

## PREFACE

With one and a half decades of transition over, change is still the norm in Central, East and Southeast Europe. In spite of several setbacks in the recent past, much of that change is positive. On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004 eight Central and East European countries have joined the European Union. Also the rest of the region is integrating rapidly into the world economy, with many former reform laggards catching up particularly fast. After a temporary slowdown during 2001-2002, economic growth in the region has again accelerated in the past two years, offering opportunities for trade, co-operation and investment which are attracting increasing interest in business circles around the world.

Even after EU accession, Central and East European countries continue to attract the attention of both the academic and business community. With progress in stabilization and reforms, new interest and economic opportunities emerge in Southeast Europe as well. Academic scholars, analysts at multi-national corporations, banks, other investors and institutions all require comprehensive and reliable information on the basis of ascertainable facts. So while the theoretical study of the transition to a market economy and integration is essential to our grasp of the economic, political and social forces that must guide policy makers, it is also the sober assessment of business opportunities in the region that has become an equally urgent mission of wiiw research and analysis. These are the dual purposes of wiiw information services and of this handbook of statistics in particular.

*COUNTRIES IN TRANSITION 2004* represents already the tenth volume – and, with the EU accession of eight Central and East European countries, also the last one in this form – in the annual statistical series produced by The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw). The present issue of the handbook contains again revised, updated and expanded annual and monthly statistics, covering key economic data on twelve transition countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Ukraine), this time for the period 1990-2004 – with the new EU member states fully covered in the last pre-accession year. Academic analysts as well as the interested business community will find here a rare comprehensive and unusually up-to-date English language compilation of comparable key statistical information about recent economic

developments in the key transition countries of Central, East and Southeast Europe.

The statistics are largely compiled from original sources published in the respective countries. The individual time series, tables and graphs in this handbook have been directly extracted and processed from the statistical databases maintained and regularly updated by wiiw. These databases are also available online or on CD-ROM. The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw) is most grateful to the Computing Centre for Economics and Social Sciences (WSR), which provides hardware facilities and database software. We also thank Bank Austria Creditanstalt for financial support in producing this volume. The handbook was designed and edited by the wiiw statistical department. The tables and graphs in the handbook reflect information and updates of the wiiw databases as of September 2004. Please address any comments and questions to wiiw, A-1010 Vienna, Oppolzergasse 6, tel. (+43-1) 533 66 10, fax (+43-1) 533 66 10 50, e-mail: [wiiw@wiiw.ac.at](mailto:wiiw@wiiw.ac.at).

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