented historical evolution and transformation of democratic governance within the European Union (EU) and the Euro Area, with a focus on key enlargement episodes. By analyzing democracy indices over several decades, it explores past shifts in democratic quality across member states and how past enlargements have influenced institutional democratic norms and practices. It employs a comparative framework to assess changes before and after major enlargement waves, highlighting persistent regional disparities and the complex dynamics of democratic consolidation. The paper aims to present the EU's democratic trajectory in a broader geopolitical context and explore how interactions with major global powers—Russia, the United States, and China—have shaped, and at times challenged, the EU's democracy support agenda. These external relationships are assessed considering the EU's normative commitments to human rights, rule of law, and democratic standards, which have increasingly come under strain amid global authoritarian resurgence and internal illiberal trends. The manuscript provides a dual-layered analysis: it offers a historical account of democratic evolution within the EU and proposes forward-looking insights into how lessons from past enlargements can inform future strategies. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between enlargement, democracy, and international politics, offering policy-relevant reflections for strengthening democratic resilience in the EU and its neighbourhood.

### **BIO**

Alberto Batinti is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science at the Sapienza University of Rome. From August 2021 to July 2022, he was an Associate Professor at the Department of Health Management & Policy at the University of New Hampshire. From February 2019 until May 2021, he has been an Associate Professor of Economics at the International Business School Suzhou - Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University. In the past, he has been an Assistant and Associate Professor at the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics; before that, he worked as a consultant both for the Italian Ministry of Economics and the Italian Institute of Statistics. He received a Ph.D. in Economics from George Mason University in 2012. His research interests are at the intersection of the fields of political economy, public choice, healthcare policy and health innovation, and the political economy of healthcare. On these topics, he published research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals as *Economica*, *Economics & Politics*, *Public Choice*, *The European Journal of Political Economy*, *Kyklos*, and *Health Economics*. In 2020 he wrote a co-authored book on the political economy of healthcare, published by Cambridge University Press in June 2020.

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## ***EU Enlargement in the Age of Disinformation: Big Tech, Geopolitics, and the Struggle for European Values***

### **ABSTRACT**

The European Union's enlargement policy treated thus far as a tool of regional stabilization and normative diffusion, now is confronted with a transformed global landscape shaped by disruptive digital technologies and geopolitical tensions. The aim of this paper is to reflect on the issue of disinformation, enforced by the growing power of global Big Tech corporations and their influence on EU's strategic enlargement agenda. Drawing on case studies from the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries, this paper analyzes how disinformation—often state-sponsored and tolerated—interacts with Big Tech platforms to erode public trust in EU institutions and enlargement narratives. At the same time, the EU's own digital regulatory efforts, including the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act, signal a growing awareness of the need to recalibrate the balance of power between public and private governance of digital media. The EU's position on disinformation which integrates the external relations element and internal market measures, should build the coherent strategy, where EU enlargement process should take particularly important place. Against this background, the paper's goal is to situate EU enlargement process within a broader struggle over the governance of the digital sphere and the resilience of democratic values.

### **BIO**

Dominika Ewa Harasimiuk is a Doctor of Laws (2007), assistant professor at the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies of the University of Warsaw. Scholarship holder of the French Government (2004-2005). Graduate of Centre Européen Universitaire, Université Nancy 2 (2005, diplomas DEA Droit Communautaire, DESE). Expert of the Latvian Higher Education Quality Agency (AIKA). Member of associations: ILA, UCAES, EUSA, PTS. Subject editor on international law in the quarterly journal IUS NOVUM, member of the editorial committee of the Socrates Scientific Journal (Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia). She has lectured and presented papers at Boston University, Salzburg University, Carlo Cattaneo University (Italy), Public University of Navarra in Pamplona among others. Research interests cover legal and political aspects of EU citizenship and EU digital policy, with particular focus on regulatory aspects of artificial intelligence.

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## ***Strategic Diplomacy in an Illiberal Age: Reframing EU Enlargement through Soft Power and Cross-Sector Partnerships***

### **ABSTRACT**

In the era of growing illiberalism and institutional distrust, EU enlargement policy requires a redefinition that goes beyond traditional mechanisms of conditionality. My proposed paper introduces a novel framework grounded in strategic diplomacy — the blending of statecraft, soft power, and multi-stakeholder partnerships — as a way to reinforce democratic values in aspiring member states. Drawing on my dual background as a corporate risk professional at HSBC and a science ambassador for the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, I explore how non-state actors (including universities, corporations, and civic leaders) can actively co-shape democratic resilience through education, ethical technology policy, and economic inclusion. I argue that these “bottom-up” coalitions can support EU goals more effectively in fragile democracies than formal top-down pressure alone.

This paper presents three real-world case studies:

1. The role of academic–corporate alliances in promoting rule of law and anti-corruption values.
2. The role of digital literacy and AI ethics awareness in empowering young professionals and early-career researchers across Central and Eastern Europe.
3. Volunteer-led diplomacy initiatives (e.g., Women in Tech, academic exchanges) as non-institutional democracy support tools.

In doing so, the paper proposes a recalibrated enlargement strategy — one that includes diverse actors, is sensitive to regional contexts, and deploys democratic innovation as a form of strategic advantage in the EU’s Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods. The paper also reflects on Poland’s potential leadership role in 2025, drawing from my interdisciplinary training in diplomacy (UN-aligned programmes in Brazil and the EU), my coordination work between HSBC and leading universities, and my experience in representing Polish science abroad.

### **BIO**

Dr Róża Różańska is a corporate risk expert at HSBC and an academic affiliated with the Jagiellonian University, where she earned her PhD with distinction in management. A two-time Science Ambassador in the Ministry-funded “Girls into Science” programme led by Perspektywy Women in Tech, she combines her background in diplomacy, AI ethics, and public policy. Róża has studied at the Sorbonne, worked in London and completed international diplomacy programmes in Brazil and Europe, including the InnSciD diplomacy school. She coordinates strategic partnerships between business and academia and represents HSBC in education-related initiatives. Her work focuses on bridging policy, education, and innovation for democratic resilience. She co-led the Polish Research Centre of the JU in London back in 2014 and since 2025, she is a member of the Tech Diplomacy Forum.

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***When the EU Turns Bad. The EU and the 2024 Elections Campaigns in North Macedonia***

**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to explore the EU related narratives during the parliamentary and presidential elections held in 2024 in North Macedonia. Whereas the EU is considered a normative power with considerable soft power, the case of the North Macedonian political discourse during the election campaigns in 2024 revealed the emergence of colliding political narratives aiming to secure a win on an openly nationalist, identity based narrative. Despite, the clearly anti-Bulgarian nature of this narrative, it spilled over and implied negative undertones and attitudes towards the European Union. The aim of this paper is to trace the ideological, utilitarian and social grounds for the emerging rhetoric and their implications for the EU perception in North Macedonia. Hence, conclusions will be made on the nature of the current place and role of the EU in the political and social discourse in North Macedonia.

**BIO**

Spasimir Domaradzki Ph.D holds a doctorate in political science from the Jagiellonian University. Assistant professor at the Department of European Union Institutions and Law at the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies of the University of Warsaw and Senior Analyst and Head of the Integration and Conflicts in Europe Team at the Institute of Central Europe in Lublin. Wilbur Fellow at the Catholic University of America, Washington D.C (2008). In the past served multiple times as an OSCE election observer. Between 2013 and 2014, he was a member of the Laboratory of Ideas program at the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland and from 2019 to 2020 a former member of the editorial team of Res Publica Nowa. Visegrad Insight Fellow since 2019 and a member of Team Europe, Poland. His research interests include Central and Eastern Europe politics, European integration with particular emphasis on the EU enlargement and its impact on the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as human rights.

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***Western Balkans in the Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic*****ABSTRACT**

Despite not being in the immediate neighborhood of the Western Balkans, the Czech Republic is an active political player in the Balkans. This is due to linguistic proximity, history, and the interests of the Republic as a member state of the European Union. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that it is a so-called small country, so its influence on the international situation is not overly significant. The Czech Republic supports the Western Balkans' aspirations for EU membership, as demonstrated, among other things, by the Czech Republic's presidency of the EU Council in 2022. The assumption is that this membership would have a positive impact on stability and security in this part of the continent. The Czech Republic also has an economic and cultural presence in the Balkans, which means that these instruments are also used to create a positive image of the Czech state.

**BIO**

Krzysztof Koźbiał, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the Institute of European Studies, Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Vice-Dean for Human Resources and Development at the Faculty of International and Political Studies. 1997 graduated with a Master's degree in history from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Completed doctoral studies at the same university, and in 2006 received the degree of Doctor of Humanities in history. In 2016, he received habilitations in political science and administration. A visiting professor at several universities: Technische Universität in Chemnitz, University of Leipzig (both Germany), Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, the University of Presov (both Slovakia), Peter Pazmany Catholic University in Piliscsaba, University in Pecs (both Hungary) and University of Belgrade (Serbia) and Charles University in Prag (Czechia). He has also completed research internships in Chemnitz and at the Liechtenstein Institut. His research interests include issues related to political systems, foreign and domestic policy of European micro-states and Central European countries (especially the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Germany) as well as the process of EU enlargement towards the Balkans. He has held scholarships from Erasmus (studies in Heidelberg), DAAD (stay at Ruhr-Universität in Bochum), SYLLF (research in Polish and Czech archives) and the Scholarship and Training Fund of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (research stays in Liechtenstein).

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## ***Serbia's EU Integration: Understanding the Dynamics of Pre-Enlargement Fatigue***

### **ABSTRACT**

The paper analyses Serbia's EU accession negotiations (2014-2024), focusing on the interplay between domestic politics and foreign policy objectives. Serbia's pragmatic foreign policy balances EU aspirations with strategic partnerships (Russia, China, US), reflecting its historical context (Non-Aligned Movement) and the Kosovo issue. The over-a-decade-long rule of Aleksandar Vučić and the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), characterised by illiberal tendencies contested by civil society (e.g., student protests of 2024–2025), appears to be insufficiently recognised by EU institutions, leading to the emergence of stabilitocrac. The stalled progress in negotiations, coupled with domestic political developments, underscores the challenge of pre-enlargement fatigue that contributes to the slowdown of the EU enlargement. Employing a qualitative methodology, including analysis of political parties manifestos and 2024-25 interviews with Serbian political actors (politicians, experts, and public servants) this paper discusses challenges in the EU negotiations and the insignificant progress, pointing out the stabilitocracy and unresolved Kosovo issue as one of the major political obstacles. Despite the Serbian government's stated priorities, the analysis reveals a disconnect between the rhetoric and actions of both the EU and Serbian political elite. The EU's commitment to the region is evident (e.g., Western Balkans Growth Plan), but Serbia's internal challenges and ambivalent stance towards European Union significantly diminish the likelihood of swift EU accession. This paper offers insights into the complexities of Serbia's EU integration seen from the perspective of domestic political actors.

### **BIO**

Dr Natasza Styczyńska is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Poland). Her academic interests include party politics, nationalism, populism and Euroscepticism in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. She leads JU team in H2020 REGROUP Rebuilding Governance and Resilience out of the Pandemic research project and is a director of studies of Una Europa Joint BA in European Studies at Jagiellonian. Previously she has been engaged in research within two H2020 projects: 'POPREBEL - Populist rebellion against modernity in 21st-century Eastern Europe: neo-traditionalism and neo-feudalism' (2019-2022) and 'EU3D - EU Differentiation, Dominance and Democracy' (2019-2023).

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## ***From Pact to Deal: Western Balkans on the Path to EU Membership Amid Migration and Climate Challenges***

### **ABSTRACT**

The six candidate countries - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia - are increasingly expected to act not only as future Member States, but also as operational gatekeepers of the Union's external borders and environmental standards. In the area of migration governance, the most significant recent shift is the growing pressure on the region to align with the new EU acquis on asylum, return, and visa policy. EU leaders are placing particular emphasis on return policies and on the external dimension of migration management. Although the EU Action Plan contributed to an 80% drop in irregular arrivals in 2024, the region remains a strategic corridor and a key target of pre-accession requirements. As for the Green Agenda Action Plan, it outlines key reforms: carbon pricing, convergence with the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS), adoption of National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs), and full implementation of the Sofia Declaration and the Paris Agreement. This paper explores the EU enlargement process in the Western Balkans through the lens of two intertwined challenges: environmental transition and migration governance. Building on the Brussels Declaration adopted at the EU - Western Balkans Summit on 18 December 2024 - and its Annex on deliverables and priorities - the analysis focuses on the implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and alignment with the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, entering into force in June 2026. However, both agendas face serious external pressures. On environmental side, the EU urges disengagement from Russian gas and participation in joint procurement schemes. Yet diversification efforts are hampered by rising Chinese investments in coal-based infrastructure, particularly in Serbia and Bosnia, often lacking transparency and bypassing EU environmental safeguards. In matters of border control and asylum, from a regional perspective, the EU's externalisation of migration management is also adding stress and tensions between States in a region where unresolved territorial disputes and a still delicate balance between different forces continue to pose a threat. In this complex geopolitical and normative landscape, the Brussels Declaration enshrines a dual conditionality: climate ambition and migration control are no longer peripheral to accession. How, then, do the Green Deal and Migration Pact function - as filters or accelerators of enlargement? Can conditionality foster meaningful transformation, or does it risk outsourcing EU challenges without ensuring genuine preparedness?

### **BIO**

Luigi Pigna is a PhD candidate in International Order and Human Rights at Sapienza University of Rome. His research focuses on climate protection measures in International and European Union law, under the supervision of Professors Gianluca Contaldi and Francesco Battaglia. He holds a Master's degree in International Relations, with a thesis on the protection of personal data under European Union law. He also obtained an LL.M. in International Human Rights Protection, where his final research paper examined the regulation of artificial intelligence within both international and European legal frameworks. He completed an internship at UNIDROIT (the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law), as part of a joint UNIDROIT/ICC project on international investment contracts.

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***Accountability, Representativeness and the Rule of Law Under Illiberal Pressure: Challenges for EU Enlargement Policy from a Central and Eastern European Perspective*****ABSTRACT**

In light of the growing illiberal trends in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the EU's broader neighborhood, this paper examines how the weakening of accountability mechanisms, the erosion of representativeness, and the undermining of the rule of law affect the European Union's enlargement policy. From the perspective of Poland—a country with its own experience of democratic transition and an active participant in the EU's normative debates—the paper explores both the root causes of illiberalism and its implications for institutional legitimacy and democratic stability in candidate and neighboring states. The analysis critically assesses the instruments employed by the EU to uphold its foundational values, including rule of law conditionality, political dialogue, and democratic governance benchmarks. Special attention is paid to the tension between the EU's normative commitments and its strategic and geopolitical interests. The paper argues that the sustainability of European integration depends not only on formal alignment with the *acquis communautaire* but also on the actual functionality of democratic institutions based on transparency, participation, and accountability. By doing so, the paper highlights the constructive role that member states—especially those in Central and Eastern Europe like Poland—can and should play in shaping a value-based future for EU enlargement.

**BIO**

Piero Gambale is a parliamentary official at the Chamber of Deputies and a member of the Board of Directors of the 'Vittorio Bachelet' Research Centre on Public Administrations. He is a member of the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions (ICHRPI), and also a Professional Affiliate at the Dirpolis Institute of the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa. He is the author of publications on public and parliamentary law.

Maciej Serowaniec is a full Professor at the Department of Constitutional Law of the Faculty of Law and Administration of NCU in Toruń. Participated as a co-ordinator and investigator in the project "Responding to Emerging Dissensus: Supranational Instruments & Norms of European Liberal Democracy (Horizon Europe) and in the research project "BETKOSOL - Better Knowledge for Better Solutions", founded by the European Union's Hercule III Programme). Laureate of the European Court of Auditors Postgraduate Research Grant Programme. Laureate of the Scholarship of the Minister of Science and Higher Education for outstanding young scientists.

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***New Kids on the Block? New Actors and Patterns of Contestation of the New Eastern Enlargement in Polish Public Sphere*****ABSTRACT**

With the EU decision to offer a candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova and then to accelerate the opening of the accession negotiations, Polish long-lasting policy preference on EU enlargement was fulfilled (despite the dramatic context of Russian aggression that contributed to these decisions). It was invited with satisfaction in mainstream political actors in Poland and the country became one of the main promoters of the New Eastern Enlargement. Yet, as in Aesop Fable “Be careful what you wish for, lest it come true!”, the actors opposing or warning against the enlargement started loudly contest the candidate countries and the process of enlargement joining the loud opponents in other EU member states. The paper analyses the emerging patterns of contestation in Poland regarding EU enlargement to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in the current changing geopolitical context. Through an analysis of Polish parliamentary debates and the media landscape, the paper uncovers politicised aspects of Eastern European states’ EU accession process, explores factors contributing to its politicisation and new actors that are active, examines justifications used for contestation of EU enlargement, and attempts to capture broader dynamics of contestation of European integration. It explores how parliamentary actors have framed the Eastern Partnership countries’ European integration process and delves into the evolving media narratives that shaped public discourse and influenced policy positions on EU enlargement. Adopting the empirical discourse-oriented perspective, the paper employs qualitative discourse analysis to examine parliamentary speeches and reports in media outlets concerning the Eastern Partnership and European integration of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia between 2013 and 2023. Our findings demonstrate that the New Eastern Enlargement in Poland is contested and politicised as part of the generally polarised debate on European integration and that new actors are becoming more vocal. Despite overwhelming support for these states’ European integration, several aspects of Poland’s relations with the candidates, notably the economic influence of potential Ukraine’s accession, are subject to contestation only by the mainstream political actors.

**BIO**

Magdalena Góra is an Associate Professor of Political Science and European Studies at the Institute of European Studies, Jagiellonian University. Her research focuses on legitimacy and contestation in the European Union’s external relations, EU actorness in international affairs, particularly in its neighbourhood, as well as democratic challenges and collective identity transformation within the EU. She has taught and conducted research at several academic institutions worldwide and has been involved in numerous international and national research projects funded by the Polish National Science Centre, the COST Programme, and the EU’s Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe frameworks. She currently co-leads the Work Package on the Future of Europe Debate within the Horizon 2020 project EU3D – EU Differentiation, Dominance

and Democracy (2018–2023), and leads a Work Package in the Horizon Europe project SHAPEDEM-EU – Rethinking and Reshaping the EU’s Democracy Support in its Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood (2022–2025). She is also engaged in the project The REpresentative DIscconnect: Diagnosis and Strategies for RECTification. Her earlier work includes participation in the Horizon 2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Innovative Training Network FATIGUE – Delayed Transformational Fatigue in Central and Eastern Europe: Responding to the Rise of Illiberalism/Populism (2018–2021). She is a member of the Jean Monnet Networks The European Union at the Crossroads of Global Order (EUCROSS) and REACTIK – REative Economy And Culture inTernatlonal linK. Professor Góra has authored and co-edited numerous peer-reviewed publications, including journal articles and book chapters. In 2020, she was awarded a Fulbright Senior Award to conduct research at the Centre for European and Mediterranean Studies, New York University, USA.

Volodymyr Posviatenko is a research assistant at the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków and a PhD student at the Doctoral School in the Social Sciences of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. He is currently working on the “REDIRECT: The REpresentative DIscconnect: diagnosis and strategies for RECTification” Horizon-Europe research project. He previously worked on the “SHAPEDEM-EU: Rethinking and Reshaping the EU’s democracy support in its Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood” Horizon-Europe and “EU-East-G-PL: Politicisation of the Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Germany and Poland – a Foreign Policy Comparison” research projects. He holds a double master’s degree in European studies from the Jagiellonian University and the University of Padua (2022). His research interests focus on issues concerning the regions of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and the Balkans, EU enlargement, EU foreign policy, democratisation in the EU neighbourhood, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity and the protection of national minorities.

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***Populists in Government. Lessons from the Experience of Hungary***

**ABSTRACT**

The Hungarian political landscape changed dramatically as a result of the 2010 parliamentary elections. Since then, Viktor Orbán and his government(s) have been in power for over 15 years now. The paper aims at researching the reasons how Orbán and his Fidesz party have been able to keep the power for such a long period. To achieve this goal, the research draws attention to the populist strategy of Fidesz. The paper argues that Orbán does not dismantle the democratic framework in Hungary but misuses it. Hence, the in the paper, career paths of the most important members of officially independent institutions (e.g., prosecutor general, Constitutional Court) are presented. Meanwhile, according to the paper, Orbán uses the conflicts with the European institutions as a tool to present that he is still against the 'corrupt elite' – a necessary feature of a populist strategy.

**BIO**

József Dúró PhD is an assistant professor at the Department of Political Science, at the Corvinus University of Budapest. Graduated in 2009 as a political scientist and economist, obtained his PhD at Corvinus in 2014 in the field of political science. His main research interests cover Euroscepticism, Populism, Radical Right, democratic transitions and political systems in Central and Eastern Europe, politics of Italy.

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## ***Who Speaks Against the Europe Union? A Study of Polish Party Manifestos (2001–2023)***

### **ABSTRACT**

This presentation investigates which Polish political parties expressed criticism of the European Union between 2001 and 2023 and to what extent. It also examines whether the degree of euroscepticism found in party manifestos is related to a party's ideological or economic orientation, or its position within the political system. The timeframe was selected for two main reasons. First, it marks the political emergence of Law and Justice (PiS) and Civic Platform (PO), both of which first contested parliamentary elections during this period. Since 2005, these two parties have alternated in governing Poland, effectively dominating its political landscape. Second, the 2023 parliamentary elections provide the most recent set of electoral manifestos available for analysis. The study employs a triangulated research design. The primary method is qualitative content analysis, used to identify negative references to the European Union in party manifestos. This is supplemented by quantitative techniques, including quantitative content analysis and statistical testing. Specifically, the Mann–Whitney U test is used to determine whether two independent groups differ significantly in terms of the frequency or intensity of such references. Pearson's correlation coefficient is applied to assess the strength and direction of relationships between selected variables. The sample was purposively selected based on three criteria: (1) the party or coalition received at least 3% of valid votes in parliamentary elections, (2) did so between 2001 and 2023, and (3) published an electoral manifesto of sufficient length to allow for reliable content analysis. In total, 42 party manifestos met these criteria, comprising a corpus of approximately 4.9 million characters.

### **BIO**

Jakub Krupa is a political scientist whose research interests primarily focus on media bias and populist discourse. He collaborates with the Center for Quantitative Research in Political Science at Jagiellonian University, where he is leading a research project on populism in Polish political parties (Preludium 2024/53/N/HS5/03472).

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## ***„America First” and EU Enlargement: Transatlantic Rivalry as a Challenge to Democracy Support in Candidate Countries***

### **ABSTRACT**

The „America First” policy pursued by President Donald Trump's administration has radically transformed transatlantic relations, introducing elements of open rivalry and redefining the United States' role as a partner of the European Union in promoting democracy. This paper analyses the impact of the rivalry triggered by Trump's protectionist, transactional and instrumental approach on the effectiveness of the EU's tools for promoting democratic reforms and counteracting authoritarian trends in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, particularly in candidate countries. The first section describes how „America First” has weakened US soft power tools such as the Fulbright and USAID programmes. This has compelled the EU to take on the responsibility and funding of initiatives that promote civil society development, combat corruption and drive judicial reform. The effects of the US–EU trade war are then discussed. This diverted EU funds from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, reducing the resources available to support transitions in candidate countries. Another section analyses how Trump's alliances with Eurosceptic and populist leaders in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Viktor Orbán) have legitimised the blocking of reforms, thereby undermining the effectiveness of EU conditionality. It is also noted that Russia and China have exploited the geopolitical vacuum created by the US withdrawal to bolster their influence by investing in infrastructure and loans. Ultimately, the paper emphasises that the „America First” policy redefines not only the role of the US in Europe, but also that of the EU. The latter faces the serious challenge of building its own strategic autonomy and reformulating its tools for supporting democracy. In these circumstances, EU enlargement is not only an integration process, but also part of a wider geopolitical competition. This puts the EU's ability to promote its interests and ideals to the test.

### **BIO**

Ewelina Waśko-Owsiejczuk is an assistant professor at the Faculty of International Relations at the University of Białystok. She is a fellow of the US Department of State and the Salzburg Global Seminar (2020, 2021), the Roosevelt Study Center in Middelburg (2016), the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at the Free University of Berlin (2017), National Science Center (2023). In 2019, the Minister of Science and Higher Education awarded her a scholarship for outstanding young scientists in Poland. Her research focuses on US foreign and security policy, post-conflict peacebuilding and theory of foreign policy and international relations. She is the author and editor of four books and several dozen scientific articles published in Poland and abroad, including: *Quo Vadis, America? U.S. National Security Strategy under President Joe Biden*, Athenaeum 2023, Vol. 79; *Central and Eastern Europe in U.S. Foreign Policy*, in: *Politics and Security of Central and Eastern Europe: Contemporary Challenges*, Springer, Cham 2023.

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## ***Canada's Strategic Reorientation: The E.U. as Canada's Key Democratic Ally Amidst the U.S. Volatility***

### **ABSTRACT**

Amid growing geopolitical uncertainty and the Trump administration's "America First / MAGA" doctrine, marked by aggressive trade policies and rhetoric questioning traditional alliances, Canada is undergoing a notable redefinition of its foreign and security policy calculus, with tightening ties to the European Union taking center stage. Despite enduring, profound economic and military dependence on the United States—accounting for 77% of Canadian exports, two-thirds of imports, and 75% of military supply expenditures—Canada has become increasingly apprehensive of Washington's volatility and is currently at the stage of actively diversifying its trade and security partnerships. The Trump-era threats, including symbolic notions of Canada as the "51st state," triggered an urgent reorientation agenda, signaling Ottawa's paradigmatic shift. Key moves have so far included Prime Minister Mark Carney's early diplomatic overtures to France, his prioritization of Canada-E.U. economic and defense collaboration, exemplified by Canada's commitment to join the E.U.'s Plan ReArm Europe, and a critical review of defense procurement intended to diminish reliance on the U.S. while enhancing procurement from Europe. The paper explores the strategic drivers and implications of Canada's evolving partnership with the E.U., particularly in light of two critical junctures: the Trump administration's illiberal trade war—marked by punitive tariffs and rhetoric undermining Canadian international posture and sovereignty—and the ascendance of Mark Carney, a staunch advocate of transatlantic cooperation and democratic resilience, as Canada's new prime minister. The paper argues that Ottawa's position as a vital partner of the E.U. in challenging illiberal trends and bolstering democracy is directly aligned with the core themes of E.U. enlargement and global democratic resilience, despite the implausibility of Canada's membership in the E.U. due to geographic, legal, and socioeconomic constraints. Nonetheless, Ottawa's pivot toward the E.U. exemplifies a "third way": a powerful non-European G7 nation intends to deliberately strengthen liberal democratic alliances and fortifying free trade principles in collaboration with Europe, yet outside the U.S. leadership, let alone the U.S. hegemony.

### **BIO**

Tomasz Soroka, Ph.D. is a political scientist, a Canadianist, and an assistant professor at the Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora, Jagiellonian University, Krakow. He earned his doctoral degree in humanities (political science) in 2010. His publications cover a variety of topics related to political, legal and cultural evolution of Canada as well as Canadian contemporary foreign and immigration policies. Currently, in his research, he focuses on Canada's language laws and policies. He has been an awardee of grants and scholarships offered by the International Council of Canadian Studies and Polish academic institutions (incl. The National Science Center). As a visiting scholar, he has conducted research at the University of Ottawa, University of Toronto, McGill University in Montreal, Carleton University in Ottawa, and York University in Toronto.

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## ***EU Enlargement Package 2024: Normative Integration and Geopolitical Strategy in fieri***

### **ABSTRACT**

While EU enlargement has traditionally functioned as a vehicle for normative integration, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has placed geopolitical considerations at the centre of the integration logic, with the European Council granting candidate status to new countries and elevating security concerns to the top of the agenda. This article explores the European Union's (EU's) 2024 Enlargement Package to assess whether geopolitical considerations have conditioned the evaluation of candidate countries' progress and state of play, particularly in light of the accelerated accession processes in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. Drawing on qualitative analysis of European Commission reports and case studies of Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, this article argues that enlargement policy is increasingly framed as both a tool of geopolitical security and a mechanism of normative diffusion. The analysis demonstrates that enlargement is now cast as a hybrid enterprise: on the one hand, a traditional mechanism of governance transformation; on the other, an immediate instrument of geopolitical positioning that recalibrates the security strategies and interests of the member states. The findings further show that conditionality remains salient, as candidate countries are still far from satisfying the *acquis communautaire*. However, strategic imperatives – particularly the need to counter Russian influence and stabilize the EU's neighbourhood – have reordered priorities and accelerated selected accession tracks. By bridging EU studies and International Relations debates on power, norms, and order, the article contends that EU enlargement has become a strategic tool for adapting to the consolidation of a multi-order world.

### **BIO**

Antonluca Lecce is a PhD Candidate at Jagiellonian University. He holds a BA in International Relations (University of Catania), a Double MA in European Studies (University of Padua–Jagiellonian University), and an Executive Master in Diplomacy and International Politics (Université libre de Bruxelles, 2023–25). His research explores populism and global governance infrastructures within EU enlargement. From 2020 to 2025, he served as a civil servant at the European Commission, contributing to policy evaluation and decision-making. He has also worked with governmental and non-governmental organizations across Italy, Spain, Poland, and Belgium, specializing in diplomacy and international affairs.

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***European Integration as a Catalyst for Illiberalism? The Role of Migration and Climate Narratives in the Rise of Right-Wing Parties in the EU***

**ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the paradoxical effects of European integration arguing that, contrary to its normative goals, the EU accession process has indirectly contributed to the rise of illiberal right-wing parties within member states. The central hypothesis posits, such as Fidesz, PiS, AfD and Fratelli d'Italia to mobilize public support by framing EU initiatives particularly the Migration Pact and European Green Deal—as existential threats to national sovereignty and identity. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative studies (e.g. Schumacher & van Kersbergen, 2014; Lockwood & Lockwood, 2022; Caiani & Lubarda, 2024), and comparative case studies from Hungary, Poland, Germany, and Italy, this research demonstrates how illiberal actors have effectively combined welfare chauvinism with anti-EU rhetoric. Migration and climate policy have been instrumentalized as focal points in a broader narrative of civilizational decline and external imposition, allowing populist leaders to present themselves as the only legitimate defenders of “the people.” The paper further examines the mechanisms of political polarization and democratic backsliding (Vachudova, 2020), highlighting the role of disinformation, media control, and institutional erosion. The findings emphasize the urgent need to rethink EU communication strategies and reinforce democratic resilience—particularly in light of ongoing and future enlargement processes, which risk replicating similar unintended outcomes.

**BIO**

Filip Białobrzewski is a third-year undergraduate student in International Relations at the Faculty of International and Political Studies, Jagiellonian University, and third-year student of Law at the Faculty of Law and Administration, Jagiellonian University. Member of the International Relations Student Association. His academic interests include Public International Law, particularly the history of its development, as well as the History of Political and Legal Doctrines. He is currently writing his bachelor's thesis on the topic of Diplomatic Asylum. Privately, a fan of cinema and black coffee.

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## ***The Agency of Verkhovna Rada in the European Integration of Ukraine***

### **ABSTRACT**

The main purpose of the presentation is to analyze the legislative activity of Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada in the context of European integration. Based on the analysis of bills considered by members of Ukrainian parliament in years 2022-2024, the focus is put on political engagement of MEPs into adoption of legislation necessary for meeting the EU requirements. Particular attention is paid to the evaluation of the consolidating nature of European integration in terms of getting parliamentary support for the development and implementation of the legislative framework required for the successful implementation of European Commission recommendations to Ukraine. Such research focus gives ground to study the impact of the European integration issue on the leadership potential of Verkhovna Rada in the institutional system of Ukraine. By doing so the presentation will test the assumption that the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine acts as a proactive institutional actor and a facilitator of Ukraine's integration into the European Union. Therefore, the research concentrates on the European integration bills passed or postponed and the voting activity of political parties and groups represented in Ukrainian parliament.

### **BIO**

Vadym Zheltovskyy is an Associate Professor at the Department of EU Law and Institutions, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Warsaw specializing in the field of European studies with focus on EU foreign policy and impact of leadership on the functioning of the EU institutions. Head of Polish Association of European Studies (Warsaw Division); member of advisory board to parliamentary commission on European Union at Polish Parliament (Sejm). In 2022-2023 he was a principal coordinator of the project "Impact of Political Leadership on the Reconsideration of EU Eastern Policy in Context of Russia's War on Ukraine" supported by Polish National Centre of Science.

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## ***Impact of the EU Enlargement on the Reform of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine***

### **ABSTRACT**

In European Commission's Opinion on Ukraine's application for membership of the EU issued in 2022 the urgent need of reform of the Constitutional Court (CCU) in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission was put as the first recommendation. In 2016 a comprehensive reform of constitutional provisions on judiciary was started in Ukraine that was triggered by its European aspirations. The aim of it is to establish an independent judiciary, to guarantee the rule of law and to reduce the corruption. At the core of the reform of the CCU is the selection procedure of judges. The principle of the competitive selection of the judges of the CCU was introduced. Venice Commission considered that for this aim a screening body should be established with an international component. The report is devoted to the analysis of the new procedure through the prism of the opinions of Venice Commission.

### **BIO**

Halyna Dovhan received her PhD in Law alongside an MA in Comparative Law (with distinction) and BA in Law from Ivan Franko National University of Lviv. In 2023 her doctoral degree was recognized by the University of Trento. Additionally, Halyna graduated from the School of Polish and European Law (diploma with distinction) organized by Jagiellonian University. She has been a Visiting Scholar at the Universities of Wroclaw, Vienna. In 2020 Halyna was affiliated with Adam Mickiewicz University as a Kirkland Research Fellow (supervisor Prof. Suchocka). Areas of Dr. Dovhan's research and teaching are: EU Law, Comparative Constitutional Law, Theory of Law, Migration Law, History of Intellectual Property Law. Halyna has 15th years of teaching experience at Ivan Franko National University and National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. As a result of war, she fled Ukraine and at the present moment Halyna is affiliated with University of Trento as Scholar at Risk.

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## ***Moving Forward: Ukraine's Position at the European Court of Human Rights in the Context of EU Accession***

### **ABSTRACT**

This research will focus on Ukraine's commitment to uphold human rights while it pursues EU accession. It will analyze its efforts to align with EU standards, especially in light of its interactions with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). With a share of over 12% of pending applications originating from Ukraine at the ECHR in 2025, this research will explore the key structural and legal challenges that continue to fuel human rights violations and prevent effective resolution at the national level, as well as difficulties adjusting its judicial system. Despite Ukraine having been granted EU candidacy status rather quickly, the research aims at exploring the country's political and social development shortcomings, and how these intersect with the country's broader political development. It acknowledges governance issues such as corruption, weak institutional accountability, and limited access to justice for vulnerable populations, which exacerbate the situation. Drawing from certain reasonings, such as the presumption of good faith, the research considers the impact of Russia's ongoing war of aggression on Ukraine's difficulty to allocate proper resources to internal human rights development. While international support has enabled some legal progress, the preference to direct state resources toward defense has significantly hindered systemic reform. Ultimately, this research aims to provide a balanced assessment of Ukraine's current human rights trajectory, highlighting both its efforts and obstacles on the path toward full EU membership.

### **BIO**

Joshua Losinger is a graduate of East European languages, Russian, and intercultural studies, he is in his final year of the Euroculture Erasmus Mundus master's degree, having shared his time between Poland, Spain, Japan, and France. Although he specialized in European politics with a strong interest in EU integration mechanisms, his deeper connection with human rights defense and the promotion of democracy led him to expand this knowledge to international and human rights law. His multicultural research on colonialism, identity and minority rights, put together with his previous involvement in European civil society initiatives such as the European Student Assembly and the Young Europeans, he recently became a Young European Ambassador (YEA), focusing on dialogue initiatives between the EU-Ukraine and EU-Armenia, hoping to bring about positive change in Europe by raising awareness and helping to connect people.

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***From Maidan to Membership: The Prospects and Challenges of Ukraine's Integration into the UE*****ABSTRACT**

The potential enlargement of the European Union (EU) to include Ukraine represents a significant geopolitical and economic challenge in contemporary Europe. Ukraine's possible accession to the EU is not only a matter of expanding the Union's borders but also involves complex considerations related to political stability, economic readiness, and social integration. This paper aims to analyze the prospects and implications of Ukraine's accession to the EU by focusing on the multifaceted factors that influence and constrain the process, including political, economic, and social dimensions. Given the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, which began in 2014 and escalated dramatically with the full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine's strategic position has become even more critical for regional security and stability. In addition to external challenges, the paper will examine Ukraine's internal problems that complicate its EU accession process. Since the outbreak of the full-scale Russian invasion, there has been a significant centralization of power in Kyiv, which, while necessary for wartime governance, raises concerns about democratic backsliding. Furthermore, endemic corruption remains a major obstacle, undermining efforts to implement transparent and effective governance. Economic challenges are equally pressing, as the country's economy has been severely impacted by the war, requiring extensive reforms and international support to stabilize and modernize its industries and infrastructure. The analysis will also trace the evolution of Ukraine's European integration efforts, beginning with the Revolution of Dignity (Euromaidan) in 2014. This pivotal moment marked a decisive shift in Ukraine's foreign policy towards closer ties with the EU. Despite numerous setbacks and difficulties, Ukraine's commitment to European values and reforms remains strong. This paper will evaluate how these developments shape the current accession prospects and what challenges lie ahead for both Ukraine and the EU in this complex enlargement process.

**BIO**

Wiktoria Koklina is a European law student at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and holds a bachelor's degree in international relations. She serves as the Secretary of the Poznań Regional Representation of the Forum of Young Diplomats and is an active member of the Central and Eastern Europe regional group. Her academic interests focus on migration policy, human rights, and the impact of populism on democracy in Europe.

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## ***What is the Future of the Eastern Partnership?***

### **ABSTRACT**

The Eastern Partnership was launched in 2009 with the aim of deepening bilateral and multilateral political and economic relations between the European Union (EU) and six partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The main objective of the programme was to support democratic, market-oriented reforms in these countries, as well as to contribute to the consolidation of their statehood, in order to serve the stability and security of both the EU and its partners. Although it was emphasized from the outset that the Eastern Partnership is not linked to the EU's enlargement policy, in 2022 Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia submitted accession applications and currently hold candidate status (although in the case of Georgia, the accession process is de facto suspended). In addition, in 2021, Belarus suspended its participation in the programme, in response to EU sanctions imposed following violent crackdowns on peaceful protesters after the fraudulent presidential elections in August 2020, as well as the regime's instrumental use of migrants for political purposes. In turn, relations between the EU and Armenia are based on a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, as well as various forms of support provided to Yerevan (e.g. a civilian mission, and assistance to the Armenian armed forces). Moreover, the Armenian authorities are increasingly showing interest in accession to the EU. As for Azerbaijan, it is worth noting that Baku is an important energy partner of the EU, but it is still not a member of the World Trade Organization, nor is it particularly interested in deepening cooperation within the Eastern Partnership. Tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, particularly regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, further complicate the regional dynamics. These developments raise important questions about the future of the Eastern Partnership and the rationale for its continued implementation – questions which I aim to explore in my paper.

### **BIO**

Olesia Kryvenko is a doctor of social science in the field of international relations. Assistant professor at the Chair of Studies on Integration Processes at the Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations of the Jagiellonian University. Author of the monograph entitled *Rosja wobec wymiaru wschodniego Europejskiej Polityki Sąsiedztwa Unii Europejskiej w latach 2004-2022* (2023) [Russia towards the Eastern Dimension of the European Union's European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004-2022], as well as a series of articles on European integration, EU external action, European security, and armed conflicts in the post-Soviet area. Current research interests include European and global climate policy, EU Eastern Partnership, political transformations and armed conflicts in the post-Soviet region.

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## ***The Limits of the European Union's Democratic Conditionality: Case Study Analysis of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova***

### **ABSTRACT**

Democratic conditionality is the cornerstone for implementing EU enlargement policy. However, democratic conditionality delivered different outcomes in the candidate countries Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. While Ukraine and Moldova have progressed on the EU integration path, granting candidate status has proved insufficient to further democratic reforms in Georgia. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the limits of democratic conditionality mechanisms in promoting democratic reforms by answering the question: why does the EU conditionality provide desired outcomes in some countries but fail in others, despite similar external threats and geopolitical tensions? To address this question, it was studied how institutional capacity, governmental cost-benefit analysis, and perceived benefits of EU integration define the effectiveness of democratic conditionality in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. There were used assumptions from two theoretical frameworks: the Europeanisation Theory and the Rational External Incentive Model. Europeanisation Theory emphasises how institutional misfit and weak administrative capacity can hinder the effective implementation of EU norms (Börzel and Risse, 2006). The Rational External Incentive Model explains that governments fulfil the EU recommendations if the expected benefits exceed domestic political costs (Schimmelfennig et al., 2003). In the case of Georgia, approximating national legislation without the prospect of membership reduced the perceived benefits of compliance, while conditionality raised the cost of maintaining the power. By applying a comparative case study approach, the paper evaluates why conditionality delivered effective outcomes in Moldova and Ukraine. On the other hand, it provides evidence-based recommendations on how to adapt strategies for countries where governments use conditionality without credible rewards for disseminating Eurosceptic narratives and consolidating authoritarianism. The findings of this research will be valuable for rethinking democracy promotion in the EU neighbourhood countries and providing more efficient tools for strengthening democratic governance.

### **BIO**

Eliso Chinchaladze is an international relations specialist and analytical journalist with three years of work experience in media organisations. She earned a master's degree in international relations from Caucasus University, where she acquired knowledge of the Europeanisation of Central and Eastern European countries, as well as the legal and institutional aspects of the EU's association agenda. In her master's dissertation, "The Factors of the De-Europeanisation of Hungary," she studied how legislative and political changes in Hungary have affected its relationship with the EU. She actively advocates for the significance of democratic governance alongside representatives of civil society organisations and participates in regional conferences on Europeanisation and European integration of Eastern Partnership countries. She looks forward to sharing her research findings on the European integration paths of candidate countries from the Eastern Neighbourhood.

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***EU Enlargement: Challenges In Russia's Neighborhood And In The Balkans*****ABSTRACT**

While enlargement is still an objective of the European Union, regional pressures will play a role in whether nations will succeed in accession to the bloc. The objective of this research is to compare and contrast how these pressures differ in different regions by comparing political developments. This research will focus on actions taken by the neighboring nations along with statements by political leaders in an effort to influence or prevent their accession to the European Union in the Balkans and amongst Russia's neighbors. We can see these regional pressures play out in the Balkans, along in the Caucasus and Ukraine and Moldova, for different motives. In the Balkans, EU membership is used as a tool to make potential new member states make concessions to current member states who use their current membership to place themselves in a position of power. This can be seen as Bulgaria uses its veto power to block EU accession to move forward with North Macedonia. Bulgaria continues its claim that Macedonian is a dialect of Bulgarian, not a separate language. In the Caucasus and Ukraine and Moldova on the other hand, Russia views these nations potentially becoming member states of the European Union as a threat to its own power, sabotaging these nations in their quest to move towards the West. With Russia, as a consequence of pro-EU sentiments Ukraine has been invaded twice, Moldova has faced energy crises, and Armenia has been threatened that there would be economic consequences, due to its current economic dependence on Russia. Notably all three nations currently have Russian troops within their national borders at the moment as well.

**BIO**

Nicholas Zalewski is a recent PhD graduate and postdoctoral researcher at Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II in public policies for cohesion and convergence in the European Scenario. His research interests are European Union enlargement, political economy, NATO, and the European Union's periphery.

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