

PREFACE

With one and a half decades of transition over, rapid change is still the norm in Central, East and Southeast Europe – and much of that change is positive. On 1st May 2004 eight Central and East European countries joined the European Union. The rest of the region is also integrating rapidly into the world economy, with many former reform laggards catching up particularly fast. Economic growth in the region has accelerated in the last couple of years, offering opportunities for trade and investment which are attracting increasing interest in business circles around the world.

Even after EU accession, the Central and East European countries thus continue to attract the attention of both the academic and business community. With progress in stabilization and reforms, new interest in Southeast Europe and the business opportunities there emerges as well. Academic scholars, analysts at multi-national corporations and banks, other investors and policy makers all require comprehensive and reliable information on the basis of ascertainable facts. While the theoretical study of the transition 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.

The *wiiw Handbook of Statistics 2005* represents already the eleventh volume in the annual statistical series produced by The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw). The present issue of the handbook takes account of the EU accession of eight Central and East European countries in May 2004 as well as the forthcoming integration/disintegration steps. The handbook has been rearranged and expanded accordingly, yet it again contains revised and updated annual and monthly statistics, covering key economic data on nearly all transition countries in Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Ukraine), this time for the period 1990-2005. The reader will find here a rare comprehensive and unusually up-to-date English language collection of comparable key statistical information about recent economic developments in the new EU member states and the key transition countries of 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 has been 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 2005. Please address any comments and questions to wiiw, A-1010 Vienna, Oppolzergergasse 6, tel. (+43-1) 533 66 10, fax (+43-1) 533 66 10 50, e-mail: wiiw@wiiw.ac.at.

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