

Conference

BILATERAL DISPUTES AND THE ROLE OF MEMBER STATES IN EU ENLARGEMENT

25 MAY 2026
12:45-14:45FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

EU enlargement has re-emerged as a strategic priority, yet its credibility continues to be shaped by domestic political dynamics within member states. In recent years, the use—or threat—of veto power has increasingly shaped the pace and direction of accession negotiations, contributing not only to delays and additional conditions but, in some cases, to prolonged stalemates. These dynamics are often linked to bilateral demands concerning history, identity, and borders, as well as to broader concerns about rule-of-law conditionality and the Union's capacity to absorb new members. While recent debates have focused on procedural reforms—most notably the possible extension of qualified majority voting (QMV) to certain intermediate steps—such approaches risk overlooking the political drivers of bilateral disputes. The challenge is therefore not only institutional, but fundamentally political.

This event seeks to shift the focus accordingly. Rather than centring the debate on voting rules alone, it will examine how and when veto opportunities become politicised, and how their disruptive effects can be contained. Particular attention will be given to mapping different types of disputes and identifying practical avenues for addressing them, including earlier engagement with contentious issues, strengthened EU mediation mechanisms, and a clearer allocation of responsibilities between member states and EU institutions, notably the European Commission. It will also explore the conditions under which member states—and coalitions of member states—have acted not only as veto players, but as enablers of enlargement, and the role they may play in supporting enlargement going forward.

This discussion takes place at a particularly significant moment. Poland will host the Ukraine Recovery Conference in June 2026, following the conference organised in Italy in 2025, further highlighting the growing connection between Ukraine's reconstruction and its long-term European integration. As enlargement once again moves to the centre of the European political agenda, there is a growing need to move beyond debates focused primarily on voting rules and to open a broader discussion on how bilateral disputes should be addressed within the enlargement process.

The event is organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali, in cooperation with the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Warsaw, the Future Democracy Lab at Jagiellonian University and the Res Publica Foundation, with the support of the Open Society Foundations – Western Balkans within the framework of the InCLUDE initiative.

PROGRAMME

12.45-13.15 *Coffee and Registrations*

13.15-13.30 *Welcome Remarks*

AGNIESZKA BIĘCZYK-MISSALA, full professor DSc in Political Sciences, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, University of Warsaw

NICOLETTA PIROZZI, Head of EU Programme and Institutional Relations Manager, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome

13.30-13.45 *Keynote Address*

NIKOLA DIMITROV, Former Foreign Minister of North Macedonia and Chief Negotiator of the Prespa Agreement

13.45-14.45 *Panel Discussion*

ZORAN NECHEV, Policy analysis and Advocacy, Think Europe Institute, Ljubljana

MAGDALENA GÓRA, Associate Professor, Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University, Kraków

MATTEO BONOMI, Senior fellow, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome

WOJCIECH PRZYBYLSKI, Editor-in-Chief of Visegrad Insight, President of the Res Publica Foundation, Warsaw

Moderator

SPASIMIR DOMARADZKI, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, University of Warsaw