

## **BEYOND WESTERN EUROPE**

From the early 1970s ROCC (then Redifon) has been a computer supplier to Eastern Europe. The West's desire to reach out to the East in order to thaw the cold war was enacted through a political initiative called 'detente' and reciprocated by the East's need for modern western technology. As a result, in 1972 ROCC granted a licence for the manufacture of its original SEECHECK proprietary computer systems to the Polish MERA combine in Warsaw.

This licensing agreement was then followed by the opening of direct ROCC operations in the then Czecho-Slovakia in 1975, Hungary and USSR in 1977. By 1990, all of these arrangements had produced around 2,000 users in Europe and Asia. During the late 1980s, ROCC was also a major PC reseller in Eastern Europe.

Trading with Eastern Europe in the '70s and '80s was fraught with difficulties equally political and economic. But at the working level, relationships with and between people whose tasks were to deliver working information processing systems often under near-impossible conditions were excellent. ROCC developed a reputation for making the impossible happen and ROCC trained a very large number of engineers, specialists and end-users in the workings of these systems. These people very often achieved almost heroic success with their ROCC systems. While in the West surveys were showing that less than 25% of computer investment delivered any measurable return, in Eastern Europe people were stretching systems to their limits and beyond to achieve every last penny of return. Because of this phenomenon, Eastern Europe proved to be a very useful input for ROCC's product development.

The collapse of the Wall, the subsequent dismantling of communism and the re-definition of Central and Eastern Europe were at one level reasons for euphoric celebration, the old political systems were very long past their sell-by dates, and at another level cause for restructuring our work in line with the great changes that were underway. In simple human terms, living at and through the revolutions in Eastern Europe have been totally unforgettable and enormously happy.

Nowhere have the changes been more profound than in Prague, the headquarters of ROCC's Central European operations. Before the revolution, it was a beautiful drab, somehow sad city, frozen in aspic, hauntingly echoing past faded glories. Today it is vibrant, fun, young,

energetic, revitalised, repainted, repaired and more beautiful than ever. Prague is one of Europe's most exciting cities.

With democracy has come increasing economic prosperity. There is money to invest in new information systems and a strategy to update to the best West European standards. Although some computing professionals and specialists have returned from exile, most of the new development is being masterminded by those who struggled most under the old dispensations. Many of today's IT Directors were trained in Crawley years ago as young specialists.

They have opportunities now that they could scarcely have dreamt of just a few years ago. The pace of change is astonishing. Old state organisations have been broken-up and privatised. Old cultures of command economy, bureaucratic administration and mindlessness have been torn out and replaced by market economies, enterprise and initiative and clear focus. The results can be seen everywhere.

ROCC's clients, users and staff have been at the forefront of these changes. The most modern state of the art technology is being installed and used. As technology generation gaps are hurdled, users are becoming proficient in the most advanced technology and once again are stretching the technology not because of lack of choice but because of challenging goals that they have set.

Change management on such a massive scale is extremely difficult and although excellent progress is being made one should underestimate the challenges that lie ahead. ROCC is well positioned in these emerging markets and well equipped to play a positive role in working partnerships with its clients to achieve worthwhile benefits to mutual satisfaction.

Years of working with people in Central and Eastern Europe have provided not only insights into other cultures but also shared values in the potential for excellent information systems to contribute to contemporary developments in improving economic performance.