

Call for Papers

The Legacy of the Big Bang EU Enlargement: Lessons Learned and Future Perspectives

1-3 June 2026

Jagiellonian University in Krakow The First ENLARGE International Conference

Enlargement has been one of the main successes of the European integration process and was labelled in 2022 by the European Parliament as “the most effective EU foreign policy instrument and one of the Union's most successful policies”. During the Big Bang enlargement (2004–2007), the EU underwent its most substantial accession, bringing in 12 new member states and reshaping the Union. This process generated not only positive outcomes but also significant challenges, including economic and regional disparities, political tensions at both EU and national levels, perceptions of disempowerment and identity loss, and profound enlargement fatigue, which intensified the wider crisis affecting the Union. Enlargement fundamentally transformed European political geography by shifting the boundaries of “Small Europe” to encompass almost the entire continent, moving countries from external partnership to full participation. Each enlargement had distinct characteristics, producing different configurations of the Community/Union; until 2004–2007, the instrument itself was largely regarded as robust and functional. Nearly three decades later, however, a Eurosceptic dimension now represents around 30% of the European electorate, while multiple crises (financial, refugee, COVID-19, war in Ukraine) have significantly reshaped both the perception and the capacities of the EU. This conference aims to examine whether the EU can still act as a catalyst for progress based on peace, democracy, and sustainable development, and to explore what lessons can be drawn from the Big Bang enlargement for the Union’s future

We welcome papers in area of political science, history, economy, law, sociology and cultural sciences, focusing (but not limited) on:

- Comparison of the five rounds of enlargement
- Democracy, participation and legitimacy in the EU after the Big Bang Enlargement
- The Enlargement process as a means of EU foreign policy
- The impact of the Big Bang enlargement on the EU & domestic institutional framework
- The Memory and perception of enlargement in the Central-Eastern Europe
- The future of enlargement: lessons from the Big Bang Enlargement
- Impact of enlargement on collective security, NATO and transatlantic relations

Deadlines:

Please send 200 word abstract to natasza.styczynska@uj.edu.pl by **28 February 2026**.

Notification of acceptance by early March. Draft programme by end of March.

What is ENLARGE

ENLARGE is a three-year academic alliance funded by the Jean Monnet Network and involving 23 partner universities from across Europe. Giuliana Laschi (University of Bologna) is the scientific lead of the entire project. ENLARGE's primary scientific aim is to study the process of European Union enlargement from an original interdisciplinary and comparative perspective. By establishing new transnational connections between European academic centres, ENLARGE promotes dialogue among experts studying the past, present and future trajectories of this major aspect of EU identity and foreign policy. To this end, the network will organise a series of conferences, meetings, summer schools, workshops and other significant research and cultural dissemination activities until September 2028. The event in Krakow is the first ENLARGE international conference.

For further information, please contact the research managers of the project at cesipe.info@unibo.it