

## Introduction

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.

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. This conference will discuss how social reforms impact on the convergence process and evaluate candidate countries possibilities of further social convergence with EU.

For new and perspective EU policy areas as *Social convergence* no established indicators and comparative study methodology of old and new member states exist. In such areas the development of statistical indicators will take time and the process needs to involve economic and social scientists, and policy officials. The conference will try to find out indicators of social convergence and how to apply these in current monitoring program.

The countries represented in the network belong to different regions within Europe. The conference will reveal 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.

This information could be used for planning EU referenda in accession countries. The question one can ask is: how does accession to the EU influence attitudes and value estimations in applicant countries and how will EU enlargement in turn be affected by the attitudes and values of people in EU member states. European self-image and European identity is reflected in the country's acceptance of post-modern ideologies and value systems.

In European integration we are more and more following the formation of a common identity as "umbrella". Most theorists have clearly expressed, that European integration does not necessarily contain a shared cultural homogeneity. It is first and foremost a formation of political institutions with their normative and political identity and formation of a common market. The national level should be remaining as a focus for the cultural identity and for the ethnic community. And in Estonia as one of smallest candidate country one can witness public debates about potential threat to the uniqueness of the ethnic identity.

Today, one of the key questions in discussions of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian politicians and the cultural elite is the imagined danger of imposed shift of national identity. Stating this fact should be the beginning of an overview of the changes in discussions concerning small state national interests for joining the EU.

New dimensions to the Baltic co-operation emerged together with increasing possibility to join with NATO. If EU Enlargement is related mainly to questions of cultural independence and political sovereignty of modern nation state then possible NATO eastward enlargement will bring along discussions related to territory and geopolitical security. After November 2002 NATO enlargement will become more realistic perspective for some EU candidate countries. In this respect Baltic co-operation could be more active and could get new practical content.

EU neighbourhood with Russia and Russia's ambitious declarations (towards NATO enlargement in Baltic states, problems with Kaliningrad enclave) will likely encourage discussions about identity and national interests in the context of common foreign policy of EU.

Accession states should not only obtain pro forma membership in 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.

The focus of the conference is not only to review economic and social conditions surrounding candidate countries as they move toward convergence with the European Union. Also, the changes of people's social and psychological well-being during the period of rapid transformation 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.

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Aksel Kirch and Juhan Sillaste (Editors)