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FOREWORD

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On 25 November 2022, the Faculty of Law of the Vytautas Magnus University had the pleasure to welcome scholars, judges and other practitioners from across Europe and beyond to the international scientific conference “*Constitutionalism in Europe: Current Challenges and Prospects for the Future*”, held in Kaunas (Lithuania). The event was organized in partnership with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the Academic Department of Social Sciences of the European Humanities University.

The occasion was marked by three significant anniversaries: the 30th anniversary of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania (adopted on 25 October 1992), the 100th anniversary of the 1922 Constitution of the State of Lithuania, and the centenary of the founding of the University of Lithuania – the predecessor of Vytautas Magnus University. These milestones offered not only a moment for celebration but also a context for reflecting on the past, present, and future directions of constitutionalism.

In an era marked by growing uncertainty and intensified challenges – from populism and authoritarianism to migration crises, pandemics, hybrid threats, and wars – the conference provided a timely forum for critically examining the resilience of our constitutional systems. Structured around three sessions, the event reflected various perspectives on how national and supranational institutions are responding to these challenges, and what strategies might suit best for safeguarding democratic constitutional values.

This special issue brings together a selection of thought-provoking articles developed from the conference presentations, each contributing to the broader discussion on the current state and future of constitutionalism.

In a keynote address **Hanna Suchocka** examines the abuse of constitutionalism in Central and Eastern Europe following the post-communist transitions. She underscores the essential role of constitutional culture, judicial independence, and the Venice Commission in resisting the misuse of constitutional frameworks by dominant political actors.

In the second article **Ingrida Danėlienė** analyses the constitutional context and preconditions for shaping the constitutional gender dynamics in Lithuania, establishing the constitutional threshold for better protection of the right to family life, equality between men and women, and other gender rights. She identifies the constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination that (along with the influence of supranational law) have had the most remarkable influence in the slow, but generally coherent development of the aforementioned constitutional concepts.

The third article of this issue, written by **Iurii Barabash**, offers a compelling analysis of the relationship between statehood and national identity in post-Soviet constitutionalism, with a focus on Ukraine. The author examines how the hesitation or failure of Ukraine's political and judicial elites to prioritize the constitutional protection of national identity contributed to the country's vulnerability in the face of aggression from the Russian Federation.

In the fourth article **Jānis Pleps** addresses the role of judges in protecting liberal constitutionalism during times of uncertainty. He discusses the limits of judicial tools in confronting illiberal democracies and argues that judges must respond with humility, creativity, and renewed commitment to their constitutional mission.

In the last contribution, **Cesare Pinelli** focuses on a deep structural issue within contemporary constitutionalism: the growing detachment of the people from the constitution itself. The article argues that this disconnect deserves more focus from constitutional scholars than the frequently invoked populist critique of the elites' detachment from the people. To support this argument, the author goes back to the establishment of a constitutional tradition in continental Europe – specifically, of a legitimacy relying on the permanent correspondence of popular values with constitutional principles. He explores the reasons of this crisis, frequently perceived as a “constitutional retrogression.”

We hope this special issue not only captures the depth of the discussions held at the conference, but also inspires further academic reflection with the urgent task of defending constitutionalism in Europe and beyond. In a time when democratic values cannot be taken for granted, the insights gathered here reaffirm a shared commitment to safeguarding democratic constitutional orders.