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Know your neighbours, neighbour **POLAND TAKES LEAD**

I remember as it were today: During Call Centre Expo 2003 in Birmingham, the panelists of the offshore outsourcing seminar were discussing best countries for call center offshoring. They vividly discussed advantages and disadvantages of India, the Philippines and South Africa. None of them mentioned Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, or Romania. When I asked about it, one of the panelists resolutely explained that none of these countries were present in international comparisons. So they could not be included in the decision-making process.

Only five years later Ernst & Young released "The 2006 European Attractiveness Survey", which indicates that Poland ranks fifth (after USA, China, Germany and India) as a location for foreign investments. Poland takes the lead in job creation, with 37.745 jobs announced. The country is leading a group of countries attracting large, mostly manufacturing projects. Propensity to invest in call center business located in Poland is lagging behind investments in manufacturing. Poland and the Czech Republic got the seventh rank as the preferred location for call center investments. Only five years had passed when the picture radically changed. Poland

and other countries of the CEE region still seem to remain the land of undiscovered opportunities for both nearshore outsourcing and setting up call centers with a focus on local population.

Why is that? Because we still do not know each other when it comes to exchanging professional visits, participating in joint seminars and less formal meetings or sharing know-how. I remember how surprised I was in 2002, seeing telemarketers older than 40 years of age in Frankfurt (Oder) and similar sign of surprise on the face of a German consultant who went with me to an outsourcing call center in Warsaw: „Well, how young they are! But the rest looks the same“. I remember a German journalist who was full of doubts as German-language capacities of Polish operators go, and their relief when they could see and hear for themselves what kind of German language operators in Katowice and Wrocław speak. There is no substitute for direct experience. So, if you are searching for outsourcing call center services and wish to test one of the CEE call centers on a par with German, Austrian or Swiss call centers, better come and see for yourself. Nothing should prevent you from knowing your neighbours.