Editorial: Building tomorrow's Europe - strategies for integration, growth, and resilience

● **Ciprian Alupului,** ● **Mihaela Clincu,** ● **Daniela-Andreia Damian**

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania

As we introduce this volume of proceedings from the EURINT 2025 International Conference, „Building Tomorrow's Europe: Strategies for Integration, Growth, and Resilience," we find ourselves reflecting on a *Europe at a crossroads*. „Europe at a crossroads*"* - it's an often-used expression, but it still seems more current than ever. The continent continues to navigate a shifting political landscape, widening social and territorial inequalities, facing demographic challenges, new security pressures, the climate emergency, and the rapid transformations brought about by digitalisation (Fouquet & Johansson, 2008; van Nimwegen & van der Erf, 2010; Simonazzi & Villa, 2016). In this context, the conference sought not only to analyse Europe's evolving challenges but also to imagine, together, a Europe that remains cohesive, competitive, and resilient.

The 14th EURINT conference was notable for the Centre for European Studies at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași, marking 25 years of teaching quality, scholarly work, along with international cooperation. That quarter-century point gave deeper meaning to the gathering, showing how insights develop within networks; it also highlighted campuses as places where discussion, inquiry, together with teamwork continue being relevant.

The chapters collected here show different views from the talks at the conference. These talks followed key questions meant to mix perspectives from various fields. One question asked how Europe might balance rising economies with growing public demands. Another explored what inclusion really looks like, given that gaps between areas and age groups are increasing. A third considered ways for Europe to regain strength in a global setting marked by constant change.

We thank everyone involved - contributors, reviewers, partners, and attendees - for their effort and commitment to making *EURINT 2025* happen. It is hoped these papers provide useful perspectives while encouraging more discussion about Europe's path ahead, rooted in equity, strength, and self-assurance. One conclusion stands out from the event: shaping Europe's tomorrow means reimagining outdated frameworks, adapting to emerging conditions, and collaborating beyond fields, organizations, and national lines.

We encourage you to examine this book as an academic work - as well as proof of a group striving for Europe's future with care, drive, and shared effort.

A large part of the book focuses on building inner strength - both in organizations and society - across EU countries and those hoping to join. Instead of

just linking systems, it looks at how strong institutions combined with tech progress can improve governance; Spătaru and Popescu show that better digital tools lead to clearer, more efficient government functions in the EU27. Alongside this view, García highlights a different angle: using structured public discussions in legislation, especially now, when technology changes how laws are made. She insists such practices should become official procedures to keep decision-making inclusive and democratically stable.

Resilience to risks gets examined across different layers. In his work on crisis communication in Romania, Lucian Barbacaru reviews existing research and data patterns, pointing out weak understanding of how local institutions manage emergencies - this suggests room for homegrown response frameworks. Moving focus to legal structures, Iulia-Marilena Sbârcea looks into *Venice Commission* guidelines alongside Romania's party setup, discussing rigid mandates and dominance by majority groups, assessing whether national rules match broader European benchmarks on fair governance, party oversight, and safeguarding dissent.

Berit Ebert looks into the durability of EU principles - Article 2 TEU - and local resistance to gender policies in Poland. Instead of broad enforcement, she examines how regional pushback shapes responses from central EU bodies like the Commission or the Court of Justice when countering democratic decline.

Some studies look at growth and integration through economics, movement between countries, or cultural resources. Instead of focusing on broad trends, Oana-Maria Cozma examines personal outcomes in her work *Happier abroad? Insights into the wellbeing of Romanian emigrants*. Her analysis asks if Romanians living in other EU nations feel better off - especially in income and standing - after relocating, thus showing how foreign environments affect life quality. On another note, Andres Matti Lembit Tomingas explores inclusion difficulties using real-life examples from vocational training programs. In his paper *Integration of Rwandan crafts students in Germany: a case study*, he outlines barriers encountered by Rwandan trainees during internships while suggesting practical solutions to strengthen support systems.

Economic models play a key role in Jingxin Hu's study on what shapes trade between Romania and top partner countries - using panel data assessed through the GLS gravity approach. Results show national income levels along with physical distance strongly influence exchange volumes; at the same time, shared regulations together with capital movement further boost commercial ties across these nations.

Beyond standard economic indicators, Ludmila Lazarev's work examines culture as a key resource for the EU - showing how involvement in cultural activities supports democracy, strengthens communities, and builds shared identity, drawing evidence from Moldova. Meanwhile, Grygorii Moschak's chapter looks at ways to enhance eco-friendly river transport across European cities, emphasizing its role in achieving emission-free mobility networks.

Looking at world imbalances and past developments, Ana-Estera Oanta together with Gabriela-Carmen Pascariu examine *Europe's colonial history*

alongside urban change and economic progress. The lasting effects, along with repeating structural trends, in nations after independence are also discussed. They show how different forms of foreign rule deepened social divides within cities while weakening governance systems across poorer regions; grasping such impacts matters when designing fair development paths to narrow gaps between wealthy and less-wealthy areas.

In another study, Rodica Pisica evaluates tax changes using data from Moldova - specifically its shift toward a uniform income levy in 2018 - and finds this move led over time to greater earnings disparity, reducing taxes' ability to balance incomes.

Andreea Cosmina Foca examines current risks tied to Europe's cyber defenses alongside existing policy weaknesses. Estonia's approach to digital security is considered here. This analysis assesses how the EU handles cybersecurity after COVID-19, pointing out split responsibilities across levels of governance - both top-down and cross-sector - as key structural issues, using insights gained from Estonia's system.

The difficulties linked to expansion and regional strategies are explored by Ana Paula Tostes together with Yasmin Renne in Moldova plus Ukraine's route toward EU entry: is there a fresh approach to Europeanization or just deeper alignment? They study how fast-track joining procedures changed after Russia's 2022 attack, asking if this marks real shifts in standards or repeated structures under unusual political timing.

On another note, Irina-Maria Cosma looks at an enduring ally through her piece titled The Turkish view on European integration: beliefs and societal reasons behind staying apart. Her work investigates values, traditions, identity factors, along with power dynamics shaping Turkey's prolonged distance from full EU inclusion.

The studies in this collection shed light on key areas - integration, development, and adaptability - offering useful insights for researchers and decision-makers shaping future European policies. Essentially, the findings suggest a strong Europe needs clear institutions and digital readiness; at the same time, it requires solid democratic practices with active public involvement.

Strong European futures depend on institutional resilience combined with active participation (Zielonka, 2014) and enhanced adaptability in governance driven by communicative practices that shape legitimacy and trust (Schmidt, 2020). Fair progress matters - not just GDP-focused results. On the global stage, firm action near its borders is necessary, yet balanced interactions with intricate allies remain crucial. From a geopolitical viewpoint, external engagement and strategic decision-making among member states are central for effective action near Europe's borders (Moravcsik, 2018). Moving ahead won't be simple, still, these academic inputs deliver critical data and guidance to tackle obstacles effectively while building tomorrow's Europe.

References

Fouquet, D., & Johansson, T. B. (2008). European renewable energy policy at crossroads—Focus on electricity support mechanisms. *Energy Policy*, 36(11), 4079–4092. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2008.06.023

Moravcsik, A. (2018). Preferences, power and institutions in 21st-century Europe. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *56*(7), 1648-1674. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12804

Schmidt, V. A. (2020). *Europe's crisis of legitimacy: Governing by rules and ruling by numbers in the eurozone*. Oxford University Press.

Simonazzi, A., Villa, P. (2016). Europe at a crossroads: what kind of structural reforms?. In: Bäcker, G., Lehndorff, S., Weinkopf, C. (eds) *Den Arbeitsmarkt verstehen, um ihn zu gestalten* (pp. 273-284). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-12159-4_21

van Nimwegen, N., & van der Erf, R. (2010). Europe at the Crossroads: Demographic Challenges and International Migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36(9), 1359–1379. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2010.515132

Zielonka, J. (2014). *Is the EU doomed?* John Wiley & Sons.