



## CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Congress in Pécs (Hungary)

Date: 4–5 December 2025

### *Regional and ethnoregional parties in Europe and beyond*

Political science research tends to focus primarily on mainstream parties and often overlooks the existence of regional parties. Regional parties are political organizations that are not of national significance but concentrate their activities in a specific geographical area, representing the interests of the population in that region, and usually contest elections only within those areas. These parties do not necessarily carry an ethnic identity; however, when they do, they may be classified as ethnoregional parties — political organizations that blend ethnic and regional characteristics. Ethnoregional parties are rooted in the aspirations of geographically defined, territorially concentrated, peripheral ethnic communities that seek recognition of their cultural identity, sometimes advocating for changes to the nation-state's functioning or, in some cases, even its democratic order. Regional and ethnoregional parties are largely peripheral organizations with territorial or local significance, as their electoral base — and therefore their specific concerns and programs — is concentrated in a particular area (e.g., a region or an area inhabited by a particular ethnic community that may extend beyond regional borders). Although some regional and ethnoregional parties occasionally participate in governing coalitions, this is not typical. Nevertheless, it is quite common for a party that holds little or no influence at the national level to be the dominant political actor in a specific region. Ethnic and regional parties have been active in Europe since the late 19th century, and several remain active today (e.g., the Basque Nationalist Party – Partido Nacionalista Vasco, the Swedish People's Party – Svenska Folkpartiet in Finland). Between the two World Wars, numerous ethnic parties gained political prominence in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, such as the Sudeten German Party in Czechoslovakia and the National Hungarian Party in Romania. After World War II, during the state-socialist period, their significance diminished considerably due to the nature of the political regimes. A renaissance of regional and ethnoregional parties occurred in the 1960s in Western Europe, and later in the 1980s and 1990s in Eastern Europe, driven by the rediscovery of ethnic identities, strong regional ties, the EU's regional policy ("Europe of Regions", MLG), and principles such as decentralization and subsidiarity.

In Central and Eastern Europe, ethnoregional aspirations are typically organized around national identity (e.g., recognition, minority rights, and their extension), with regional interests (e.g., territorial autonomy) often being subordinate. In Western Europe, however,

the representation of regional interests is often equally important or even more significant than that of minority rights. Today, there are generally no legal obstacles to forming ethnoregional parties in EU countries — with the exception of Bulgaria, where the constitution formally prohibits ethnic-based parties —, though such parties are tolerated in practice. Nevertheless, there are substantial differences among states regarding the extent to which they support, create opportunities for, and provide a favourable environment for the successful functioning and political representation of regional and ethnoregional parties at various levels of government.

Although these parties constitute a distinct party family, they are often ideologically diverse, raising the question of whether they can even be placed on the traditional left-right political spectrum. Evidence from the European Parliament suggests that both approaches are valid: regional and ethnoregional (and ethnic) parties may either operate within the European Free Alliance (EFA) framework or join larger political groups aligned with their ideological orientation.

The aim of this conference is to discuss the opportunities and challenges faced by regional and ethnoregional parties. We welcome both empirical case studies and comparative analyses.

We invite proposals addressing one or more of the following topics:

- Political issues represented by regional and ethnoregional parties
- Electoral success of regional and ethnoregional parties at different territorial levels (local, regional, national, European)
- Integration of regional and ethnoregional parties into party systems
- The behavior of regional and ethnoregional parties in the European Parliament
- The impact of democratic regression and the rise of populism on regional and ethnoregional parties
- The EFA's cooperation with the European Green Party in the European Parliament
- Regional and ethnoregional parties and the issue of territorial integration vs. secession

Please send your abstract at [jean-michel.de.waele@ulb.be](mailto:jean-michel.de.waele@ulb.be) by 8 September 2025 (23:59 CET)

*The conference is co-organized by the Université Libre de Bruxelles (Cevipol) and HUN-REN Centre for Economic and Regional Studies (Institute for Regional Studies).*

**Scientific Committee:**

Jean-Michel De Waele, Université Libre de Bruxelles – Cevipol

Balázs Brucker, HUN-REN Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Institute for Regional Studies, Pécs

Nóra Baranyai, HUN-REN Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Institute for Regional Studies, Győr