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REGION 8 and EAST EUROPE

History, Development and future Strategy

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What is "east Europe?"

The term "east Europe" is used in Region 8 as a non-political term for countries of the former Communist bloc, namely Albania, the Baltic States, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the states which were part of the former USSR.

When Communism ended Sections already existed in Czechoslovakia (the Section now covers the Czech and Slovak Republics), Hungary and Poland. East Germany was a special case, and development there has been left to the Germany Section. The most difficult development problems were outside these countries; in the remaining countries of the former Communist bloc; I refer to this area as "inner east Europe".

How it all began

It was the Finland Section which, by paying the dues for four members in Estonia in 1991, triggered off the moves into inner east Europe which I initiated. Why not, I thought, pay the dues for potential members in inner east Europe? In a year or so they would be able to pay for themselves (how wrong I was!).

Towards Sections-in-Development

I introduced Sections-in-Development (S-i-Ds) into Region 8 in 1983 to assist in establishing Sections. Briefly the concept, approved by the Regional Activities Board (RAB), enabled an S-i-D to be established with 20 members who would form a Committee and organise activities which would attract the 50 members needed to form a Section, which was expected to result within three years. S-i-Ds were administered and funded by Region 8.

I set out to form S-i-Ds in inner core east European countries by arranging that Region 8 would pay for 20 members and that each S-i-D would form a Committee. I expected that when formed they would provide some form of Section activities (wrong again - they never did!).

I found persons suitable to form S-i-Ds by personal recommendations from Chairmen of neighbouring Sections, and then invited the person recommended to select 19 others whose dues Region 8 would pay, and to form a Committee. In this way S-i-Ds were established in Albania, Bulgaria and Lithuania.

Diversity without unity

Due to the Region 8 initiative and to the many contacts between IEEE members (especially in Regions 1 through 6) and persons in east Europe, efforts to assist spread to a variety of sources, each acting on its own. The result of this diversity was a lack of any unified policy or sharing of experience which would have made some of what was done more effective.

As the person appointed by the Region 8 Director to be the centre for Region 8 developments in east Europe, I attempted to find out who was helping whom, but decisions had already been taken by the time I made contact, and there is no doubt that some help is being provided which I have not heard of.

The dangers of go-stop

Some Societies and some non-IEEE entities have paid dues for a limited period only - one or two years. This leads to some ill-feeling among those whose membership ends abruptly. A Moscow Section was started and ended in this way; the result was that when a Moscow Section (now the Russia Section) was founded again it took some 18 months before the Chairman was willing to make contact with Region 8.

It really is advisable that IEEE and non-IEEE entities deciding to pay dues should regard it as a long term commitment, even if this means considerably reducing the number of members who can be supported.

The unexpected

Through a meeting in London with a Ukrainian electrotechnical engineer I learned that in east Europe subordinates are not likely to be supported by those above them. Thus the culture requires that a Chairman must be very senior in the profession to receive support from senior colleagues.

Because, as I have mentioned, we were unable to make contact with the Moscow Section, I established an S-i-D in St. Petersburg. After the Moscow Section once again made contact with Region 8, and became the Russia Section, I informed the St. Petersburg Chairman that the S-i-D would become a Subsection. This rearrangement was refused because of rivalry with Moscow; St. Petersburg was not prepared to become subordinate to Moscow, and there at the moment the matter rests.

Dues and fees payments

As a very general estimate, based on experience, dues and the fee of one Society cost about one month's salary. Persons could not afford this. Our first thoughts were to have them pay a nominal amount, but this would have led to horrendous problems of local control and notification of who had paid and, because of the difficulties of transferring into hard currency, to the opening of local bank accounts which would be under IEEE control. This idea was abandoned at birth!

Completed membership applications were sent to Region 8 Treasurer Rolf Remshardt, who forwarded them to Mary Ann Hoffman in Regional Activities with an explanation of how Region 8 would pay. This system worked very well. A few applications reached Mary Ann direct from applicants, but thanks to her close co-operation with me none of these succeeded - we had no cases of Region 8 "charity"!

The way in

Few university courses mentioned on east Europe applications are on the Recognised Educational Programs (REP) list, and it would have been impossible to go through the procedure in "unknown territory" with persons who had no knowledge of the IEEE system. Accordingly I arranged with Admissions and Advancements Committee Chairman Forrest Staffanson that applications paid for by Region 8 would be marked "Region 8" and A&A would accept them even if the grading were no higher than Associate. This system also worked very well.

Development falters

By 1994 it was becoming clear that the Region 8 annual expenditure of around \$5 000 was not achieving the expected results. There were no indications of how long it might take for members to be able to pay for themselves; S-i-Ds were not functioning as entities; some members did not accept invitations

to renew membership at Region 8 expense. It was decided that payment would continue for those who applied, but no new members paid for by Region 8 would be accepted.

There were suggestions in Region 8 and in RAB for special low dues and fees with reduced services; for instance, a group of four members with publications sent to only one of them to be shared with the others. So far no low dues arrangements have been implemented.

A change of direction - the library projects

Ideas evolved in 1993 for sending IEEE publications to libraries in east Europe without charge for the material or for freight. Funds came from Region 8 and from members in the Region who were invited, through the Region 8 News, to make voluntary contributions with their Dues Renewals. Region 8 promised to contribute \$1 for each \$1 which members gave, up to a maximum of \$5 000. In 1993 members voluntarily contributed around \$5 000, producing a total fund of \$10 000.

To assess which libraries could best use publications I sent a questionnaire to 153 libraries; the replies which I have received (59 to date) provide an invaluable database. So far it has been used for three projects:

- (a) The supply of Society publications for the past ten years on microfiche and for the next five years probably on paper. Mike Adler is co-ordinating this project, in which some 18 IEEE Societies are participating. Charles Turner and I selected the 15 libraries to receive the material.
- (b) To send to every library which had returned a questionnaire a box of books no longer needed and provided free by the IEEE Press. Region 8 will pay the freight (estimated at \$5 000 to \$10 000).
- (c) Inviting members in Region 8, through the Region 8 News, to send their unwanted IEEE publications to libraries nominated by Charles Turner, with Region 8 paying the freight if asked to do so. Charles Turner is co-ordinating this project.

A problem in sending material is what information to provide on the packaging to enable it to pass through the Customs at least expense to the recipient, whom we ask to pay any duty. I have asked recipients to let me know how this should be done, but we have some anxiety that, if too much duty is demanded, the material may be left in Customs.

Co-operation with the (UK) Institution of Electrical Engineers

It is IEEE policy to co-operate with the IEE, which is seeking to expand its influence outside the UK. There is an IEE/IEEE Centre in Hungary supported by Region 8 funds. IEE/IEEE is providing \$1 000 a year to the Popov Society, initially for three years, starting in 1994. An IEE/IEEE Centre in the Ukraine is next in line for Region 8 financial support. followed by an IEE Centre in Belarus.

"Small" Sections

When more persons in east Europe can pay their own dues they may struggle to the total of 50 members necessary to form a Section, but find it impossible to enlarge further. A major reason for forming a Section is to arrange activities which will attract more members, and so enable the Section to expand; members can receive only limited benefits from a Section of 50. In addition, the average re-imburement of a Section representative attending each of the two meetings of the Region 8 Committee every year is \$1 100, so each new Section increases the overload on Region 8 funds. We bear in mind that, with the

Region 8 assessment of \$11, a Section needs 200 members before Region 8 funds break even.

For these reasons Region 8 has adopted a policy that the Director is unlikely to approve applications to form Sections with less than 100 members; this policy is not confined to east Europe. Regional Activities is aware of the policy, and refer applications to me, for consideration by the Region 8 Director.

Paid assistance

Charles Turner has arranged for a senior engineer in Moscow to be paid for assisting in the development of the Russia Section. Similar arrangements may be made elsewhere. Because salaries are so low in east Europe the fee is not much in equivalent hard currency.

Communication

I have not encountered any problems in using English when communicating with east Europe by printed word. The level of competence is high. However, when I occasionally have to phone to obtain a fax connection I do not expect to encounter an English speaker.

It is often a problem to send faxes; persistence, sometimes over more than one day, can provide success. In addition faxes from east Europe suffer in transmission more often than faxes from west Europe or from the US. I do not know how widespread e-mail is, as I am not myself on e-mail.

Where now?

Short term:

*We must encourage countries we are supporting to find funds from government or from local companies or international companies operating in their country.

*Our supply of free publications will continue.

*We shall be alert to other means of cost effective support.

*We shall consider forming a Baltic Section, although we have conflicting reports from colleagues in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on whether this might be prevented by political, cultural and language differences.

*We shall continue to maximise the funding available.

*We must retain a fair balance between Region 8 financial support to east Europe and the financial support given to the rest of the Region.

Longer term, we must remain alert to where all this is leading. There is an enormous potential membership in east Europe when salaries start to rise to west Europe levels, as we must anticipate that they will do eventually. Region 8 will then become a well IEEE populated area stretching 15 000 kms (9 500 miles) from Lisbon to Vladivostock, and from Kirkeness in north Norway to Cape Town. Such a huge area would have to split into two Regions.

I believe that this will be the outcome of what the Finland Section started in 1991, and I leave this thought as a reward to whomever has read this far.