

## DESCRIPTION OF THE CONFERENCE SESSIONS

### **Sessions on Growth, Convergence and the Lisbon Strategy**

6 April 2006, 9.00-11.00

#### Plenary session: Growth and Jobs: the New Lisbon Strategy one Year Later

The opening session of the conference will set the stage for discussions and debates by bringing high level keynote speakers introducing the results, mistakes, unfinished tasks of the renewed Lisbon strategy. The session will give a balanced overview on the current state of the Lisbon strategy focusing on the main challenges for both the old and new Member States by key representatives of the European Commission, European financial institutions and the research community.

6 April 2006, 11.00-13.00

#### Parallel session: Growth Problems in the EU-15

The major issues raised in this session will be the impediments for faster economic growth in the old member states. It will ask the speakers to identify the major structural, institutional weaknesses the EU 15 countries as a region face and to assess their impact on the growth performance of the European Union. The session will also focus on the differences in economic growth and performance between the European economies and the reasons explaining the differences. The session will also present the lessons that can be learnt by New Member States from the experiences of successful old members.

7 April 2006: 14.00-16.00

#### Parallel session: Convergence in the New Member States

This session will discuss the major factors determining the speed of catch up and economic growth of New Member States. It will also touch upon the issues of macroeconomic challenges facing the fast converging economies and the policy options available for them.

7 April 2006: 16.30-18.00

#### Plenary session: European Competitiveness and Lisbon Challenges

The final plenary session of the conference will discuss the major challenges that influence European competitiveness and the Lisbon Strategy. This section will also try to summarise the major findings and conclusions from the earlier sessions of the conference.

### **Sessions on Information Economy, Information Society and Competitiveness**

6 April 2006, 14.00 – 16.00

#### Parallel Session: ICT and Productivity

First, the session aims at presenting the contribution of ICT to productivity growth and thus competitiveness. Second, it assesses the relations between the use and promotion of ICT and the Lisbon process. The session raises the question whether the use of ICTs is a real drive in achieving the Lisbon goals and how to emphasise its role in the Lisbon framework? Third, the session focuses on the essence of ICT utilisation – which ways of usage can really add to the increase in productivity and competitiveness?

7 April 2006, 9.00 – 10.30

#### Plenary session : Information Economy, Information Society and Competitiveness

First, the plenary session presents how the European Commission visions the role of the Information Economy and Society within the Lisbon process. Second, it debates whether the role of ICTs is different in the New Member States compared to the Old ones and whether this initial divide diminishes and new divergent clubs might emerge within the EU-25. Finally, the session provides the view of the business sector about the future of Information Economy and Society within the enlarged Europe.

7 April 2006, 11.00 – 13.00

#### Parallel session: Technological Changes: ICT and R&D

First, the session discusses the impact of R&D and ICT in the European Union. Second, it analyses the role of ICT-related R&D in European competitiveness. At last, the session touches upon the technological convergence debate in global terms.

7 April 2006, 14.00 – 16.00

#### Parallel session: eServices in the New Member States

The session debates about the role of „e” in Services in the future. It raises the question that for how long Service and eService will stay divided, what is the expected evolution of the two areas. Second, the session focuses on the developments related to eHealth in the New Member States. Finally, it provides the business sector view on the current trends related to various eServices solutions in Hungary and Central Europe.

### **Sessions on Public Finance and its Reform**

6 April 2006, 11.00-13.00

#### Parallel session: Flat Taxes, Tax Competition and Fiscal Adjustment

The main purpose of this session is to describe the broadening experiences of the New Member States with the adoption of flat taxes. The session will also concentrate on the assessment of the competition initiated by the declining and low tax rates in the New Member States and its impact on fiscal adjustment.

6 April 2006, 14.00-16.00

#### Parallel session: Public Sector and Public Finance Reform in the New Member States

The session will assess the lessons from recent successful and unsuccessful reform of the public sector, reduction of public redistribution in the New Member States. The major questions raised will include the sequencing of reforms, the management of temporary costs arising from reforms, the political economy of reforms, the coordination of fiscal adjustment and public sector reforms.

7 April 2006, 11.00-13.00

#### Parallel session: Health Care and Pension Reforms in the New Member States

The weaknesses of the health care and pension systems are one of the crucial structural problems of public finances in the New Member States, as with some exceptions these systems were not reformed in these countries. Institutional, financial, ownership problems result in high and inefficient spending with worsening health care and pension indicators. The session will focus on the major pillars of successful reform in both domains based on recent European experiences and starting position of the New Member States.

7 April 2006, 14.00-16.00

#### Parallel session: Fiscal Rules in the New Member States

The role of fiscal rules in establishing and maintaining fiscal prudence and responsibility is crucial for macroeconomic stability in the New Member States. The session first will describe the lessons learned by advanced and emerging market economies with the adoption of fiscal rules. Then it will focus on the functioning of the existing rules in the New Member States and will try to assess what fiscal rules would suit the most these countries in the short-and medium-term.

### **Sessions on Enlargement towards South Eastern Europe**

6 April 2006, 11.00-13.00

#### Parallel session: Macroeconomic challenges and growth prospects in Southeastern Europe

While the region is not homogeneous, there are similar trends characterising most economies in the region: GDP per capita is lower than that of the New Member States but GDP growth is high; inflation is generally low, while unemployment is high; budget deficit is manageable, while trade deficit is one

of the most important problems in the region. The main question of the session is that whether the current domestic demand driven growth is sustainable or not and whether the current economic problems (like current account deficits) are manageable in the future.

6 April 2006, 14.00-16.00:

Parallel session: Financial Sector Development in Southeastern Europe

Financial sector development progressed in line with macroeconomic evolution. One of the most important tendencies was credit boom in the region similarly to that kind of development in the New Member States countries. This session focuses on the challenges provided by fast credit growth, unbalanced growth of the financial sector, lack of appropriate financial intermediation.

6 April 2006, 16.30-18.00

Plenary session: EU25 & SEE: the Stabilisation & Association and the Accession Process

The Southeastern Europe countries are all declared potential EU candidates. Some of them (official candidate countries) will join the EU in medium term, and in case of the other countries the Stabilisation and Association process means the framework in bilateral relationship. The main objective of this plenary session is to discuss the future development of relationship between the region and the European Union.

7 April 2006, 11.00-13.00

Parallel session: FDI and Privatisation in Southeastern Europe

In the last few years FDI inflows increased in the region mainly due to the still ongoing privatisation, and in line with these trends, the business climate of these economies also improved. The main question of the session is to assess the future sustainability of this process, the attractiveness of the region towards foreign direct investments, the future challenges facing the privatisation process.