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Special Session Proposal

Central and East European regions on the common path - 20 years of integration with European Union

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Abstract

In the year 2024, two decades will have passed since the most substantial expansion of the European Union (EU), measured in terms of the number of states and population. The simultaneous accessions concerned ten countries mainly from Central and East Europe (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia). The 20th anniversary of the EU's enlargement is not only a good opportunity to celebrate but also to summarise and evaluate the impact of this momentous event and to review changes associated with it.

The multi-accession highlighted the massive scale of regional disparities within the EU. Facing this challenge and striving for convergence while maintaining the identity and specificity of countries is the main goal of European cohesion policy. Therefore, its instruments should lead to strengthening economic, social, and territorial cohesion across all European regions. The Cohesion Policy underpins European solidarity and supports relatively weakest territories to the greatest extent by providing billions of EUR to support i.e., job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth, sustainable development, and

improvements to citizens' quality of life. Thus, the European funds are perceived as one of the most significant factors providing financial capital for pro-developmental investments accompanying the restructuring processes in Central and East Europe.

The session aims to provide opportunities for presenting the outcomes of research focused on identifying and assessing regional changes observed since the accession to the EU in the countries that joined after 2004. Therefore, the research on regional growth patterns in Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia is also highly welcomed. The key questions of the session are:

- What is the current level of regional disparities and dynamics of changes since EU accession?
- What are the key driving forces that underpin positive changes?
- What are the key challenges to regional growth and regional cohesion?
- What are the methodological novelties or obstacles when approaching the measurement and identification of changes both in the past and those expected in the future?

We expect that the papers may embrace general socio-economic situation or focus on a specific issue of regional development.