

Introduction by Guest Editor

The main theme of this issue is the 20th anniversary of the membership of the Visegrad Group countries in the European Union (EU), including the changes that have occurred in their economies and legal systems, as well as new development challenges. This EU enlargement, which took place twenty years ago, is still referred to as large and has left its mark both on the further development of European integration processes, but also on the members of the Visegrad Group: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia.

I am presenting to the Readers the result of the research project carried out by employees of the Department of European Integration and Legal Studies of the SGH Warsaw School of Economics. The main aim of the project was to identify similarities in the process of integration of the Visegrad Group countries within the EU and the impact of membership in the Union on the society, legal system and economy of these countries. The initial idea of establishing the Group was to intensify cooperation in the area of building democratic structures and a free market economy. These countries were also pioneers in European integration, initially creating the Central European Free Trade Agreement and also being the first to sign the Europe Agreements establishing an association with European Communities and their member states.

Despite the different start of the accession negotiations, V4 countries became the EU Member States together, albeit with different adjustment conditions. Their history after World War II may seem similar, because all four countries belonged to the so-called Eastern Bloc under the control of the Soviet Union, but their differences in social, legal and economic terms became particularly visible during the last two decades of functioning within the EU system. The conducted study allowed us to identify many common features, but also significant differences in trade in goods and services, public aid provided, approach to migration or accession to the Eurozone, as well as the functioning of the law, including adjustments to environmental requirements. The Visegrad Group countries benefited in many ways from their presence in the EU, and membership itself also affected their economy, society and legal system in different ways. The results of this research are presented in this issue of "Przegląd Europejski – European Studies Quarterly".

I would like to thank the Editor-in-Chief, dr hab. Marta Witkowska, prof. UW, and the Managing Editor, dr Elena Kucheryavaya, for their support in the publishing process, as well as the reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions that helped improve the quality of our articles. The publication of these articles was financially supported by Collegium of World Economy of the SGH Warsaw School of Economics.

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