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The Legitimacy
of New Regionalism
in the European
Integration Process



FROM EXCLUSIVE BORDERS
TO INCLUSIVE FRONTIERS
IN THE **Western
Balkans**



International conference

The enlargement of the EU towards the Western Balkans

5 of June 2025
Oradea, Romania

Jean Monnet Project: 101085662
WBREGIO <https://wbregio.riseoradea.ro/>

Jean Monnet International Conference

***THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE EU TOWARDS THE WESTERN
BALKANS***

**June 5th, 2025
Oradea, Romania**

New geopolitical realities, associated with a process of national-identity emancipation, have led to the redrawing of political maps in South East Europe. Slowly, societies from this space matured and the injuries of the past began to heal. Even though there are still many open wounds, a reconciliation process has begun at the level of public discourse, at the political level and even at the level of identity.

The process of European integration seemed to be the solution in the context of widespread aspirations of the populations of these states towards the EU accession. Even if in the past years the process was promising, the actual situation shows that this is a highly contested and unfinished project. The idea of regional cooperation or regionalism, seen as policy cooperation in different areas among geographically proximate neighbors, has been a main tendency in the foreign policies of the countries, particularly in Europe. The above external explanations of regional cooperation are particularly important in cases of conflictual or post-conflict, developing and aid dependent societies like the Western Balkans.

The Jean Monnet international conference will seek to identify and analyze the process of European integration and the level of different forms of cooperation between regions, ethnic and confessional groups in contemporary societies. We propose to explore the origins and best practices of different type of cooperation's at different levels and its role in the European integration process and today's global environment.

The topic of the conference addresses EU studies by proposing a detailed explanation of the concepts like role of the civil society in the democratization process, management of interethnic relations, security versus openness of borders, new regionalism and the role of these in the European integration process.

The conference is organized by the University of Oradea, Faculty of History, International Relations, Political Science and Communication Science, Department of International Relations and European Studies, in the frame of the Jean Monnet Project 101085662 WBREGIO, *The legitimacy of new regionalism in the European Integration process. From exclusive borders to inclusive frontiers in the Western Balkans.* In this sense, we propose to find solutions, processes and elements which can be defined and used as actors involved in policy making at

EU level, but, most importantly, actors that can channel EU values at the local level by promoting governance and openness to the citizens.

IMPORTANT INFORMATIONS

- The official language of the conference: *English* and *French*
- Accepted proposals are coming from various disciplines including political sciences, European studies and international relations, history, philosophy, sociology, law, anthropology, linguistics, etc.
- The conference is organized in a hybrid mode (physical and online). Presentations will be delivered also online. Participation through the online channel will be possible based on invitation of the organizing committee.
- The organiser cover the costs of print and publish all the materials of the conference including the volume comprising the articles.
- Selected papers will be proposed for publication in the conference volume and in the following journals: *Eurolimes* and *Annals of the University of Oradea, Series of International Relations and European Studies*, (quoted in several international databases, ERIHPLUS, EBSCO, CEEOL and Index Copernicus)

Conference Programme

Organizers:

University of Oradea

Faculty of History, International Relations, Political Science and
Communication Science

Department of International Relations and European Studies

The conference was financed by the Jean Monet project n.101085662
WBREGIO

*The contents of the present material and its annexes do not necessarily reflect the opinion or the position of
the European Commission*

Scientific & Organizing Committee

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Constantin Țoca, University of Oradea

Elena Zierler, University of Oradea

Thursday, June 5

08:30 – 09:00 – **Participants arrival and registration**
(Boardroom of the University of Oradea)

09:00 – 09:30 – **Official opening of the Conference**
(Boardroom of the University of Oradea)

Speakers:

Prof.univ.dr. Sorin Şipoş, Vice-Rector for International Relations of the University of Oradea

Prof.univ.dr. Gabriel Moisa, Dean of the Faculty of History, International Relations, Political Science and Communication Science, University of Oradea

Polgár István, University of Oradea – module coordinator

Scientific debates

09:30 – 11:00: Plenary Session
(Boardroom of the University of Oradea)

Chairperson: Polgár István, University of Oradea – module coordinator

Keynote speakers:

09:30 – 10:00

Radu Carp - *Bringing human rights and democracy to the fore of a successful Western Balkans enlargement - a tough choice in time of illiberal democracies*

10:00 – 10:30

Mircea Brie - *The Identity Challenges of the European Integration Process of North Macedonia*

10:30 – 11:00 **Debates, Q&A session**

PANEL 1

Challenges and Milestones in the European Integration Process Room V04, University of Oradea

Chairperson 1st session: Alina Stoica, **University of Oradea**

11:00 – 11:20

Iryna Barbir - *The role of local self-government in supporting the process of European integration of Western Balkans: institutional cooperation, investment attractiveness and cross -border partnership*

11:20 – 11:40

Svetlana Cebotari, Natalia Putină - *Internal Divisions and Social Cohesion – Obstacles in the EU Accession Process. The Experience of the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova*

11:40 – 12:00

 Iulia-Marilena Sbârcea - *The Enlargement of the EU towards the Western Balkans*

12:00 – 12:20

 Teodora Stankovic - *The Geopolitical Aspect of EU Enlargement: The Case of the Western Balkans*

12:20 – 12:30 **Debates, Q&A session**

12:30 – 13:30 **Lunch break**

PANEL 1

Challenges and Milestones in the European Integration Process

Room V04, University of Oradea

Chairperson 2nd session: Mészáros Edina, University of Oradea

13:30 – 13:50

Sigér Fruzsina - *The enlargement of the EU towards the Western Balkans*

13:50 – 14:10

Reza Tavalla - *Digital Nationalism and European Integration: Insights from Romania as a Model for the Western Balkans*

14:10 – 14:30

Laurentiu Petrila, Radu Sorin Turcescu - *Croatia: A Model of Integration, Democracy, and European Citizenship for the Balkan States*

14:30 – 14:50



Alba Gerdec, Artela Roshi – *Public Demands in Treaty-Making: An Analysis of Albania's Alignment in the Context of EU Integration*

14:50 – 15:10



Marijan Premović, Aleksandra Rakočević - *Development of science in Montenegro in the context of European integration*

15:10 – 15:30

Horváthy Balázs - *The WTO membership of the Western Balkan countries – A transformative potential on the road to the EU*

15:30 – 16:00 **Debates, Q&A session**

PANEL 2

Co-operation and public policies towards the EU Room V012, University of Oradea

Chairperson 1st session: Laurențiu Petrila, University of Oradea

11:00 – 11:20

Mészáros Edina - *How resilient is the EU to disinformation coming from the Western Balkans?*

11:20 – 11:40

Ivanna Makukh-Fedorkova - *Cognitive warfare as a tool to counter European integration: the case of the Western Balkans*

11:40 – 12:00

Luminița Șoproni, Florentina Chirodea, Ioana Bordeianu - *Convergence and Divergence: The Dual Impact of Economic Agglomerations on Development of Microregions. Bihor County study case*

12:00 – 12:20

Serhii Shvydiuk – *The Role of Civil Society and Public Opinion in Poland's European Integration Process: Lessons for the Western Balkans*

12:20 – 12:30 **Debates, Q&A session**

12:30 – 13:30 **Lunch break**

PANEL 2

Co-operation and public policies towards the EU

Room V012, University of Oradea

Chairperson 2nd session: Cosmin Chiriac, University of Oradea

13:30 – 13:50

Bottyán Zsolt - *Romania's Path in the EU: Challenges, Achievements, and Relevance for the Western Balkans*

13:50 – 14:10



Anatoliy Kruglashov - *Ukraine and Moldova's accession to the EU. A shared destiny of being placed into a waiting room*

14:10 – 14:30

Dan Apăteanu - *Boosting Cooperation in the European Integration Process: East-Central Europe as a Model for the Western Balkans*

14:30 – 14:50

Gavriș Aurora - *Methods and means at European level to eradicate human trafficking. Origin area victims*

14:50 – 15:10

Bianca-Larisa Gaidoș, Alina Stoica - *The Republic of Moldova and the European Future: The Dynamics of EU Accession Negotiations*

15:10 – 15:30

Knapp László - *EULEX Kosovo and the Changing Role of the European Union*

15:30 – 16:00 **Debates, Q&A session**

PANEL 3

Security versus openness of borders. Socio-economic features and differences

Room V06, University of Oradea

Chairperson 1st session: Bianca-Larisa Gaidoş, University of Oradea

13:30 – 13:50

Constantin-Vasile Țoca, Cosmin Chiriac - *Lessons from Romanian - Hungarian cross-border cooperation for EU membership candidate countries*

13:50 – 14:10

 Nádasi Levente, Tökés Tibor, Trón Zsuzsanna - *Convergence of the Western Balkans towards the European Union*

14:10 – 14:30

 Zsolt Radics, Zoltán Dorogi - *Hungarian economic interests and goals in the Western Balkans after the millennium*

14:30 – 14:50

 Bói László, Mátyás Szaboles - *Predictive Accident Forecasting Software in Hungary and Serbia*

14:50 – 15:10

Cristina Matiuța - *Digitalization as a tool to increase government accountability and social participation. Good practice examples in Romania*

15:10 – 15:30

Polgár István – *Social Responsibility and Territorial Cooperation in the Western Balkans*

15:30 – 15:50

Anca Oltean - *The image of Romania's adhesion to Schengen space reflected in the newspaper "Adevărul" (2024-2025)*

15:50 – 16:00 **Debates, Q&A session**

Abstracts

Radu CARP - *Bringing human rights and democracy to the fore of a successful Western Balkans enlargement - a tough choice in time of illiberal democracies*

Abstract: The European Union and the United States shifted the democracy assistance in the Western Balkans towards supporting more civil society, instead of a strict economic perspective. Dismantling USAID is a severe blow to this effort but nevertheless a form of support for democratization and human rights in the region will stay in place. Everything connected with the old paradigm of democratization must be changed, because even liberal democracies are confronted with huge challenges at home. The aggressive rise of populism, of extreme right and far left may be seen across Europe, and in the United States so we may ask what is wrong with the current model of democracy before asking countries like the ones from Western Balkans to democratize themselves. It was thought that Central Europe integration into the European Union could serve as a model for Western Balkans countries but first we realized that there is a substantial gap due to some neglected factors and then we realized that even in Central Europe the model of illiberal democracy may work very well, in Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary in different periods after their accession to the EU and therefore the enlargement experience in this region may not be so relevant as it was thought before. The starting point of this paper is that we facing a need to change very fast and in a radical way the democratization model that may encourage a strong human rights protection and powerful rule of law mechanisms. This paper tries to describe such model and to see if it may be accepted by the EU institutions currently in charge with Western Balkans enlargement.

Mircea BRIE - *The Identity Challenges of the European Integration Process of North Macedonia*

Abstract: The present research is intended to be an analysis of the implications and challenges of the identity disputes in North Macedonia's. Based on this, we are taking into account the internal differences, which appear between the Macedonian and the Albanian communities and the external ones, focusing on the relationship of North Macedonia with Greece and Bulgaria. Tensions created by the mentioned disputes were possible to settle only through external intervention with the aim of solving the conflict by reaching an agreement or a resolution.

Iryna BARBIR - *The role of local self-government in supporting the process of European integration of Western Balkans: institutional cooperation, investment attractiveness and cross-border partnership*

Abstract: The European integration of the Western Balkan countries is a complex and multi-level process, in which not only national governments but also local authorities play a critical role. This paper examines the role of local self-government as an instrument of deepening integration through strengthening institutional cooperation,

increasing regional investment attractiveness, and developing cross-border partnerships. The focus is on a comparative analysis of the experience of Eastern Europe (particularly Ukraine) and the possibility of its adaptation in the context of the Western Balkans. Special attention is given to the strategic role of Ukraine and Romania in the regional context, as well as the experience of Chernivtsi as an active participant in inter-municipal cooperation with Romanian twin cities within the Danube macro-region.

Svetlana CEBOTARI, Natalia PUTINĂ - *Internal Divisions and Social Cohesion – Obstacles in the EU Accession Process. The Experience of the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova*

Abstract: The process of integration into the European Union represents a strategic objective for many of the states in the Western Balkans, including the Republic of Moldova, regions situated at the crossroads between Europe and the former Soviet spaces. Although EU membership brings numerous economic, political, and security benefits, it also entails a series of internal challenges, some of the most significant being related to internal divisions and social cohesion—major obstacles in the accession process, as the success of integration largely depends on the internal political and social cohesion of the candidate states. In the case of the Western Balkans, ethnic, religious, and national divergences, fueled by post-communist conflicts, continue to undermine the stability of the region. In many Balkan states, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, and Montenegro, the process of reconciliation between ethnic and national groups is incomplete, and nationalism and separatism continue to influence domestic politics and external relations.

Iulia-Marilena SBÂRCEA - *The Enlargement of the EU towards the Western Balkans*

Abstract: This paper presents a comparative analysis of Romania and Serbia's constitutional and political party systems at their respective stages of European Union integration, with a focus on how mechanisms designed to address power concentration and illiberal governance have evolved within the EU framework. Romania's accession in 2007 had been prepared by a period of accelerated reform, driven by strong EU conditionality. Instruments like the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM), GRECO reports, legal opinion and guidance from the Venice Commission were all complementary to the aim of building compliance with international democratic standards.

Teodora STANKOVIC - *The Geopolitical Aspect of EU Enlargement: The Case of the Western Balkans*

Abstract: The European Union (EU), through the 2003 Thessaloniki agenda, supported the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU and stated that the countries in the Balkan region are potential candidates for membership in the EU. This was part of broader strategy to stabilize the post-conflict region of the Western

Balkans and represent a continuation of normative power of the EU, such as promoting democracy, rule of law, and reforms. However, over time, the EU enlargement process has repeatedly entered a state of stagnation. Despite the nominal support for the enlargement policy, many EU member states have begun to express scepticism, not only because of internal challenges of the EU, such as Brexit, migration crisis, and the rise of populism, but also due to dissatisfaction with the progress of reforms in the candidate countries.

Fruzsina SIGÉR - *The enlargement of the EU towards the Western Balkans*

Abstract: In the time of slow and protracted integration progress of the Western Balkans and the enlargement fatigue of the European Union, something stirred up quite waters. The Ukrainian chapter is a relatively new and unforeseen one in the EU's enlargement history, with a totally different dynamic.

The question arises whether Ukraine's accelerating European integration process hinders or fosters the integration progress of the Western Balkans? What is the reason behind the slowness of the Western Balkan process and the exceptional speed behind Ukraine's European integration process?

The speed of the European Council's decision to grant candidate status to Ukraine was inconceivable before February 2022, especially in light of the Commission's annual reports, that painted not overly optimistic picture on Ukraine's implementation of the Association Agreement.

As Marta Kos, Commissioner for Enlargement said at the latest "EU meets the Balkans Forum", enlargement is the EU's most strategic policy tool in consolidating stability and ensuring sustainable peace and security in a unified Europe. Is the EU able to seize this historic moment and complete the unification of Europe at last? Are the Western Balkan countries ready to implement the necessary reforms and be the beneficiaries of recent geopolitical changes and the evolving new world order? Is the period of enlargement fatigue over?

We have several questions to answer, but one thing can be taken for granted: the Western Balkans are in a new reality.

Reza TAVALLA - *Digital Nationalism and European Integration: Insights from Romania as a Model for the Western Balkans*

Abstract: In a digital era of speedy change, social networks have come to represent powerful platforms that mold public discourse and national identity, frequently with deep implications for European unification. Through semi-structured interviews and hashtag analysis, this study examines the communicative design of Romanian social media nationalism to show how digital platforms both magnify patriotic discourses and also polarize social narratives. As a post-communist state integrated in the European Union since 2007, Romania provides a significant case study of how digital media both build national pride and threaten social unity. Through the analysis, the role of user interactions and algorithm-driven curation in negotiating national identity is emphasized, mirroring tensions between local heritage and global forces in broader spheres. Drawing on these conclusions, this paper suggests that the Romanian

experience is instructive for the Western Balkans, where digital nationalism can also impact regional cooperation and the EU integration pace. Through studying these trends, the study argues for media literacy as a mediator of divisive discourse, presenting a scalable model for future research and Western Balkans' policy. Through bridging communication studies and European studies, this analysis makes a much-needed addition to the study of digital identity in the EU enlargement dynamics.

Laurențiu PETRILA, Radu Sorin TURCESCU - *Croatia: A Model of Integration, Democracy, and European Citizenship for the Balkan States*

Abstract: While Poland has long been considered a model for attracting European funds in the region, Croatia is increasingly emerging as a benchmark for European integration among the Balkan countries. Although it is the most recent state to join the European Union, Croatia became the first country from the former Yugoslavia—after Slovenia—to gain EU membership. Moreover, Croatian authorities have outpaced some older EU member states, such as Romania, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic, in key areas of integration, including accession to the Schengen Area and adoption of the Euro.

Alba GERDECI, Artela ROSHI – *Public Demands in Treaty-Making: An Analysis of Albania's Alignment in the Context of EU Integration*

Abstract: The paper investigates three fundamental public demands in the EU treaty law and practice - transparency, accountability and participation - that Albania, as an EU candidate country, must address in its legal and political processes. A recent illustration of the tension between public demands and treaty practices is the migrant agreement between Italy and Albania, which exposed significant concerns over transparency and public participation. The agreement raised questions about the role of civil society and public discourse in shaping the terms of bilateral treaties, demonstrating the gap between Albania's current practices and EU expectations.

The paper begins by outlining the EU's established standards regarding these principles drawing on relevant legal frameworks, reports and jurisprudential sources. It then assesses how these standards are addressed in Albania at the national level by analysing reports of civil society, media coverage, political party positions, legal cases, as well as parliamentary debates related to treaties. On the international front, the paper reviews Albania's treaty practices as perceived by international organizations, courts and media outlets. Through this comparative analysis between Albania's current situation and EU expectations, the paper identifies critical gaps and challenges in meeting these public demands. Finally, it offers concrete recommendations for aligning Albania's treaty-making practices with EU standards, contributing to the broader discourse on democratic participation in international law.

Marijan PREMOVIC, Aleksandra RAKOCEVIC - *Development of science in Montenegro in the context of European integration*

Abstract: This paper examines the development of science in Montenegro within the framework of the European integration process. It focuses on institutional reforms, the

enhancement of research infrastructure, and the involvement of Montenegrin scientific institutions in European Union programs, particularly Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe. The paper also addresses key challenges faced by the Montenegrin scientific community, including funding limitations, researcher mobility, and the alignment with European open science standards. By analyzing key strategic documents and statistical data, the study offers insights into the prospects for Montenegro's deeper integration into the European Research Area (ERA).

Balázs HORVÁTHY - *The WTO membership of the Western Balkan countries – A transformative potential on the road to the EU*

Abstract: The World Trade Organization (WTO) is widely regarded as the cornerstone of global economic governance, providing a rules-based framework that facilitates trade liberalization and dispute settlement mechanism among its member states. The proposed paper explores the implications of World Trade Organization (WTO) membership for the Western Balkan countries on their path towards European Union (EU) accession. As Albania (2000), North Macedonia (2003), and Montenegro (2011) have already joined the WTO, while Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue accession negotiations in observer status, WTO membership serves as an important tool to align these countries with international trade law standards. The main argument of the paper is that this alignment also brings the countries closer to the EU's internal market, and therefore the WTO membership has a transformative potential in the EU accession process as well. The paper analyses how WTO membership facilitates trade liberalization, institutional reforms, and economic modernization, thereby enhancing competitiveness and attracting foreign investment in the Western Balkans. It also examines the role of WTO membership in deepening regional cooperation through CEFTA and in supporting the implementation of EU Stabilisation and Association Agreements, which collectively underpin the Western Balkans' EU integration agenda. By contextualising WTO membership within the broader EU convergence framework, the paper explains how the WTO membership acts as a strategic catalyst for economic transformation and political stabilization in the region, accelerating their journey towards full membership in the European Union.

Edina MÉSZÁROS - *How resilient is the EU to disinformation coming from the Western Balkans?*

Abstract: Disinformation, information manipulation and interference are forms of hybrid threats manifesting across the world. The threat is expanding, and a growing number of actors, mainly originating from the EU's neighbourhood are using an increasing number of tactics. This study, besides the conceptualisation of the terms disinformation and resilience, intends to inspect the agencies created, the policies and instruments used by the European Community and its Member States meant to tackle this phenomenon. More precisely, the research is aimed at examining resilience building to disinformation originating from the Western Balkans. While the qualitative assessment of the Disinformation Resilience Index and of the EU *Disinformation Review* will reveal the level of exposure and vulnerability of certain EU member states

to disinformation, the study also focuses on inspecting the actual measures that were taken to counter disinformation by bolstering societal resilience. Besides evaluating the efficiency of the initiatives launched at Community level (such as, the Rapid Alert System against Disinformation or the *EEAS Western Balkans StratCom Task Force*), the paper also prioritizes familiarizing the reader with fact checking organizations and disinformation countering measures launched at the level of the civil society.

Ivanna Makukh-FEDORKOVA - *Cognitive warfare as a tool to counter European integration: the case of the Western Balkans*

Abstract: Cognitive warfare is an emerging form of conflict where the human mind becomes the primary battleground. Rather than using conventional weapons, it involves manipulation of perception, emotions, and thinking through disinformation, propaganda, and psychological operations. In the context of the Western Balkans, cognitive warfare has become a strategic tool used by external actors to undermine the region's path toward European integration. Russia actively employs cognitive influence as a tool of hybrid warfare in the Western Balkans to obstruct the region's European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Its main goal is to alter public perception, undermine trust in Western institutions, and promote a favorable image of Russia as an alternative geopolitical center.

Luminița ȘOPRONI, Florentina CHIRODEA, Ioana BORDEIANU - *Convergence and Divergence: The Dual Impact of Economic Agglomerations on Development of Microregions. Bihor County study case*

Abstract: Economic agglomerations refer to the grouping of companies, services and institutions within a specific geographical area, leading to a growing concentration of economic activities. These agglomerations make it easier not only for the enhanced collaboration between companies, but also the sharing of knowledge and resources. The grouping of economic activities promotes a favourable environment for innovation, collaboration and competitiveness, contributing to the overall productivity of the region. This phenomenon can be observed in urban centers and industrial parks, where synergy between companies and the associated labour pool considerably improves economic performance.

Serhii SHVZDIUK – *The Role of Civil Society and Public Opinion in Poland's European Integration Process: Lessons for the Western Balkans*

Abstract: Becoming a member of the European Union is a complicated journey, but it's more successful when everyday citizens and social groups actively engage and express their support. Poland's path from a post-communist state to an EU member provides essential insights, particularly for Western Balkan countries where scepticism about the EU and strong national identities present significant challenges.

This study examines how civil society (groups and organisations outside of government) and public opinion shaped Poland's path to the EU. It also tries to find lessons that the Western Balkan countries can use.

Zsolt BOTTIAN - *Romania's Path in the EU: Challenges, Achievements, and Relevance for the Western Balkans*

Abstract: Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007 marked a pivotal moment in its post-communist transition. This paper analyzes the multifaceted experience of Romania's EU integration over the subsequent years, examining its trajectory across key dimensions to distill relevant insights for the Western Balkan countries currently pursuing membership. The analysis adopts a comprehensive approach, investigating the economic transformations, including macroeconomic stabilization, structural shifts, trade reorientation, and the crucial role of EU funds, alongside persistent challenges like external dependencies. Politically, it assesses the consolidation of democratic institutions, advancements and persistent issues in governance and the rule of law (including anti-corruption efforts), the evolution of civil society, and Romania's adaptation to the EU's foreign and security policy framework, including its regional role. The study further explores the significant socio-demographic impacts, focusing on labor market dynamics (including migration and brain drain), demographic shifts, and social cohesion.

Anatoliy KRUGLASHOV - *Ukraine and Moldova's accession to the EU. A shared destiny of being placed into a waiting room*

Abstract: Countries of the Western Balkans got the prospect of EU membership after ending the hot phase of post-Yugoslav conflicts and wars. The leverage of European integration had to encourage them to depart from the collective traumas of conflicts and war towards a brighter and more prosperous common European future. Slovenia and Croatia successfully joined the EU in 2004 and 2013. The remaining candidate countries are in the waiting room for the unpredictable member states' status. This story is also critical to Ukraine and Moldova. They both have been recognised as the candidate states in 2022 simultaneously and to a very extent, under the pressure of a dramatically changed geopolitical situation in Europe since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Dan APĂTEANU - *Boosting Cooperation in the European Integration Process: East-Central Europe as a Model for the Western Balkans*

Abstract: This paper analyzes the key tools and instruments used to boost cooperation in the EU integration process – including cross-border cooperation programs, pre-accession assistance funds, institutional partnerships, and legal harmonization mechanisms. It examines how these mechanisms operated in East-Central Europe as a model, and how they are being applied or could be enhanced in the Western Balkans. Specific EU initiatives such as the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), Euroregions, Twinning projects, and other forms of regional, ethnic, or confessional cooperation are discussed. The impact of these tools in fostering integration and reducing barriers among diverse communities is also evaluated, highlighting successes to date and lessons for the future.

Aurora GAVRIȘ - *Methods and means at European level to eradicate human trafficking. Origin area victims*

Abstract: Human trafficking in its forms of manifestation, mainly through sexual exploitation, forced labor, and coercion to commit crimes, especially of children and people with disabilities, is a phenomenon often related to organized crime but whose real dimension is unknown; in its assessment, we can only refer to the data and statistics that come to the attention of the authorities and are investigated by judicial authorities. Among the elements that enhance the phenomenon of human trafficking at the European Union level is the conflict in Ukraine, which has generated, on the one hand, the departure of numerous people from the territory, and, in general, the migration phenomenon, especially that created by foreign citizens also in search of a better life.

Bianca-Larisa GAIDOȘ, Alina STOICA - *The Republic of Moldova and the European Future: The Dynamics of EU Accession Negotiations*

Abstract: This study analyses the Republic of Moldova's path toward European Union integration, set against the backdrop of the current geopolitical context marked by instability and war on the continent's eastern borders. Since the initiation of EU accession negotiations, Moldova has undertaken a series of institutional, legal, and internal reforms essential to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. These changes have accelerated the country's approach to Europe, particularly in the wake of the Ukrainian conflict. As a result, Moldova's partnership with the European Union has become increasingly strategic, evolving beyond economic, political, and identity-based motivations, and reflecting Chisinau's desire to integrate fully into the European framework. This research examines both the theoretical and historical aspects of EU-Moldova relations, highlighting the evolution of these interactions through key agreements and phases of bilateral cooperation. It also investigates Moldova's internal challenges, such as political instability, corruption, and the weakness of democratic institutions, alongside the opportunities provided by European support in governance, research, education, and justice. Furthermore, the study explores the role of civil society in advancing participatory democracy and facilitating the process of Europeanization. This analysis serves as a foundation for further research on EU enlargement and the transformative impact it has had on the candidate countries within the Eastern Neighbourhood.

László KNAPP - *EULEX Kosovo and the Changing Role of the European Union*

Abstract: The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) is the largest civilian mission of the EU, which was established in 2008, when the territory became independent. It has a mandate for a wide range of monitoring and some executive activities covering both criminal and civil justice issues. Recent case law of the European Court of Justice established the non-contractual liability of the European Union for insufficient investigations carried out during that mission into the torture, disappearance and killing of victims of the 1998–1999 Kosovo War. The judgment

gained attention from the perspective of EU law, since missions and operations alike are established under the Common Foreign and Security Policy, which falls out the jurisdiction of the Court, but the case also enables the paper to examine the changing role of the European Union in Kosovo.

Constantin-Vasile ȚOCA, Cosmin CHIRIAC - *Lessons from Romanian - Hungarian cross-border cooperation for EU membership candidate countries*

Abstract: The European Union, through its policies, programmes and instruments specific to cross-border cooperation provides member and candidate states funding aimed at supporting neighboring border areas to implement projects that, through their results, would help underdeveloped areas achieve results that would improve their economic and social status. All these results should help balance out the level of development of the various regions of the European Union, while also increasing their quality of life. The Romania - Hungarian border is a rich source of good practice examples, covering three long budget funding time frames. Some of these showed remarkable results, reflected through improved social, economic, educational, infrastructural indicators, to name a few.

NÁDASI Levente, TÓKÉS Tibor, TRÓN Zsuzsanna - *Convergence of the Western Balkans towards the European Union*

Abstract: Our paper explores whether the Western Balkan six (WB6) countries are converging towards the European Union (EU) and examines the key drivers behind their convergence. After a brief overview of EU convergence history and the relevance of Maastricht and Copenhagen criteria, the study situates itself within the broader literature on economic convergence. The research investigates whether the WB6 are catching up by examining GDP per capita, growth rates, and World Governance Indicators. Using cross-sectional regressions across EU members, WB6 countries, and other accession states, the study highlights both achievements and persistent gaps. Although cross-sectional analysis limits visibility into dynamic processes, findings reveal mixed patterns of convergence, varying significantly across countries. The discussion supplements the results with brief country cases, offering a nuanced comparison based on key indicators. The paper concludes by reflecting on future convergence prospects within an evolving EU framework.

Zsolt RADICS, Zoltán DOROGI - *Hungarian economic interests and goals in the Western Balkans after the millennium*

Abstract: The paper reviews the goals, means and directions of Hungarian economic expansion in the Western Balkans. In this context, the course and events of Hungarian firms' and institutions' penetration of the region are presented. We also show the impact of this through a statistical analysis of the flow of goods and capital. The main question is: are the effects primarily symbolic or do they actually strengthen economic and social links? At the end of the analyses, the answers will lead us to new topics for research.

BÓI László, MÁTYÁS Szabolcs - *Predictive Accident Forecasting Software in Hungary and Serbia*

Abstract: Traffic safety remains a critical issue in Central and Southeastern Europe, where accident rates are consistently high. To address this challenge, we developed the Sopianae accident prediction software, a data-driven system utilizing predictive algorithms to identify high-risk locations and time periods for road accidents. The project, led by the Faculty of Law Enforcement at the National University of Public Service, applies statistical and probability-based models incorporating traffic, weather, and historical accident data. The software, built on a Microsoft SQL database and running in a Windows environment, aims to support law enforcement agencies in proactive accident prevention. In addition to analyzing the Hungarian context, our research presents the Serbian accident prediction system, enabling a comparative approach to regional traffic safety strategies.

Cristina MATIUȚA - *Digitalization as a tool to increase government accountability and social participation. Good practice examples in Romania*

Abstract: The use of digital technologies to improve the efficiency and accessibility of public institutions and to invigorate the traditional forms of interaction between them and citizens is one of the European Union's priorities, which put on the table significant resources to support the digital transformation of its member states. The paper examines the spread of digital technologies across the European Union, and particularly in Romania, and their potential to promote transparency and accountability within the public institutions, to fight against corruption and to expand citizens' social mobilization.

POLGÁR István – *Social Responsibility and Territorial Cooperation in the Western Balkans*

Abstract: One of the great challenges of contemporary Europe is related to the process of integration and the need for European integration of different communities and regions. Evaluations conducted have shown that there is a great need for expertise and policies regarding the development of the European integration process. New geopolitical realities, associated with a process of national-identity emancipation, have led to the redrawing of political maps in South East Europe. Slowly, societies from this space matured and the injuries of the past began to heal. Even though there are still many open wounds, a reconciliation process has begun at the level of public discourse, at the political level and even at the level of identity.

Anca OLTEAN - *The image of Romania's adhesion to Schengen space reflected in the newspaper "Adevărul" (2024-2025)*

Abstract: The paper intends to present the evolution and perception of Romanias Schengen aderation and its effects upon Romanian society in overall as presented by the Romanian newspaper "Adevărul".

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