

From ‘Visegrad Four’ to ‘Varna Four’: The rise and role of regional cooperation in Central and South Eastern Europe

Time: 13 April (Friday) 2018

Venue: Central European University, Budapest, Oktober 6 utca 7, Oktober Hall

While the Visegrad Group has been a fixture in Central Europe for almost three decades, recent years have witnessed the emergence of new cooperation formats in the Eastern parts of the European Union. But this process has also brought up new questions about the role of such formats. On the one hand, there is agreement that in the increasingly complex EU decision-making process, such groups can play an important role in preparing and pre-negotiating major EU legislation. On the other hand, some of these formats have an overlapping membership, which is provoking debates if the rise of one format might come at the expense of another.

The political climate in Central Europe has also provoked concerns about other roles these groups might take. On paper the Three Seas Initiative, for example, is a framework for economic cooperation and infrastructure investment. But it has raised questions about being a potential political counterweight to “Brussels”. The V4’s ongoing tensions with other member states and EU institutions has provoked similar questions, in how far the group might become a conservative coalition within the EU. We will seek to clarify in how far these formats should be seen as competition to one another or as complementary, and what role these groups are likely to take in the future development and functioning of the European Union.

09:30 **Registration**

10:00 **Welcoming remarks**
Jan Niklas Engels, Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest Office

10:10 **Keynote Speech**
Kai-Olaf Lang, Senior Fellow, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin

10:45 **Panel 1: The rise of regional cooperation: competition or complementarity?**
Chair: Łukasz Janulewicz, Research Fellow, CEU CENS, Budapest

Piret Kuusik, Junior Researcher, Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, Tallin

Vasile Rotaru, Senior Researcher, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest

Paul Schmidt, Secretary General, Austrian Society for European Politics, Vienna

Zsuzsanna Végh, Research Fellow, European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder)

12:00 **Coffee Break**

12:30 **Panel 2: The role of regional cooperation: a conservative coalition in the EU?**
Chair: András Szalai, Research Fellow, CEU CENS, Budapest

Veronika Józwiak, Analyst, Polish Institute for International Affairs, Warsaw

Igor Merheim-Eyre, Analyst, International Republican Institute, Brussels

Zuzana Stuchlíková, Head of Brussels Office, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, Brussels

Edit Zgut, Foreign Policy Analyst, Political Capital, Budapest

13:45 **Concluding Remarks**

14:00 **Buffet Lunch**