



**Erste Bank is the largest bank in
central Europe based on total
assets and number of clients**

The 2004 annual results for Erste Bank der oesterreichischen Sparkasse shows that the bank has become the biggest financial provider in central Europe, not only in terms of customer numbers, but also based on total assets, pushing Belgium's KBC into second position.

With a customer base of nearly 12 million, Erste Bank has provided services to more customers in this region than anyone else for almost five years. Belgian bank KBC is ranked second with 9.1 million customers, followed by Raiffeisen International with 5 million. Positions four and five belong to Bank Austria-Creditanstalt – part of Germany's HVB Group – and French bank Société Générale, with 4.4 million and 4 million customers respectively.

With total assets of EUR 33.3 billion as at year-end 2004, Erste Bank also clearly tops the assets rankings in central Europe, replacing Belgian provider KBC (total assets EUR 31.1 billion), which is now in second place. Italy's UniCredito (EUR 30.6 billion) and HVB subsidiary Bank Austria-Creditanstalt (EUR 30.0 billion) are in third and fourth place.

Erste Bank Group conducts retail banking activities in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia. It is the market leader in terms of retail deposits in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (27% and 35% of market share respectively), second in Hungary (10%) and third in Croatia (also 10%). Erste Bank Group has made eight acquisitions in the last few years, including the largest Czech and Slovakian banks: Česká spořitelna and Slovenská spořitelna. The most recent purchase was Hungary's Postabank, which was integrated into the group in August 2004. GDP rates in central Europe are running at 4-5%, and Erste Bank regards these countries as the sole European growth markets. It sees double-digit growth here in nearly all retail products (from consumer credits to asset management products).