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BOOK REVIEW

**Andreas Kellerhals, Tobias Baumgartner, Fatlum Ademi (eds.).
EU Enlargement and European Integration: Challenges and Perspectives. Switzerland, EIZ Publishing, 2024**

Kainat Baloch*

In the current geopolitical and institutional climate of the European Union, *Rule of Law and EU Enlargement: Conditionality, Compliance, and Beyond* arrives as a meticulously structured and analytically robust contribution to the growing body of literature on European integration, legal conditionality, and normative governance. Edited by Andreas Kellerhals, Tobias Baumgartner, and Fatlum Ademi, the volume navigates the intricate legal, political, and institutional dynamics underpinning the EU's rule of law architecture in the context of its Eastward enlargement.¹

The volume is methodically organized into ten interrelated articles, each of which interrogates a distinct facet of the rule of law's trajectory within EU integration. From the foundational jurisprudence of the EU treaties to the innovative deployment of internal conditionality tools, the editors provide a thematic and temporal progression that reflects both doctrinal depth and policy relevance.

The first chapter explores the rule of law as a central value of the European Union and a key condition for accession. While it forms the moral and legal foundation of European integration, it has become one of the Union's most difficult challenges, especially amid internal backsliding in member states such as Hungary and Poland. These issues, she notes, undermine the EU's credibility in promoting rule-of-law reforms abroad.

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¹ Visit https://eizpublishing.ch/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/EU-Enlargement-and-European-Integration-Challenges-and-Perspectives-Digital-V1_03-20250313.pdf.

The gap between adopting legal frameworks and implementing them effectively in candidate countries, particularly in the Western Balkans, Ukraine, and Moldova is highlighted. The author questions the adequacy of existing monitoring tools like the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism and the Annual Rule of Law Reports.

This chapter further connects the issue to the geopolitical context after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, arguing that the EU's renewed enlargement drive must not come at the cost of its foundational principles.

The next chapter shows how the United Kingdom continues to remain closely linked to the European Union even after Brexit. It is emphasized that rather than experiencing full *de-Europeanisation* or complete separation, the UK now exists in a state of *orbiting Europeanisation* remaining outside the EU institutions but still influenced by its policies, regulations, and markets.

Chapter three examines the evolving relationship between the Western Balkan states and the European Union. It focuses on the current state of the EU enlargement process. It highlights both progress and persistent challenges in countries such as Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. The author emphasizes that while the EU continues to promote reforms in governance, rule of law, and democratic institutions, internal divisions within the Union and slow implementation in candidate countries hinder momentum.

Chapter four explores Armenia's evolving partnership with the European Union under the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA). The author highlights CEPA as a pragmatic yet limited framework that strengthens political dialogue, governance reform, and regulatory alignment while being constrained by Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The author notes that CEPA offers opportunities for modernization, transparency, and closer institutional cooperation, but implementation faces obstacles including weak administrative capacity, geopolitical pressures, and ongoing security challenges. Ultimately, the study views CEPA as both a milestone and a balancing act signifying Armenia's attempt to pursue European integration without severing its traditional alliances.

The next chapter analyzes the complex and evolving relationship between Switzerland and the European Union. It explains how these agreements have long allowed Switzerland to access parts of the EU single market without full membership. However, increasing legal and institutional tensions have strained the model. The author notes that disputes over regulatory alignment, the role of the European Court of Justice, and migration policies have created uncertainty about the sustainability of this framework.

Chapter Six examines Moldova's determined yet challenging path toward European Union accession. The author highlights the country's rapid reform efforts in governance, justice, and anti-corruption since obtaining EU candidate status in 2022. The author underscores Moldova's strong political will and public support for integration, contrasting these with persistent obstacles such as economic fragility, Russian influence, and limited administrative capacity. Despite these hurdles, the study portrays Moldova's accession desires as both ambitious and realistic, arguing that sustained reforms and EU engagement could turn an "incredible" aspiration into an achievable milestone for the country's European future.

Chapter seven explores the European Union's ambitious goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 under the European Green Deal. The author discusses how the initiative positions the EU as a global leader in environmental policy, driving transitions in energy, transport, and industry. The author highlights key opportunities, including technological innovation, green investment, and international leadership, while also acknowledging challenges such as economic disparities among member states, social costs, and dependence on fossil fuels. The study concludes that the EU's success as a "green leader" will depend on maintaining political unity, ensuring fair transitions, and effectively balancing environmental goals with economic realities.

The next section analyzes the profound transformation in EU-Russia relations, arguing that recent geopolitical developments have led to a fundamental paradigm shift. The author explains how Russia's aggression in Ukraine and growing authoritarianism have dismantled the cooperative framework that once defined the partnership. The EU's response through sanctions, energy diversification, and strategic autonomy marks a move from engagement to containment. The author underlines that this shift is not temporary but structural, redefining Europe's security, energy, and foreign

policy landscape. Ultimately, the study concludes that the EU must adapt to a long-term confrontation with Russia while reinforcing unity and resilience within its own borders.

Chapter nine explores the complex and often contradictory relationship between the European Union and China, focusing on the tension between economic cooperation and the EU's commitment to human rights. The author argues that while China remains a vital trade and investment partner, growing concerns over human rights abuses, surveillance practices, and political repression have strained relations. The EU's challenge lies in balancing pragmatic economic interests with normative values central to its identity.

The final chapter envisions possible trajectories for the European Union by the year 2050, exploring political, economic, and social scenarios shaped by current global and internal challenges. The author outlines alternative futures ranging from deeper federal integration to fragmented regionalism, emphasizing how decisions made today on climate policy, migration, digitalization, and governance will define the Union's long-term identity. The author maintains that adaptability, solidarity, and strategic foresight are essential for sustaining the EU's relevance in a rapidly changing world.

Reading "*Integration: Challenges and Perspectives*" is significant for scholars, policymakers, and students seeking a comprehensive understanding of the European Union's current dilemmas and future trajectories. The book provides an interdisciplinary perspective that links law, politics, economics, and international relations, allowing readers to grasp how internal governance issues and external partnerships jointly shape the EU's identity and influence. By engaging with real-world case studies from Brexit and the Western Balkans to EU-China and EU-Russia relations, the book deepens awareness of how global dynamics affect regional integration. It encourages critical reflection on the EU's capacity to uphold its foundational values while adapting to geopolitical shifts, technological change, and climate imperatives. Ultimately, the book equips readers with analytical insights into the evolving nature of European integration, highlighting why the EU remains a pivotal actor in shaping the norms and policies of the international order.

Despite its breadth and analytical sophistication, the book does leave certain gaps unfilled. Notably, the absence of substantial perspectives from

candidate or accession countries limits the scope of its empirical grounding. Greater representation of these voices could have provided more nuanced insight into the local reception of EU legal conditionality and the socio-political dynamics that mediate compliance.

Similarly, the volume offers only limited engagement with external geopolitical pressures such as Russian influence, regional instability, or transatlantic divergences which increasingly intersect with the EU's internal rule of law discourse. In an era of hybrid threats and normative contestation, these factors warrant more explicit consideration.

Rule of Law and EU Enlargement: Conditionality, Compliance, and Beyond is a timely and intellectually rigorous work that significantly advances scholarly understanding of the EU's evolving legal governance. It synthesizes legal theory, policy analysis, and institutional critique into a cohesive and accessible volume that would serve as a considerable value to scholars of EU law, comparative politics, and international relations.