

The logo consists of the words 'LIB' and 'MOD' stacked vertically in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. They are contained within a teal-colored square that has a 3D effect, with a lighter teal shadow on its right side.

LIB  
MOD

Zentrum  
Liberales  
Moderne



KONRAD  
ADENAUER  
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PROGRAMME

# THE FUTURE OF EU ENLARGEMENT: **EU INTEGRATION AS A GEOPOLITICAL NECESSITY**

The Political Discourse on  
Gradual Integration and  
Russian Influence

# THE FUTURE OF EU ENLARGEMENT: EU INTEGRATION AS A GEOPOLITICAL NECESSITY

## The Political Discourse on Gradual Integration and Russian Influence

Monday, October 5, 2026  
16:30 - 20:10, followed by reception  
Academy of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung  
Tiergartenstraße 35, 10785 Berlin

As Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine enters its fifth year, the European Union faces the challenge of adapting its enlargement policy to a changing geopolitical landscape.

Against this backdrop, the debate on models of gradual EU integration is gaining momentum among policymakers, academics and candidate countries. At the same time, this debate has increasingly become a target of Russian influence operations aimed at spreading anti-European narratives, such as the alleged loss of national sovereignty, and thereby destabilising democratic societies in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

This international conference will address these two closely interconnected developments. It will examine current proposals for gradual EU integration and their implications for the candidate countries Ukraine, Moldova and Montenegro. Particular attention will be paid to the opportunities that gradual integration or associate membership could offer for the future of EU enlargement policy. The conference will also analyse Russia's use of information manipulation as a tool to undermine democratic development in the EU's neighbourhood.

### **Key questions of the conference:**

- How can the European Union strike a balance between geopolitical action, institutional credibility and long-term prospects for enlargement?
- What institutional reforms does the EU need to implement gradual integration credibly?
- How could gradual integration or associate membership work in practice?
- How are proposals for gradual EU integration perceived in public and expert debate?
- What narratives and tools does Russia use to undermine public support for European integration and obstruct reform processes?
- What common patterns of Russian influence can be identified across countries, and how can the European Union and its partners respond effectively?

The conference will be held in **German and English with simultaneous interpretation** in both languages.

## CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

- 16:00 - 16:30** | **REGISTRATION**
- 16:30 - 16:45** | **WELCOME REMARKS**  
**Mark Speich**, Secretary General, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung  
**Marieluise Beck**, Founder and Senior Fellow, Center for Liberal Modernity
- 16:45 - 17:15** | **KEYNOTES**  
**Ambassador Sebastian Fischer**, Deputy Director-General, EU Core Issues and Coordination, Federal Foreign Office, Germany  
**Maida Gorčević**, Minister of European Affairs, Montenegro
- 17:15 - 18:30** | **PANEL 1**  
**Gradual Integration and Associated Membership  
– A New Dynamic in EU Enlargement Policy**  
  
**Maida Gorčević**, Minister of European Affairs, Montenegro  
**Liubov Akulenko**, Executive Director, Ukrainian Centre for European Policy (UCEP)  
**Anastasia Pociumban**, Research Fellow, German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)  
**David Preisendanz** MP, Rapporteur for EU Enlargement Policy, CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Bundestag  
Moderation: **Matthias Hespe**, Policy Advisor Eastern Europe, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
- 18:30 - 18:45** | **BREAK**
- 18:45 - 20:00** | **PANEL 2**  
**Russia's Playbook Against EU Enlargement**  
  
**Saba Brachveli**, Programs Manager, International Civil Initiatives (ICI), Germany, and Civil Society Foundation, Georgia  
**Denis Cenusă**, Geopolitical Analyst, Associated Expert, Geopolitics and Security Studies Center, Lithuania, and Centre for European Policy Analysis, USA  
**Chantal Kopf** MP, Spokesperson for European Policy, Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group in the German Bundestag  
**Areg Kochinyan**, President, Armenian Council  
**Dmytro Shulga**, Europe and the World Programme Director, International Renaissance Foundation (IRF), Ukraine  
Moderation: **Khatia Kikalishvili**, Programme Director Eastern Partnership, Center for Liberal Modernity
- 20:00 - 20:10** | **CLOSING REMARKS**  
**Ralf Fücks**, Founder and Managing Director, Center for Liberal Modernity
- 20:10** | **RECEPTION**

## BIOGRAPHIES



**Liubov Akulenko** is the Executive Director of the Ukrainian Centre for European Policy (UCEP). She studied political science at Kyiv National Pedagogical University of M. P. Dragomanov, gaining a Master's degree in political science from the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. In 2013, she obtained a PhD in public administration. She began her research career in 2010 at the Ukrainian think tank Centre UA, establishing the Ukrainian Centre for European Policy in 2015. She specialises in EU enlargement policy and EU-Ukraine relations.



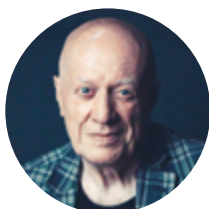
**Marieluise Beck** is a Senior Fellow at the Center for Liberal Modernity (LibMod), which she founded together with Ralf Fücks. A veteran Green Party politician, she was first elected to the German Bundestag in 1982 and has held many positions since, including Parliamentary State Secretary and Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration. As spokesperson for Eastern Europe for Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group (from 2009 to 2017), she became a prominent defender of human rights, especially in Russia, Ukraine, the Balkans and Belarus. From 2005 to 2017, she was also a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, where she joined the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.



**Saba Brachveli** is a Programs Manager at the International Civil Initiatives (ICI) and Civil Society Foundation Georgia. He teaches criminal law at Ilia State University. A legal expert with extensive experience in human rights and criminal justice, he has served as a National Expert and Trainer for Council of Europe projects. From 2019 to 2022, he was Deputy Head of the Criminal Justice Department at the Public Defender's Office of Georgia and a Professional Fellow at the Atlanta Public Defender's Office. He holds an LLM in Criminal Law and Criminal Justice from the University of Edinburgh. He is a co-author of a legal textbook on the Limits of Criminal Law.



**Denis Cenusa** is an Associated Expert at the Geopolitical Security Studies Centre (Lithuania) and the Centre for European Policy Analysis (USA). He defended his doctoral research at Justus Liebig University Giessen (Germany) on EU governance and Russian hybrid warfare in Eastern Europe ("Magna Cum Laude"). His broader research focuses on EU integration, EU–Russia competition, hybrid warfare, critical infrastructure, and geopolitical dynamics in the Black Sea region, Eurasia, and the Global South.



**Ralf Fücks** is Managing Director of the Center for Liberal Modernity (LibMod). Before founding LibMod in 2017, he served on the executive board of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung from 1997 to 2017. He joined the Green party in 1982 and was an MP in the Bremen city legislature from 1985 to 1989. He served as co-chair of the German Greens from 1989 to 1990 and returned to local politics in 1991, when he served as Senator for Environment and City Development in Bremen. His work focuses on sustainable development, the future of liberal democracy and foreign policy. He is a regular contributor to major media outlets and the author of numerous books. His latest publication, *Liberalismus neu denken* (*Rethinking Liberalism*), came out in 2022.



**Maida Gorčević** is Minister for European Affairs of Montenegro. She graduated from the University of Montenegro's Faculty of Law, specialising in civil law. During the mandate of the 42nd Government of Montenegro, she was an Advisor to the Prime Minister for Minorities, tackling issues related to human and minority rights, as well as youth rights. Simultaneously, she presided over the Management Board of the Official Gazette of Montenegro and was a member of numerous government committees (Commission for Examinations for Work in the State Administration, Commission for Personnel and Administrative Issues and others). In 2023, she was elected a member of the Parliament of Montenegro and was appointed as Minister of European Affairs. She is participant in the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) on „Women, Peace and Security“ and an alumna of the U.S. State Department.



**Dr. Khatia Kikalishvili** LL.M. is Programme Director for the Eastern Partnership at the Center for Liberal Modernity. She is a European lawyer and an expert on foreign and European policy, as well as the rule of law and democratic reforms in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Prior to her work at LibMod, she was an advisor in the German Bundestag from 2008 to 2018, focusing on European and Eastern European foreign policy. She specialises in EU integration, German foreign policy towards Russia and Eastern Europe, and geopolitical developments in the Eastern Partnership countries. She has published widely and lectured extensively on the role of the EU in the region. She received her PhD in European Law from Saarland University.



**Areg Kochinyan** is an Armenian political analyst specialising in regional security, conflict resolution, and foreign policy in the South Caucasus. Since 2022, he has been serving as the President of the Armenian Council, a Yerevan-based think tank focused on security, governance, democracy, and regional affairs. Since 2025, he co-founded and coordinated Peace Bridge, an Armenian-Azerbaijani Track 1.5 diplomacy initiative aimed at facilitating dialogue and supporting peacebuilding efforts between the two societies. Previously, he served as Spokesperson of the Security Council of Armenia and held leadership positions in several Armenian research and civil society organisations. He pursued doctoral studies in World History at Yerevan State University.

## BIOGRAPHIES



**Chantal Kopf** MP is the Spokesperson for European Policy for the Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group in the German Bundestag. She has been a member of the German Bundestag since 2021. She is a full member of the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union and a member of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly. She is also vice president of Europa-Union Deutschland e.V and a member of Atlantik-Brücke e.V. Prior to entering the Bundestag, she worked in constituency offices for members of the German Bundestag and the Baden-Württemberg State Parliament. From 2018 to 2021, she was the district chair of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen in Freiburg. From 2019 to 2021, she also served as spokeswoman for the Federal Working Group on Europe of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen in Baden-Württemberg. She holds an MA in political science from the University of Freiburg.



**Anastasia Pociumban** has been a Research Fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) since April 2022. She works in its Center for Order and Governance in Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia where she leads the Eastern Partnership Think Tank Network. Her work focuses on the impact of Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine on regional dynamics in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood: Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Her areas of expertise include EU eastern enlargement and democratisation, hybrid threats, reform processes, and conflicts in this region. Previously, she worked for Equal Rights & Independent Media (ERIM) in Lyon, Democracy Reporting International in Berlin, and for the European Endowment for Democracy in Brussels. She studied European interdisciplinary studies at the College of Europe and philosophy and communication at the University of the Academy of Science in Moldova.



**Dr David Preisendanz** MP is Rapporteur for EU Enlargement Policy for the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Bundestag. He studied law at the University of Konstanz and the University of Lausanne in Switzerland from 2003 to 2009. He completed his first state examination in law in 2009. In 2012, he received his doctorate in law, followed by the second state examination in law in 2014. From 2014 to 2017, he worked as a lawyer at a large international law firm in Stuttgart. He then served as in-house counsel at Robert Bosch GmbH from 2017 to 2025. Since 2025, he has been a member of the German Bundestag, where he serves as a full member of the Committee on Legal Affairs and the Committee on European Union Affairs.



**Dmytro Shulga** is Europe and the World Programme Director at the International Renaissance Foundation, the Ukrainian part of the Open Society Foundations network. He studied international relations in Ukraine and European Integration Law (LLM) in Dresden. He joined the Foundation's European programme in 2005 to promote civic initiatives to advance Ukraine's integration into the EU. In 2015, he authored the text of an unofficial civil society application for EU membership, which later formed the basis of Ukraine's official application in 2022. Since 2023, his programme has been titled 'Europe and the World,' reflecting expansion of the mandate to also promote communication, solidarity and partnerships with other regions of the world as well. His interests include Ukraine-EU relations, transatlantic and global diplomacy, and international support for Ukraine in response to Russian aggression.



**Dr Mark Speich** is Secretary General of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). From September 2017 to May 2025, he served as State Secretary for Federal, European and International Affairs and coordinated legislative affairs in the Bundesrat for North Rhine-Westphalia. Prior to this role, he was CEO of Vodafone Foundation Germany and of the Vodafone Institute for Society and Communications, Vodafone's corporate think tank, respectively from 2008 to 2017. Before joining Vodafone, he held the position of Director of Policy Planning of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Bundestag and as Director of Programs for the Herbert-Quandt Foundation. From 1997 to 1998, he was Personal Advisor to the President of Bonn University. He started his career in the political advisory staff of the CDU's Secretary General in 1995. He was educated at Pembroke College, University of Cambridge (MPhil) and the University of Bonn (PhD) where he read Modern History, Political Science and Constitutional Law.

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