

Dear Guests, dear Friends,

Welcome to our workshop in the Gobelín Hall of the Hungarian Parliament. My name is István Hegedűs and I am the chairman of the Hungarian Europe Society.

This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the political transition from communist dictatorships to democracies, the regime-changes, or the „Wende” as the Germans say, the velvet and not so velvet „refolutions”, to use the term of Timothy Garton Ash.

We also celebrate the 5th anniversary of the entry of many new democracies in the Central European region to the European Union.

And we face our second European elections just in to weeks, whilst for most of the older member states, their European citizens can vote for their MEP-s the seventh time since 1979.

Our Hungarian Europe Society has found these historic events and dates good reasons enough to organise this meeting today and tomorrow to discuss some of the most relevant political and social scientific issues related to the changes, the successes and the failures of the last twenty, and the very last five years from an all-European approach.

We will have a special opportunity, together with our invited guests, to talk about the adjustment of the relatively new member states to the European project, their similarities and individual differences, and the process of Europeanization in all of the member states.

We are going to speak about the role of the national media covering European issues and the level of the development of a European Public Sphere.

And we will discuss the rise of populism, europessimism and euroscepticism – whether the emergence of such „isms” is a general tendency in the European political arena, or, these are the specific problems of some recently joined member states.

We will finally really focus on the forthcoming European elections, analysing such matters like the functioning of the European party families, voter behaviour and participation.

I hope you will enjoy our workshop.

Welcome again and let's start to work!