

Invitation to the Launch of the CEFTA Academic Network

5 May 2026, 10:00 – 14:30 | Hybrid format
Faculty of Economy, University of Tirana, Rruga Arben Broci 1, Tirana

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the CEFTA Secretariat and the 2026 Albanian CEFTA Chairmanship, we are pleased to invite you to the launch of the CEFTA Academic Network, to be held on 5 May 2026 in Tirana.

The CEFTA Academic Network is a new initiative aimed at strengthening research-based policymaking in support of intra-CEFTA economic integration and the related process of gradual integration with the EU Single Market. The initiative is co-funded by the Open Society Foundations for the Western Balkans and implemented by the CEFTA Secretariat under the 2026 Albanian CEFTA Chairmanship.

In recent years, CEFTA has evolved well beyond the scope of a traditional free trade agreement and taken on a broader role in supporting the implementation of the Common Regional Market and the wider process of gradual integration with the EU Single Market. In this context, the need for strong analytical support and closer engagement with academia has become increasingly evident.

It is against this background that the CEFTA Academic Network is being launched as an open and voluntary initiative. Its purpose is to provide a practical framework for cooperation between academia and policymakers, while strengthening the role of research and analysis in support of CEFTA's policy priorities.

The launch event will present the concept of the initiative and the forms of cooperation it aims to encourage. It will also introduce the **Guiding Principles for Academic-Policy Cooperation within CEFTA**, which are intended to provide a shared point of reference for institutions wishing to engage with the initiative. These principles are not formal commitments and do not require institutional accession procedures. They are meant to support open, inclusive, and transparent cooperation among institutions that see value in contributing knowledge and analysis to CEFTA-related policy discussions.

The event will also formally announce the **CEFTA Research Award**, an open competitive call inviting PhD students and master's thesis candidates to submit concept notes on priority themes connected to CEFTA's work and the gradual integration of CEFTA Parties with the EU Single Market. Through this component, the initiative aims to encourage the involvement of early-career researchers and to create an avenue for younger scholars to contribute to policy-oriented work.

Beyond launching the initiative, we also see this event as an opportunity to start a wider exchange on how academic cooperation can support better policy design and implementation in areas of common interest.

Your participation, whether in person or online, would be greatly valued as a contribution to this shared effort. We would also be grateful if you could circulate this invitation among colleagues and early-career researchers who may wish to engage with the initiative.

To confirm your participation, kindly register via the following link: [registration link](#)

We sincerely hope to have the pleasure of welcoming you on this occasion.

Yours sincerely,



Pranvera Kastrati Phd

Director

DRAFT AGENDA

10:00 – 10:30 | Welcome and Opening Remarks

Welcome address

Pranvera Kastrati, Director of the CEFTA Secretariat

Opening remarks

- Minister Delina Ibrahimaj, on behalf of the Albanian CEFTA Chairmanship
- H.E. Silvio Gonzato, Ambassador of the European Union to Albania (tbc)
- Professor Bernard Dosti, Dean of the Faculty of Economy
- Andi Dobrushki, Director of the Open Society Foundations for the Western Balkans

10:30 – 11:15 | Introducing the CEFTA Academic Network

Introduction to the initiative, its objectives, operating principles, and open, voluntary approach to participation. Presentation of the Guiding Principles for Academic-Policy Cooperation within CEFTA, as well as the proposed thematic areas, topics, and structure of the CEFTA Research Award.

11:15 – 11:30 | Coffee break

11:30 – 13:00 | Round Table: Defining the Research Agenda in Support of Trade Policymaking

Discussion with academics from CEFTA Parties on the proposed thematic areas and topics for the open call, including suggestions and inputs from participants in person and online.

Moderator: Professor Tanja Mišćević

Participants: Academics from CEFTA Parties

13:00 – 13:30 | Closing

Summary of key messages and next steps, including the open call and ways to engage with the CEFTA Academic Network.

13:30 – 14:30 | Networking lunch