

JÁN FIGEĽ

MATURATION FOR EUROPE

This summer has seen the arrival in our bookstores of the new book by European Commissioner Ján Figel'. Entitled "Maturation for Europe", it is an expressive work that captures the depth, scope and multilayered character of Slovakia's process of accession to the European Union - "an historically unique, unrepeatable period in our present history".

It is a publication of interest also to banks, as they keenly perceive those lines of force in our societal development that enable them to formulate appropriate strategy and implement selected policy for the given period.

The author of the book "Maturation for Europe" is among the most qualified in his field having been both an attentive observer and active player in the preparation process for EU accession. Ján Figel' first entered European politics back in 1993 when he became a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. From 1998 to 2002 he was a State Secretary of Slovakia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while also serving as Chief Negotiator for negotiations on the accession of Slovakia to the EU, a position he held until April 2003. Since 2004 he has worked at the European Commission as a Commissioner for a highly relevant portfolio.

The new book by our EC Commissioner is an interesting and stimulating chronicle, covering the period between 1998 and 2003. In the space of six years, the author uses as many media channels as possible to comment on a broad spectrum of questions, themes, problems and moves related to the material, organisational, institutional and personnel preparations for Slovakia's EU accession.

At the same time, this does not simply chronicle a sequence of facts and events. The author reflects on the country's potential to make positive changes. He urges "Slovak citizens to grow in awareness, education and qualifications in order to be focused on the new economic, legal, political, and cultural space of the European Union". For Ján Figel', Europe is not a community of businesspeople but a community of values. To this end he has been inspired by study and understanding of the ideological wealth and legacy left by Robert Schumann, the father of Europe.

The author understands the nature and speed of the changes taking place in Europe and the world, which he penetrates in a dialectic on the relationship between European integration and globalisation. He reaches the correct and logical conclusion that "globalisation is becoming a new factor in which Europe may be a serious player only if it is united and able to proceed jointly". In contrast to Eurosceptics, the author is clearly aware that the integration of Europe means the anticipation of our

continent's responses to the challenges of globalisation in the 21st century. As the author documents his historical optimism, so the book attains an even greater relevance, especially at a time when there is a growing wave of Euroscepticism in connection with the approval of the EU constitution and the EU budget. Understanding this historical and geopolitical context is essential for realising from where and to where Slovakia is heading. He acknowledges the shifts in Slovakia towards a civic society. He is convinced that "the Visegrad cooperation was and remains an important instrument of integration for all".

The core of the book concerns the process of Slovakia's ethical maturation towards its place in Europe and the world, and the country's potential and preparedness to play an active role in the new European arena. One clearly senses from this book that Ján Figel' likes Slovakia and understands it. Being in Brussels and Strasbourg gives a detachment and view from above that enables him to understand better and more deeply the actual needs of Slovakia and its citizens. His patriotism is neither fervent nor superficial, but deep and gracious, and not for a moment does he slip from his professional level. He is proud that Slovakia has opened up to the world within a relatively short period of time, but also notices its weak position and shortcomings.

He identifies the basic problems which need to be solved and everything which "is necessary to do to develop human potential, increase employment, further improve the business environment and development of education, overcome substantial regional disparities, and generally to enhance the social and political culture and enforceability of rights".

In all of this he indicates much about the essential directions for formulating an overall vision of Slovakia's position in the world, at a phase in time when human progress is at the level of the knowledge economy.

It is good that the banking system in Slovakia is also playing an active role in this positive process.

doc. Dr. Ing. Vladimír Valach