

THE DISCUSSION ON SLOVAKIA'S ENTRY TO THE EUROPEAN UNION INTENSIFIES

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Now less than seven months separates us from the long-awaited accession to the European Union. Although the public informedness on this integration bloc has increased thanks to activities performed prior to the public referendum on Slovakia's accession to the EU, much remains to be done.

The Government Office of the SR opened its official information campaign with the conference, "The Economic and Social Contexts of Slovakia's Integration into the European Union", held on 4 September 2003, and organised in cooperation with the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS).

The conference was aimed at presenting the eponymous impact study drawn up by the Institute of Slovak and World Economy (ISWE) of the SAS. In the congress hall of the historical building of the National Council of the SR in Bratislava, a meeting of invited members of parliament, parliamentary committee chairmen, chairmen of political parties represented in parliament, members of the SR Government, representatives of the research body, universities, the state administration and regional administration, representatives of various interest associations and groupings, non-governmental organisations and the mass media was held.

At the beginning of the conference Deputy Prime Minister of the SR Government for European Integration Ing. Pál Csáky and Chairman of the SAS prof. Ing. Štefan Luby, DrSc. held the speech. Both praised the expert elaboration of the study and expressed their thanks to its authors. Pál Csáky emphasised the aim of the conference, which was to initiate a society-wide discussion on Slovakia's membership in the European Union.

The study was introduced by the manager of the authorial team and ISWE SAS Director doc. Ing. Milan Šikula, DrSc., who outlined to those present also the main features of the external environment in Slovakia's integration stage into the EU.

The effect of Slovakia's accession to the EU on foreign trade and the inflow of foreign direct investment were assessed by Ing. Richard Outrata, CSc., Ing. Daneš Brzica, PhD. in his presentation focused on institutional issues. Ing. Karol Morvay, PhD. dealt with the main tasks of economic policy and prof. Ing. Milan Buček, DrSc. dealt with the regional aspect of

integration into the EU. The prospects of the business sector in connection with the SR's incorporation into the EU were dealt with by doc. Ing. Peter Staněk, CSc., the issue of agriculture by Ing. Marián Božík, PhD., the labour market and social dimensions of integration by Ing. Ján Košta, CSc. An assessment of the performance of the Slovak economy and the forecast trends of its development to 2010 were presented by doc. RNDr. Viliam Páleník, PhD., and doc. Ing. Jan Iša, DrSc., in conclusion, presented a paper on the SR's preparation for accession to European Monetary Union.

Between the individual blocks, the conference provided sufficient room for discussion. A point of stimulation was the exchange of opinions concerning Ireland as a country that may be a model for Slovakia in many aspects. Representatives of the business sector expressed an interest in an exchange of practical experience in the formation of projects and great feedback was caused by the issue of selecting a regional policy strategy.

The discussion will, however, continue also on public radio and television, which together with the contact workplaces of some ministries provide the public, entrepreneurs and local authorities with valuable information on the EU.

During the conference, it was emphasised that membership in this integration bloc is connected with opportunities, chances and advantages on the one hand, which need to be exploited, and certain risks, threats and disadvantages on the other hand, which need to be identified in time and minimised. Integration advantages and disadvantages are not a static thing, but represent a dynamic process, which to a large extent depends on the abilities of subjects integrating to react to them.

Essential in the preparation for accession to the EU is the participation of all hierarchical levels and subjects in Slovakia's integration strategy, as appropriate to their place and tasks. Among central authorities,



regional authorities, entrepreneurs, sectoral and employee associations, as well as other interest groupings, communication, mutual coordination of procedures and alignment of interests should not be missing. This will subsequently enable them to define the integration strategy in their sphere of competence and to participate in forming the overall national economic strategy of incorporation into European structures. These conditions call for a need to apply a more systematic approach in the course of the country's preparation for accession to the European Union.

The impact study of the ISWE SAS, the standard scientific defence of which was held at the end of June, follows up to the results of last year's study and is certainly not the last. Its basic aim was to deepen the scientific argument of claims for pro-integration adaptation of the Slovak economy. It may be said that it is actually an appropriate jumping-board for the Government's campaign, whose information activities will continue even after the completion of Slovakia's integration process.