

## To readers of the IES Proceedings 1.1

This first issue of the *Proceedings* of the Institute for European Studies is a sample of contributions of the conference held in Pärnu (4-6 October, 2002).

This conference was organized by the Institute for European Studies as fourth meeting in the framework "Monitoring Preparations of Transition Countries for EU-Accession". The conference was opened by President of the Republic of Estonia, Dr. Arnold Rüütel. All 20 national participants of the conference (from the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Estonia) represented the network of scientists from different areas - economists, sociologists, political scientists, ethnographers, public opinion researchers, but also representatives of EU-integration offices and political parties were present.

*The first focus of the conference* was to review economic and social conditions surrounding candidate countries as they move towards convergence with the European Union. During the conference the impacts of social and economic reforms within the convergence process were discussed. Evaluation of candidate countries' possibilities of further social convergence with EU took place. Although all Central and East European countries have completed a successful transition from centrally planned to a market economy and made in last 3-4 years remarkable progress in adopting the *acquis communautaire* to join the EU, the level of their economic achievements is rather low still. In this situation thus what all candidate countries need, is catching-up in terms of economic development and institutional building. Besides the economic development and legal harmonisation candidate states must also achieve convergence in social programs with the respective EU level.

*The second focus of the conference* was to review what changes of people's social and psychological wellbeing during the period of rapid transformation and what they are going to reveal their collective-ethnic and national identification. These factors are going to influence the preconditions for overall shift in attitudes before EU-referendum.

The conference revealed the extent to which we are justified in speaking about similar identities inside the region and which characteristics are more general and specific to all regions, and how members of the EU and accession countries differ.

*The final focus of the conference* that was analyzed and discussed was to consider the accession as a process where the states should not only obtain *pro forma* membership of European Union, they should become socially well-developed European countries. The question of much socio-political relevance in home affairs is also about whether candidate countries' rapid movement towards European Union membership contributes to the cohesion within the society or is an obstacle to its achievement with various side effects. Integration of new member countries into the European Union could be analysed on many different levels. Integration of the EU is often handled as a political project, economic co-operation project, or as a legal project of harmonising national laws with European Union legislation. Success on all these levels is dependent on public support for politicians' decision-making and on positive attitude to the enlargement in general.

This first issue of IES Proceedings and Pärnu Conference could not have come into being without the active support of Professor Jerzy Hausner from Poland as Initiator of Kraków, Prague and Budapest conferences (1999-2001).

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