



CESO Update

ECONOMIC COOPERATION IN THE CARPATHIAN BORDER REGION

Since the Canadian Executive Services Overseas (CESO) began its Central and Eastern Europe program in 1990, over 600 organizations, companies and government bodies have received advisory services in such areas as management training, marketing, import/export, business planning and human resource development. Development of private enterprises, particularly in the manufacturing sector, is one of the main focuses of CESO activities in Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine.

Sometimes through sheer perseverance and diplomacy, one person can accomplish what governments and organizations cannot. Such is the case for Steve Serenyi, who in a series of CESO projects in Central Europe, managed to unite representatives

from three bordering countries to form a cooperative business association aimed at improving the region's depressed economy.

The Carpathian Border region Economic Development Association (CBED), established last November in Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine, was the impressive culmination of Serenyi's efforts. The main goals of the organization are to promote employment through regional economic cooperation and joint business activities, including opening cross-border trade, organizing regional trade shows (which has since begun), financing a computer network between the independent councils of each country, and setting up a tri-lingual trade journal.

A long-time business and marketing expert and CESO Volunteer Adviser, Serenyi first conceived of the CBED during a 1993 project in Satoraljhely, Hungary, a town that borders on Slovakia and Ukraine. His job was to assist the mayor's office with economic planning and help foster trade with the neighbouring region in Slovakia.

Though history has caused ethnic tensions to run high in the region, Serenyi

says he soon recognized that "the only way to stimulate the local economy was to promote commercial exchange with border cities in Slovakia and Ukraine", all of which suffer from high unemployment and economic depression.

The idea of setting up a free trade zone in the Carpathian border region was not new, but efforts by various levels of government had proved ineffective in the face of ethnic conflict. Serenyi overcame this obstacle thanks, in large part, to experience and contacts in the region, as well as his pragmatism and diplomatic skills.

During the initial project, Serenyi gained the necessary support of politicians and entrepreneurs in Hungary to establish a local economic development council. He then accompanied a delegation of Hungarian business representatives to Slovakia, where the cooperative process was launched with the creation of an association of Hungarian and Slovak mayors and business people.

In a subsequent project in April, 1994, Serenyi was invited by the Regional Enterprise Foundation of Slovakia to continue his coordinating efforts. This time



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