FOREWORD

Croatia is preparing for EU membership in 2007. Since signing the Stability and Association Agreement (SAA) in October 2001, Croatian policy has put a strong emphasis on activities to meet the demands of the SAA and to achieve the ambitious goal of becoming a candidate country in a relatively short time. In this context, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Institute of Public Finance in Zagreb initiated a project to monitor and to evaluate the EU accession process of Croatia by Croatian researchers. Although there are regular official reports on the progress of the implementation of reforms in Croatia by the government and international organisations, we launched this project, because we deem it important to present a critical view of independent domestic experts on the accession process covering political, economic and social aspects. The EU Monitoring project has been given the task of watching and analysing the accession process during the years to and producing annual reports on the development of Croatian society in the EU accession process.

It is from this point of view that the project attempts to analyse deficits and problems as well as the progress in the development of the reform programs aimed at meeting the requirements of SAA and EU standards in general. This analysis should lead to the elaboration and formulation of alternative approaches or eventually to policy recommendations. The main objective of the whole project is to present the results of this work to the interested public and to create an impetus for public discussion. One important target group in this sense is of course the group of decision makers at different levels of society in the government, economy and public administration. But apart from them it is necessary as well to address representatives of organisations and groups in the sector of civil society, as reforms in preparing the country for EU membership concern and challenge all parts of the society. To date, a large majority in Croatia has supported the aim of joining the European Union.

To start the project we organized a workshop in Zagreb at the end of March 2002 gathering interested researchers and potential authors for the study to reflect on the concept of the project and discuss the priorities to be covered. Furthermore, we invited two researchers from Poland and Bulgaria, who are participating in similar projects in their countries, to report on their approaches and experiences. Last but not least, at this stage of the project we also asked representatives of
the Ministry of European Integration to take part in the discussion of priority areas as seen by their Ministry. As a result of this workshop a team of authors agreed to prepare papers on the identified priority areas and along common guidelines.

The studies presented in this book give the reader an insight into the situation and problems of different areas in Croatian society and their political approaches to the implementation of reform programs in preparing the country for EU membership. The book concentrates on economy, legislation, and civil society issues. By this selection we think we have chosen some of the most important areas in the context of EU accession at the present time. We hope to contribute by this work to the efforts of Croatia to implement the necessary reforms and thus smoothing the way to the European Union.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who participated in this project, particularly Dr. Katarina Ott, director of the Institute of Public Finance and editor of the volume, as well as Prof. Dr. Nenad Zakošek, for assisting in editing the contributions.

Zagreb, November 2002

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