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*Roundtable*

**“The Future of the European Union and its Enlargement:  
Does its Cohesion and Global Geopolitical Competitiveness Rely on Its Enlargement?”**

*Hybrid event*

*23th of November 2023 / 9.45 AM /  
Institute of Philosophy SAS, 4th floor  
(Klemensova 19, 4th floor, Bratislava)*

The project is carried out with the support of the Visegrad Fund and co-financed by the  
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• Visegrad Fund





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# AGENDA

9.45 – 10.15 Registration

10.15 – 10.30 **Welcoming address: Juraj Marušiak**, *Slovak Academy of Sciences: The Institute of Political Science*

10.30 – 12.00 **Roundtable: “The Future of the European Union and its Enlargement: Does its Cohesion and Global Geopolitical Competitiveness Rely on Its Enlargement?”**

**Panelists:**

- **Juraj Marušiak**, *Research fellow at the Institute of Political Sciences, Slovak Academy of Sciences*
- **Spasimir Domaradzki**, *Ass. Professor at University of Warsaw, Institute of Central Europe, Visegrad Fellow 2020-2021 at Res Publica Nova*
- **Gábor Egry**, *Director at the Institute of Political History-Budapest*
- **Michal Vit**, *Assistant Professor at Metropolitan University Prague and a Senior fellow and Director of the Institute of Modern Development in Prague*
- **Valentin Valkanov**, *Researcher at Human and Social Studies Foundation, Sofija*
- **Risto Aleksovski**, *Researcher at Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Skopje*

12.00 – 12.30 **Discussion: Open Floor for All Attending Participants**

**Discussants-Respondents:**

- **Július Lörcincz**, *former journalist and diplomat (former Ambassador of Slovakia to Zagreb)*
  - **Ján Cingel**, *head of Strategic Analysis think tank*
- Please note: That every registered participant at the Roundtable can take up the role of the Discussant.*

*Please register for the event not later than 18 of November 2023 by following this [link](#) and filling out the registration form. Please keep in mind that the number of in-person participants is limited to 50, and, as such, if you accept the invitation, the sooner you register the better.*

# ABOUT THE ROUNDTABLE

*Roundtable:*

**“The Future of the European Union and its Enlargement: Does its Cohesion and Global Geopolitical Competitiveness Rely on Its Enlargement?”**

We are witnessing times when the European Commission labels itself and even once “politically neutral” programs (such as science and education) as geopolitical, its president speaks of Europe’s global competitiveness and raises the issue of enlargement among the priorities for such competitiveness (the Speech from Oct. 5th, Granada, Spain). After the Russian full-scale aggression on Ukraine of Feb. 24, 2022, the EU granted the candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, thus expanding the group of candidate states at the EU’s doorstep. Can Kosovo-Serbia become a source of instability for Europe, and can as a counterbalance, improved Macedonia-Bulgaria relations help in that sense. Will the expanded group of candidate states make a difference? How will the EU enlargement policy change? Can the EU soft power resolve regional conflicts?

# ABOUT THE PANELISTS

**JURAJ MARUŠIAK**, Ph.D. (1970), political scientist and historian. Since 1996, he has worked as a senior research fellow at the Institute of Political Science, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, since 2022 as its director. His research is focused on the history of Slovakia in the 20th century, the political development of Slovakia after WWII, and the comparative politics and international relations in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989. His research interests lay in the field of the V4 countries, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. He participated in an international research project focused on the history of the dissident movement in Slovakia. 2002-2003, Juraj Marušiak finished the Lane Kirkland scholarship in Warsaw (Poland) at Warsaw University, specialising in East European Studies. He conducted several short-term research and teaching stays in the Czech Republic, Russian Federation, Poland, Belarus and Bulgaria. He is an author of monographs "Slovenská literatúra a moc v druhej polovici päťdesiatych rokov [Slovak Literature and the Power in the second half of the 50's] (Brno 2001), (Dez)integračná sila stredo európskeho nacionalizmu [The (Dis)integration Power of Central European Nationalism. A Study of the Visegrad Group Countries] (Bratislava 2015, in co-authorship with Mateusz Gniazdowski and Ivan Halász), and Príliš skoré predjarie... Slovenskí študenti v roku 1956 [An Early Spring That Came Prematurely... Slovak Students in 1956] (Bratislava 2020).

**SPASIMIR DOMARADZKI** Ph.D. – assistant professor, Department of European Law and Institutions, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, University of Warsaw. Visegrad Insight Senior Fellow 2020-2021. Senior Researcher at the Institute of Central Europe. Wilbur Fellow at the Russell Kirk Center in Mecosta, Michigan and Catholic University in America in 2008 and the Sofia University Center for Excellence in 2010 and research fellow at IREF 2014-2015. Member of the Ideas Lab team at the Chancellery of the President of Republic of Poland

2013-2014. Member of Team Europe Poland. His research interests concentrate on Central and Eastern Europe with particular emphasis on the questions of political transformation, historical policy, human rights, European integration and transatlantic relations.

**GÁBOR EGRY** is a historian, holding a PhD from ELTE, Budapest, senior research fellow and director general at the Institute of Political History, Budapest. His research focuses on nationalism, everyday ethnicity and the politics of identity in modern Eastern European history. He has been a visiting fellow at NEC-IAS, Bucharest, Imre Kertész Kolleg, Jena, CREES, Stanford University, IOS Regensburg. His latest book *Etnicitás, identitás, politika: Magyar kisebbségek nacionalizmus és regionalizmus között Romániában és Csehszlovákiában 1918–1944* [Ethnicity, Identity, Politics. Hungarian Minorities between Nationalism and Regionalism in Romania and Czechoslovakia 1918–1944], shortlisted for the Felczak-Wereszycki Prize of the Polish Historical Association, analysed everyday ethnicity in the interwar period and how it was related to politics of identity. He authored articles published in East Central Europe, Hungarian Historical Review, Historie Otázky Problémy, Slavic Review. His current position is Principal Investigator of the ERC Consolidator Project NEPOSTRANS (Negotiating post-imperial transitions: from remobilization to nation-state consolidation: A comparative study of local and regional transitions in post-Habsburg East and Central Europe) that compares transitions from Austria-Hungary to the successor states in the wake of WWI at the local level.

**MICHAL VIT** is an Assistant Professor at the Metropolitan University Prague. He obtained his doctorate in 2017. Previously he was associated with the Institute for European Policy (IEP), Berlin and EUROPEUM, Prague. He underwent research fellowships at University of Konstanz and University of Vienna, South East European University (MK). He cooperates as a consultant with international organizations, such as OSCE.

**VALENTIN VALKANOV** (b. 1989) – holds a bachelor degree in Sociology, a master's degree in Social Entrepreneurship, currently teaching and working on a PhD with New Bulgarian University. With research experience in the practice of sociology in the fields of public attitudes and market research, and also as a member of various academia research teams. Fields of interest – public attitudes, propaganda, conspiracy theories, political sociology, media, sociology of medicine, deviant behavior.

**RISTO ALEKSOVSKI**, is a junior researcher in the Institute of social sciences and humanities - Skopje. His main contribution to the research done by the ISSHS is gathering the data, data mining and visualization. The projects that he work on are: ““Who owns Alexander the Great?: A Question Upon Which EU Enlargement Relies,” (data gathering and data visualization), “Ethnically and Gender Inclusive Grass-Root LGBTI Movements in Macedonia” (data gathering and data visualization), “Official Language Usage in Municipalities in the Republic of Macedonia” (data gathering), “Legalizing Restrictions of the Freedom of the Press” (data visualization), “TECHNOLOGY OF STATE CAPTURE Overregulation in Macedonian Media and Academia” (data mining and data visualization), Freedom of expression, association and entrepreneurship in a captured state: Macedonia in 2015 (data visualization), “Прирачник за застапување заснован на податоци” /Manual for advocacy based on data/ (research and data visualization). He is one of the creators of the campaign #заробендржава and its web site and also the creator of the on line campaign that emerged from the publication “Legalizing Restrictions of the Freedom of the Press.”

ABOUT THE  
"ALLIANCES FOR EU"  
PROJECT

“Alliances for EU” is a 2023/2024 project implemented by an international consortium of European academic institutions and organizations (Res Publica Foundation (Poland), Institute for Modern Development (Czechia), Institute of Political History Nonprofit LLC (Hungary), Slovak Academy of Sciences: The Institute of Political Science (Slovakia) and Human and Social Studies Foundation – Sofia (HSSF) (Bulgaria) coordinated by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities – Skopje. It is funded by the International Visegrad fund and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Korea.

The project seeks to engage in an analysis and advocacy initiative aiming at depolarizing the intercultural relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria in order to prevent the pending possibility of another stalemate of the EU enlargement process.

### **The Scope and Background**

Polarization between the Macedonian and Bulgarian societies rose since to a dramatic extent since June 2022, following the EU solution to the Bulgarian veto and the conditioned opening of negotiations with N. Macedonia. Even the most prominent CS perceived as pro-EU started talking about alternatives to the EU. This was the overwhelming climate and ISSHS stood alone (literally) in its support of the EU Council’s decision advocating for cultural conflict resolution with Bulgaria and relaxation of the general discourse in N. Macedonia toward the Bulgarian minority. Hate speech has been normalised even in the mainstream. In the previous year, we carried out a IVF supported project seeking to devise policy solutions that could help resolve the Bulgarian-Macedonian deadlock stalling EU enlargement and promote cultural reconciliation. By way of including top v4 and other European experts in analysis, and in high level direct advocacy, we could exert some influence over some

policy makers. Half of our recommendations in last years' IVF supported project concerning lifting the veto, seem to be reflected in the EU's General Position. However, the part of the recommendations that concerns cultural reconciliation remains yet to be realized. Considering the Bulgarian minority in N. Macedonia ought to be recognized by next year, the main efforts should be directed at depolarization, cultural conflict resolution and inter-cultural dialogue. We are sadly a rare CS initiative that seeks to engage in this issue of depolarization and maintain a strong EU commitment in the CS mainstream.

One should introduce a platform of continuous cultural exchange between the two countries enabling an essentially performative exchange on sensitive subjects concerning matters of cultural and national identity. By "performative", we mean – performing gestures of goodwill, a self-critical stance demonstrated by each of the parties with regard to the purported "absolute" truth on matters of national identity, thus creating a dialogue of trust and tolerance of unpopular opinions to either of the two sides of the dispute at issue. Cf. Szpala, Vit, Gabor at <https://tinyurl.com/6ys>. Topics of history or identity should be balanced out by topics concerning the future and the very issue of EU enlargement. By the latter, we mean that we intend to raise awareness as to the importance of the war in Ukraine and why it makes EU enlargement more pressing than ever. Thus we intend to organize a series of in-person and online encounters that seek to build bridges of communication and thus sustainably combat the climate of polarization. While executing our activities targeting the issue of polarization, we intend to actively engage in presenting and seeking peer feedback on the policy solutions we propose with regard to the inter-cultural conflict (with consequences on EU enlargement) in front of key figures among the v4 policy makers and opinion makers. Considering v4 is the region we can learn most from concerning resolution of the type of problem at hand – but also shares similar medieval heritage – the project can contribute critically to the desired intercultural depolarization.

## **The Added Value to Already Existing Initiatives**

The civil society in North Macedonia is next to silent on this matter, except when some individual representatives of it aim to display patriotism and defend the national/ist position of their side. More often than not, the majority of the CS organizations and the academic community have been engaged in pointing “national traitors” rather than engage in active depolarization and examining one’s own nation’s nationalist stance in the dispute. Certainly, there are exceptions, and we are not the only ones engaging in challenging the status quo, but it is a highly rare occurrence in our present CS and academic environment. Due to our previous close collaboration with colleagues from Bulgaria and interaction with the Bulgarian society, we must say – the situation there is not very different than that in North Macedonia. Therefore, what we bring as an added value to the project could be broken down to the following components: 1) we engage in a self-critical stance toward our own nationalism/s and actively engage in building bridges of reconciliation with the other side, which, as said, is a rather rare practice in our Macedonian-Bulgarian context, 2) we include Bulgarian scholars and civil society representatives as part of our project team, demonstrating good faith, the performative gesture of “we are in this together,” 3) we will engage in active advocacy in front of the informed public in Bratislava and other cities in v<sub>4</sub> (through our partners) postulating the comparative nature of similar problems within the region of v<sub>4</sub> and the models of de-escalation we can learn from.

## **Regional Relevance: Good Neighborly Relations in EU**

Improvement of the good neighborly relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria as the prerequisite for unblocking Europe’s enlargement process. Also, in the given context of discussions of experts and politicians of utmost European authority

(e.g., Joseph Borrell, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/time-move-forward-eu-integration-western-balkans\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/time-move-forward-eu-integration-western-balkans_en))), of a possible regional destabilization of the Balkans as a spill-over effect of the war in Ukraine, the enlargement process should be resumed and accelerated precisely to ward it off said danger – this project seeks to do precisely that, by seeking to establish a platform that will de-escalate the public discourse in both countries and help foreground a constructive dialogue of the decision makers in the direction of finding a possible resolution. Consequently, it is an essentially regional project, at least on thus presented two levels if not more. Currently, the only initiative toward intercultural reconciliation between N. Macedonia and Bulgaria is one that sprang precisely thanks to the IVF supported previous project run by ISSHS (Avenues of Cooperation) and it is called Bulgarian-Macedonian Friendship club. It is based in Sofia but includes numerous Macedonians, and our project leaders are among the founders of this informal initiative. As it is informal, lacks structure and direction, and is not a legal entity of any sort, we will use this network as a pool of experts and activists to keep the reconciliation debate going on the Digital Platform which is the core output of the project, thus synergizing the two efforts.

### **ISSHS' and Consortium's Experience in the Area**

ISSHS has recently completed an IVF supported project on the same matter with somewhat different objectives and outputs that come down to viable policy solutions, building on the good models of the Visegrad group and the experiences of devising the Prespa Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia. We continue to advocate for those solutions – and are open for their improvement and enrichment. However, in order to do so, there is a pressing need of depolarizing the binational public discourse – this project will aim to do so precisely. We were included in similar project initiatives that foregrounded the positive climate that enabled

the elites to arrive at the solution called "Prespa Agreement" which put an end to the Macedonian-Greek next to three decades long dispute. In the previous IVF supported project under the titles Avenues of Cooperation, the former chief of the committee of foreign affairs of Syriza and university professor and civil rights activists, Costas Douzinas witnesses of this cooperation whose speech can be found on the YouTube playlist Avenues of cooperation. In short, ISSHS does have experience in projects of this sort, and they predate the agreements with Greece and Bulgaria: our studies on the perception of Macedonian identity, such as "Who Owns Alexander the Great: A Question Upon Which the EU Enlargement Relies," whereas some of them deal with the matter of political polarization, the conflicts polarization creates and how to resolve them (a dozen of events and several studies published by ISSHS on the matter at hand).



[www.alliancesforeu.org](http://www.alliancesforeu.org)  
[www.isshs.edu.mk](http://www.isshs.edu.mk)