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Call it the greening of glasnost.

In an effort to help Maryland businesses cash in on the political and economic changes in Eastern Europe, Maryland Gov. William Donald Schaefer is planning a trade mission to the region in May, apparently one of the first by a U.S. governor, officials said today.

Details of the trip were being kept under wraps for an official announcement next week.

But J. Randall Evans, state secretary of economic and employment development, said it will be similar to Schaefer's six other missions, in which he has led groups as large as 30 to the Middle East, Japan and Western Europe.

In the fall, Schaefer became the first U.S. governor to lead a trade mission to Saudi Arabia. Since returning, he has pursued the theme of international development with renewed vigor in his speeches and news conferences.

The aim of this trip, Evans said, is to give Maryland businesses an opening to new markets being created as Eastern European countries change their economic policies. Evans would not say what countries the governor plans to visit. But wherever Schaefer goes, he apparently will be ahead of the competition.

According to the National Governors Association, most state trade activity is concentrated in Japan and Western Europe.

Only Illinois, for example, has established a trade office in the Soviet Union, and association officials said they know of no trade missions to the Eastern Bloc since communist regimes began tumbling there.

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Nathan Landow, a Bethesda developer and chairman of the Maryland Democratic Party, will be among a group of party officials going to Hungary later this month to study that country's electoral system, and he said Schaefer's trip couldn't come at a better time.

"There is a tremendous amount of movement here in the business community to establish themselves in Eastern European countries," Landow said.

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