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Škoda Auto's near abroad

It's usually Russian politicians who speak of the near abroad as a way to distinguish between the former countries of the Warsaw Pact, or the Soviet Union itself, and the rest of the world. When Škoda Auto Chairman Bernhard Maier used the term last night on [Czech TV](#), it was to narrow down the scope of the car company's search for the right wage conditions for a new factory. Škoda can't find enough qualified people in the CR, he said, and it has big sales-expansion plans. The goal is to go from last year's 1.2m cars to 2m within a decade, but Škoda has a history of making projections it fails to meet. First it had a goal of 1m cars by 2011-2012, and then a goal of 1.5m by 2018. The public can't know whether these figures are puffed up intentionally as a way to win media attention and extract concessions from the state and labor unions, or whether they are merely bad projections. It's the same this time. Škoda Auto is threatening to outsource production, move it to Germany or build a new factory in Slovakia or Poland, but can it really be serious given the economic slowdown that is overtaking Europe?

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