

Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe



It all began with the vision of a true Central European: thanks to the commitment of Austrian politician and diplomat Theodor von Hornbostel, the "Research Institute for Issues of the Danube Region" was founded in Salzburg in 1953.

As co-founder and first chairman, Hornbostel recognised the need for scientific exploration of this region to "contribute to a better understanding of the intrinsic political, cultural and economic forces of the Danube region and their significance for a peaceful and united Europe." However, there was still a long way to go before a united Europe would become reality: because peoples and countries in the Danube region were divided by the Iron Curtain following World War II, countries were rebuilt under very different political and economic conditions.

For more than thirty years the institute was the only Austrian organisation that devoted itself entirely to research on the Danube region – both within and beyond the border. Starting in 1956, detailed research results and consequent discussions were published in the institute's own scientific journal, "Der Donauraum". In the same year, the institute was relocated to Vienna.

In 1995, Erhard Busek replaced Norbert Leser as chairman of the institute. With this change in management came a new focus on consolidation and cooperation that led to a renewed motivation to work. Under the new name "Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe", activities were extended to include all of Central and Southeastern Europe as well as parts of the Black Sea region.

Today, IDM is a non-university research institution based on associations and consisting of individual and corporate members.

Dr. Erhard Busek, Chairman

Former Austrian vice-chancellor and Minister for Science and Education

Jean Monnet Professor ad personam

Central Europe has been given to us again after 1989 - it is the development axis of Europe along the Danube. It is the task of the IDM to support the future political, economic and social development, so that we contribute to global security especially with regard to our neighbouring regions.



Rethinking the Eastern Partnership and EU-Russia relations

SEBASTIAN SCHAPPER/ JACK GILL

2021 has seen the deterioration in relations between the Russian Federation and its neighbours to the west. A Russian military build-up on the Ukrainian border has led to new fears about a possible Russian escalation, with the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy going so far as to suggest a coup d'état was being planned.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has caused an international crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, with thousands of people stuck on the forested border areas in freezing conditions. With few supplies and a lack of state support from either country, a serious humanitarian emergency is underway.

After the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 2020, both Armenia and Azerbaijan are coming to terms with the new reality of the situation. Russian soldiers are stationed across Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, and it is unlikely they will leave for the foreseeable future, as the tense relations after the conflict simmer on.

For the first time since its independence in 1991, Moldova has a real pro-European government, which is ready to tackle the necessary reforms. However, the 14th Russian army is still present in Transnistria and relations with Moscow have been further strained by negotiations about a new gas delivery contract.

EU-Russia relations are currently in a precarious position. The latest deployment of troops by the Kremlin prompted a reaction from the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, who claimed that there will be serious consequences for any Russian aggression in Ukraine. The EU has maintained economic sanctions against Russia since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, thus both economic and political relations have been frosty ever since. Russia's neoimperialist ambitions to assert its own sphere of influence has often brought it into direct confrontation with its neighbours, especially Ukraine and Georgia.

In doing so, the Russian Federation fails to respect the sovereignty of its neighbours and deliberately hinders the integration process of sovereign states that want to join the EU.

The Eastern Partnership

The EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) aims to improve and deepen the EU's relations with six post-Soviet countries in Eastern Europe (Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus) and the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan). Founded in 2009, it was supposed to promote and facilitate deeper integration of these countries with the EU. Over the last 12 years, however, it has become clear that some EaP countries are more committed to European integration than others, and they appear to be in different streams in how much they desire to further approximate with the EU. As the strategic interests of the countries increasingly diverge, this could in the long-term lead to a fracturing of the EaP as a cooperation platform.

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