

TRANSITION ECONOMIES IN THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

doc. Ing. Vladimír Gonda, PhD.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Faculty of National Economy of the University of Economics Bratislava, an international scientific conference "Transition Economies in the Process of European Integration" was held within the premises of the University of Economics on 9 – 10 October 2003. The patronage over the conduct of this conference was assumed by Marián Jusko, the Governor of the NBS. The purpose of this scientific undertaking was to analyse theoretical and practical issues of transforming the economy of the SR and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the issues of their integration into the EU and the EMU.

This conference was attended by the economics community at large: educators and researchers of the University of Economics of Bratislava, representatives of other universities from Slovakia and from abroad, as well as experts from professional research institutes and representatives of economic practice. All in all, more than 270 professionals took part in the conference, of which 70 came from the following foreign countries: the Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal, Austria, the Russian Federation, the USA and Great Britain.

The meeting, which started with a plenary session on the morning of the first day, was opened and conducted by doc. Ing. Ján Gonda, PhD., the subdean of the Faculty of National Economy of the University of Economics for science and doctoral studies. He formulated the objectives of this conference, mentioning that the said scientific undertakings is held as part of events on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the constitution of the Faculty of National Economy, which it commemorates this year.

In his address concerning the 50th anniversary of the Faculty of National Economy, prof. Ing. Vojtech Kollár, CSc., the rector of the University of Economics in Bratislava, pointed out that the participation of eminent figures of political, social and economic life of the SR, foreign guests, University graduates, cooperating partnership institutions, friends and the Faculty sympathizers not only created a jubilee setting for the



Officials presiding the conference (from left to right): Ivan Mikloš, the Vice-Premier of the Government and the Minister of Finance of the SR, Vojtech Kollár, the rector of the University of Economics in Bratislava, Rudolf Sivák, the dean of the Faculty of National Economy of the University of Economics in Bratislava, Marián Jusko, the Governor of the NBS.

international scientific conference, but is also an expression of the regard and stature of the Faculty of National Economy in pursuing its mission. The Faculty of National Economy of the University of Economics today has a substantial role in Slovakia in training and educating economists, specifically national economists. The core of teaching, scientific and research activities of the Faculty consists of the acquisition, creation and development of theoretical, but also empirical knowledge on market economy and the Slovak economy in particular. Through its structure of accredited study areas, the quality of scientific and research work, internationalisation of the study and international co-operation, the Faculty of National Economy has a prominent position among faculties at this University and Faculties of Economics and Management within the network of institutions of higher learning in the SR.



A keynote address at the plenary session of the conference was given by Ing. Ivan Mikloš, the Vice-Premier of the Government and the Minister of Finance of the SR. In his speech on the Slovak Economy in the EU, New Opportunities and Challenges, he outlined the progress made in accomplishing of nominal and real convergence, the advantages of tax reform, and he also mentioned plans with regard to drafting the state budget for 2004. He positively assessed the development in 2003, since, as he noted, it establishes favourable tendencies for the future. Price deregulations and changes in the taxation should be completed in the next year. In the words of Mikloš, the introduction of an even 19% rate of income tax and a 19% rate of VAT will simplify the tax system, making it more transparent. The Government believes that the tax and fund contributions system reforms will revive the economy and promote enterprise in Slovakia. This year, the state budget deficit is supposed to fall to about 5% of GDP, and in the next year the Government envisages its further reduction to the level of 3% of GDP. The accomplishment of Maastricht criteria will depend on several decisions and their timing. A precondition for achieving their fulfilment is the necessity to continue structural reforms. He expressed his belief that upon accession to the EU, the Slovak economy will grow more rapidly. The audience's attention was notably captured by a hypothetical proposition that was subject to live discussion, that the Slovak economy is no longer a transition economy, but a converging economy.

The second keynote speech at the plenary session was delivered by Ing. Marián Jusko, CSc., the Governor of the National Bank of Slovakia, and was entitled Slovakia in the Context of European Integration - Where We Stood and Where We Head Now (see papers on pages 2 to 5).

In his presentation on University Education Prior to the EU Accession (Economic Aspects), prof. Ing. Rudolf Sivák, PhD., the Dean of the Faculty of National Economy of the University of Economics mentioned, among other things, that the faculty of this Faculty trained more than 20 000 graduates since its foundation. The majority managed to assert themselves in practice, which he considered a positive and gratifying thing. Monitoring analyses of the National Labour Office confirm that there is an increasingly great demand for the SNE graduates in the labour market and that they prove themselves in all segments of the market economy.

He stressed that the Faculty of National Economy, the University of Economics and Slovak higher education institutions in general must flexibly respond to foreseen changes in the labour market, as well as to

the process of globalisation, Slovakia's entry into the EU, and, by the same token, also to a new competitive environment, under which they will be delivering higher education. This will necessitate, among other things, a more intense international co-operation in science and research and a more profound involvement in projects underway in the broader European or global science and research context. R. Sivák considered the current model for financing the institutions of higher learning to be no longer sustainable. He believes that the financing recognised in the countries with developed economies, consisting of several components, has good prospects.

Another contribution at the plenary session was presented by Ing. Robert Šimončíč, the General Director of Microsoft Slovakia, s.r.o., the President of the European Board of American Chambers of Commerce, whose focus was on the economic implications of information technologies in the process of European integration. A guest to the conference, Doc. Ing. Peter Staněk, CSc., who works in the Institute of the Slovak and Global Economy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, aroused the attention of the audience by his speech devoted to the macroeconomic and microeconomic implications of the accession of the SR to the EU. He pointed out that our task today is to concentrate on co-ordination of tax policy, social policy, pension policy, regional policy, on co-ordination in the area of environmental policy, agri-sector and labour market. As the achievement of the Maastricht criteria is a must, a consistent reform of public finances is required. According to P. Staněk, regard for environmental aspects in the economy leads to a huge demand for investment, but concurrently also to huge supply opportunities. The adoption of safety standards means that a higher occupational safety standard is achieved. At the same time, the implementation of projects in the area of transport, infrastructure and environment will enhance both the business environment and the standard of life of people in general. On the other hand, there is a series of necessary steps that must be taken with regard to the adoption of technical, safety, environmental and other standards, which are of the nature of community law, and thereby take precedence over national law. In conclusion to his presentation he stated that nowadays we are witnessing cardinal globalisation changes. Slovakia would not stand its ground alone; being a part of a large economic area of the European Union it has much greater chances – both on the overall economic level, as well as in terms of individual economic entities. Nevertheless, the actual utilisation of the space provided by the EU will depend on decisions made by the Government, formation of the busi-



ness environment, but also on the activity of individual economic entities. This is where P. Staněk sees pros and cons of Slovakia's entry into the EU. The expected effects of accession to the EU in the mid and long term also need to be assessed from this point of view. Entry into the EMU in itself will bring about a number of new positive effects, but its timing will depend on the actually achieved economic situation, accomplished reforms, notably those in the public sector, and on a radically more effective economy as a whole. Only in that case can we expect those positive effects which we believe can be achieved upon accession to the EU and to the monetary union.

Thereafter, criteria for defining a transition or converging economy, topical issues relating to institutions

of higher learning in Slovakia, and so on, were discussed.

The conference proceedings continued in the afternoon and the next day by work in eight sections.

The aim of this international scientific conference, which was the presentation and international exchange of experience on accession of Slovakia and other CEE countries to the EU and the EMU, has been accomplished. Outlines of all speeches presented there will be published in the proceedings, thereby creating space for disseminating these views also to a wider professional community.

Photo: Zuzana Jójart