

# European SMEs Use Funds to Share Knowledge and Stimulate Growth



Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner Telegrafía successfully applied to the Leonardo Da Vinci programme for €18,000 (U.S.\$23,000). The funds were awarded to support an exchange programme dedicated to sharing human resources experience, knowledge, and skills.

Changes are taking place in the development of the Slovak Republic economy as it attempts to increase its employment levels and develop its human resource skills. According to "Time to Move Up a Gear," the European Commission's 2006 annual progress report on growth and jobs, gross domestic product per capita was at 52 per cent of the European Union (EU) average in 2004. However, the report shows that strong economic growth has not been reflected in the labour market in 2004, when the unemployment rate remained the second highest in the EU at 18.2 per cent.

One of the ways companies are trying to create a more skilled and efficient workforce in Slovakia is by looking at the area of human resource development and planning. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are beginning to recognise that increasing the employability of local citizens allows them to use an existing human resource more effectively.

One such company—Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner Telegrafía—is a leader in the IT market in Slovakia. The 130-strong team specialises in engineering services for radio-communication technology and information and communications technology outsourcing. Telegrafía wanted to expand its highly skilled workforce and help develop the competitiveness of the local economy.

The company decided training and education needed to be at the heart of the drive to achieve these goals. Telegrafía teamed up with three other Slovakian organisations to create a group dedicated to sharing human resource knowledge and business intelligence.

The Technical University of Košice, the local and regional government of Košice, and training organisation Astra participated in formulating an exchange project that would allow Slovakia to benefit from the experiences and best practices of European SMEs in this field. Iveta Orbánová, Project Manager at Telegrafía, says: "The main goal of this project is to share experience, knowledge, and skills in human resource development in SMEs. Using this knowledge, we hope to create more workplaces and increase employment rates in our region."

Following the advice of a European Union Grants Advisor (EUGA) consultant, Telegrafía successfully applied to the Leonardo Da Vinci programme for €18,000 (U.S.\$22,800). Using the funds, the group embarked on the exchange project between October 2005 and January 2007. Over the course of the project, delegates from the group will make 12 visits to SMEs in Greece, Italy, and Malta. The partners hope to establish a base of international contacts to cooperate on future projects, publications, study materials, and vocational courses. In addition, a discussion forum will focus on issues such as gender equality and equal opportunities for women in relation to higher managerial positions.

The Leonardo Da Vinci vocational training action programme is part of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme. Its primary objective is to respond to the demand for new skills and help cope with the problem of unemployment in Europe. It supports innovative initiatives for promoting business knowledge throughout Europe, funding overseas work placements with the goal of improving training across the continent.

## EUGA Fast Facts

Microsoft® believes that technology can play a key role in economic and social growth. It is working in partnership with technology companies, banks, consulting agencies, and other organisations to help more SMEs obtain government funding through its European Union Grants Advisor (EUGA) programme. Through this programme, SMEs and local and regional governments increase their awareness and understanding of EU funds as well as take advantage of a facilitated application process should they wish to apply for funds that they are eligible for.

## Lisbon Agenda – Fast Facts

In March 2000, the European Council (EC) set a goal for the European Union (EU) to prepare its transition to a knowledge-based economy and society. This initiative known as the Lisbon Agenda, promotes better policies for the information society, and research and development, and encourages structural reform for competitiveness and innovation. The EU recognises that a powerful way to achieve this is to fund IT awareness and training schemes, research and development, and support new business start-up.