

HOW CAN THE EU COUNTER RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE IN THE EU'S NEIGHBOURHOOD?

The [Trans European Policy Studies Association \(TEPSA\)](#), in cooperation with [Carnegie Europe](#), has co-organised the second meeting of the **Expert Hub on EU Enlargement**.

Date: Monday, 12 May

Time: 10:00-12:00 (networking coffee as of 9:30)

Location: Carnegie Europe - Rue du Congrès 15, 1000 Bruxelles

The meeting was held under the Chatham House Rule

ABOUT THE EXPERT HUB ON EU ENLARGEMENT

The InvigoratEU Expert Hub gathers an exclusive group of distinguished EU and national policymakers and civil servants from the European Commission, EEAS, European Parliament, Council Secretariat, Permanent Representations and current/upcoming Presidencies of the Council of the EU, who work on EU enlargement and related issues.

It is created in the framework of the Horizon Europe project [InvigoratEU - "Invigorating Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy for A Resilient Europe"](#), which sets out to explore how the EU can invigorate its enlargement and neighbourhood policy to enhance Europe's resilience.

Between 2024 to 2026, TEPSA is organising a series of closed-door discussions to bring together Expert Hub members and researchers from the InvigoratEU project. These meetings provide a forum for a structured dialogue about key research findings and policy advice on EU enlargement. Selected members of the Expert Hub are invited to each meeting based on their specific expertise and its relevance to the topics discussed and can provide feedback and insights into the research process.

FORMAT AND LOGISTICS

The second Expert Hub meeting took place on **Monday 12 May 2025**. The event started at 9:30 with a networking coffee, followed by a roundtable discussion from 10:00 to 12:00. The meeting was hosted at Carnegie Europe, located at Rue du Congrès 15, 1000 Brussels.

The meeting took the form of a roundtable discussion, featuring concise and focused insights from our consortium's researchers, followed by an open group discussion. Such a format allowed for transparent exchanges to address long-standing challenges with fresh perspectives. We enjoyed active and policy-oriented discussions based on evidence-based research. The meeting was strictly upon invitation and took place under the Chatham House Rule.

CONTENT AND OBJECTIVES

The influence of external actors in the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans is multifaceted and long-standing, manifesting across various dimensions and levels. This trend is driven primarily by two key factors: the **prolonged stagnation of the EU enlargement process** and the **growing geopolitical ambitions of external actors** such as Russia, China and Turkey. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has underscored the necessity of bolstering the resilience of the EU's neighbouring states against foreign interference. In response, the EU has intensified its support for these countries, recognising that countering malign external influence is crucial to safeguarding Europe's resilience. However, US disengagement is making this more difficult.

This discussion focused primarily on Russia's interference in the EU neighbourhood, examining the mechanisms and tactics Moscow employs to increase its influence. If Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine represents the most extreme form of external coercion, Moscow's destabilising efforts in the EU's neighbourhood extends far beyond military aggression, encompassing hybrid warfare, security, political, and economic dimensions. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia has actively worked to restore its control over multiple countries in the region, sustaining "frozen conflicts" in Moldova or Georgia, pressuring Southeastern European countries over energy dependency and rapidly developing hybrid warfare tactics such as cyberattacks against the Western Balkans. In parallel, the Kremlin has cultivated networks of anti-democratic actors aligned with Moscow's strategic interests in multiple countries, interfering with pro-EU political developments and democratic consolidation.

Why is Russia able to challenge the sovereignty of entire nations in the Eastern neighbourhood? Can Moscow directly threaten stability in the Western Balkans? What strategic tools does Russia employ in its attempts to dismantle the EU's neighbourhood and the European project? To what extent can Russia derail the EU aspirations of neighbouring countries? How can countering foreign influence contribute to democratic consolidation in the EU neighbourhood? How can the EU remedy its insufficient presence in these regions?

Strahinja Subotic (CEP) and **Nicoletta Pirozzi (IAI)** first presented InvigoratEU's External Influence Index. **Vladislav Kulminski (IPIS)** examined how the Kremlin targeted Moldova's 2024 presidential election and referendum and the ongoing threats as the country heads into the crucial 2025 parliamentary elections. **Levan Kakhishvili (ETH Zürich)** discussed how an illegitimate pro-Russian government has actively obstructed Georgia's EU integration path, engineering rapid democratic backsliding and geopolitical realignment. Finally, **Strahinja Subotic (CEP)** analysed Russia's entrenched influence in Serbia, including its deep-rooted presence within political elites and state institutions, affecting foreign policy orientations.

This roundtable provided a comprehensive analysis of Russia's malign interference in the EU's neighbourhood while fostering a strategic discussion on countermeasures. By drawing on concrete examples from Serbia, Moldova, and Georgia, this InvigoratEU Expert Hub meeting identified actionable steps for reinforcing the EU's position in its neighbourhood and mitigating Russian interference.