



Europe on Edge: Tackling Hybrid Warfare amid Elections, Foreign Influence and Unfinished Europeanization

Regional Conference

Grand Hotel Sofia, Triaditza Hall 2

9 am – 5:30 pm, 29 January 2025

Background

2024 magnified Europe's manifold crises, with Central and Eastern Europe continuing to be a key frontline. The significant elections that took place across the region will shape the political landscape for years to come. Polarized election campaigns have demonstrated once again the impact of hybrid warfare—including Russian-sponsored efforts—to destabilize democracies and erode public trust. Hybrid warfare tactics that combine traditional propaganda with modern tools and unconventional methods are increasingly affecting societies at a deeper level.

Moreover, while EU countries have grappled with their own internal problems related to the rise of the far-right, political instability and anti-democratic tendencies among youth, what happens in the battlegrounds defined by “unfinished Europeanization” will embody a major unresolved challenge to European and global politics. Indeed, the destabilization of Moldova through manipulation of minorities, severely undercutting Georgian democracy in concert with China and fuelling irredentist claims that hinder a reconciliatory memory politics in the Balkans represent strategies in Moscow's arsenal that are likely to prefigure future flashpoints.

This one-day conference, organized by the Bulgaria-based think tank [Institute for Global Analytics](#) and the Czechia-based press freedom initiative [SCIENCE+](#), will bring together journalists, scientists, government and civil society representatives. The event will provide a conceptual treatment of the intersection between hybrid warfare, foreign influence and setbacks in European integration coupled with a specific geographic focus on Romania, Moldova, the Western Balkans as well as Georgia and Belarus. Participants will additionally gain tools to enhance audience engagement through trustworthy, independent journalism and discuss strategies to strengthen societal resilience against disinformation.

The conference represents the **2nd annual edition** of a series of events organized by IGA and SCIENCE+ motivated by the pressing need to study and combat hybrid warfare in Central and Eastern Europe. The first roundtable titled “*The Youth Factor Rises in Central Europe. The Attitudes of Millennials and Gen Z in Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia and Serbia towards Russia's War against Ukraine, Traditional Values, and Democracy*” took place on January 29, 2024 and you can find further information about the event at this [link](#).

January 28, 2025

18:00 – 20:30 Reception and keynote speech at Hyatt Regency Hotel: The defining trends, threats and perceptions in Central and Eastern Europe

- *Dominika Hajdu*, Policy Director of the Center for Democracy & Resilience at GLOBSEC

January 29, 2025

9:00-9:30 Registration at Grand Hotel Sofia

9:30-10:00 Opening remarks, IGA and SCIENCE+

10:00-11:15 After the Super-Election Year in Europe: Taking Stock

The panel will draw lessons learnt regarding the major patterns and consequences of hybrid warfare, as well as strategies for counteraction, during the elections in Europe with a specific reference to the surprise presidential results in Romania, the high-stakes referendum in Moldova and the dramatic events surrounding the parliamentary vote in Georgia. The panel will also reflect on the outcomes of the European Parliament elections and their implications for regional politics.

- *Dr. Miruna Butnaru-Troncotă*, Professor at National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (Romania)
- *Giorgi Gogvadze*, Director at Georgian Center for Strategy and Development (Georgia)
- *Aleksandre Khunjua*, Intelligence Analyst, Mantis Analytics (USA/Ukraine)
- *Massimo Flore*, Disinformation Expert, Aurora Fellows

Moderator: Dr. Rumena Filipova, Chairperson, IGA

11:15-11:45 Coffee break

11:45-13:00 Forever Standing on the EU's Doorstep? The Path Ahead for the Western Balkans

The panel will discuss foreign and domestic trends in the battlegrounds defined by “unfinished Europeanization” and how the latter can embody a major unresolved challenge to European politics. The interventions will focus on developments that are both unique to the Western Balkans and also shared with other regions still standing on the doorstep of European integration, primarily the South Caucasus.

- *Miroslav Szadovski*, Senior Analyst at Hybrid CoE (Helsinki)
- *Dr. Shalva Dzebisashvili*, Associate Professor at University of Georgia
- *Dr. Donika Emini*, Executive Director of CiviKos platform (Kosovo)
- *Daniel Sunter*, Founder of Balkan Security Network (Belgrade)
- *Dr. Adnan Huskic*, Professor at Sarajevo School of Science and Technology

Moderator: Dr. Rumena Filipova, Chairperson, IGA

13:00-14:00 Lunch break at the hotel

14:00-14:45 Interactive Session: Audience Engagement in Polarized Times: presentations by the SCIENCE+ audience analysis team and Q&A session.

- *Mykola Okhotnik*, Audience researcher, SCIENCE+
- *Dominika Stawarz*, Audience researcher, SCIENCE+

14:45-15:45 Real-life Consequences of Hybrid Warfare – A Case Study on Bulgaria and Europe: presentations by the IGA team exploring the hybrid warfare tactics employed in Bulgaria and Europe, and the impact of digital technologies on political corruption.

- *Dr. Rumena Filipova*, Chairperson, IGA
- *Dr. Stoyan Panov*, Senior Analyst, IGA
- *Barbara Bačová*, Analyst, IGA
- *Marketa Vasickova*, Analyst, IGA

15:45-16:00 Coffee break

16:00-17:00 An Emerging Authoritarian Axis in Eastern Europe? How Belarus and Georgia Resist Europeanization

The panel will comparatively examine the evolving tactics of the authoritarian regimes in Georgia and Belarus. The speakers will provide insights into how autocracies adapt, collaborate, and leverage hybrid warfare to suppress dissent and maintain control. The panel will further elaborate on regional security dynamics in the South Caucasus through the Armenian perspective.

- *Veronica Laputska*, Co-Founder of EAST Center (Warsaw)
- *Armen Grigoryan*, President of Center for Policy Studies (Armenia)
- *Diana Petriashvili*, Director of Programs, Free Press for Eastern Europe

Moderator: Maryia Sadouskaya-Komlach, Chairwoman, Free Press for Eastern Europe

17:00-17:30 Closing