



28th Annual Conference of Central European Political Science Association (CEPSA)  
**"TWENTY YEARS OF EU MEMBERSHIP: LESSONS LEARNED, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES"**

Thursday 3rd - Friday 4th of October 2024, Kaunas

*Organized by*

*Central European Political Science Association in cooperation with Vytautas Magnus University, Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy and Lithuanian Political Science Association*

You are cordially invited to the International Conference commemorating the 20th anniversary of the accession of eight Central and Eastern European (CEE) states, along with Cyprus and Malta, to the European Union in 2004, which finally ended the division of Europe after the Second World War. For many of these countries, joining the EU meant a return to their rightful place as Europeans. Despite years of totalitarian rule, the people of CEE countries never stopped claiming their European identity.

For Europe, the EU enlargement presented a unique opportunity to unify a previously divided continent and extend the peace project across most of the region while continuing to build the entire continent on the same set of values: democracy, the rule of law, and the respect for fundamental freedoms and rights. For the new EU member countries, EU accession required a decade of reforms necessary for implementing the so called 'acquis', convincing citizens that feared the idea of opening the market and overcoming reluctance in Member States towards enlargement.

Over the past two decades, these countries have witnessed significant achievements alongside formidable challenges that have shaped their political, economic, and social landscapes. The 2004 EU enlargement has undoubtedly brought about significant positive changes in the CEE countries, fostering economic development, political consolidation and regional integration. The accession process required significant improvements in democratic institutions, governance and the rule of law. The CEE countries have made progress in consolidating democratic practices and upholding European values, contributing to political stability in the region. These countries have actively participated in EU decision-making, with leaders from the region occupying key positions in EU institutions and successfully holding the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. This active engagement has allowed them to influence policies that directly affect their interests and concerns. EU membership has fostered citizen engagement in the political processes of the CEE countries. Participation in European Parliament elections and other EU-related activities has increased, fostering a sense of European identity among citizens. EU membership has contributed to the development of the CEE countries in many ways, but these countries have also contributed to the development of the EU.

Despite these achievements, the CEE countries face persistent challenges. Economic disparities persist, with rural areas lagging urban centres, contributing to social inequalities. Concerns about democratic backsliding have emerged in some countries, raising questions about commitment to the rule of law and democratic values. The rise of populist movements and nationalist sentiments in some countries underlines the delicate balance between national identity and European integration.

Security challenges have also emerged, notably in the context of Russia's assertive actions in the region and its war in Ukraine. Issues such as energy dependence on Russia, cyber-security vulnerabilities and the strengthening of defence capabilities require collective responses from both individual countries and the EU. Finding the right balance between engaging with neighbouring countries and maintaining a united front within the EU remains a complex diplomatic challenge. As the CEE countries continue to navigate the evolving geopolitical landscape, the lessons of the past two decades will play a crucial role in shaping their future within the European Union.

The conference aims to bring together political science researchers to engage in insightful discussions, reflections, and analyses on the main achievements, lessons learned from the past, challenges faced, and opportunities ahead for Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, which are members of the European Union, over the past two decades. The conference serves as a platform for interdisciplinary exchange and fostering new perspectives. The conference panels will feature both theoretical and empirical contributions, including comparative or single-country studies, all related to the general theme dedicated to the twenty years of EU membership. We invite papers from various subfields and theoretical and methodological approaches. Please see below for a list of potential panel topics:

- **Comparative Politics** (EP elections in CEE countries, Electoral processes in Central and Eastern Europe, Political parties in CEE countries, Populism and autocratic trends in CEE countries, Political Leadership of CEE countries)
- **International Relations** (The role of EU in world politics, EU Transatlantic relations, Challenges to the EU Foreign and Security policy)
- **Public Policy** (EU enlargement policy from CEE countries perspective, Reforms of EU Migration and Asylum policies, regional integration in the CEE region, Socio-economic development and green transition)
- **Security Studies** (Security challenges for CEE countries, The Russia's war in Ukraine and its implications, Cyber-security threats)
- **Political Communication** (Disinformation in International Relations, Disinformation as a threat to democracy, Political campaign communication, social media in political communication)

Panel and paper topics are not limited to the suggested topics mentioned earlier. The conference is open to researchers from all countries with an interest in Central and Eastern European affairs.

## Paper and panel proposals

The academic programme will follow the standard panel format, with each panel consisting of four to five papers and a chairperson. Individual paper proposals and complete panel proposals are welcome.

### Proposals for panels should include:

- Name, institutional affiliation and email address of the proposed panel chair.
- Proposed panel title and summary of its theme (approx. 250 words + up to 5 keywords).
- Tentative indication of possible panellists including their names, institutional affiliation and email addresses.

### The tasks for a panel chair include:

- proposing a panel around a theme.
- maintaining a balance between established and up-coming scholars, and postgraduate students.
- maintaining a balance with regards to the national affiliation of panellists (up to two panel members from the same national political science association).

**The closing date for panel proposals:** 15th May 2024.

### Proposal for papers should include:

- Name, institutional affiliation and email address of the proposed contributor.
- Proposed paper title and summary of its theme (approx. 250 words + up to 5 keywords).
- Proposed panel where the paper could be placed (if known).

**The closing date for paper proposals:** 15th May 2024.

**Proposals should be submitted to:** [cepsa2024@vdu.lt](mailto:cepsa2024@vdu.lt)

Participants will be informed of the acceptance in June 2024

The first draft of a programme will be available in late June 2024

### Organizational issues:

- the conference fee is not required for political scientists affiliated to institutions from CEPSA countries.
- the organizers provide limited meals (Coffee breaks and reception dinner on Thursday).
- the organizers do not cover the travel and accommodation costs.
- the organizers are prepared to advice to the participants in finding accommodation.

### Conference venue:

Vytautas Magnus University  
Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy  
V. Putvinskio str. 23  
LT-44243 Kaunas, Lithuania

**Location:**

The location of the city allows quick access by various means of transport. There is the Kaunas airport ( <https://www.kaunas-airport.lt/>). You may reach Kaunas city by public bus or taxi. Another airport is in Vilnius (<https://www.vilnius-airport.lt/>). The trip takes approximately 1 and a half hours by train or a bus from Vilnius to Kaunas. There are plenty of train and coach connections each day. You may reach Kaunas by international buses as well. More information about Kaunas: <https://visit.kaunas.lt/>

**Organization committee:**

Ingrida Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, Chair of the committee, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Miro Haček, President of CEPSA, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Petr Just, General Secretary of CEPSA, Metropolitan University Prague, Czech Republic

Sima Rakutienė, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Aistė Žemaitytė, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Rimgailė Kasparaitė, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Robertas Eismontas, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Liutauras Gudžinskas, acting President of the Lithuanian Political Science Association, Vilnius University, Lithuania

**We are looking forward to your application and let us meet in Kaunas to discuss the experience and the new challenges for CEE Countries!**