

Spring 1998 Newsletter

- [Receding Flood Waters Galvanize Civic Response](#)
- [A Voice For The Roma Community](#)
- [President's Column - Pioneering A Network](#)
- [Romania Added To Partners' Map](#)
- [Thirty Serbs Under Thirty - A Vanguard For A Pluralistic Era](#)
- [Mediation Helps Small Business Sector Flourish](#)
- [Georgian Political Parties Forge Working Relationships](#)
- [Parliament Trains On Camera](#)
- [Citizens Clash In Chintulova](#)
- [Partners' Center Highlights](#)
- [Peer Mediation Takes Off In Slovak Schools](#)

RECEDING FLOOD WATERS GALVANIZE CIVIC RESPONSE

Last summer, large areas of Poland were devastated by a series of record

floods. Local governments were ill equipped to deal with the homelessness, property destruction, and incidents of missing persons that followed the disaster. The distribution of food and medical supplies, the rebuilding of homes and infrastructure, and the continuation of social services in the wake of the flood proved to be enormous challenges, impeded by a lack of financial resources and inadequate cooperation among local government, NGOs, and citizens.

The catastrophe demonstrated that citizens and NGOs need to work closely with each other and with local governments to provide medical aid, transportation, shelter, search and rescue teams, and public safety assistance. Responding to this need, Partners-Poland, through a project funded by PHARE, initiated a program designed to increase NGOs' ability to respond to future crisis situations.

The program consists of a series of trainings aimed at enabling NGOs to quickly mobilize and effectively cooperate with each other and with local governments when an unforeseeable crisis strikes. This includes assisting NGOs in building response networks, developing citizen volunteer programs, and establishing liaisons to local governments and social service agencies. The program also assists NGOs in developing projects to organize citizens and municipalities to rebuild strained social services and damaged infrastructure in flood zone areas.

Partners-Poland plans to complement this NGO initiative by providing a skill building program for municipal officials in flood zone areas aimed at establishing links between local governments and the NGOs trained in the original program, in order to provide municipal leaders with the practical skills necessary to respond efficiently and cooperatively in times of critical need.

A VOICE FOR THE ROMA COMMUNITY

Tensions between the Czech majority and the Roma minority received worldwide attention this past summer, when a documentary about the new lives of Roma immigrants in Canada was aired in the Czech Republic, sparking a would-be exodus of Czech Romas to Canada and Great Britain. Both countries were ill-prepared to handle the deluge of visa applicants, and they, along with other international governments and NGOs, have pressed the Czech government to address the very real problem of discrimination against the Roma minority in their country.

In an attempt to deal with this crisis, Partners-Czech worked with the Czech government's Ministries of the Interior, Education, Labor and Social Affairs, local government representatives, the Open Society Fund, and several Roma groups to develop a new position of "minority advisor" in municipal governments. A minority advisor will be appointed in every city in the Czech Republic to represent the needs and concerns of the local Roma population and to facilitate interaction with local government officials, working to break down prevalent stereotypes and racist attitudes towards the Roma population. Each advisor will be trained in negotiation skills, and will work with both the local government and Roma groups, serving as a bridge between two cultures.

Partners-Czech has been chosen to lead a specialized training program to prepare Roma minority advisors for their new roles. Program participants were chosen from local labor offices, local social service offices, and Roma NGOs. Partners-Czech's preparation program includes communication and negotiation skills trainings, as well as workshops on understanding state welfare programs and state social policy.

The Czech Ministry hopes the establishment of this new advisory position will help build much-needed understanding while reducing ethnic tensions and violence between the Czech majority and their Roma neighbors. In the long-run a more prominent "voice" in local government may emerge for the Romas, clearing the way for improvements in social and economic status.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN - PIONEERING A NETWORK

In 1999, Partners for Democratic Change will celebrate its tenth anniversary. Partners' Centers in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and, Slovakia have pioneered the field of conflict and change management throughout Central and Eastern Europe. A new professional cadre of trainers, mediators, conciliators, and facilitators are now working across government, non-government and market sectors. So much learning, training innovations, project development, new application methods, and material are coming from each Center that it is now critical for Center enhancement and for the further professional development of the field within the region that a European Network be established.

Centers have much to share in such areas as training design and implementation, trainer development and retention, income generation and training fee pricing, mediation services and income, and programmatic innovations. Envisioned is a Network that serves as a provider of information, training assistance, management services, and coordination of Partners' East-to-East training programs. The

Network would integrate common work interests, exchange project information between the Centers, and build on existing Center activity and strengths.

In May, a series of management enrichment programs will be conducted in Prague. This will be connected to a meeting of Center Directors that will focus in part on how the Network can address the diverse needs of the Centers and assist Centers in their programmatic, training, and sustainability initiatives.

The Network has the potential to maximize the expertise that now exists in the National Centers and to make it available to newer Centers. The Network is also the logical entity to market and coordinate Partners' East-to-East training and trainer development programs to existing Centers and to organizations in countries where there are no Centers. A well functioning Network could also provide a mechanism for introducing on a regional basis new programs, conducting advanced trainer development, implementing Center management programs, and initiating new National Center development. The regional Network of National Centers, "Partners-Europe," will serve these needs and coordinate the diverse and innovative activities of Partners' Centers.

ROMANIA ADDED TO PARTNERS' MAP

Ana Vasilache, founder and Director of the Foundation for Local Development and Public Service (FLDPS) in Bucharest, has been chosen to direct Partners- Romania Foundation, the eighth National Center established in Central and Eastern Europe by Partners for Democratic Change. Ana has a distinguished background in developing training programs and conducting training sessions for Romanian local government officials.

The FLDPS is being reorganized into Partners-Romania Foundation for Local Development and will incorporate the organization's local government work as well as expand conflict and change management programs to the non-government and market sectors. Partners- Romania Foundation will train trainers in cooperative planning and facilitated dialogues, implement cooperative planning initiatives, and begin ethnic and national minority training and conciliation work in different Romanian cities.

Ana has an extensive domestic and international education in urban planning and community development. She has organized extensive training programs in Romania, throughout Central Europe, and for the UN Center for Human Settlements where she will be serving as a trainer this Spring in India.

THIRTY SERVS UNDER THIRTY - VANGUARD FOR A PLURALISTIC ERA

Myslenice, Poland, was the site of an inventive training program conducted for thirty young Serbian leaders by a joint team of professionals from Partners-Poland, Slovakia and Georgia. Conceived by Maciej Tanski, Director of Partners-Poland, and originally introduced in Polish schools, this interactive communication program is attracting young leaders from a cluster of cross-border towns.

After garnering acclaim for its pilot project, Partners-Poland received a contract to adapt and tailor its unique program into a three-week seminar for future trainers and small group facilitators who hope to

initiate a similar program in Serbia. Modeled on the hallmark program originally designed by Partners-Poland for students at the Polish School for Young Civic and Political Leaders, this new incarnation of the program was organized by a consortium of five Serbian organizations. Trainings were led by Maciej Tanski, with assistance from an East-to-East training team consisting of Partners-Slovakia Director Dusan Ondrusek and Trainer Vlado Labath, Polish Trainer Barbara Limanowski and Partners-Georgia Trainer Sophiko Shubladze.

Training topics included a palette of communication skills, focusing primarily on team building, interpersonal communication, conflict resolution and negotiation, public presentation skills, working with the media, public relations strategies, leadership and project management. On the final day, the session was culminated by a group communication drill in which participants had to compete for one mythical grant which was to be awarded for the best communications campaign. In this hands-on practical application session, two of the groups coincidentally chose the subject "Driving a Car When Slightly Tipsy," and designed dual campaigns against drunk-driving, complete with budget, posters and video clips. Aside from being fun, participant evaluations ranked overall program value an impressive 4.8 on a scale capped at five.

Future leaders from the cities of Belgrade, Kragujevac, Nis, Novi Sad, and Uzice, as well as from the Republic of Montenegro joined together to explore these new methods for advancing civil education. A sub-set of participants were targeted as future in-country trainers. Their assignment is to launch a vanguard program for young social activists from divergent political orientations aimed at promoting political culture by introducing democratic pluralism. Under the supervision and mentoring of Partners-Poland, they will conduct inaugural training sessions for the School for Social Action, Belgrade, in July of this year.

MEDIATION HELPS SMALL BUSINESS SECTOR FLOURISH

As in the United States, emerging democracies and market economies in Central and Eastern Europe rely on small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) to drive their economy. Healthy reform of this sector is a key issue for transitioning democracies.

Hungary provides a strong example of the role of government in providing support for SMEs. Its program has several components including improved access to capital, streamlined procedures for establishing SMEs, tax and other legal reforms, and technical assistance provided by local enterprise associations. The Hungarian Government has many partners in this project, including the U.S. Agency for International Development and EU PHARE.

Partners-Hungary also plays a part in assisting SMEs. By introducing market mediation to Hungary, Partners has actually helped to save small businesses and jobs, as in the following case example: Tomasz Sandorfi, a classic entrepreneur, started a small furniture painting business in Pomaz, just outside of Budapest. The business began with the owner, two skilled workers and one unskilled worker. Over time, the relationships between the owner and the employees deteriorated and the business was starting to lose money. The workplace was disorganized and the employees were unmotivated. An attempt to remedy the situation by altering the internal hierarchy backfired. As time passed, problems multiplied until the owner thought that he would have to close the business and lay off employees.

Instead, Tomasz contracted with Partners-Hungary. After a preliminary interview, a mediation session was scheduled. The owner and all three employees participated. Although the employees were skeptical, the mediator helped them to focus on their common interest in keeping the business open and profitable. With the assistance of the trained mediator, they were able to come to a mutually satisfactory agreement. They also agreed to meet again in one month to discuss their progress. Tomasz said that he was pleased with the mediation and that he learned a lot from the process, including the importance of good communication and negotiation skills.

Mediation is especially well suited for SMEs because it is informal, inexpensive and quick. Unlike larger businesses, an SME is less able to survive a prolonged dispute or pay legal costs associated with a lawsuit. Also, many of the disputes which SMEs face are not of a legal nature and could not be solved in the courts. Mediation will continue to have a role in shaping reforms that foster and assist small business.

GEORGIAN POLITICAL PARTIES FORGE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

The current government of the Republic of Georgia faces many challenges: forestalling potentially explosive ethnic conflicts, rebuilding a decayed municipal infrastructure, and instituting a plan of democratization through local government elections. These challenges are daunting, but not impossible, thanks to the efforts of the current progressive Georgian parliament.

Working in cooperation with Speaker of the Parliament Zurab Zhvania, Partners- Georgia was able to bring together a group of parliamentarians from various political parties in Likani, Georgia, this December for a three-day workshop on negotiation skills. This program, sponsored by the United States Information Agency, was designed to provide parliamentarians with a chance to enhance their negotiation skills as well as to outline principles of managing effective meetings. Law Professor Charles Wiggins, who teaches negotiation at the University of San Diego, led the training.

The lively discussions generated during workshop simulations and exercises had a two-fold function. On one level, they helped to hone participants' negotiation skills, which should prove useful in dealing more effectively with members of opposing political parties, government branches, NGOs, mass media, and other international organizations. Even more importantly, the workshop generated a sense of cooperation between members of diverse political parties, and served to enhance relationships, which will benefit future work in the Georgian parliament.

In a survey conducted at the end of the session, participants stated they would use newly-acquired skills to work more effectively with internal organizations, mass media, commissions and parliamentary delegations. They also believed they would use a new approach in conceiving and defining internal and external politics, preparing for elections, acknowledging self-behavior in a group, and in improving personal relationships. All of the participants benefited from Partners' interactive training style, and recommended future trainings for other party members. Partners-Georgia will continue to host trainings for political leaders during the coming year.

PARLIAMENT TRAINS ON CAMERA

A short video documentary captures Partners-Georgia's training of Members of the Georgian Parliament.

Excited by the prospect of newly elected Members of the Georgian Parliament receiving conflict management skill training, Jay Rymeski of Current Communications, committed his time and skills to producing a documentary on The Transfer of Conflict Management Technology. In front of his camera, Members of Parliament discussed the importance of applying the new skills to their political responsibilities.

The short documentary when completed will include footage of the training program and interviews with participating Members of Parliament, political leaders, and the Director of Partners-Georgia, Vano Matchavariani. The video captures the attitudes and reactions of officials to a new democratic conflict management process.

CITIZENS CLASH IN CHINTULOVA

The reallocation of state property to citizens in Bulgaria is a slow process, often subject to allegations of favoritism and corruption. This is true for small plots of agricultural land and for huge state monopolies. In Chintulovo, a small village near Sliven, a controversial land redistribution policy nearly led to violent confrontations between citizens.

Arable land is paramount to the livelihood of Chintulovo's farmers, and many had hoped the reallocation of state property would benefit the local economy. But a number of citizens complained that the land was unfairly divided. The fact that land was doled out in closed, private meetings led to charges of bribery and discrimination. The situation became so heated that a number of near-violent clashes occurred between recipients of property and citizens who felt excluded from the process.

Citizens soon organized to protest the land redistribution, and to find a way to avoid violence over the issue. Hoping that outside pressure would lead to a reversal of the existing policy, fifty inhabitants of Chintulovo signed a letter requesting assistance and sent it to the mayor of the nearby town of Sliven. Sliven's mayor turned to Partners-Bulgaria's Community Dialogue Group (CDG), a group of representatives from all sectors of Sliven society which regularly addresses community issues. The CDG sent a working group to Chintulovo to investigate the problem and to meet with all involved parties.

The CDG convened a meeting of representatives from all sectors of the village and facilitated a round table dialogue in which all parties were able to express their concerns. The discussion led to an agreement in which the local government consented to reverse its previous land distribution pronouncement, and agreed to institute a new, open land distribution policy. Under the new policy, distribution would be determined on an equal basis, with no preferential treatment given to personal or business relations. It would also be done publicly, in a process facilitated by the CDG delegation. The agreement was signed by municipal and citizen representatives.

Citizens of Chintulovo learned the value of citizen participation, managed to reverse a decision that affected the livelihood of the community, and prevented incidents of violence.

PARTNERS' CENTER HIGHLIGHTS

Bulgaria

The staff of Sliven Women's Prison received training in team building and communication. * Pleven's NGO Center and the Family Planning Association learned cooperative planning and problem solving techniques. * With funding from USAID, sixty local government representatives in Sofia were schooled in facilitation skills. * In Borovets, Partners facilitated a meeting of 200 government and Parliament members, funded by the Vtora Pobeda Foundation. * The SEGA Foundation sponsored team building workshops for members of the United Roma Union in Sliven. * Teachers from the Central Teachers Institute learned new conflict resolution and mediation skills. * The Youth and Children's Committee paid for a training in communication skills for orphaned children. * The above trainings were facilitated and led by Partners' trainers Mitko Marinov, Ventseslav Panchev, Zhenya Kolibanska and Ivelin Nikolov.

Czech Republic

Unemployed Romas embarked on a long-term program to learn communication, negotiation, and other employment skills. * Teacher groups honed their cross-cultural communication skills as part of a training program entitled Against Racism and Intolerance. * The Open Society Fund sponsored a series of teacher trainings in communication skills and drug abuse prevention as part of an alternative education and school development project. * Partners, and a delegation of other NGOs and state institutions, made a presentation to the Czech Senate concerning the prevention of ethnic conflicts. * A presentation describing parent-teen mediation methods was made to high school teachers and students in Prague. * Czech trainers and presenters included Dana Rabinakova, Alice Hamplova, Tatjana Siskova, Helena Stohrova, Petra Pekarkova, and Pavel Kriz.

Georgia

Members of the Citizen's Union political party participated in work sessions aimed at improving their communication, negotiation, and group management skills. * Georgian trainers enhanced their range of capability by observing and assisting as American trainer Charles Wiggins tutored members of the Georgian Parliament in mediation and negotiation. * Tbilisi's staff includes trainers Lela Giorgobiana and Sopiko Shubladze, Director Ivane Matchavariani, and new Administrator Irakli Vetsko.

Hungary

The Ministry of Environmental Protection organized a public debate facilitated by Partners, between citizens, environmental organizations, power station representatives, and industrial plant owners, over a law demanding fees for violation of environmental pollution standards. * Upon request from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Partners prepared a tri-city survey on human rights and the Hungarian police as part of a three-year European Union initiative entitled Human Rights and the Police, 1998-2000. * Partners presented details about its ethnic work at a conference organized by the Hungarian Government to examine the status of Romas. * Land rights around a lake was the topic of mediation in Pasca. * In Szeged, a mediation/collective problem solving program was initiated to decide how to improve conditions in a poor and dangerous district. * The Partners team included Kinga Goncz, Sandor Geska, Balazs Endrei, Istvan Herbai and Janos Wagner.

Lithuania

Future teachers at the Vilnius Pedagogical Institute learned conflict resolution and communication skills. * Cross-cultural skills trainings for Russian, Polish and Lithuanian high school students continued, sponsored by the Open Society Fund-Lithuania and the King Badouin Foundation of Belgium. * In Bialostok, Poland, an academic course on negotiation continued for students from the Management and Finance University. * Trainings were performed for mediators from Labor Exchange offices all over Lithuania. * In Klaipeda, a meeting for NGO leaders and local government administrators was facilitated, using funding from the Democracy Commission of the US Embassy in Lithuania, and the PHARE Democracy Program. * Active staff and trainers included Juozas Lakis, Jurate Tamosaityte, Kristina Maulyte, Roma Pivoriene, Daiva Racelyte, and Saulius Samulevicius.

Poland

In Belgrade, a training-for-trainers in negotiations, team work, and leadership was launched for the newly opened School for Social Action. * A successful fee-based mediator training was offered for participants from the business, law, and NGO sectors. * Contracts were signed with Agricultural Cooperative Development International (ACDI) and the Polish National Chamber of Construction to conduct mediation trainings for employees. * Participating trainers included Maciej Tanski, Ilona Ilowiecka, and Bohdan Roznowski, as well as Slovak Director Dusan Ondrusek.

Romania

Ana Vasilache was chosen to direct Partners-Romania Foundation.

Slovak Republic

Strategic planning meetings were facilitated for the Children of Slovakia Foundation. * Sponsored by the Foundation for a Civil Society, a program on leadership, organizational development, and management was conducted for local NGO and community representatives. * Students studying social work at Comenius University were trained in communication and other skills. * A lecture series on Conflict and Tensions in Residential Settings was presented to part-time students from correctional facilities. * In collaboration with the Anton Tunega Foundation, a set of trainings was organized for the Slovak coalition of democratic political parties, including teaching public relations skills to mayors and state officials, and facilitating a conference on health and women's issues. * Director Ondrusek gave a number of presentations on nonprofit issues at Johns Hopkins University and around Slovakia. * The list of staff and trainers includes Dusan Ondrusek, Vladimir Labath, Gabriel Bianchi, Kaja Mikova, Natalia Kusnierikova, Jana Pruzinska, Kalka Pauliniova and Ales Bednarik.

Partners-Network

Partners-Hungary hosted a conference for Partners' international staff, sponsored by the PHARE Democracy Program and the National Forum Foundation. Representatives from each Partners Center attended the conference, which provided information exchange sessions, advanced trainings to enhance trainer skills, and field visits to Partners' projects in Hungary, including Pacsa and Nagykanizsa. * Partners-Slovakia and Partners-Czech participated in a training for trainers workshop entitled Coping with Violence,

led by Regional Coordinator Ilana Shapiro and trainers from George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR). Trainers from both countries discussed the advances and declines in Alternative Dispute Resolution programs in their respective countries. (see photo) * Under a grant from the United States Institute for Peace, Professor Charles Wiggins of the University of San Diego Law Faculty led a series of peace building course development work-shops for academics in Lithuania, Hungary and Slovakia.

PEER MEDIATION TAKES OFF IN SLOVAK SCHOOLS

High schools in Bratislava are not immune to the problems of urban schools worldwide, including violence among students.

Partners-Slovakia is focusing on the prevention of violent disputes by establishing peer mediation programs.

According to Program Manager Ales Bednarik, the program is important because "it introduces a new style of thinking to the Slovak educational system, in which students take responsibility for solving problems, and teachers are more aware that students have the maturity, creativity, and will to resolve conflicts."

First, Partners trains teachers and counselors who work with youth-at-risk. Then they, in turn, teach students how to be third-party mediators, who neutrally facilitate negotiation between disputing fellow students. (The mediation model used by students is essentially the same as the one used by Partners in its commercial and community mediation services, although students generally adapt a less structured, more informal approach). Partners works with teachers to implement the program, offering follow-up training, coaching of student mediators, and guidance on outreach.

Since the program's inception, students have mediated a variety of teenage issues. Not all of the conflicts concern pressing societal issues - in one case, a student mediated a dispute how to spend funds raised for the school graduation celebration. While some cases may seem parochial, the simultaneous goals of the program - to teach students a framework that is relevant to their future, and to seed prevention expertise in schools as a buffer against predicted increases in violence and gang activity - are lofty enough.

Partners-Slovakia has established four functioning peer mediation programs in Bratislava schools. Although peer mediation is still a new concept in Slovakia, a number of other schools and universities have asked Partners to implement programs in the coming year.

[Go to Partners for Democratic Change's homepage](#)