

## NEWS RELEASE

Brno, November 29th, 2002

### **Erste Bank Group Launches Educational Campaign on EU Membership**

A one-day regional conference „Living in the Neighborhood“, that takes place in Brno today and is organized by Erste Bank, opened a series of edifying programs on the possibilities of cooperation between EU candidate countries and Austria. Erste Bank expects that edifying programs will be take place also in Hungary and Slovakia running until 2004 when the next round of EU enlargement is planned.

„Being the most successful Central European Financial Group, we feel it is our duty to be active in an edifying campaign on the EU enlargement. We want to give our clients and partners in the EU candidate countries a platform for a broad discussion about EU enlargement. We want to help with eliminating worries and with creating a dynamic Central European region,“ Reinhard Ortner, a member of Erste Bank Board of Directors said.

„Erste Bank can make this process easier for its clients in the candidate countries thanks to its knowledge of both, the EU and the environment in the candidate countries. We aim to create one integrated Central European region for financial services: a Czech joiner buys wood in Slovakia, produces a table in Moravia and sells it in Lower Austria. And we will be the bank that provides him a complete service in the whole region,“ Ortner said.

The conference „Living in Neighborhood“ is focused mainly on SMEs, infrastructure development in the boarder regions and cultural cooperation. Besides around approximately 300 representatives of companies and institutions of both countries, also Erhard Busek, President of the Donau and Central Europe Institute and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Austria and the Czech Republic, Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Cyril Svoboda took part at the conference.