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Business goes “back to school” - CEED successfully launches pilot training programs in Varna and Burgas

The Center for Entrepreneurship and Executive Development (CEED) – the newest SEAF venture in Southeast Europe – has successfully broken ground in Bulgaria at the end of last year. In late November, the new Center hosted its first class in Marketing for young and dynamic entrepreneurs. The pilot CEED training took place in a very contemporary training facility on the Black Sea coast city of Varna, the third largest city in the country.

This first module with the working title “Entrepreneurial Toolbox” is part of the CEED training program for business owners and private sector managers. The theme of the workshop was: *“Marketing – luxury or means for survival and growth”*. Instructor and key presenter of the lecture was Rumyana Kalcheva, Managing Director and majority owner of Market Test (www.mtest.bg) - a leading Bulgarian market research and consulting company. Mrs. Kalcheva is a well known research specialist with broad experience, years of field work and applied knowledge in marketing, advertising and PR. She herself is a successful entrepreneur who has been through the “ups and downs” of the real business starting her own company some 10 years ago.

The CEED business offering was very well accepted by the local business community. Twelve local entrepreneurs registered and attended the class, which turned out to be a lively discussion about leading marketing techniques, roles and methods of market segmentation as well as best PR/advertising practices. The combination of pure economic theory mixed with the taste of “real life” examples and case studies, attracted the audience and left the door open for more brainstorming and conversation even during the break out sessions.

Some of the participants included representatives from leading local companies and small business working in the area of real estate, household appliance manufacturing, healthcare, finance and other. Upon successful completion of the CEED training each “student” received their Certificate of Achievement which became their first CEED award in a series of entrepreneurial toolbox classes in strategy, finance, and accounting scheduled for later this year in Bulgaria.

To build on the success in Varna, Nikolay Yarmov, the local CEED Executive Director, rolled out and repeated the training in the neighboring harbor town of Burgas. Within a few weeks of the official start, Mr. Yarmov and his team delivered the second CEED class and executive training program. The subject was slightly modified to address the needs of the local small business and entrepreneurs. *“Market segmentation and positioning”* was the theme of the second CEED delivery which took place just days before Christmas and included some twenty participants from all over the region. Car dealers, pension fund managers, bankers and traders came together to share experience, learn from each other and exchange ideas for their future business operations. As always, networking and business contacts were part of the training model thus allowing companies to build links, share their wisdom and prospect for new business. With the aim of CEED expanding regionally and becoming the hub for cross-border cooperation and business networking, the Bulgarian CEED graduates will soon have the opportunity to network with their colleagues from Romania, Serbia, Macedonia and Croatia.



“Working locally, thinking regionally and dealing globally, this is the natural trend for true entrepreneurship development” says Nikolay Yarmov, CEED Executive Director for Bulgaria. “All we need is to stay the course and keep track with the constantly changing business environment which could only happen with solid business background and education. This is what we offer at CEED – business knowledge and networking.”

The Center for Entrepreneurship and Executive Development, CEED, is a new program designed to help provide much-needed training to entrepreneurs and middle-level executives of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). CEED is being established in the Balkan region by the Small Enterprise Assistance Funds (SEAF) with key support and sponsorship from USAID. The Center’s purpose is to ‘Accelerate the Growth of Emerging Businesses Through Know-How and Networks.’

SEAF is a global investment firm focused on providing growth capital and operational support to businesses in emerging markets and those underserved by traditional sources of capital. SEAF selectively makes structured debt and equity investments in locally owned enterprises with high growth potential. Based in Washington D.C., SEAF (www.seaf.com) invests in more than 20 countries around the world through an international network of 15 offices in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Investors include a cross section of public and private institutions, including several of the international finance institutions, local pension funds, insurance companies, banks and family offices.