

20 Years in the EU: CEE and Its Path to Progress

Time flies. It has already been twenty years since a number of CEE states (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) entered the European Union (EU) and became full members. These two decades have been marked by incredible progress – economic, political, and social. The citizens of these countries have played their part to reap the fruits of the European project that contribute to the improvements in quality of life, mobility, conducting business, and exercising democratic freedoms. All these processes, however, have ran in parallel to several major challenges – rising populisms, economic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, to name but a few. All these issues have put a strain on the so-called ‘new members’.

Nonetheless, the year 2024 is a momentous occasion for the CEE region. Therefore, we wanted to use this opportunity to celebrate 20 years of being a part of the European Union – a project that, despite its challenges, continues to better our political, economic, and social culture. This is why in the 20th issue of the *4liberty.eu Review*, we discuss the past, the present, and the future of CEE in the EU, with the focus on a wide range of topics – competitiveness, adopting the euro, free trade, foreign and security policies, among others.

We also look at the newer members (like Croatia, which joined in 2013) and potential future ones –Ukraine and Georgia. This broad perspective allows us to better understand the full landscape of opportunities, hopes, and challenges that stem from being a part of the European Union. Overall, we learn that the EU continues to be an aspirational project that builds up both the CEE region and Europe as a whole. It remains a shining beacon of hope for freedom, democracy, unity, human rights, and the rule of law, which is why being a part of this club is key for all countries that desire to cultivate these values.

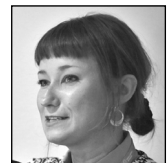
The 20th anniversary issue of the *4liberty.eu Review* is at the same time the last issue of the publication. I would like to personally use this opportunity to thank you, our Readers, authors, editors, and other unique individuals who made this remarkable project possible. We trust it has given invaluable insights into the Central and Eastern European perspective on a number of areas – from education, to economy, regulation, politics, to social issues and various freedoms. It was a privilege to be a part of this extraordinary effort of our partners in the *4liberty.eu* network and other colleagues across Europe. We hope that the publication will continue to be a part of the ongoing discussions long after it ceases its operations. After all, *finis coronat opus*¹.

Enjoy your reading,

Dr Olga Łabendowicz



Editor-in-Chief of *4liberty.eu Review*



¹ In Latin, ‘the end crowns the work’.