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**A European success story? Central Europe from democratic revolutions to EU accession (1989-2004) and beyond**

**DATE: 30.09. 2021 17:00**

**PLACE: European Centre of Solidarity, Gdańsk**

**Premiere of documentary movie and public debate**

**1989** represents a **turning point in history**, both for Central Europe and the whole European continent. In East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary, democratic opposition managed in a short period to peacefully oust communist elites that had been ruling their countries for several decades. Hence, between 1989 and 1991 the new political elites were able to reunify successfully with a democratic neighbour (**Germany**) or build the democratic foundations of their states (**Czechia, Poland, Hungary**). The **German reunification** in 1990 itself can be considered as the preliminary step of the integration of Central Europe with the rest of the continent. Meanwhile, the **democratic and economic transitions** of the 1990s constituted necessary preconditions for Central European countries to achieve their **accession** to the Euro-Atlantic organizations such as the **European Union** and NATO. The transition was sometimes painful but successful, as **2004** became the symbol of unity of the European continent with the biggest ever European Union enlargement. Germany played a particularly important role in that process as the most significant advocate of the accession of Central European countries to the EU.

Today it is particularly important to recall the legacy of democratic transition of 1989 and the largest European integration of 2004 when nationalism, populism, and authoritarian trends are on the rise in Europe, particularly in Central European states and undermines the unity of the EU. Indeed, this legacy may serve as a crucial source of inspiration for activities aiming at the reinvigoration of European values.

The main goal of our **project EUHERITAGE** is to remind the European citizens about the importance of democratic transition of Central Europe and its accession to the EU and the values (**liberal democracy, rule of law, civic national identity, free market economy**) underpinning these processes. The same values make the fundamental foundations of the Union.

Our first event will be held in **Gdańsk**, the city of Solidarity, a mass social movement that contributed greatly to the democratization of Central Europe paving the way to its accession to the EU. During the meeting, a **premiere of documentary movie**- made of historic archives and interviews with several eminent personalities- will take place. It was. The screening will be followed by the **public debate** dedicated to the topic of our project.

Gdańsk is a representative of **local government** in our consortium. Therefore, our debate will pay a special attention to the key role that local governments played in democratic transition and the accession to the EU between 1989 and 2004. We will also discuss how today local governments may counter the democratic backsliding in Europe.

## Agenda

**17:00-17:10** – Official opening, **Piotr Grzelak**, Vice-Mayor for Sustainable Development and Housing, City of Gdańsk

**17:10- 17:20** – Presentation of the project: **Adam Balcer**, Senior Fellow, WiseEuropa

**17:20-17:40** – Screening of the movie *“A European success story? Central Europe from democratic revolutions to EU accession (1989-2004) and beyond”*

**17:40-18.40** – Debate:

Moderator: **Adam Balcer**, Senior Fellow, WiseEuropa

Panelists:

1. **Istvan Hegedus**, Chairman, Hungarian Europe Society, former Vice-chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Hungarian Parliament, Hungary
2. **Vít Beneš**, Lecturer, International Relations and European Studies Department, Metropolitan University Prague, Czech Republic
3. **Magda Krzyżanowska-Mierzewska**, LL.M., former Head of Division at the Registry of the European Court of Human Rights, Strasbourg, Poland
4. **Markus Meckel**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of GDR (Apr-Aug 1990), Member of German Bundestag (1990-2009)

**18:40-19:00** – Q&A Session

**Partners:**

