

EVALUATION REPORT

of the

RELINK PROGRAM – NEW EUROPE COLLEGE, Bucharest

Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara

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by

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IV. General conclusions and recommendations

1. General remarks

Several Relink fellows had been asked after their first year of inception of their project to modify it in focusing on academic teaching, restructuring of the curricula and institutional extension. This meant for quite a few of them a substantial additional amount of work. Interestingly enough, nobody had complained about this. On the contrary, almost everybody expressed satisfaction about having been asked to apply his/her research to the teaching experience and to focus on direct work with students. All underlined the danger, that the best students are leaving the country, if there is not something done about it, and all were convinced that teaching methods have to be considerably improved if not changed. They all spoke almost with feelings of success how they had involved students in various research projects, and how they had carried out their scientific work within the confines of their universities. It was felt as rewarding having developed new courses and seminar outlines to new standards in higher education and research. All insisted on good contacts with students and most of all underlined the opportunity that they could bring students to the NEC for lectures, but also to use the library of NEC and the computer facilities.

Without wanting to make flattering compliments to the NEC and the organizers of Relink fellowships, I want to underline the profound gratefulness and recognition expressed in one way or another (but certainly never because of reasons of politeness or diplomacy) by all interviewed fellows: for the grant that allowed the acquisition of books and photocopies to be distributed among students, for travels abroad, but most of all for an environment that stimulates the dialogue between different fields of research, interdisciplinary seminars, and meetings with foreign scholars which is rather unique in the Romanian scientific and academic context. NEC represents a network on which intellectuals can rely. One fellow, Carmen Aida Hutu from the Technical University in Iasi, formulated the expectation that NEC-people one day could become a pressure group on the Ministry of Education to implement reforms. Some complained, in a gentle and sad way, that their university duties do not permit them to attend as regularly as they want to the seminars organized by NEC.

NEC is not felt as an elitist place, as I first would have thought, but as a community. Thanks to NEC, fellows develop and keep contact among each other, organize common seminars, and invite each other to their different universities in Bucharest and in the regions. NEC also serves as a center where Relink fellows can bring their students to make them benefit from the library, computer facilities, and most of all from meetings with Romanian and foreign scholars whom they never would be able to meet otherwise.

The aim of Relink fellowships, to bring young Romanian scholars back from studies abroad to work in one of Romania's universities or research institutes, is of utmost importance given the brain drain of the young Romanian intelligentsia. It is equally important in my eyes that the contacts that they developed with foreign institutions and colleagues are continued by annual research trips to a foreign institute of their choice to sustain contacts and to develop new ones. Especially when comparing the young Romanians whom I met during my short stay in Romania to young French academics, with whom I have regularly to do, I was profoundly impressed by the ease and openness in which these young Romanian scholars moved along Western thematics, topics, discourses, and last, but not least, languages. All spoke an excellent English, almost all of them also an excellent French, some German and Italian. All have firm research contacts abroad, they take part regularly in international conferences, and quite a few of them have already quite impressive lists of publications and translations.

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In concluding, I do want to underline the extraordinary quality of work and reflections, of human input, engagement and conviction which I have encountered during a week of meetings with Relink fellows and supportive structures. Knowing the difficulties of life and existence in Romania today, I can only honor those who are willing to devote their activities to building up or rebuilding academic structures that hopefully will enable the younger generation to work under better conditions. The innovative and integrative role played in this process by the NEC cannot be praised enough. The Rector Andrei Pleșu, the Scientific Director Anca Oroveanu, and their colleagues Alexandru Suter and Marina Hasnaș are functioning or performing in a truly extraordinary way. Their enterprise should be helped by all possible means in encouraging the further development of collaborative groups among Relink fellows/alumni and in bringing by the extension of their influence an essential change at the classroom level. Necessary structural changes and system reforms should be discussed by NEC itself in collaboration with some (or all) of the Relink fellows/alumni concerned and supporters of NEC. Several such persons with whom we met expressed interesting ideas in these directions. The caliber of persons whom we met is extraordinary, and this group could be used at this stage to call for real and tangible change in the higher education sector.

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