



EPOKA UNIVERSITY  
CENTER FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES  
STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2028



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## Contents

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<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>VISION, MISSION AND CORE VALUES .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTATION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>6</b>

## I. INTRODUCTION

Center for European Studies (CES), established in 2008 and operating under the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences at EPOKA University, is a multi-disciplinary research and outreach unit that contributes to EPOKA University's mission by advancing research, teaching, and public engagement on European and global issues.

CES is founded on EPOKA University's regional-renowned teaching reputation and research excellence. The Center seeks to encourage cross-disciplinary understanding of the diversity of the societies and cultures that constitute Europe. It examines how traditional divisions within Europe such as the ones between North/South and West/East influence present membership in the European Union and its future expansion; while dealing with the issues of exclusion and inclusion, and global positioning in the European "space." CES undertakes a central role on promoting research excellence, evidence-based policymaking, academic debate, and civic awareness on issues related to EU studies with a particular focus on and the Western Balkans – EU relations.

### CES in EPOKA: Past Achievements

- Established in 2008.
- A research-based unit under the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences of EPOKA University.
- 8 International Conferences on European Studies and co-organized 1 International Conference on Balkan Studies.
- Numerous guest speakers in EU open forums participated in various national events.
- Journal of European Social Research (previously named Journal for European Studies).
- Coordinating one EU funded project: WB-EUPath Jean Monnet Module.

## II. VISION, MISSION AND CORE VALUES

### Vision

To be a leading regional hub for interdisciplinary research and public outreach on European integration issues, contributing to academic excellence, policy relevance and societal outreach in Albania and the Western Balkans, in line with EPOKA University's vision research-driven education and internationalization.

The main goals and strategies of CES include enhancing communication among academia, students, civil society and relevant stakeholders in line with the priorities cited in the following strategic documents:

- 1- Epoka University's Strategic Plan 2024-2028
- 2- EU Western Balkans Strategy: A Credible Enlargement Perspective (2018)
- 3- Enhancing the Accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans (2020)
- 4- EU Country Progress Reports

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## Mission

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The Center for European Studies promotes interdisciplinary and policy-oriented research on political, social, judicial, economic and cultural dimensions of Europe and European Union. CES is committed to building this Strategic Plan on the need to research, communicate and discuss the integration process across relevant stakeholders such as academia, students, policymakers, civil society, and international partners, supporting EPOKA University's strategic priorities in research excellence, innovative teaching, international cooperation, and community engagement.

CES supports the University's research agenda by:

- Conducting and disseminating high-quality research on European integration;
- Promote interdisciplinary and policy oriented research;
- Promoting academic and civic dialogue on EU–Western Balkans relations;
- Engaging students and the broader community through events, workshops, and publications;
- Strengthening national and international partnerships and projects that advance EPOKA's visibility in European research and policy circles.

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## Core Values

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- Excellence in Research, Teaching and Analysis
- Promoting Academic Freedom and Integrity
- International Cooperation and Partnership
- Innovation and Interdisciplinarity
- Societal Impact, Policy Relevance
- Inclusivity, Diversity, and Social Responsibility

## III. STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

**Goal 1.** *Strengthen Research Excellence in European Studies.* - Reference to G.7, O.18-O.19 and G8, O.22 of EPOKA University Strategic Plan 2024-2028.

**The Center for European Studies** aims to enhance its role as a research-driven center producing internationally visible, policy-relevant, and interdisciplinary research on EU studies, with a particular focus on the Western Balkans. It promotes research that investigates processes of European integration and cooperation from a political, economic, social and cultural perspective; analyzes the development of EU policies and institutions over time; and various forms of cooperation and conflict that characterizes the union's relationship with states and regions. More specifically, the center strongly supports research works that study Albania's progress for the EU agenda and the challenges of the integration that are specific to the Western Balkans region

**Objective 1.1.** *Strengthen interdisciplinary research that investigates processes of European integration; EU governance and EU-Western Balkans.*

**Objective 1.2.** *Enhance the quality and quantity of publications affiliated with CES.*

**Objective 1.3.** *Strengthen participation and leadership in competitive international research projects (e.g., Jean Monnet, Horizon Europe, Erasmus+).*

**Goal 2.** *Enhance Teaching, Learning and Student Engagement in EU studies – Reference to G.1 of EPOKA University Strategic Plan 2024-2028.*

**The Center for European Studies** contributes to EPOKA University’s teaching mission by enriching curricula, promoting research-led teaching, and supporting students at all study levels. It aims to transmit knowledge to students on the institutions, processes and policies of European Union to raise awareness on the opportunities and challenges that the mechanisms of accession and membership bring to different levels and groups of society. Moreover, the process has increased the need in the region for comprehensive expertise in European affairs and will enable students to learn about the interplay of EU institutions with their national institutions.

**Objective 2.1.** *To increase students’ knowledge and awareness on EU institutions, policies and accession processes through lectures, seminars and open forums.*

**Objective 2.2.** *Support the development of new study programmes or modules on European Studies at graduate level.*

**Objective 2.3.** *Promote student involvement in research, internships, policy debates, and EU-related academic and civic activities.*

**Goal 3.** *Enhance Visibility, International Networking and Collaboration – Reference to G.11 and G.33 of EPOKA University Strategic Plan 2024-2028.*

**The Center for European Studies** aims to strengthen its international profile and networks through sustainable collaborations and active participation in European academic and policy networks. It focuses on developing and deepening cooperation and partnerships through EU projects and other regional funding opportunities. As a country still in transition, CES strengthens the need to learn from the experience and expertise of institutions and professionals located in EU countries.

**Objective 3.1.** *Strengthening strategic partnerships and cooperation with national, regional, and international actors like universities, research centers, think tanks, public institutions, civil society actors.*

**Objective 3.2.** *Increase CES’s visibility through international conferences, workshops, policy dialogues, public events and publication outreach (Journal of European Social Research).*

**Goal 4.** *Enhance Societal Impact and Policy Engagement – Reference to societal impact priorities of EPOKA University Strategic Plan 2024-2028.*

**The Center for European Studies** aims to translate academic knowledge into societal value by engaging policymakers, civil society, and the wider public.

**Objective 4.1.** *Produce evidence-based recommendations/guides relevant to Albania’s and the Western Balkans’ EU integration processes.*

**Objective 4.2.** *Organize public debates, roundtables, and capacity-building activities targeting policymakers and civil society actors.*

#### IV. IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of this Strategic Plan will be guided with annual activity including details on activities, responsibilities, timelines, performance indicators, and required resources.

Progress will be monitored through:

- ▶ Annual activity and performance reports,
- ▶ Research output indicators (publications, projects),
- ▶ Teaching and student engagement indicators,
- ▶ Partnership and internationalization indicators,
- ▶ Societal impact and outreach indicators.

The Director of CES, in coordination with the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences and EPOKA University management, will oversee implementation and ensure alignment with the University Strategic Plan 2024–2028.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

This Strategic Plan of the Center for European Studies presents the center as a key contributor to EPOKA University’s academic mission and societal role. By aligning closely with institutional priorities and developments in the area of European studies, CES will continue to advance research and teaching excellence, international cooperation, and meaningful engagement with the society during the 2024–2028 period.

Goals	Objectives	Instruments and actions	Measurable Indicators	Start	End
<b>G.1</b> <i>Research Excellence in European studies</i>	O.1.1 <i>Interdisciplinary EU research</i>	Establish CES research groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 new research area/year</li> <li>• Min. 1 workshops/year</li> </ul>	2024	2028
	O.1.2 <i>Increase Research Output and Quality</i>	Journal of European Social Research Issue; Edited Books/Conference Proceedings; Reports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Journal issue/year</li> <li>• 2 edited books or conference proceedings (2024-2028)</li> </ul>	2024	2028
	O.1.3 <i>Externally Funded Projects</i>	Jean Monnet, Horizon Europe, Erasmus +	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Min. 1 application every two years</li> <li>• Min. 1 Funded Project</li> </ul>	2024	2028
<b>G.2</b> <i>Teaching and Learning</i>	O.2.1 <i>Student Knowledge and Awareness</i>	Open Forums; Guest lectures by EU practitioners; Student debates & simulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Min. 2 activities/year</li> </ul>	2024	2028
	O.2.2 <i>Academic programs/modules on European Studies</i>	Support MSc/PhD FLSS programs in EU Studies; Research-led teaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New program or module approved</li> <li>• Integration of CES research in teaching</li> </ul>	2026	2028
	O.2.3 <i>Student engagement</i>	Student assistants in CES projects; Thesis supervision & mentoring; Internship opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Min. 1 internship/year</li> <li>• Min. 1 student year engaged in CES activities.</li> </ul>	2026	2028
<b>G.3</b> <i>Internationalization and Visibility</i>	O.3.1 <i>Strategic partnerships</i>	Agreements with EU universities & other actors; Joint conferences & workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Min. 2 active international partnerships</li> </ul>	2024	2028
	O.3.2 <i>Visibility &amp; outreach</i>	International conferences; Policy dialogues; CES web & media presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 international event/year</li> </ul>	2024	2028
<b>G.4</b>	O.4.1 <i>Policy</i>	Organize public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Min 1 activity/year</li> </ul>	2024	2028

<b>Societal Impact and Policy Engagement</b>	<i>engagement</i>	debates, roundtables, and capacity-building activities targeting policymakers and civil society actors			
	O.4.2 Societal Impact	Produce policy briefs, reports, and evidence-based recommendations relevant to Albania's and the Western Balkans' EU integration processes	• Min 1 Report/year	2026	2028

