



Institute of European Studies, Belgrade

&

**National Centre for Research on Europe,
University of Canterbury, Christchurch**

CALL FOR PAPERS
for the International Conference

EU Enlargement in a time of increasing geopolitical challenges: 'Fresh momentum' and beyond

**Institute of European Studies, Belgrade
15-16 June 2026**

After the completion of the 2004/07 enlargement round and Croatia's accession in 2013, EU enlargement progressed very slowly, resting on 'life support' (O' Brennan, 2014) until it was de-facto frozen in the mid-2010s. Exclusively focussed on the Western Balkans after the EU suspended accession talks with Turkey (following several years of standstill) in 2018, attempts to re-launch and re-vitalise the EU enlargement process in this region via the adoption of the 'new' EU enlargement strategy in 2018 and the Commission's revised methodology for accession negotiations in 2020 conspicuously failed. Still suffering from post-2004/07 'enlargement fatigue', preoccupied with its internal crises and, more recently, with increasing regional and global geo-political challenges to peace and security, the EU's political elite and even more so wider public seem to have lost interest in any further enlargement. On the other hand, democratic backsliding and political instability have worsened in the Western Balkan candidates, which have begun to lose faith in the EU and show signs of widespread 'non-enlargement fatigue'.

However, the EU enlargement process was somewhat 're-energised' by the EU's response to the geopolitical challenge which its Member States faced when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Only four months after the Russian invasion the EU decided to grant candidate status to two Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, Ukraine and Moldova, although EU membership was not labelled or even announced as a possible outcome of established cooperation in any of the EaP documents, and despite the problematic democratic records of both countries. The following developments - the opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania in July 2022 (17 and 8 years, respectively, after these two countries were granted candidate status), the granting of candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina (in December 2022) and to another EaP country, Georgia (in December 2023), as well as the opening of accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova (already) in June 2024 – were labelled by the European Commission as 'a new phase with fresh momentum' in the enlargement process (European Commission, 2024). It seems that this 'fresh momentum' has so far been used most effectively by Montenegro and Albania both of which have made (after many years of standstill) significant progress in the accession negotiation process during 2024 and particularly 2025 and hope to close it by 2028 and 2030, respectively. This hope is further encouraged by some recent optimistic announcements coming from the EU, particularly the European Commission (Von der Leyen, 2025). However, such optimism is not extended to



other current candidates for EU membership, especially not to the Western Balkan neighbours of Albania and Montenegro, which have been waiting for an EU future of their own for over two decades now. The answers to the questions of whether, when and how these 'remaining' current and potential candidates can hope to accelerate their accession to the EU remain highly uncertain.

The conference seeks to address these, and other questions and issues related to the current prospects for the EU enlargement process and EU relations with the candidates and potential candidates for membership. The conference organisers welcome panel and paper proposals from a broad range of disciplines, including but not limited to political science, history, economics, sociology and cultural, educational or environmental studies.

Please submit your abstracts of no shorter than 200 and no longer than 300 words with your name, title and affiliation to the conference administrative coordinator by **20 March 2026**. The organisers expect to inform participants of the acceptance of their papers or panel proposals by **27 March 2026**. The conference organisers expect to publish one or more edited volumes (a book or a special journal issue) from the selected papers presented at the conference. Participants will be invited after the conference to submit an extended and enhanced version of their papers for possible publication.

For any further information please contact the **conference administrative coordinator, Mrs Sonja Dragović at EUconf2026@ies.rs** or one of the programme coordinators listed below.

Keynote speaker:

Professor Richard G. Whitman

School of Economics, Politics and International Relations, University of Kent, UK

Conference Organisers and Programme Coordinators:

Dr. Milenko Petrovic, Jean Monnet Chair, President of Australasian Association for Euro-Asian Studies (AAEAS), Senior Lecturer Above the Bar and Deputy Director, National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE), University of Canterbury, New Zealand (milenko.petrovic@canterbury.ac.nz)

Dr. Milan Igrutinović, Research Associate, Institute of European Studies (IES), Belgrade, Serbia (milan.igrutinovic@ies.rs)

Conference Administrative Coordinator:

Mrs. Sonja Dragović, Administrative Secretary, Institute of European Studies, Belgrade (EUconf2026@ies.rs)

Conference Organising and Programme Committee:

Dr Slobodan Zečević, Professor and Director of the Institute of European Studies (IES), Belgrade, Serbia

Dr Martin Holland, Professor and Director of the National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE), University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

Dr Maja Kovacević, Professor and the Dean of the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade

Dr Miloš Petrović, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade, the Editor-in-Chief of *International Problems*

Dr Milenko Petrovic, Jean Monnet Chair, AAEAS President, NCRE, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

Dr Milan Igrutinović, Research Associate, Institute of European Studies (IES), Belgrade



Important notes:

- 1) The official conference language is English. Please write your paper and panel proposals in correct English as the conference organisers do not provide a proofreading service and authors are solely responsible for the textual presentation of their proposals. All accepted abstracts will be published in the conference programme that will be posted on the conference website.
- 2) This conference is an exclusively face-to-face event with no virtual presentations; the conference aims to foster academic discussion and momentum through extensive live interactions among participants.
- 3) Conference participants are not required to submit full papers for this conference; only abstracts will be reviewed. The authors of selected papers presented at the conference will be invited after the conference to submit a full and enhanced version of their papers to be considered for publication in a guest-edited issue of an international peer-reviewed journal or an edited book that the organisers expect to secure.
- 4) At the conference, the organisers will cover morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea on both days. Participants will cover their own traveling and local lodging.
- 5) We welcome expressions of interest among all participants to serve as panel chairs. Please send your EOI together with your paper/panel proposal submission.

Important dates:

Abstract submission deadline: **20 March 2026**

Panel and abstract acceptance notification issued: **27 March 2026**

Registration deadline for your name to appear in the conference programme: **25 April 2026**