

## PREFACE

The dominant process in the European continent entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century is integration. As we hope, at the very beginning of the new decade the European Union will enlarge. The new member- and associated states will bring both in terms of quality and quantity new challenges in the political and economic cooperation. Similarly, a shift of priorities in the strategic goals of the Union is probable. The conditions of development will further differentiate the traditional tasks, and the requirements of the post-industrial society may force the decision-makers in the western and eastern parts of the integration to choose different development philosophies. Within the unified community policy the development strategies relying on the principles of solidarity, equity and justice, strengthening territorial cohesion and decreasing regional inequalities must be harmonised with measures increasing competitiveness. The essential scene of the harmonisation of the two development paradigms will be the region, since this spatial framework seems to be the most optimal for adapting the “fine mechanisms” of the productive factors, human resources and natural environment, the democratic power practise and the programming of social development. The functions of national governmental tier have been reorganised and an increasing number of decision-making competencies are being decentralised.

During the previous decade one of the characteristics of European development was the consolidation of the regional power structure, the regionalism. Within the member states of the Union – enriched by significant differences and historical antecedents – the strengthening of the territorial decision-making tier below the national state progressed with undiminished intensity. The unitarian countries are gradually transforming

The new democracies and market economies in East-Central Europe cannot withdraw themselves from the above processes. In the case if they intend to unite the advantages of integration for their national rise, they must decentralise their traditionally centralised state political systems and the sectoral management and administration established within the framework of planned economy must be complemented by regional autonomies. The decentralisation of the political system in the transition states – disregarding whether it is a strategic or an operative issue – the interpretation of regional autonomy show similar differences, as the characteristic differences between the western democracies

some two to three decades ago. The space winning and institutionalisation of regionalism in East-Central Europe may become a new differentiating factor in the economic development ability and the decentralising countries may integrate faster and the unitary countries slower and with more difficulties.

The volume introduces the East-Central European achievements of regional development policy. Besides the analyses of the territorial transformation processes of the transformation period the studies draw a comprehensive picture of the economic and political factors influencing the organisation of the territorial medium tier – the region – as well as the characteristics of the objectives, means and institutional system of regional development introducing significantly different approaches of certain countries on the regional policy tasks of the state, the future of the autonomous political action space of the regions.

While in Eastern Europe even the application of the traditional state regional policy causes vital debates, in Western Europe and the United States already a different, post-modern type of regional political praxis is becoming generally applied. This new practice is introduced by the last two studies of the volume.

This volume is the overture of the research programme, which was launched by the Centre for Regional Studies in order to investigate the East-Central European transformation.

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