**Depleting Democracies within the EU: The impact of the radical right in Central and Eastern Europe**

Zsuzsanna Végh, PhD Candidate, European University Viadrina; Program Officer, The German Marshall Fund of the United States

Radical right parties have been on the rise within the European Union and are increasingly seeking to influence politics both on the national and the European level. In the Central and Eastern European member states of the EU, their impact has been felt on mainstream parties, in sensitive policy areas such as minority affairs and asylum, and ultimately even on the quality of the democratic polity. In countries like Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia, faced with the electoral threat posed by the rising radical right, mainstream parties often opted for collaboration with their radical right counterparts and the co-optation of their policy positions. As the exploration of these cases suggest, such engagements did not only lead to the mainstream’s positions shifting to the right, but also to restrictions regarding minority rights and asylum regulations across the countries of the region. Furthermore, once such changes unfolded, they stuck—reversals were not likely even once the radical right exited the scene. Ultimately, these shifts signal a challenge to fundamental values of liberal democracy, such as inclusion, and mark the depletion of democracy. Though the focus here lies on countries of Central and Eastern Europe, similar processes may and do unfold also in more established democracies of the European Union.

This talk will present the key take-aways of the monograph titled “Depleting Democracies: Radical Right Impact on Parties, Policies, and Polities in Eastern Europe” written by Michael Minkenberg and Zsuzsanna Végh and published by Manchester University Press (2023).

Zsuzsanna Végh is a PhD candidate at the European University Viadrina and a program officer at the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Her analytical focus is on Central and Eastern Europe, especially the foreign and EU policies of the Visegrád countries, the state of democracy, and the role and impact of the populist radical right in the region. Végh has extensive experience working at the intersection of policy analysis and academic research. She has been an associate researcher at the European Council on Foreign Relations and authored reports for Freedom House’s flagship project, Nations in Transit, on her native Hungary. She worked at the European University Viadrina as a researcher and lecturer in 2017–2024, and at the Center for European Neighborhood Studies of Central European University in 2012–2017. Végh holds Master’s degrees in international relations and European studies from Central European University and in international studies from the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest.