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FIFTEEN FEET OF SEPARATION

Building Bridges Instead of Walls The world press turned its lens on Usti nad Labem last summer, after the municipal government announced plans to erect a 15-foot wall designed to separate ethnic Czech homes from Roma ones, effectively creating a Roma ghetto. Plans to build the wall were announced as a result of complaints to the City Council by Czech families about noise and refuse generated by their Romany neighbors. But underlying these complaints is a more insidious attitude of intolerance toward Romas, an attitude which has caused some members of the Czech government to come under criticism recently from international human rights groups.

As intolerance against Romas grows, the economic and social gaps between ethnic Czechs and their poorer, often unemployed, Roma neighbors widens. Mr. Ladislav Hruska, the Mayor of Usti nad Labem, was quoted in The New York Times regarding the proposed wall, "This wall is about one group that obeys the laws of the Czech Republic and behaves according to good morals, and about a group that breaks these rules - doesn't pay rent, doesn't use proper hygiene, and doesn't do anything right." Partners-Czech has been working in Usti nad Labem and other communities throughout the Czech Republic to combat these divisive attitudes. Through a program organized by the Czech government, Partners has trained over 100 Romas fluent in both Romany and Czech languages to work as "minority advisors," liaisons with government and civic agencies. In the cities of Most and Pardubice, Partners-Czech facilitates round-table discussion groups which involve both Romas and local community leaders in resolving municipal issues. The Czech Center also runs a program called "Against Racism" which trains Czech teachers in cross-cultural skills. Center Director Dana Rabinakova says that many Czechs "aren't able to understand that the Roma have a very different culture, a different behavior, and a different style." Many of Partners-Czech's ethnic programs are designed to help both groups to understand and accept each other's differences without fear.

Last July, the Czech Republic's Office of Romany Affairs asked Partners-Czech to send mediators specifically to Usti nad Labem, in the hope that they might be able to bring Usti's Czech and Roma citizens together to talk things over and ultimately squash the erection of the wall. Director Rabinakova and

Mediation Director Alice Hamplova visited with each of the families involved in the wall dispute to discuss individual concerns. Based on information culled from these visits, they will be better able to mediate discussions between Roma residents and the Usti Council. Although breaking down mutual distrust is difficult, Partners-Czech is hopeful that the wall will never materialize.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN: UNDERSCORING THE CIVIC DIMENSION

Underscoring the Civic Dimension Last April, Hungarian Police Chief Ferenc Banfi entered a Nograd County meeting anticipating a long night of verbal ping-pong with the leadership of the town's Roma community. Police relations with the Roma had reached a low point and suspicion and distrust prevailed on both sides. Instead of the expected mud-slinging, the four hour meeting concluded amiably, with all parties agreeing to a concrete plan of action: a public committee, including the mayor, chief of police, and Roma leaders, was established to investigate Roma allegations about police misconduct. What was the ice-breaker that rerouted tensions and invoked consensus?

Nograd County is one of many areas in Hungary using new methods introduced by Partners-Hungary and other Partners' Centers to address complex issues and vying interests between many persons and organizations. Through training, direct relationship-building and facilitation, Partners- Hungary was able to mobilize community and governmental support for cooperative planning and problem-solving processes.

This capacity to engage in large-scale social change processes exemplifies the advanced skills now available in all ten of Partners' international Centers. Underscoring the civic dimension of democracy, the Centers' cooperative participation methods enable citizens, non-governmental organizations, business associations, and governmental entities to achieve consensus on contentious social and economic issues.

The cooperative planning process addresses issues and concerns at an early stage, before disagreeing parties become entrenched and polarized. This focus on "upstream" diversion serves to prevent the outbreak of more overt conflict.

After successfully building Center skills in negotiation, mediation and cooperative planning, Partners' next critical step will be to incorporate cooperative processes, system design, and consultancy skills into each Centers' repertoire by the end of 1999.

Using existing Centers as well as a new Regional Partnership, a council of all Partners' Centers and Partners-International, we will be able to enhance the capacity of existing and future Centers by introducing updated conflict and change management programs and training-for-trainer initiatives on a regional basis. With this exponential skill-building potential, Partners is able to rapidly advance a culture of conflict and change management in the transitioning democracies.

EXPLORING AN AMERICAN INITIATIVE

Twelve practitioners of cooperative planning and directors of community and agency mediation centers rendezvoused in San Francisco in July to form an inaugural think-tank for Partners' American initiative. Layering on its considerable foundation of expertise in building capacity and promoting democratic skills overseas, Partners now intends to work with local, regional and national organizations in the United States.

To this end, Partners' hosted a national planning meeting to explore the development of an American Center designed to further the capacity of American community conflict resolution programs and increase professional and cultural diversity in the field of citizen participation and cooperative planning processes.

In light of the significant transition anticipated as shifting demographics and economic globalization impact our daily lives, Partners views cooperative planning as an important tool for promoting full inclusion of all citizens and expanding American democracy into the 21st Century. As part of its mission, Partners hopes to repatriate lessons learned in Eastern Europe and elsewhere by developing and adapting similar capacity in the United States.

CREATING A PIPELINE FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

In Medgidia, a city in southeastern Romania, more than 170 families lack a functioning sewage system. Understandably, citizens have besieged Medgidia's City Hall with complaints. In the past, the official response would have been easy, though hardly satisfactory -- "It's beyond our control." Now that local officials in Romania are no longer powerless bureaucratic extensions of the central authorities, they must face the responsibility of being accountable to citizens, and the challenge of real decision-making that implies. This requires local leaders to assume such roles as policy makers, communicators, financial analysts, negotiators, facilitators, and institution builders.

Medgidia's Mayor, Mircea Pintilie, and Vice Mayor, Marian Iordache, participated in the Partners-Romania program "The Art and Science of Leadership in Local Governments," a workshop which provides both technical know-how and communicative leadership skills to elected leaders from all over Romania. To date, nearly 300 Romanian officials have participated in the program.

As part of the program, consisting of a series of residential trainings, participants learn the theory and practice of assuming their new, multifaceted roles. This includes training in negotiation, facilitation, communication, citizen participation, team-building and financial management. The program is practical in nature, using actual local issues as case studies, and modeling the dynamic, interactive, and participatory communication style expected from effective leaders.

Participants from Medgidia saw this program as an opportunity to address their city's sewage problem. Through a series of simulations and exercises, Pintilie and Iordache worked with other participants to devise a sewage construction program which they would later promote to the City Council and to citizens. Subsequently, Medgidia's local government developed an action plan and budget which provided for the construction of a new sewage network in the affected neighborhood. The action plan included a citizen contribution drive, in which inhabitants could volunteer their skills, time and resources. The plan also included Medgidia citizens in project oversight and evaluation.

After completing a geological and topographical needs assessment, construction of a sewage system began in August 1998. Citizen response has been tremendous, as evidenced by massive volunteer labor and substantial financial contributions to the project. Partners' workshop served as the catalyst to bring a proper sewage system to several hundred inhabitants of Medgidia.

MUNICIPAL MEDIATIONS IN HUNGARY

The Kalaka Foundation discovered the value of mediation in a recent dispute with the local government of Soskut, Hungary. The Foundation, which provides services to mentally disabled children, had been denied local government funding to renovate its facilities. Though the government strongly supports the work of the Foundation, it was uncomfortable with high reconstruction costs. Partners-Hungary seized this opportunity to suggest a mediation process that would produce a mutually acceptable result and a desirable, positive relationship. The Kalaka Foundation and the Soskut local government agreed, and a Partners' mediator facilitated a solution that enabled the Foundation to continue its work and begin the necessary reconstruction of its building.

Local governments are increasingly using Partners' mediation practice to resolve issues with citizens, businesses, NGOs, and social service agencies. The town of Vistonta recently asked Partners-Hungary to mediate the distribution of an environmental pollution tariff that had been levied on a local industrial plant. Another case concerned citizen complaints over the high cost of a new local telephone service. In the town of Pacsa, local government officials contacted Partners-Hungary to mediate a case involving a group of local citizens who disputed the use of a cooperatively owned lake.

Partners has opened new mediation territory in Hungary by offering local governments a range of mediation services which can support their growing and complex relationships with the private, civic, and social sectors. In several communities, these sectors have discovered that mediation offers a cost effective, efficient way to handle complex multi-party disputes, while building trust between citizens and local governments.

CITIZENS AND FERTILIZER PLANT SEEK BETTER CHEMISTRY

Vratza, Bulgaria does not want to be known merely for "Vratza Lung Syndrome," a respiratory illness that makes children's lungs look like those of adult smokers. Harmful emissions of ammonia, dust, and dio-xide sulfide from the Chimko fertilizer plant have been blamed for respiratory diseases, as well as for a host of other health and ecological problems. The Chimko management is interested in improving the plant's track record, and has already implemented some environmental protection measures. Since Chimko represents the economic base of Vratza and a livelihood for many of its citizens, few people have an interest in closing the plant.

But the good will of the involved parties is not enough to resolve health risks that plague the city. Lack of communication between ecological, health, and social service NGOs has resulted in competition rather than cooperation. Vratza's local government has generally not utilized the NGO community's expertise in assessing city health issues. Citizens, though concerned, have lacked confidence in institutions, and often feel unempowered to influence local conditions. The Chimko plant, meanwhile, struggles with the necessity to implement improvements during a difficult economic period.

Following extensive interviews with citizens, NGOs, health organizations, Vratza's local government, and Chimko's management, Partners-Bulgaria is developing a permanent civil forum in Vratza designed to resolve the city's health and ecological issues. The forum includes representatives from the Regional

Environmental Protection Agency, leading NGOs, the city council, local mass media, hospitals, interested citizens, and Chimko's management, who will work together to raise public awareness of the city's environmental situation, develop citizen capacity to influence local policy, and find ways to reduce overall health risks. Over the next year, Partners will train the forum in communication, negotiation and facilitation skills, and will facilitate its crucial first meetings.

Vratza's citizens are enthusiastic about the forum. According to Maria Moleshka, Director of Infoeco Club-Vratza, "Partners' specialists are well known among professionals from all areas relating to Vratza's ecological future: health, education, NGOs, and local government. This will help in the establishment of a civil forum consisting of a wide range of organizations and persons who will work together."

BARGAINING AWAY THE GHETTO IN KOVAROVCE

Hard hit by difficult economic conditions, Romas in the small Slovak village of Kozarovce suffer high rates of unemployment. While some believe this validates a notion that Romas are lazy and unmotivated, Roma leaders point to the institutional obstacles they face on a daily basis. The only bus stop near their community was recently closed, severely limiting their mobility. Kozarovce's Roma neighborhoods also lack a reliable waste management system and other services. Most disturbingly, the local government refused to allow new Roma residents to register as citizens of Kozarovce, effectively denying them their right to state social and financial assistance.

These policies have led to the effective ghettoization of Kozarovce's Romas. In response, Partners-Slovakia initiated an unprecedented dialogue process to bring together Romas, ethnic Slovak and Hungarian citizens, and local government representatives to address issues of citizen rights and fair access to needed services.

Last spring and summer, Partners-Slovakia facilitated a series of historic meetings between Kozarovce's Romas and the local government, during which the mayor agreed to visit the Roma neighborhood, implement a waste management project, and register Romas as legal residents. These important steps are only the beginning of an ongoing dialogue, as a number of trust issues remain. In particular, Romas fear a return to business-as-usual, since the local government has been slow to put any agreements into effect. Partners-Slovakia is now working with all involved parties to ensure full implementation of agreements, and to continue the momentum of the dialogue.

SEMINARS THAT ACT OUT REAL LIFE

An outcast paramour, an evil mother, and a saintly child were among the cast of characters in a role play that took place during the seminar "Mediating Family Economic Issues." The role play was a depiction of a family business and inheritance case that had been mediated by Partners-Argentina Director Gachi Tapia and Francisco Diez. Using colleagues from the audience as volunteer actors, Tapia and Diez brought the case to life, using interactive staging techniques to better illustrate material and enhance interest. By the end of the group session, the financial, legal and psychological issues that develop within the family unit surrounding topics such as marriage and partnering, adoption, separation and divorce, infirmity, death,

and family business had been demonstrated and discussed.

This interactive workshop, along with a second seminar entitled "The Practice of Private Mediation," was conducted in Buenos Aires, Argentina, by Professor Jay Folberg, Dean of the University of San Francisco School of Law. Approximately 150 Argentine mediators attended each session, learning specific tools for managing difficult disputants and for addressing the most challenging parts of the mediation process. Information about mediation models in the United States was also shared, including strategies for conducting successful mediations, methods for post-mediation follow-up with disputants, and methods for marketing mediation services.

Mediation has become popular in Argentina since the implementation of a 1996 law in the city of Buenos Aires that allows for the use of mediation prior to litigation in civil and commercial cases. Originally, registered mediators were selected from a list maintained by the Court of Appeals, however, since February of this year, disputants may choose to select a private mediator. This option has created an instant market for private mediation in Argentina and has spawned a concomitant number of requests for mediator training using experts from Argentina and the United States.

PROMOTING POLISH PROFESSIONALS

Partners-Poland brought an important new set of tools to Agricultural Cooperative Development International/Voluntary Over-seas Cooperative Assistance's (ACDI/VOCA) Firma 2000 program when it trained Polish business advisors in mediation skills useful for assisting newly developed enterprises. Sponsored by USAID, the Firma 2000 program is a support and consultation service designed to strengthen Polish small- and medium-sized businesses. Firma 2000 requested that Partners train their Polish business advisory staff in mediation skills so they might, in turn, offer mediation assistance to clients.

The business advisor training involves three specific activities. First, ACDI/VOCA consultants are trained in mediation, giving them knowledge of the dispute resolution process and its application to business conflicts. After the training, consultants and Partners-Poland prepare presentations to educate local enterprises about the value of mediation as a dispute resolution alternative. Finally, the ACDI/VOCA consultants are available to offer mediation services to local companies or to advise them on the use of mediation as an alternative to costly and time-consuming litigation.

Employing the use of simulated business mediation case models, the training program for ACDI/VOCA received strong praise from the training group. Tadeusz Klaczkowski, President of the Suwalki Regional Reconstruction Agency, stated, "Although I have had a great deal of professional training, I think this mediation training was extremely useful and effective." Feedback from the ACDI/VOCA consultants indicates a new understanding of ways to manage conflict in the business community as well as a recognition of the need for strong communication skills. Many of the business advisors also noted the value of mediation as an alternative to the adversarial legal process which dominates the Polish business environment.

A healthy business sector relies on the ability to resolve contract and other commercial disputes efficiently and at minimal cost. Partners-Poland is poised to assist the business sector by working with business advisors and business people to develop and implement mediation training and services throughout

Poland.

PARTNERS' CENTER HIGHLIGHTS

Argentina

Director Gachi Tapia conducted a negotiation skills training in Cordoba for 30 accountants from the Professional Council of Economic Sciences. * At Austral University in Buenos Aires, Tapia and chief trainer Oscar Rodriguez Robledo trained 30 lawyers in mediation. * They also conducted an academic workshop for twelve academics from three universities in Buenos Aires and a collaborative planning workshop for 50 participants at the First International Conference on Conflict Resolution. * With the Buenos Aires City Government, Partners' organized a workshop on how to improve dialogues between politicians and citizens. * Center staff presented Partners' work at a conference organized by William Ury for NGO leaders and mediators throughout Argentina.

Bulgaria

Under new Director Daniela Kolarova, Partners-Bulgaria is training school advisors from all over the country in how to inform students of their UN rights. * Trainers Steli Peteva, Tsvetan Davidkov, and Rumén Minkovski developed and trained citizen-government dialogue groups in Plovdiv and Gabrovo. * Center staff delivered a conflict management workshop for police academy instructors from throughout Bulgaria, in cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. * Partners-Bulgaria also trained guidance counselors from 19 schools in peer counseling, negotiation, and assertiveness.

Croatia

Partners established a new Center in Croatia. * Director Damir Grubisa and Chief Trainer Jadranka Mimica will build the Center's training capacity, and will implement cooperative planning processes, ethnic conciliation services, and training programs.

Czech Republic

Director Dana Rabinakova and Mediation Director Alice Hamplova trained the staff of Czech refugee camps in mediation skills. * The Center established a new Ethnic Conciliation Commission in Prague District 9, with support from the deputy mayor. * In Most, Pardubice, and Pisek, trainer Helena Stohrova and ethnic coordinator Tanya Siskova facilitated round-table discussions between Roma leaders, police, social workers, and municipal representatives. * Center staff trained students and teachers in Pribram and Roudna u Sobeslavi in drug abuse prevention. * In Svratka, the Center trained probation officers in mediation skills, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice. * Partners- Czech continued its "Against Racism" project, providing ethnic sensitivity training for elementary and secondary schools teachers.

Georgia

Trainers Ivane Matchavariani, Lela Giorgobiani, and new Director Sophiko Shubladze facilitated a meeting

of parliamentarians, government ministries, and NGOs as part of a National Academy of Public Administrators conference. * In Poti, the Center trained local government representatives in conflict resolution skills, in preparation for upcoming cooperative planning work. * In Marneuli, staff trained the local Social Service Board in communication and negotiation skills. * Trainers Khatuna Sanikidze and Tina Asatiani trained members of the Georgian Institute of Public Administration in negotiation skills.

Hungary

Trainer Istvan Herbai trained the management of the National Parks and Nature Conservation Office of the Ministry of Environmental Protection in conflict management skills. * Director Kinga Goncz trained managers of Hungarian National Radio in leadership consultation skills. * In Debrecen, the Center worked to build the capacity of the local government's Social Office, by providing prejudice reduction training, strategic planning services, and meeting facilitation models. * Chief Trainer Sandor Gesko conducted a needs assessment on police human rights issues, interviewing crime victims. * The staff provided ongoing organizational consultation to the Okotars Foundation, an environmental NGO. * Partners-Hungary continued its work with the Menhely Homeless Shelter, providing team building training and facilitating strategic planning sessions.

Lithuania

Renamed "Baltic Partners for Change Management," the Center is building training and mediation capacity in Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. * Under Director Gaila Muceniekas, the Center is establishing a community mediation service in Vilnius, and will implement a local government cooperative planning process in the Fall. * Chief trainer Kristina Kovaite and trainer Jurate Tamosaityte are providing training, facilitation, and consultation services to the Council of Invalid Affairs, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Medical Association of Lithuania, and other social service entities.

Poland

Under Director Maciej Tanski, Partners-Poland is implementing a peer mediation program at the Raoul Wallenberg School, an elementary school which mainstreams disabled children. * Mediation Manager Ilona Ilowiecka organized a series of mediation trainings for representatives of the Polish construction industry, in cooperation with the National Chamber of Construction. * Trainers Rafal Swiezak and Anna Szlagowska trained members of the Plock City Council in negotiation skills. * In Uniescie, Center staff trained a group of rural civic activists in team building skills. * The Polish team concluded the first stage of its Flood Zone Project, providing crisis management skills training to NGO leaders from Kudowa Zdroj.

Romania

Director Ana Vasilache and Deputy Director Nicole Rata conducted a series of leadership workshops for municipal officials, and published a training manual on local leadership. * The Center provided consultation on NGO and local government cooperation for municipal officials in Slobozia. * The staff is developing a guide for local governments on their rights and responsibilities under the new Romanian law. * Partners-Romania conducted a needs assessment for banks giving credit for municipal development. * The Center is assessing locations to establish two ethnic conciliation commissions.

Slovak Republic

The Center helped prepare the NGO community for the October elections, facilitating pre-election discussion forums in Bratislava, Kosice, Mojmirovce, Lucenec, Stupava, and Zilina. * In Stara Tura, Director Dusan Ondrusek and trainer Kaja Mikova trained 47 Peace Corps volunteers in cross-cultural approaches to community development. * Trainer Gabriel Bianchi trained administrators from the Ministry of the Environment in organizational development and conflict resolution. * The Center facilitated a strategic planning process in Liptovsky Hradok for A Project, an environmental NGO. * Trainer Natalia Kusnierikova trained families with disabled children in effective communication skills. * In Stara Lesna, Center staff conducted cross-cultural communication trainings-for-trainers for NGO leaders, in cooperation with the Canadian Embassy.

Regional and Cross Border Initiatives

Two representatives from each Center participated in a cooperative planning training in San Francisco, California. * In Belgrade, Polish and Slovak trainers trained young Serbian leaders in conflict management skills. * Partners-Romania hosted a "Leadership for Local Govern-ment" training-for- trainers, attended by representatives from several of Partners' Centers. * Slovak staff conducted a methodology training- for-trainers for Russian, Hungarian, Polish, Slovak, Slovenian, and Bulgarian trainers, in cooperation with Johns Hopkins University. * In New Delhi, India, Romanian staff trained elected officials from 6 South Asian countries in leadership and management. * The Czech Center is providing ongoing training and consultation to the Ukrainian NGO sector. * Slovak trainers trained representatives of Bosnian NGOs in organizational development skills, in cooperation with World Learning. * The Hungarian staff conducted a Police- Community Relations workshop at the International Global Anticrime Strategies Conference. * Czech trainers facilitated a 6-day meeting of political leaders from Bosnia and Hercegovnia, in cooperation with KNO Worldwide. * A structure for the Regional Partnership was formulated and the search for its manager is underway in Hungary.

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