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News in Brief

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USAID Partnerships and Training Project for Russia and Ukraine to be Managed by IREX

IREX has entered into a three-year cooperative agreement with the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to manage the USAID Institutional Partnerships and Training Project. This is the first major cooperative effort between USAID and IREX.

The program's aim is to strengthen the capacity of Russian and Ukrainian educational and professional institutions to provide better training and membership services.

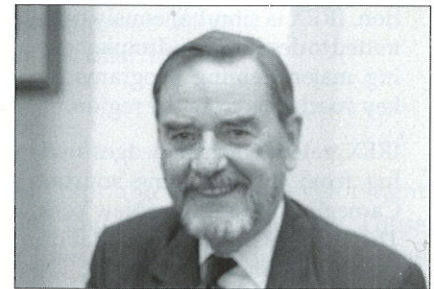
Through partnerships with American educational institutions, professional associations, and trade organizations, the project is designed to strengthen the institutional bases of a growing civil society in Russia and Ukraine and the development of democratic norms and a free market economy.

Under the project, IREX will assist USAID in the selection, monitoring, and provision of technical assistance and public information support to some 30 partnerships between US universities and professional associations and their counterparts in Russia and Ukraine over the next two years. Joint projects will focus on the critical areas of democratization and public administration, economic restructuring, health, energy, environment, social sector restructuring, humanitarian and PVO assistance, agribusiness, and housing and urban finance.

Submission of applications for initial grants is already complete and the competitive process for the awarding of the grants has begun at IREX. It should be completed by January 1995 and announcements about applications for future grants will be made later next year.

McKinney H. Russell, former Counselor of the United States Information Agency, will serve as Project Director (see article, right).

Since the 1960s IREX has maintained a constant commitment to developing high-quality working partnerships between American specialists and their Russian, Ukrainian, and other colleagues in the region at all levels: individual, institutional, and intergovernmental. By supporting cooperative professional development programs maintaining critical access to the region during the most difficult periods of the Cold War, IREX kept the channels of communication open and laid



McKinney Russell to Serve as Project Director

McKinney H. Russell has joined IREX to serve as Project Director of the USAID-funded Partnership and Training Program. Mr. Russell retired from the United States Information Agency (USIA) this year after more than 30 years of distinguished service.

As Counselor of USIA from 1991 to 1993, he supervised the regional area directors in charge of all overseas operations at over 200 USIS posts. A Career Minister in the Foreign Service, he earlier served as Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs and USIA Director in the Soviet Union, Germany, Brazil, Spain, and China.

Mr. Russell played a key role in launching USIA's cultural and information centers in the former USSR and in establishing the Edmund S. Muskie Fellowship program, which enables young NIS specialists to pursue US graduate study in a number of public policy professions. In the academic year 1993-1994, he was Diplomat-in-Residence and a visiting professor at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. ■

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E-Mail and Internet in Southeastern Europe

An IREX Overview

by Ian Watson (watson@info.irex.org)

From the chaotic, exhaust-choked boulevards of central Bucharest it takes twenty minutes to reach a quiet academic building housing one of Romania's central computer nodes. In a bare, concrete-walled room, computers send and receive messages from all around the world through a phone line to Western Europe. The Internet has reached Romania. But has it changed the lives of individual scholars and professionals? Can Americans yet e-mail their colleagues across Southeastern Europe? This summer, Ian Watson, a linguistics and computer specialist, traveled through the region to answer these questions for IREX.

Every country in the world has access to the Internet, but not every country has affordable access. With an account on an American university computer system, or a commercial service like CompuServe or America Online, you could actually be "on the Internet" from anywhere in the world. From Southeastern Europe, for example, with a computer, a modem, and a telephone, you could make an international phone call to your local access number back home, log in, and send e-mail. But you would likely have to pay too much for the phone call to make it worthwhile.

Networking becomes affordable when universities and private companies start local nodes for their scholars or paying clients, where the messages of many users are pooled. Transmitting all these messages together makes more efficient use of international phone time. Through the use of such local and national networks, the marginal cost of sending one e-mail message falls almost to zero.

Therefore, e-mail access for scholars, individuals, and non-profit organizations in Southeastern Europe depends on the initiative and enterprise of individuals in the academic, government, non-profit, and commercial sectors of each country in setting up such e-mail nodes.

A new Internet node must make telephone calls to at least one other Internet node to transmit messages. The best way to do this is to permanently lease a telephone line to the other node. For example, many Southeastern European countries' academic computer networks have run their first line to the University of Vienna in Austria. A low-capacity line costs a few thousand dollars per month. To afford these links, academic networks must have steady funding, and commercial networks must have many customers.

Some of the countries of Southeastern Europe have met these challenges more successfully than others. Specifically, it's possible to reach many people by e-mail in Croatia and Slovenia; some people in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia; a few users in Bosnia; and virtually no one in Albania.

Country Reviews

In **Croatia** and **Slovenia**, computer network development is on a level approaching that of Western Europe. These countries are the only ones whose networks have purchased enough international "bandwidth" (high-capacity leased phone lines to the West) to offer advanced, "real-time" Internet features such as Gopher and the World Wide Web. The University of Maribor in Slovenia is alone in the region in opening Internet access not just to faculty but also to all its students—as most American universities do. In both countries, many scholars already use e-mail, and those who don't can get accounts fairly simply.

Croatia and Slovenia have succeeded because their governments, since independence, have committed to making significant investments in improving and publicizing the academic computing systems they inherited from the old Yugoslav network. Almost all Croatian networking is operated by the Croatian Ministry of Science and Technology. Slovenia's high standard of living and rate of computer ownership made it especially ripe for networking. It now has separate networks for academic, non-profit, and commercial users.

Serbia is a special case. Before sanctions, its computer networks were comparable to Croatia's. Sanctions have not affected telephone links to Serbia, and thus did not prohibit the international transmission of e-mail. But sanctions have made it virtually impossible for Serbia's network administrators to continue the relationships with the European Internet community that ensure smooth traffic flow. For starters, sanctions have prohibited the import of computer hardware and spare parts—the life-blood of any active network. And ultimately they have made the cost of international telephone calls so high relative to the Serbian economy that government support for academic e-mail has been cut drastically. Serbia therefore manages only a trickle of Internet traffic, which will likely increase only as sanctions are relaxed.

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As for **Bosnia**, the on-going conflict has precluded substantial computer network developments. One bright spot, however, is a network called ZAMIR (For Peace). ZAMIR, in cooperation with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, maintains a fragile network link between Switzerland and a mini-node in Sarajevo which reportedly has 150 Internet-addressable users. ZAMIR also has nodes in Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia, and offers e-mail and conferences to its largely peace- and human rights-oriented user base. In a region where computers are sometimes seen as symbolic adornments and network operators can be loath to increase their traffic, the manager of the ZAMIR node in Zagreb prods Croatian users to report to the network on their activities. Through the Internet, their first-person accounts of issues such as refugee resettlement have been reposted on networks around the world.

In **Albania** there are no indigenous e-mail nodes, although the Tirana offices of some international organizations do place phone calls to nodes in other countries to download their mail. At a cost of roughly \$1 per minute to Italy, this is an expensive and sometimes painstaking task, affordable only to the deep-pocketed. Several groups have expressed interest in supporting a local node in Tirana, and IREX recently started a computerized forum for those interested in developing Albanian networking (for information, write to ALBNET-L@info.irex.org).

Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Romania each have locally-based Internet nodes both in the academic community, and in the non-profit or commercial sectors. Each country supports at least one low-capacity leased line to the West. However, at the most prominent universities in these countries, e-mail access tends to be a privilege restricted to a few faculty members, usually in computer science and the natural sciences. Provincial universities may have little or no e-mail access at all. The commercial networks are not sufficiently developed to provide a cheap enough alternative means of access for individuals. When people in these countries try to gain e-mail access for themselves, they often get frustrated.



These latter three countries have struggled to answer basic questions about academic network design, such as:

Who will pay? Government funding is scarce. The director of one nearly computerless university computer center in the region has given up on local sources of equipment support and is pinning his hopes on proposals for over \$1 million in hardware donation from foreign organizations.

Who will manage the nodes? When embryonic Internet nodes stand to receive government allocations, foreign grants, or official status, their directors stand to gain prestige, travel, and job stability. The lure of appointment causes bitter turf wars between individuals and organizations competing for these

responsibilities and benefits, and often preaching different theories of network design. Such disputes have hobbled network development in Romania and Macedonia.

Who will be allowed to use the network? Paradoxically, academic network managers often have no incentive to attract users: since funding is not dependable enough to expand in step with demand, networks can get overloaded easily. With this disincentive to expand usage, network access becomes a guarded privilege, and many scholars who might become e-mail advocates never get a chance to try it.

Will the telephone company cooperate? One of the largest operating costs of a computer network is for telephone service, especially for leased international lines. Unfortunately, many state-run telephone utilities in Southeastern Europe have discovered the profit motive but retained an effective monopoly. Prices for many services that networks need are higher than in the United States, and response time is slow. Healthy computer networks need effective telecommunications deregulation.

Commercial networks in these countries promise some relief from these troubles. They respond to demand and market conditions rather than government funding and administrative fiat, and can therefore usually provide effective service to specific projects. For example, EUnet Bulgaria has responded to a growing user base by lowering its charges for sending international e-mail to \$0.08 per

kilobyte, or about sixteen cents a page. This is still much more than American or even Slovenian commercial services charge, but low enough so that some of Bulgaria's new private universities can afford to purchase Internet connectivity from EUnet.

Yet commercial networks still tend to attract institutional rather than individual clients (it will be some time before Bulgaria or Romania can boast the equivalent of CompuServe or America Online). And perhaps more importantly, their pay-as-you-go cost structure discourages active and creative use of networks: scholars are often loath to explore the Internet when the meter is running. So while commercial services may be more responsive and accessible, they probably cannot serve as an affordable vehicle for connecting critical masses of academic and non-governmental organization users in the region.

What does the future hold? Throughout the world, the "alumni" of academic exchange and professional internship programs often serve as a critical lobby for network access upon return to their native countries. Unfortunately, many Southeastern European scholars who learned to take e-mail for granted during a year abroad find that it is still a privilege at home. Yet it is heartening that the Internet has reached almost every country in the region, that there are no technical barriers to its spread, and that international assistance is making some headway (see box). Considering that in the beginning of 1991 only Yugoslavia had limited e-mail access, progress in the region has been very rapid. By the summer of 1994, scholars in most of the region's capital cities had a fighting chance of being able to get an e-mail account through their institution. The more people use e-mail, the more people will find out and clamor for broader and better access. If you correspond with someone in Southeastern Europe who you'd like to contact via e-mail, now is a good time to start suggesting that they find out how to connect.

Contact Information for Major Computer Networks in Southeastern Europe

Bulgaria

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The International Assistance Picture

by Tony Byrne, Senior Program Officer, and Ian Watson

Foreign assistance has targeted computer networks in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, and to a lesser extent in Croatia and Slovenia. The Soros-associated foundations have been very active: donating personal computers, funding non-profit networks, and training and supporting end-users. For example, they have brought computer labs and Internet access to over a dozen Romanian high schools, given computers and modems to a regional media outfit in Macedonia, and supported the ZAMIR network in ex-Yugoslavia.

The academic computer networks of Italy, Austria, Germany, and other European countries have provided free connection points for the leased phone lines that carry e-mail between Southeastern Europe and the heart of the European Internet. Often, they have paid the full cost of these lines. Slovenia has assisted Macedonia in the same way. European academic exchange programs such as TEMPUS have made large hardware donations to universities and have also brought Southeastern European students to study computer science at Western universities. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is reportedly developing plans to support international connectivity in Southeastern Europe, as it has already done in Ukraine.

IREX has found that international efforts could be strengthened by closer coordination, by greater attention to improving the basic computer skills of end-users, and by better follow-through. Without an effective on-site presence, some international networking assistance efforts must choose among jockeying local partners, and there is some tendency for paralysis to result.

IREX is presently seeking support to build on its contacts, alumni, and field offices in Southeastern Europe to expand network access in the region as we have begun to do in the former Soviet states. Each country in the area has its own unique needs and opportunities. IREX's objective is to cooperate with other international agencies across the region to bring broad and open network access to non-commercial constituencies, and to incorporate critical training programs into efforts to improve network infrastructure. Look for updates on these developments in future issues of *News in Brief*. ■

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Alumni News Contributions

The Alumni News Column is a regular feature which appears in each issue of the IREX *News in Brief*. We invite all past IREXers to contribute professional news, such as recent appointments, new publications, and scholarly prizes. Please indicate if publication resulted from an IREX grant.

To submit entries you may fill out the form below or send the information on a separate typewritten page. **Please enclose a recent photograph of yourself** with your name and address printed on the back. The photo will be returned to you after publication. Group photos should be accompanied by a complete listing of names of the people pictured.



Alumni News Submission Form

Name: _____

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New Address **Phone:** (____) _____

Please check a topic:

Appointments/Promotions

Awards/Honors

Retirements

New Publications

Other _____

Announcement: _____

