

Eisenhower Fellowships – 2009 Multi Nation Program
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As the senior coordinator of foreign trade programs at the Ministry of Environment and Water, Zsófia Cseh is a leader in promoting corporate engagement and economic cooperation through external trade activities and via investments with a focus on innovation, research and development, and technology transfer. She coordinates regional projects involving small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), governmental bodies, and professional associations. Through these projects, the Ministry aims to achieve global solutions in environmental and water technologies and services.

Ms. Cseh came to the fellowship with the following objectives: to understand American small and medium-sized enterprises and their place in the U.S. economy; to examine how best to implement green technologies and sustainable development as part of SMEs' daily business; to gain insight into the social and economic role of green companies in the U.S.; to learn about best practices in the field of corporate social responsibility and green education from the perspective of SMEs; and to visit institutions, both in the academic and private sector, that focus on green research and development activity.

Ms. Cseh visited corporations, NGOs, consulting firms, government agencies, and universities to explore development opportunities for small and medium sized companies which ensure their long-term sustainability. She also attended the 2009 Milken Institute Global Conference which drew some 3,000 leaders from the worlds of business and finance, philanthropy, government, healthcare, education and news media to discuss, debate, and deliberate the most difficult challenges facing the world today.

One thing Ms. Cseh was assured of on her fellowship was the impact of SMEs on the U.S. economy. SMEs play a vital role in maintaining a national competitive advantage, particularly in the development of a knowledge-based economy. At the heart of a knowledge-based economy are encouragement of innovation and establishment of an entrepreneurial culture. However, in both Hungary and the U.S. access to financial resources is a common difficulty. The biggest surprise for Ms. Cseh was the fact that nonprofit organizations in the U.S. are doing the same work she does in a governmental position; she believes there is a lack of nonprofit organizations in Hungary, and nonprofits are an important bridge between governmental bodies and private enterprises.

Ms. Cseh's fellowship led to several viable outcomes. She plans to follow the model championed by Byron Kennard, Executive Director of the Center for Small Business and Environment. He believes that entrepreneurial creativity and drive can protect the environment while creating jobs and economic growth. She also plans on arranging a Vermont-Hungary Sustainable Summit next year. She saw several parallels between the state of Vermont and Hungary due to their similar sizes and commitments to green technologies, sustainable development, and the creation of a stakeholder environment. Lastly, she is going to work with ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability in Oakland, CA to help them open an office in Budapest.