

RESILIENCE AND THE EU'S EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD COUNTRIES: CRISIS,  
TRANSFORMATIONS AND POLICIES, EDITED BY GILLES ROUET, AND  
GABRIELA CARMEN PASCARIU. PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, CHAM, 2025.  
XXXIII, 617 PP. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-73379-6>.

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**Abstract**

This book explores one of the central issues in contemporary international relations and, simultaneously, the confrontation between Russia and the West: the eastward expansion of the EU. Globally, the eastward expansion of the EU holds the potential for the EU to emerge as a new pole of global politics, capable of significantly influencing the balance of power in the modern world. Regionally, the latest wave of EU enlargement, which has included post-socialist European states, could be decisive in establishing a new type of interstate relations on the continent and in determining the extent to which Eastern European and Baltic countries adapt to EU standards and norms. In other words, it could have a direct impact on reform processes in post-Soviet and post-communist countries. For Eastern European countries, analyzing this process is important not only for determining prospects for further development within the EU political system or for the Eastern Partnership countries. This book analyzes the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe following the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's ongoing, aggressive, full-scale war against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022. In this context, the authors of various chapters in this book examine the economic, social, institutional, and political instability in the countries of the eastern part of the EU.

**Keywords:** *resilience, geopolitical risks, Eastern Neighbourhood Countries, Eastern Europe, dramatic changes, long-term economic growth, sustainable development, medium economic stability.*

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Received: 20.06.2025  
Revised: 11.07.2025  
Accepted: 25.07.2025

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In this book's 20 chapters, the authors comparatively analyze the various dimensions of resilience in European integration and the EU's Eastern Neighborhood, thereby examining the underlying causes of crisis and transformation of political systems (Rouet 2025).

The EU is the most advanced regional integration association, interacting with both individual states in various regions of the world and other regional structures. The EU's external relations have expanded significantly in the post-bipolar period. The EU seeks to consolidate its role in the international arena: in global trade, development assistance, and the promotion of regional integration, democracy, and security. The EU has consistently demonstrated an interest in implementing interregional policies, which is enshrined in its foreign policy doctrine and is further evidenced by a comprehensive system of interregional relations. However, various cases demonstrate that the EU is not always successful in implementing its interregional strategy, and each existing and emerging approach has its own unique characteristics (Crombois 2025; Pascariu 2025). Beyond the EU, other regional associations are also striving to build interregional ties, thereby forming an extensive network of regional partners, of which the EU is the most active. The relevance of the chosen topic is determined by both the above-mentioned practical considerations and theoretical problems: despite the existence of a number of studies devoted to the phenomenon of interregionalism, the key factors that determine the success or failure of the implementation of interregional relations in modern world politics have not yet been identified.

Issues of regional, interregional, and, more broadly, transregional cooperation are acquiring particular prominence and attracting the attention of an increasing number of researchers. Most studies of the phenomenon of interregionalism in global politics, as institutionalized relations between two regional integration associations to varying degrees, are conducted primarily by authors from European universities, drawing primarily on the experience of the EU. Consequently, a Eurocentric perspective on this issue currently prevails in the theory of new regionalism (Pintilescu and Viorica 2025).

Thus, a significant literature has accumulated on the new paradigm and normative approaches to EU foreign and security policy, as well as individual cases of EU interregional policy. However, studies assessing the characteristics and causes of the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of individual interregional areas of EU activity and situating this experience within the context of the transregionalization trend remain insufficient. Currently, the practice of interregionalism is used not only by the most developed integration association, the EU, but also by other integration blocs. However, to successfully integrate them into interregional relations, it is necessary to identify their specific features and the challenges of their formation. It is particularly important to consider Russia's war against Ukraine, the migration crisis, the vulnerability of Eastern Partnership countries to geopolitical risks, as well as the

dimensions of multiculturalism in the context of new geopolitical securitization and steps to enhance resilience in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood countries (Schäffer 2025; Țigănașu, Corodescu-Roșca and Cărbune 2025).

The research objects in various chapters of this book are based on a common understanding of the resilience of interregionalism in EU foreign policy. The authors of this study, using various dimensions, explain the characteristics and risks of EU interregional policy in various regional areas. In their chapters, the authors identify the specific features of EU interregional policy in various regional areas (van Gils 2025).

By identifying the specific features of resilience and the factors hindering the development of EU interregional relations, the authors address the following objectives to achieve this goal:

- To summarize theoretical approaches to understanding the resilience of the EU political system and interregionalism as a phenomenon of modern international relations;
- To identify the main areas of EU interregional policy, their evolution and key characteristics in challenging times, and the path to EU integration for the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans countries;
- To identify the most and least institutionalized areas of EU interregional policy and characterize their specific features;
- To identify key features and challenges hindering the implementation of EU interregional policy;
- To identify the participation of Romania and the Slovak Republic in the implementation of the EU's geostrategic interests in Ukraine (Muntele and Bănică 2025; Terem and Gura 2025), thereby assessing the risks of a Russian invasion of Ukraine and strengthening the EU's position in its new Eastern neighborhood;
- To identify shortcomings in EU-Azerbaijan relations from 2009 to 2023, taking into account the threats of Europeanization and hybrid challenges;
- To consider the EU's key steps toward the Eastern Neighborhood in the context of the growing instability of the global order, i.e., the challenges of resilience and transformation in the Eastern Neighborhood during and after the war in Ukraine.

The authors' most significant findings include the identified levels of approximation of legal and regulatory acts as a tool for ensuring the resilience and stabilization of the legal systems of EaP countries on the path to full EU membership, as well as the transformation of the European Neighborhood to "Greater European Council". The authors also identify the main functions of interregionalism as a foreign policy instrument, the causes, characteristics, and challenges of interregional practices

in the modern world, using the EU as an example, and a refined typology of interregional relations (Wojakowski 2025).

The theoretical significance of this book lies in its analysis of the factors that facilitate and, conversely, hinder the development of interregional ties. Through an analysis of the EU case, the authors aim to contribute to the development of the concept of interregionalism and the theory of new regionalism, which underpin their research. The practical significance of the research chapters in this book can be linked to the focus on developing interregional ties in the post-Soviet space. Understanding the characteristics, drivers, and obstacles of the EU's interregional policy and assessing its experience may prove valuable for the foreign policy of the EaP countries. Furthermore, individual sections of this book can be used in educational processes on foreign policy and European integration strategies in the EaP countries and also serve as the basis for a broad academic discussion (Nitou 2025).

In this comparative analysis of the resilience of European integration as a complex phenomenon, the concepts of new regionalism, transregionalism, interregionalism, institutionalism, and the neoliberal approach are used as theoretical foundations. Theoretically, the very possibility of the emergence of interregional ties is explained by the open nature of the new regionalism policy. The EU's transregionalism strategy helps explain the influence of interregional ties on European and global politics, as well as their determinacy in current trends in international relations. In this sense, the resilience of European integration and the EU political system can be viewed as one type of transregional ties. The theory of European resilience is important for the book in terms of studying the institutionalization of new EU strategies in global politics. Institutionalism is also applicable in identifying the most and least institutionalized areas of EU interregional policy. The use of a neoliberal approach in this work allows us to consider the modern system of international relations as a complex set of subsystems linked by complex interdependence, institutionalization, and the trends of globalization and integration (Maha and Socoliuc (Guriță) 2025).

Despite a number of obstacles, developing interregional ties remains a significant area of EU foreign policy. In a context of global uncertainty, diversifying trade ties has become crucial for the EU, as well as seeking not only new trading partners but also political allies. Furthermore, geopolitical tensions, the energy crisis, and unstable political situations in certain regions of the world are pushing for the acceleration of negotiations on a number of agreements.

The growing number of regional ties, as well as the desire of existing regional blocs to establish new ones and develop existing ties with individual regions, suggests promising prospects for studying the phenomenon of interregionalism in the coming years. Furthermore, studying the phenomenon of interregionalism within a developed integration association such as the EU, as well as the challenges it faces in building its

interregional ties, could also serve as a basis for studying the interregional ties of EaP countries (Pintilescu and Viorica 2025). In this regard, it can be assumed that if the existing problems of interregional cooperation between the EU and other integration associations are overcome, and more interregional agreements are concluded, the EU will face a number of challenges, as establishing interregional ties requires EU leadership to re-engage and consider the foreign policies of EU member states.

Identifying the factors hindering the development of interregional ties allows us to make a forecast regarding the prospects for the further evolution of interregionalism in EU foreign policy. Undoubtedly, in the face of competition with global centers of influence and geopolitical instability, the EU must actively seek new allies. This could stimulate the signing of more interregional agreements, which in turn are necessary to strengthen the EU's geopolitical influence and maintain its competitiveness on the global stage. Concluding agreements with an entire interregional association, rather than with an individual state, will also allow the EU to reach a larger number of allies and thereby strengthen relations with individual countries. Currently, the EU prefers to initially conclude bilateral agreements with individual countries of integration associations in order to lay the foundation for future interregional agreements (Wojakowski 2025). However, the question of whether this approach is effective remains open. In light of geopolitical tensions and the emergence of transnational initiatives from China and the United States, the EU should be more flexible and consider not only the cultural and political characteristics of integration associations but also their integration models, which may differ from those of Europe. Accordingly, the main challenge for the EU may be the development of a more flexible cohesion policy, as it currently acts primarily unilaterally, which confirms the use of normative power and the imposition of rigid norms on member countries of regional associations. It is assumed that the development of a flexible and compromising approach may be a key factor in strengthening interregional relations in various regional areas.

The unstable political situation in certain regions also significantly impacts the development of constructive dialogue between the EU and individual regions and, consequently, the functioning of regional associations (Poz'arlik 2025). Based on an analysis of the EU's interregional policy areas, we found that one of the reasons for the slowdown in interaction is the unstable political situation in the EaP countries, as well as unresolved conflicts within these countries. There are numerous unresolved political contradictions in virtually every region of the world, which, to varying degrees, impact interaction with the EU. Another example of weak interregionalism due to political contradictions is the EU-Russia relationship, caused by the Ukrainian factor (Holovko-Havrysheva 2025). Russia's large-scale war against Ukraine, which has been waged since 2022 (Dírdală 2025), is one of several reasons, as Russia itself is impeding the development of any interregional ties between the EU and the EaP countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic has recently emerged as a serious global challenge since the beginning of 2019. Caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome, it was declared a non-traditional security threat in many countries in Europe and Asia. With the rapid spread of the virus, individual EU countries, such as Italy and Spain, suffered significantly and found themselves practically facing the disease. One reason for this is the EU's delay in providing adequate assistance and adapting morally and infrastructurally. European values and norms, such as trust and solidarity, which underpin the very philosophy of European integration, found themselves in the face of new challenges (Kruglashov 2025).

The pandemic led not only to a health, economic, and social crisis but also to a significant slowdown in regionalization processes. To control the spread of the virus, countries were forced to resort to national securitization. National security measures included self-isolation, border closures, and travel bans, which to some extent helped slow the spread of the pandemic. However, all these national restrictions seriously damaged regional cooperation. The COVID-19 crisis has fueled populist forces promoting protectionism and immigration control, leading more and more countries to resort to protectionist and import substitution policies, which has significantly limited international supplies (Rouet and Côme 2025).

Another global challenge is the migration crisis, specifically the influx of illegal migrants and refugees into EU countries. This crisis began in 2014-2015 and has not only continued to this day but is also becoming increasingly pressing. The rise in illegal migration to the EU is considered a serious problem, as it is linked to rising crime rates. The influx of refugees into EU countries is primarily due to the destabilization of the situation in North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, namely the Iraqi Civil War, the Syrian Civil War, the wars in Afghanistan, the war in Libya, the military operation against the terrorist organization ISIS, the crisis in Serbia and Kosovo, religious clashes in Nigeria, and the conflicts in Yemen and Pakistan. Another factor is the population boom in African and Middle Eastern countries and the inability of states in these regions to ensure socioeconomic stability for their citizens. The primary factors contributing to the acute crisis in the EU include the lack of a unified policy and concept for the reception and distribution of refugees across EU countries, as well as the lack of adequate funding and coordinated rapid response actions (Pascariu and Clipca 2025).

A new influx of refugees into European countries was observed in 2022 with the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine. In this situation, it is noted that EU countries responded in a more coordinated manner, utilizing existing legislation and incorporating large-scale funding from European funds. However, the influx of refugees from Ukraine did not cause a particularly acute crisis in the EU, as EU member states managed it relatively successfully. Furthermore, an increase in

migration flows is possible due to a lack of resources and infrastructure for receiving migrants. The issue of solidarity among member states regarding refugee reception policies remains relevant. The development of a unified, coordinated migration policy has become a priority in recent years. In the summer of 2023, EU member states held a series of negotiations on reforming the Asylum and Migration Policy Regulation and the Asylum Procedures Regulation. Today, the EU's response to the refugee influx is particularly urgent not only in the context of the Ukrainian issue but also in connection with the new influx of irregular migrants from the Middle East, triggered by the recent escalation of the conflict between the radical Palestinian movement Hamas and Israel in October 2023. European leaders have already held a series of emergency meetings and a summit to address the risk of new migration waves. Countries bearing the brunt of the burden of receiving refugees from the Middle East have already requested humanitarian aid (Socoliuc (Guriță) and Maha 2025). If the conflict situation in the Middle East intensifies, a new migrant crisis in Europe is possible, which could become much more dangerous due to the unresolved accumulated problems of migration and asylum governance. The need to resolve global crises, in turn, significantly slows down the process of building successful interregional policies, which is reflected in the protracted negotiations on certain agreements, as well as the inability to ensure stability in the fulfillment of certain obligations (Pascariu and Clipca 2025; Gerasymchuk 2025).

The EU actively applies its inherent policy of conditionality, as it is a large economic bloc and, by offering regional organizations or states access to its market, advances its political interests. This may be a factor hindering the implementation of EU interregionalism, particularly in relatively developed integration associations. The implementation of a policy of conditionality can have a positive impact on those who have accepted European values and rules, manifesting itself in political recognition, granting candidate status for EU accession, promising preferential relations, market access, signing favorable agreements, and providing aid. However, it can also manifest itself in a more inactive manner, namely, by imposing embargoes, suspending or limiting economic agreements and aid programs, denying visas to senior officials, terminating EU accession negotiations, and freezing contacts (Onofrei, Oprea and Cigu 2025).

At present, the EU strives to maintain a competitive strategic position and a certain geopolitical influence, since for many integration associations, the EU is a profitable trading partner, investor and political ally. One of the factors influencing the establishment of successful interregional relations is the EU's rivalry with other influential centers. The main competitors are the United States and China, which extend their influence to virtually every region of the world and thereby hinder the EU's development of interregional ties. This is also a manifestation of the competitive

transregionalism that shapes the geopolitical competition between transregional projects. In this context, among the main factors slowing down the establishment of interregional relations of the EU, the authors highlight: 1) competition with global powers and centers of influence, 2) the policy of conditionality, 3) the imposition of strict legislation and norms, 4) political conflicts and instability of regional partners, 5) global challenges, 6) the bureaucratic mechanism of the EU, 7) changes in the foreign policy priorities of integration associations.

As is well known, the EU promotes its values by enshrining them in normative documents. However, some regions may not adopt them for various reasons, including because these norms may conflict with the values and cultural characteristics of the countries. Therefore, the successful dissemination of norms depends largely on the presence of a common, favorable historical experience, and as political reality demonstrates, the presence of a common historical experience is not always determined by geographical proximity.

### **Conflict of Interests**

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

### **Ethical Standards**

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

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