Another initiative is the World Information Network for Exports (WIN Exports) — a computerized international sourcing system. It currently lists more than 24 000 Canadian firms and provides a convenient and straightforward mechanism for determining precisely what Canadian goods are available on international markets at any given time.

Natural Affinities

Asked to identify the countries with the greatest potential for Canada's future exports, Canadians pick Central and Eastern Europe more often than any other market in the world.

The reasons are clear. The countries in the region are opening the doors to private enterprise, and to markets that have been starved of Western technology, management, goods and services for many years. There are strong "natural affinities" between what Canadian business can provide, and what is needed in the region, according to J. Reid Henry, First Secretary (Commercial) at the Canadian Embassy in Moscow. "We are seeing some of the best and the brightest of Canadian entrepreneurs and business people coming to the region," says Henry.

Pursuing Opportunities

Indeed, Canadian business people are demonstrating their keen interest by aggressively pursuing opportunities unfolding in Central and Eastern Europe. In the U.S.S.R., for example, more than 50 Canadian firms have signed joint-venture agreements with Soviet counterparts in the following sectors: pulp and paper, telecommunications, transportation, marine technology, medical technology, microcomputers, energy, livestock enhancement, industrial machinery and construction.

Newbridge Director General Alex Volynsky with his wife Svetlana in Red Square.

Canada-U.S.S.R. commercial relations have been dominated by grain sales since the signing of a landmark trade agreement in 1956 and the first exports of the Canadian Wheat Board in 1963. But non-grain sales to the U.S.S.R. are rising rapidly. Sales of semi-finished and finished goods over the period from mid-1989 to mid-1990 increased 65 per cent, to $77 million from $46 million.

Oil and gas, mining equipment and services, agriculture and other infrastructure technologies are among the most promising sectors for Canadian firms to work with Soviet partners, reflecting similarities in the geo-climatic conditions of both countries.

For example, the most accessible oil and gas fields in the Soviet Union tend to be extremely sour, as they are in Canada. As a result, a number of Canadian firms are active in the region, including Canadian Fracmaster (oil well fracturing systems), Select Oil Tools (down-hole equipment), Dreco Ltd. (drilling rigs), and Farr Canada. The world-renowned Montreal, Quebec-based consulting-engineering firm, Lavalin International, is involved in the largest projects. Through a subsidiary known as Partech Lavalin, it has already won more than $500 million in project contracts in the Caspian Sea basin, with more agreements in the making.

Fostering linkages between the Soviet aerospace industry and Canadian companies is also expected to yield great mutual benefits. Leading the way is a Canadian-Soviet joint venture that hopes to put a communications satellite into space and thereby provide teleconferencing in the U.S.S.R. and broadcast television programming into Moscow hotel rooms. Sov Can STAR (Space Trade and Research) is owned by General Discovery Ltd., a Canadian firm specializing in joint ventures with the Soviet Union, and Glavcosmos, a Soviet government agency that designs, builds and launches Proton rockets. A number of Canadian and Soviet government departments and agencies are also involved in, quite literally, getting this project off the ground.

Canada also has substantial expertise and a variety of products to offer the Soviets in the area of computer/telephone system interface. Newbridge Soviet Telekom is the name of a joint venture between the Ottawa-based Newbridge Networks Corp. and the Moscow Telephone Network. Its Director General is Alex Volynsky, whose parents emigrated from Moscow to Canada when he was a child. Now he is back for a three-year stay, working to implement an ambitious marketing plan.

Bullish on the long-term prospects, Newbridge is taking things one step at a time. "Our strategy is to start by selling equipment," says Volynsky, "then to move into technology transfer, training, and ultimately manufacturing here." After one year, Volynsky has seen sales grow to $10 million — 30 per cent of which are in hard currency.