

PRESS RELEASE

International Conference
ECONOMIC REFORMS FOR EUROPE: Growth Opportunities in An Enlarged EU
18 March 2004
The Forum Hotel, Bratislava

General Information

The Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic and INEKO – Institute for Economic and Social Reforms are organising, under the auspices of Slovak Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, the international conference “**ECONOMIC REFORMS FOR EUROPE: *Growth Opportunities in An Enlarged European Union.***” The main objective of the conference is to exchange information on economic and social reforms in Slovakia, transition economies and the European Union. The panel discussions will cover reforms of the social system (with an emphasis on pensions, the labour market, and the social net), the tax system and the business environment. The event will also present opportunities for foreign investment in accession countries and provide information about the advantages and challenges these countries offer to potential investors.

The conference will include the meeting of the **finance ministers of Austria, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia and Poland**, who will present their views of the reform process in Europe. Some further high-level attendees from EU and accession countries, non-governmental organisations and international institutions (the World Bank, OECD, UNDP, EIB) have also confirmed their participation. Moreover, an OECD representative will present the latest Economic Survey of the Slovak Republic, 2004.

For further details, such as a conference agenda and information about speakers, please, visit our website: <http://www.ineko.sk/euroreform>.

Background

The accession of post-communist countries into the European Union is, after the fall of communism, another radical change in European history. The common interest of the old and new EU members, as written in the Lisbon Strategy, is in sustainable economic growth and a high standard of living. To achieve these objectives, the enlargement of the European Union is not enough. Deepening globalization and the threats resulting from the ageing population represent new challenges that Europe is facing today. **The ability to react more flexibly to changes of the environment and thus to create an area suitable for long term investment is needed more than ever.** The existing experience of Slovakia, other Eastern European countries and even current members of the European Union confirms that to meet these challenges, deeper change in economic and social rules is unavoidable.

The majority of European countries have already begun making some changes, but their advance is more or less non-coordinated. Some have made bigger progress than others. In order to provide the best possible outcome and to break the resistance that reforms often engender, the establishment of information channels about the reasons, content and consequences of economic and social reforms is necessary. **The goal of the conference “Economic Reforms for Europe” is to create a platform for the exchange of such information.** This may contribute to the future application of knowledge from the existing reform process in different parts of Europe without repetition of possible mistakes.

Within the European Union, the sharing of the ideas and interests of the old and new member countries will play an important role regarding the speed and quality of reforms. As this process moves forward, the ability to profit from the existing experience of reform countries may be crucial. Among them, **Slovakia has recently begun to implement critical changes in almost all areas of social life. The conference participants will have an opportunity to obtain detailed information about most of these changes.**

Declaration

On the Future of Economic Reforms in Europe
*Signed by Non-Governmental Organisations and Individuals
from EU Candidate Countries
Bratislava, March 2004*

More than 30 non-governmental organisations and individuals from EU accession countries have already signed the declaration on the future of economic reforms in Europe. The document has been initiated by INEKO – the Institute for Economic and Social Reforms, an NGO from the Slovak Republic, on the occasion of the EU enlargement on 1 May 2004.

The declaration will be provided to the participants of the international conference "Economic Reforms for Europe: Growth Opportunities in Enlarged European Union," to be held on 18 March 2004 in Bratislava.

The full version of the declaration and the list of signatories is accessible at: <http://www.ineko.sk/euroreform>. INEKO welcomes both NGOs and individuals, especially from 12 candidate countries, but also from other states, to join the document.

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Partners of the conference

*General partner: Slovenská sporiteľňa, a.s., Bratislava
Main Partner: Slovak Telecom, a.s., Bratislava
Partners: U. S. Steel Košice, s.r.o.
The World Bank*

We would also like to thank Volkswagen Slovakia, a.s. for supporting the event.