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Evaluation Report on the

New Europe College in Bucharest (Romania)

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Preliminary remarks

On request of the *New Europe College* in Bucharest I evaluated the work of the college in July 2003 and in the course of two days, July 21st and 22nd 2003, I also spoke to all groups involved with the college. During those two days I lived in the college in order to sniff the atmosphere and experience the situation. I was accompanied by Dr. KATHARINA BIEGGER from the Institute for Advanced Study (*Wissenschaftskolleg*) in Berlin. I thank her sincerely for her advice and help and primarily for keeping the minutes of the long-lasting discussions in Bucharest. The discussions were prepared through comprehensive written materials about the college, which had been sent to me on my request four weeks before the inspection. I am grateful to the college administration for making all the documents I required available to me in an open and non-bureaucratic way and for sending them to me in good time, so that I was able to prepare for the inspection in July. I am also thankful that I could enjoy the hospitality of the college from breakfast till dinner even if (or probably exactly because) these meals had a working character.

In Bucharest Mrs Biegger and I interviewed the following people: (1) the Rector of the college Professor Dr. ANDREI PLEȘU, (2) the scientific director Dr. ANCA OROVEANU, (3) two Romanian members of the advisory board, (4) the executive director Mrs MARINA HASNA and (5) altogether 21 research fellows of the *NEC*, *Relink*, *Getty*, *Regional* and *NEC-Link* programmes of the college. The interviews were carried out in German and English. It was of benefit to me that I had been able to visit Romania a number of times and in various capacities ever since 1973. First, as a guest of the German Ambassador, at the time (1973) ERWIN WICKERT, then, in my capacity of a professor of German, to deliver lectures as a guest of Romanian universities. Later on I had the opportunity to accompany the then-Federal President ROMAN HERZOG on his state visit to

Romania and recently (in April 2002), as President of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, I took part in a fellows' meeting lasting several days in Klausenburg (Cluj-Napoca) and Bucharest. That does not mean that I am an expert on Romania but I was still able not only to observe the enormous changes that took place in the country in the course of 30 years (between 1973 and 2003) from a distance, but also to examine them there and then. Moreover, the special programmes of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for scientific reconstruction in South-Eastern Europe have often brought me together with a number of Romanian colleagues, so that I had a relatively wide basis for passing judgements already before the beginning of the evaluation. I stress on this fact because most of the research fellows with whom I have talked were still children at the time when I first visited Romania (and subsequently, as the first German author, published in the local journal of the University of Bucharest). After all, in the early 70ies, the dictator NICOLAE CEAU |ESCU was considered in the West to be a dissident within the Eastern Block, who enjoyed political goodwill. In contrast to this "external" impression the domestic political situation had rapidly changed in the direction of a brutal dictatorship. In a letter from January 25th, 1975 that I received from the then-head of cultural affairs of the German Embassy it says: "Last year [1974] was culturally unsuccessful. All activities were concentrated on the two central domestic political events – the 30th anniversary of the liberation from the fascist rule, as it is called, and the 11th party conference. The ideological penetration increased; the anyway small sphere of private freedom was further restricted by means of some decisive laws. The atmosphere is oppressive. Enormous efforts are required to demonstrate the advantage of our cultural goods against that background."

The (not only intellectual) desert left by CEAU |ESCU'S dictatorship is indescribable and inconceivable for the people who have grown up in the West. Even if today many things have turned to the better in Romania, the inheritance

of the dictatorship is still to be felt everywhere. The country that should dare to jump from the pre-modern into the post-modern needs for this life-threatening jump elites who are willing to undertake it unselfishly. These elites, however, (intellectual, economic, political, cultural), and even the consciousness of the necessity for elites within a society, were systematically destroyed in the times of the dictatorship. It will take a long time to restore the elite-consciousness and at the same time to build up new elites. If the Western countries, whose wealth in comparison to the transition countries (or following a different terminology: transformation countries) in Central and Eastern Europe is still enormous notwithstanding all the economic turbulence, suspend prematurely their by now so generous help, if they lose their patience far too early, then all the efforts would have been in vain. The difficulties the transition countries would then get into would also spread over Western Europe. The motto that should lead the work in Romania and in the other transition countries is still “help to help yourself”.

Initial Situation

What HEINRICH URSPRUNG and PETER WEINGART wrote about the *New Europe College* (henceforth NEC) in their evaluation report in 1999 is still valid today: this is the first and only *Institute for Advanced Study* (henceforth IAS) in Romania. The NEC was founded with the help of the Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin and is accepted into the circle of the world wide spread and well-organized *Institutes of Advanced Study*. Its goal is best described by the Rector and founder of the college, ANDREI PLEȘU, in his Ernst Reuter speech at the Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin in 2001. PLEȘU's project to confront the continuous destruction of the Romanian elites with new elites (especially in research and teaching) and to create healthy conditions for the growth of these

elites seems to me, ten years later (the *NEC* was founded in 1994), to have succeeded. ANDREI PLEȘU wanted “to create an ambience where elitist talent would be identified, re-established, encouraged and supported in the process of its realization. The research fellows should receive what they were not offered either in the times of the dictatorship or now, during the transition period – a modest subsistence, full freedom of thinking and expression, modern working equipment, contacts to the international science elites. They are expected to participate weekly in a friendly colloquium where everybody’s project is discussed in turns. The aim is thus, among other things, to acquire again intellectual skills that were on the verge of degeneration and disappearance as a consequence of the marginalization (in certain cases illegality), isolation and abuse imposed by the old way of life”. This remains the unchanged core programme of the college that should not be changed, either. It is surrounded by individual programmes that have various sponsors, without watering down the core tasks. The individual programmes have various working emphases. The interdisciplinary character of the college, the links to the international scientific scene, its informal and at the same time performance-orientated and performance-promoting atmosphere create the basis for the various emphases.

It seems of importance to me that the college attempts, again and again, to involve the “region” (that is, South-Eastern Europe) in its efforts to start up a discussion among nations that are mistrustful (often even hostile) to one another. The college is trying to create elite consciousness in the *region* and to spread the kind of hope that South-Eastern Europe needs more than anything else. It is understandable that in this process there is a language problem that arises within the college, since it is no longer only Romanian that is spoken there. This, however, is a common “problem” for the *Institutes for Advanced Studies* all over the world. In Romania one could observe the peculiarity that the languages spoken at the college are predominantly French and German rather than English.

The German scientific language has an island here, an island that is even willingly inhabited. This is of importance also because of the fact that the reputation of the German culture, in spite of the exodus of the German-speaking minority, is high; great value is attached to it for the creation of elites. In Sibiu (Hermannstadt), the suburb of the former German settlement region, for example, 3000 children go to German schools in spite of the fact that there are only 2000, mostly elderly Germans living in the city (Deutsche Welle, July 29th, 2003). Learning German is extremely popular among the young Romanians. German sponsors should be aware of the chances that are being offered to them here (for economic relations as well).

The *NEC* brings its research fellows together with guests from all over the world, who are invited to the college for lectures, seminars and short stays. 196 fellows have had research stays at the college until October 2003. The college organized (until May 2003) 163 evening lectures with a total number of 143 invited speakers, where it is considered to be a great honour among the professors and students in Bucharest (and understood in that way by the professors) to be invited as guests to such events. The research fellows make really good use of the possibilities for travelling opened up by the grants. Preferred countries are France, Germany, Great Britain and USA. 152 research trips were financed in the various programmes of the *NEC* until March 2003, among them within the *NEC* and in the *Relink* programmes – research trips of 120 fellows. The net meshed by this *IAS* for its fellows becomes increasingly thicker. The affiliation of the research fellows with the current level of research seems to work out well, especially since the well-maintained computer equipment of the college allows for the maintenance of the personally created contacts.

The *NEC* has its own institute building in the Strada Plantelor 21 since October 6th, 2000. The building rights for the building that had been acquired for the Organization of the Swiss in Romania in 1940, was left to the Swiss *Stiftung Wissenschafts- und Kulturzentrum NEC Bukarest-Zug* (specially founded for this construction) for the period of 50 years by the Swiss Confederation. This foundation, on its part, passed on the building rights for 20 years to the foundation to which the *NEC* is legally subordinated (*Fundatia Noua Europa*). This somewhat complicated construction had to be chosen in order to secure the independence of the *NEC* and to give the Romanian state the possibility to treat the *NEC* as its own and not as a foreign foundation. The Swiss Confederation, the *Zuger Kulturstiftung Landis & Gyr*, the canton of Zug, the Volkswagen Foundation and the *Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft* participated in the financing of the building that had been decayed during CEAU | ESCU's time and was now restored in original and expanded. The Romanian state participated indirectly by a discount on the value added tax on all materials and services.

The building, that was built in 1910 and was reconstructed and expanded for 3 million Swiss francs, and which the main sponsors from Switzerland still have the right to use, was tailored to the needs of the *NEC*. There are reception and multi-functional rooms, as well as a flexibly usable conference hall (for 120 people), a small library (whose equipment makes *NEC* proud with justification), office rooms, studies, flats for the research fellows, the guest scholars and always one artist. This building is not only appropriately furnished and designed but also elegant and beautiful. An ambience has been created with modern works of art, with the staircase, the wing, the furnishing, etc., where intellectual work can flourish. The complicated locking and alarm system that secures the building is almost too perfect. It is, however, patiently and with expertise clarified to the guests by the specialist in electronics in the house (who works preferentially during the night). The design of the house has to be primarily

attributed to the executive director MARINA HASNA | who is a professional architect and who – as the Swiss Ambassador said at the opening ceremony – conducted the renovation and the extension “with an iron fist”. Mrs HASNA | knew how to arouse in her employees (from the janitor to the cleaning lady) that community spirit which is uncommon even according to the western criteria. Every employee feels so responsible for the house as if it belongs to herself/himself. Thus, in this house live from the Rector to the handyman in a what could be called almost charismatic atmosphere of solidarity where everything is arranged in such a way as to offer the fellows the best working and living conditions.

The infrastructure of the *NEC* is appropriate for its goals in terms of personnel and equipment. Along with the 11 permanent employees (including the Rector) there are six assistants working on a contract basis. These make altogether 15 full-time employees (October 2003). During the academic year 2002/2003 there were 42 fellows living and working within the various programmes of the institute. All in all, this is a significant and prominent, no longer to be ignored institution not only in the intellectual life of the country and the region, but also within the community of the *IAS*. The rules of the *IAS* have been perfectly adapted here to the needs of a transition country.

Elite consciousness rules in the *NEC*. This is primarily demonstrated by the strict and quality-controlled selection of the fellows through a multi-level procedure following the announcement. Members of the scientific committee, of the management of the *NEC*, as well as other outstanding scholars are involved in the selection of the short-listed candidates. The candidates nominated by the commission receive a call from the scientific advisory board at every spring meeting. The number of applications is always many times larger than the number of the available positions. The institute sticks to its decision to enable its

fellows a “modest standard of living”. The grant amounts currently to € 460 per month. In spite of that the fellows are envied for having the luck to be able to work and live for some time on this research island in the middle of the transition turbulence. The institute itself is subject to the envy of other research institutions. It is necessary to have strong nerves and enormous negotiation skills to protect the *NEC* from damage. It seems to me, however, that this kind of astuteness is the main characteristic feature of the Rector, under whose charge the *NEC* flourishes and is going to flourish further on. My question, whether ANDREI PLEIU would not get tired and would not one day withdraw from the leading position of the institute, alarmed the members of the advisory board. Nobody at the *NEC* wishes to think of such a withdrawal.

Greater difficulties for the further development of the *NEC* result, as far as my observations go, from the fact that (1) the Romanian state treats the work of the institute with benevolent indifference at best. I can see no *active* state support of any constituted form. On the one hand, this encourages the independence of the *NEC*, on the other, however, it places enormous demands because of the constant acquisition of new financial means (also for the infrastructure) and hinders long-term planning. The possibility for long-term planning, however, is of vital importance for such institutions. (2) The conditions for the support of research and for the engagement of sponsors have, as is well-known, considerably changed of late. The interest in Europe, due to the EU extension to the east and the concentration of the relatively small amount of available funds, are restricted to the Brussels framework programmes and the establishments of the Union. Countries like Romania that are not (or not yet) included in the expansion to the east disappear increasingly from the sphere of interest of the Union states that have to struggle with enormous problems in the process of the unification. (3) The economic collapse has considerably subdued the readiness of a number of sponsors for a (here necessary) long-term engagement. All these

difficulties affect first, within science, the arts and the humanities (and thus also the *NEC*), since they cannot offer any compensation for the donated funds that is quickly achievable and visible on the surface. The fact, however, that an engagement is definitely worth, since with the support of institutes like the *NEC* foundations are laid for a lasting rallying, for the building of a whole ruined country, is an argument that, in the times of an economic weakness, is easy to ignore.

The *NEC* maintains no statistics of what kind of occupations the fellows engage in and how the elite building influences the daily practice. The largest number of the former fellows are employed as professors at the higher institutions of the country. Among them there are, of course, deans and people in other higher-standing university positions. It seems, however, that part of the fellows have moved to other institutions of the state apparatus. The consequence should one day be that these former fellows would bring about a basic change in the attitude of the Romanian state to an elite institute that has been given as a present to it through the cleverness and diligence of ANDREI PLEȘU and his creative assistants. For the time being, however, I would recommend for the still manageable number of fellows to be “further supported” (in the style of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation), which means to connect a society of friends and sponsors of the college with an association of its alumni and to accompany the fellows into their daily work. The former fellows of the institute expressed their wish to be able to participate annually in a scientifically geared meeting of the alumni organized by the college.

To sum up, I would like to emphasize on the following: *If the efforts made up to now that have brought all those involved to the edge of their strength should be visibly worth, it is necessary, in my opinion, to have another decade of intensive*

funding and support of the creative enterprise NEC. Within this decade it should be attempted at making the institute permanent.

Interviews in Bucharest

1. The Rector

The range of interviews in Bucharest started with a conversation with the Rector ANDREI PLE |U. A characteristic feature of this conversation is a certain degree of melancholy because the Rector, without dramatizing the situation, sees the commitment of the Romanian state to the college, that could secure its permanent establishment, far in the future. He defines the situation in Romania in the following way: “For us normality is still a luxury”. Especially the arts, humanities and the social sciences have to wait for a long time before they could enjoy a state quality funding of the type offered by an *IAS*. ANDREI PLE |U describes very vividly the specific place of the *NEC* in a transition country where decades of experience and devastation of a number of dictatorships continue to have an effect, where various nationalities, religions and cultures come into conflict, where the economic structure is ruined and the modern times arrive only hesitantly. It is clear that these initial conditions created the impetus for the foundation of the *NEC*. ANDREI PLE |U suffers from the decline of the elites of his country, which can be equated to the decline of the country itself. Some have disappeared, he says, to prison or to a peripheral existence, others have survived discretely and have been marginalized (like the impoverished aristocracy), the “green house elite” (artists and writers), however, was organized in well-surveilled protectorates “where an acceptable survival was offered as a countermove to staying out of the ‘now’ or to a triumphal co-operation”. He thus attempts to create a new elite in the field of science where achievements could not be expected without elites. He is trying, in the first

place, to spread around the persuasion in the necessity for elite consciousness, so that the universities could again become institutions of research and teaching, so that they could be liberated from their existence as technical colleges.

ANDREI PLE |U sees in the increasing number of programmes a certain danger for the unity and the profile of the institute. On the other hand, such a large number of programmes is only natural for an institute that has to be funded exclusively by sponsors. The sponsors all over the world are ready to finance short-term programmes but not the infrastructure necessary for them. “One is ready to finance the soup (says ANDREI PLE |U) but not the kitchen and the cook.” I do not share the Rector’s scepticism to the bad sound of the key-word “elite sponsorship” in the West. On the contrary: more and more programmes and awards for sponsoring top-science are being constantly created. The *NEC* should try to make use of this tendency. That is why it seems important to me to make an attempt also through political channels (through the ministries of foreign affairs of Switzerland, Germany, the financial organizations, the association of the *IAS*, etc.) to transform the toleration on the part of the state into a state support, so that at least a small part of the infrastructure expenses could be covered permanently. The *NEC* is not only a pearl in the science scenery of Romania, first of all it gives the country the kind of reputation within the international science community which the universities struggling for their existence and the rotten institutes of the Academy will not be able to achieve in a long time.

The Rector is hesitant (probably rightly) in his answer to the question of whether the state of the *NEC* would improve if the spectrum of the disciplines from which the fellows come would be widened. The attempts of the institute to increase the number of the fellows from the fields of jurisprudence, economics and applied social sciences have been of little success by now. The “modest

subsistence” offered by the *NEC* is not attractive enough for such disciplines. The good graduates of these disciplines that are demanded by the economy (after all, we are dealing here with *postdocs*) cannot be attracted by *NEC*, it does not want to have, for good reasons, the average quality that offers itself. In the case of mathematics and the theoretical natural sciences it seems doubtful to ANDREI PLEȘU whether the discipline cultures within the institute would not dissipate too much. The example of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Berlin, however, proves that, and how, the theoretical natural sciences could be involved in the interdisciplinary discussion. There, however, it is possible to explain the strong position of, e.g., the theoretical biology only through the cooperation with the universities of the city and the region. The *NEC* lacks definitely, however, such a hinterland. In spite of the Rector’s (legitimate) scepticism the *NEC* should at least make an attempt to place an accent in the direction of the discussion between the arts and humanities and the natural sciences. Questions related, for instance, to the evolution of the human being, the ethical principles in the natural sciences and medicine, the beginning of life and a dignified death, etc., are going to captivate the society even stronger in Romania as well. An institute like the *NEC* can find its due place in this scientific and social discussion only if it takes fellows from the theoretical natural sciences as well.

2. The scientific director

The discussion with Dr. ANCA OROVEANU was basically concentrated on the obviously very successful (art-historical) *Getty Programme* and its motivation. Art history makes it possible to comprehend specific problems of the arts and humanities at the Romanian universities: the isolation of the disciplines (which is even more aggravated by the existence of a special university of arts in

Bucharest), the still existing division between the university (with professors intensively involved in teaching) and the institutes of the academy which are geared to research, the decades long missing contact with the international research and with foreign countries in general, so that, for example, it was impossible to notice in wide-spread textbooks when reproductions were printed sideways, the missing contact to the international iconotheks, to the media, etc. All that cannot be caught up within a couple of years, but a new beginning can be made and it is made by the *Getty Programme*. In a “visualised” world (in the midst of the famous *iconic turn* of the developed knowledge and information society) it is not possible that the Romanian art history freezes on the point of the fifties of the previous century. A programme like the *Getty Programme* is essential to life for the *NEC* even if only because of its transdisciplinary influence. ANCA OROVEANU explains that this programme can definitely sponsor research within the fine arts in the widest sense (that is, also architecture, archaeology, film and television). The programme has, however, no topic or year-specific accent, although the initial idea was different. The practice has demonstrated that one should start from the very beginning. It is impossible to group coherently the research stays of foreign guest scholars around one topic. It is difficult enough in general to win outstanding foreign experts of art history to spend a week or more at the *NEC* in order to work with the fellows. In case the *Getty Programme* would be continued, which is, in my opinion, urgent not only in view of this information, they want to try [says Mrs OROVEANU] to realize a topic-concentrated project. The model case of art history, a discipline that is flourishing at many universities of the world, demonstrates powerfully the necessity to build new elites. I have to respect the achievements of the *NEC* here, but they seem to be like a drop on a hot stone in view of the neglect of the discipline at the universities.

3. Members of the Advisory Board

The two members of the Advisory Board (MIRCEA DUMITRU, Dean of the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Bucharest and GABRIEL LIICEANU, a publisher and university lecturer who has also worked for a long time at the University of Heidelberg within the framework of the “Tandem Programme” of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation) emphasize unanimously the high status of the *NEC* in the intellectual life of Romania, and mainly in Bucharest. The support of highly talented young people (under 45 years of age) is a sign of hope in a world that is not otherwise spoiled by hope. The *NEC* is the only place where the arts and humanities which are neglected in South-Eastern Europe would be sponsored generously and without reservation. The institute has the effect of a magnet in the intellectual life of the country: All important people of the country and all important guests come sooner or later to the *NEC*. [This means, however, that the country makes use of the *NEC* as a shop window to the foreign countries? Then it should also contribute actively to the design of this shop window].

Using himself as an example, the current Dean of the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Bucharest describes how he was supported by the *Relink* Programme after his return from his 5-year doctoral studies in the US. His seat at the university was in fact reserved, but through the *NEC* he was opened up the possibility to be able to continue his research, to get access to the necessary journals, to receive new literature and to be able to stay in contact with his foreign partners. Ever since he has been involved in the university administration he has been able to realize how efficient the *NEC* works with an incomparably small personnel and what kind of services it produces for its fellows.

Both colleagues confirm without hesitation that the institute is especially influenced by ANDREI PLEȘU and his personal commitment. His charisma, his attitude of tolerance and generosity (GABRIEL LIICEANU, the Director of the HUMANITAS publishing house talks about an “ecumenical spirit”) give the *NEC* its own profile.

4. The executive director

The discussion with MARINA HASNA | makes it clear how important the selection of the employees and their training for such a service enterprise like the *NEC* is. She maintains a strict and at the same time liberal regime. She sees as the central task of the administration of the *NEC* the creation of an atmosphere of mutual trust, willingness to work and co-operate. The work of the administration of an *IAS* in Bucharest is much more demanding than in the western countries due to the rather resigning mentality that is still extensively dominant in the country, due to the lack of transparency in the process of decision-making, due to the sluggishness of the state authorities, etc. Moreover, the bookkeeping of an institute living only from sponsor funding is immensely complicated since every sponsor has its own, different calculation regulations and even only the variety of currencies is very demanding on the employees at the bookkeeping department. The friendly atmosphere created by Mrs HASNA | in spite of all difficulties is already demonstrated by the names of the animals living in the *NEC*. After all, a specific characteristic feature of Bucharest is that it is a city where there is a multitude of stray cats and dogs. One of the (stray) dogs of the institute is called “Nec”, the other one – “Relink” and the tomcat carries the name of “Zero-Value-Added-Tax”.

Mrs HASNA |' second main concern (apart from the services for the fellows) is taking care of the institute building of whose excellent condition she is rightfully proud. This building gives the institute visibility to the outside world and stability within it and makes the large number of events, that have made the *NEC* known in the whole country and in the region, possible. The maintenance of the house – and this is an additional difficulty – has to be financed mainly from the funds for the basic programme, since the short-term programmes contain insufficient administrative costs. The greatest difficulty for the *NEC* lies in securing the financing of the core programme that embraces primarily the ten one-year *NEC* fellowships, the invited guests series of lectures, the personnel and equipment costs of the institute. The sponsors agree to pay these potentially permanent costs only reluctantly. And still, all programme branches are unthinkable without the core programme. The work of the institute is carried out within its framework, this is where the community is created through which the *NEC* influences the scientific life of the country and the region.

5. The research fellows

The discussions with the 21 research fellows from the various programmes of the *NEC* were variations of the same repetitive melody: the high esteem, the affection, the gratefulness they feel for the *NEC* and the research time presented to them there. The often used metaphors for the institute were “paradise” and “island”. It is a “paradise” (this symbol has been chosen many times) in the wasteland of the academic life in Romania embossed by strict administrative hierarchies and inconvenient bureaucracy, *a beautiful island of peace and tranquillity* in a sea of stones full of career regulations, promotion rules and the refusal of services all around. A high-ranking official at a Romanian university stresses on the fact that in the *NEC* he has found the only “rational bureaucracy”

in the country. The fellows coming from the region, who find Bucharest a foreign, rather unfriendly and cold city, have felt themselves in the *NEC* hospitably accepted and at the same time involved in the omnipresent interdisciplinary context of the scientific and personal discussion.

The institute addresses clearly and primarily young scholars who find themselves in that situation of creative dissatisfaction which will be the basis for the revival of the academic life in Romania. In the *NEC* they come to realize the stimulating opportunity to get together with colleagues and to change something, while the higher education institutions and research institutes are obviously still governed by the stiff, hostile to innovations and hierarchical tendencies. Buried traditions are being brought back to life at the *NEC* (those mentioned most often are developments in philosophy, the long-ostracised religion and the sciences that belong to it, the psychoanalysis), topical social questions are being discussed freely, in short: here reigns really the “kind of democracy of the well-being” that was described as indispensable for the scientific advance by GEORGE STEINER in his *Grammars of Creation* (2001).

The fellows of the institute emphasize that they have been able to capture (often for the first time in their life) the essence of what is called science: the self-determined competition of free ideas, the common interest in progressive theories, the lively scientific dialogue, the connection to the international scientific discussion. Thanks to their research trips funding the fellows go out into the world, but the *NEC* brings (to the country as well) within the Guest Programme also stimulating discussion partners in large numbers. Within the interdisciplinary discussion at the college one learns to productively doubt his/her own assumptions and judgements. The frustration that constantly overcomes people in the Romanian academic life have completely disappeared here. The pressure to have to constantly inform colleagues from outside one’s

own discipline on the relevance and methodology of one's own research is a good exercise and teaches one to check again one's own theories. Unquestioned basic assumptions would be undermined, blind spots in one's world of ideas would be discovered, new insights would be opened. One of the fellows said that he had learnt through his stay at the *NEC* that, and how, science should legitimize itself in society. A former female fellow reckons that she had experienced her stay at the *NEC* like an *upgrading* of a computer; finally, a sociologist noted that due to his stay at the *NEC* he has transformed from a *sociologist who produces valid sentences* to a *sociologist who produces ideas*. In a group of 15 to 25 participants in the Wednesday seminars (where, as a fellow said, *the spirit of the fellowship* is being rehearsed) it is guaranteed that everybody could take part in the discussions.

The relatively small (according to the Western standards) library and the (again according to the Western standards excellent and primarily excellently maintained) technical equipment that are available to the fellows of the college free of charge are felt to be helpful and valuable mainly because of their difference in quality in comparison to the conditions at the universities. There is literature and journals in the library of the *NEC* which are not available in the whole country. The fellows' wishes are taken into account by purchases. The well-informed EDP co-ordinator guides the fellows in the use and application of the computer network. In this connection the fellows mention again and again the unselfish services of the institute administration. The *NEC* is called the absolute example of *best practice* in terms of academic administration. Within the context of the country it is almost miraculously reliable, obliging and incorruptible.

One cannot overhear in all these discussions and interviews the feelings component. The *NEC* is experienced as a place of cordiality and care, even

friendship; it is often spoken of a *NEC family*. The question of whether this could be some kind of a “Mafia” receives a spontaneous reply: “Yes, but with the difference that in the case of the Mafia it is the rule of keeping silent that reigns, in the *NEC* it is the rule to speak and discuss publicly.” With the atmosphere outlined here the institute helps those who have returned back to the country, the beginners, the fellows from outside Bucharest and from abroad to overcome the foreignness, the loneliness, the hopelessness. For more than one of the interviewees this feeling of encouragement for a new scientific start was the best that the *NEC* has to offer. This feeling of encouragement is triggered, however, not only through the friendly atmosphere that is cultivated in the college, but also by the fact that the college has been ascribed in all its structures a model character for a future science scene in Romania.

Even though most of the fellows keep up their teaching assignments in a reduced form during their stay at the *NEC*, they still immerse at the college into the atmosphere of peaceful research and stimulating discussions, which is hardly existent at the universities with their highly strenuous teaching activities. The college throws a bridge between teaching and research by offering a chance for concentration on one’s own research and the basic rule it demands, namely to transmit one’s ideas comprehensively and in a discussible form. The research fellows experience support in their teaching also through the fact that they are allowed to bring some of their students who are honoured with such invitations to certain occasions (guest presentations, library research). The challenges on the part of the other disciplines, the different opinions and ideas are assessed unanimously as fruitful even if there is, among the small number of fellows, seldom a close discipline comrade. The question of whether the discipline spectrum should be widened to the natural sciences receives hesitant approval as well as critical voices. The difficulties within such a dialogue obviously take

priority over the capability for dialogue among the social scientists (as it is all over the world) that is still to be restored.

The fellows' reports make it clear that many of them have achieved a higher step in their career through their stay at the college and through its support and that the stay at this *IAS* is seen and recognized as an award, which it is. It is also clear that in the peaceful working atmosphere at the *NEC* it was possible to complete important publications, that the stay there increases the chances to be invited to international conferences, that fellows receive invitations for research stays at foreign institutes, that the fellows can participate in larger international research projects by invitation, that in the *NEC* therefore they were able to finally make the connection to the world of science. The still young *NEC-Link* programme is often pointed out. The wish to maintain and optimize it in such a way that it could have an effect of a sourdough at the universities is often voiced. This programme offers the opportunity to bring about the spirit of reform and the spirit of the self-determined scientific discussion to the universities. Only the *Boltzmann Institute* was not mentioned by the fellows. It is obviously not so well integrated in the work of the *NEC* like the other programmes, so that it should be left out of this evaluation report.

On the whole, I was left with the following impressions: the *NEC* does such a good job that it has to be on its guard against an excessive demand on its efficiency on the part of the fellows. Exactly because of the fact that it is an "island" in the academic world of Romania slowly recovering from the devastation of the dictatorship, the fellows attribute to it accomplishments which are impossible to be realized with the weak power of the college. The confidence of the fellows in the (seemingly) unlimited efficiency of the *NEC* is often unrealistic. The science scene in Romania, at the universities and at the Academy of Sciences cannot be fundamentally reformed by the college; the

NEC can only offer a model for such a reform. The *NEC* can hardly participate in the training of doctoral students, in introductory courses or summer schools in a number of disciplines; it is financially not in a position to found branches outside Bucharest or even to function as a centre for applications for the funds to be received from the European Union. All these suggestions and a number of others, even less realistic, were made. It will be good for the college to concentrate on the core mission formulated by ANDREI PLEȘU (the creation of elite through research) and to equip this elite with the skills to cultivate with its own power, also after the farewell from “paradise”, the stony field of the soil consisting of thistles and thorns.

Assessment

The *New Europe College* in Bucharest is an *Institute for Advanced Study* that can be compared without second thoughts to the best institutes of this type in Europe and the US. Within the first decade of its existence it has won world wide recognition, so that nobody could say that they know Romania if they do not know this institute. The *NEC* is trimmed to the needs and conditions of a transition country; it is going, however, to realize easily the transition to the everyday life of the *IAS* after the construction and consolidation phase which I estimate to last for about two decades. It fulfils its core mission in an exemplary way – to create a new science elite through research, to stimulate interdisciplinary discussion and to pave the way for international research co-operations. The grants received there are appropriate to the situation in the country.

The college budgets the entrusted funds economically and with a sense of responsibility. I fully respect the efforts on the part of the Rector and his

comrades-in-arms to constantly acquire new funds and new programmes that do not contradict, but strengthen the core mission of the institute. The fact that this could sometimes result in the establishment of a programme that cannot be fully integrated belongs to the mechanisms of such a *fund raising* based enterprise. Nevertheless, the institute should later on give up the testing of programmes that are practically impossible to integrate. Especially the conception of the *NEC-Link* programme with its mixture of grants, funds for trips and books as well as modest funds for guests and symposia seems to me to be designed and planned in such a way that it is impossible to miss its influence on the universities. Nevertheless, there should be an evaluation after the first phase (2005) in order to check whether the universities are willing to accept the chance for structural improvement offered to them just as a decoration or as a reform model to be integrated.

I should repeat here that the administration of the college and the services it offers are admirably unselfish, reliable and incorruptible. They are primarily oriented towards the needs of the fellows. The basic aims of this administration are to facilitate the working conditions of the fellows, to provide them with the infrastructure they need and to let them work and live in a caring, secure and cultivated atmosphere.

The *NEC* is a relatively small *IAS*. I am convinced that it should not strive to expand extensively, since only the current size makes that atmosphere of friendly solidarity possible – the atmosphere that defines the charm and the radiance of the institute. It is, together with the college in Budapest, actually the only institute of this type in the south-east of Europe and should therefore be accompanied by the sponsors with special attention and financial contributions.

The strict, quality-based conditions and regulations for acceptance of the fellows, the high-ranking supervisory boards and last, but not least, the personality of the founding Rector himself guarantee the high level of the work done at the college. The college is a model for the country and its science scene; in the future, however, the state and the politics in Romania should make more efforts than now to acknowledge appropriately the increased international reputation attributed to them through the richness of ideas, the working force of the personnel and the acquired funds of the institute. That means (*ceterum censeo*): they have to contribute to the work of the *NEC* in the foreseeable future without, however, intervening in its self-defined work. Even the strongest flame hope could stop burning if there is no shimmer of light to be seen at the end of the tunnel.

By all means, the transparent regulations of the institute (the creation of a stimulating discussion atmosphere, the Wednesday seminars, the guest presentations and other events, the contacts with foreign institutions, the strong infrastructure) present in their integrity and solidarity, to my mind, a basis for a scientific *centre of excellence* that could hardly be improved but should urgently be stabilized, so that the *Strada Plantelor 21* in Bucharest makes one of the best addresses of the science scene in Europe.

Recommendations

The fellows of the *NEC* expressed the already mentioned rather unrealistic wishes in reply to the question concerning desirable changes or expansion of the programme scope. These wishes make clear in their (almost endless) trust in the *NEC* its exceptional position in a stagnated science scene. There have also been, however, recommendations that seem to be realizable. They are partly included

in the report above. All realistic recommendations are suitable to contribute to the stabilization of the *NEC* without threatening its core mission.

It was almost unanimously suggested that the *NEC* should create a convincing, rich in materials and à jour supported homepage. These were predominantly the fellows from outside Bucharest who expressed that wish, which would facilitate their contact with the college and enable them to get access to the *NEC* data also from abroad. I can imagine, when I see the efforts the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation invests in such pages, that such a wish cannot be fulfilled without additional EDP personnel. It is the maintenance of a convincing and always up-to-date Internet page that demands a lot of efforts. In spite of that, such an Internet page is an identity card for the quality of an institution in the electronic age and contributes to its international reputation. It is probably easier to fulfil the wish expressed by a number of fellows for a subscription for some electronic journals than the creation of an Internet page. Another understandable wish is to receive feedback from the institute authorities on the research articles submitted at the end of the fellowship.

Finally, some of the interviewed alumni of the college suggested the establishment of a *NEC* award for young talents. In contrast to the Academy awards that are considered by many to be quite unconvincing, a *NEC* award as ascribed straight away prestige and external influence for the young scientists. The award could be in the form of prize money, an additional trip abroad, financial support for a publication or the covering of translation costs of a scientific work, etc. There are no limits to the ideas for the arrangement of such an award. I completely support this proposal since it would probably be relatively easy to find a sponsor for its realization and the award would have a double influence: (1) It would be a new sign of hope for young people in the

region. (2) It would strengthen the external influence of the *NEC* and would be a marketing factor for the college that could not be overseen.

Otherwise it seems to me that the main task of the *NEC* in the future is to stabilize the already achieved and to consolidate the core programmes. In the long run, this will not be possible without state support, which means that the public relations work of the college is of special importance. A calm, but lasting advertising campaign should be started by a circle of “friends and sponsors” whose members need not be only the alumni of the college but also all those involved in the work of the *NEC*. Such a campaign would not only improve the financial situation of the institute but would also raise its popularity and influence. It is of course a dream that the *NEC* could find a sponsor that would make its core tasks independent of fund raising and applications for state funds through a large foundation. However, even such a dream could be brought closer to its fulfilment by means of a marketing campaign. It would probably be even possible to invite one or more reporters from the Western media for a short stay at the institute under the condition that they would write a report about the college. It is also worth thinking of whether it could be possible to bring at least the founders and sponsors themselves to make a tour of the college.

As to the equipment of the library with German language literature or literature published in Germany, that, in my view, could still be improved, the institute should turn to the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* in Bonn. There is a special programme for book donations for foreign libraries that could be taken advantage of by the *NEC*. Otherwise, however, also for these recommendations it is valid that the *NEC* should see its main task in the maintenance of its current structure and the stabilization of its core programmes in such a way that they could, in the long run, give the accent of excellence to the humanities and the

social sciences in Romania and in the south-east of Europe without which no country today could be scientifically (and economically) competitive.

Postscript

It is probably possible to best illustrate the economic difference between the countries in the west and the east of Europe by an anecdote. This difference defines in fact a difference in the way of thinking that makes a responsibility of honour for the west not to decrease its commitment to the reconstruction of the transition countries. When I arrived in Bucharest in July 2003, I told the Rector of the *NEC* that I had recognized immediately the street of Saint Stephan leading to Strada Plantelor thirty years after I had driven along it for the last time. By saying that I meant the surface of that street consisting of cobblestones probably from the times of World War II, with deep hollows and potholes that did not allow a speed over 20 km per hour. My attention was drawn to the condition of this street mainly because of the fact that there was a pilot scheme in the vicinity of my house in Germany to put “whispering asphalt” on the motorway that really lowers the noise many times and thus protects the night’s rest of the citizens. “Yes”, said ANDREI PLEȘU with shining eyes when I talked about my curious effect of recognition somewhat cryptically, “CEAUȘESCU was no longer in a position to destroy this part of the town, his demolition machinery has not come so far.” This is therefore the difference in the way of thinking between a West-European and a transitional country. The one thinks that the street surface has not been renewed for more than half a century, the other one – that the barbarism has left something at all that is worth being renewed and restored.

Sources of the report

(1) Written materials of the NEC

Short descriptions of core and additional programmes. Annual reports from the years 2000 – 2002. Budget for 2002 and 2003. Statutes of the *Fundatia Noua Europa*. Earlier evaluation reports by HEINRICH URSPRUNG and PETER WEINGART (1999) and by JUTTA SCHERER (2001). Lists of fellows and statistics from 2000 on. Lists of guest professors and events. Publications of the *NEC* (Yearbooks, *Relink* series). Written reports of some former fellows on the effects of their fellowships.

(2) Discussion partners in Bucharest (21-22 July 2003)

Representatives of the *NEC*: Professor Dr. ANDREI PLEȘU (Rector), Dr. ANCA OROVEANU (scientific director), MARINA HASNAȘ (executive director).

Members of the advisory board of the *NEC*: Professor Dr. GABRIEL LICEANU (Philosophical Faculty of the University of Bucharest, Director of the HUMANITAS publishing house); Professor Dr. MIRCEA DUMITRU (Dean of the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Bucharest).

Romanian professors: Professor Dr. IOAN PANZARU (Vice-rector of the University of Bucharest); Professor Dr. ZOE PETRE (Professor of history at the University of Bucharest, advisor of the Romanian President 1996 – 2000).

21 fellows of the *NEC* from all programmes (with the exception of the *Boltzmann Institute*): Dr. CAMELIA BECIU, Dr. ȘTEFAN BORBÉLY, Dr. MIANDA-TINCUTA CIOBA, Dr. ROMANITA CONSTANTINESCU, CHRISTIAN-NICOLAE GAȘPAR, Dr. ALBENA HRANOVA, Dr. ISTVAN HORVÁTH, Dr. KÁZMER KOVACS, Dr. MIRCEA MICLEA, Dr. MARIA MILADINOV, Dr. MIHAELA MIROIU, Dr. GHEORGHE ALEXANDRE NICULESCU, Dr. IOANA PARVULESCU, COSIMA RUGHINIȘ, Dr. VALENTINA SANDU-DEDIU, Dr. SRDJAN SLJUKIC, Dr. DIANA STANCIU, ALEXANDRU LEO ȘERBAN, Dr. RADU TEODORESCU, Dr. ȘTEFAN VIANU, Dr. ANA MARIA ZAHARIADE.

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Dr. phil. Katharina Biegger, scientific expert at the Institute for Advanced Study (*Wissenschaftskolleg*) in Berlin.