After the Curtain

In the more than 20 years since the fall of Europe's communist regimes, much has changed in higher education in Eastern and Central Europe.

BY SUSAN LADIKA

WHEN LIVIU MATEI ENROLLED IN UNIVERSITY in his native Romania in 1985, he wanted to study psychology. But the subject was considered dangerous and had been banned by the communist government. Just four years later, communism collapsed throughout Central and Eastern Europe, and Matei, who had resorted to studying philosophy, was among a group of young academics who created a new psychology department at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.

Fast forward 23 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and subjects like psychology are freely taught, and Matei has gone on to serve as chief operating officer and professor of public policy at Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, Hungary. It's a U.S.-style university established in 1991 expressly "to promote open society and democracy."

Priyanka Sengupta, a 2012 graduate of McDaniel College, in Budapest, Hungary, during her semester abroad.

MCDANIEL COLLEGE

Along with this openness has come internationalization. A number of Western-style universities have sprung up in the region, while public institutions strive to draw international students from throughout the world.

That push to internationalization is designed in part to create a "more aware and open people, and hopefully will lead to a peaceful place," says Nina Lemmens, director of internationalization and communication at the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), which works to attract foreign students and faculty to universities throughout Germany, including the portion that once stood in then-East Germany.

It's a far different era from when ideology separated East from West.

Before the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, the international students at universities in Central and Eastern Europe primarily came from traditional Communist allies in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. And the system and teaching style were quite different from that found at U.S. colleges and universities.

Ivan Manev, a Bulgarian native who now is dean and professor of management at the University of Maine in Orono and a member of the board of trustees at the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG), started his undergraduate studies in 1982. He studied international economics at what was then known as the Institute of Economics at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia.

Students were on a set path. Once they selected their major there was no deviation, and no elective classes. Manev, who was good at math and statistics, would have only been able to study those subjects, which were outside his immediate discipline, on his own time and he was already going to class 43 hours a week.

The first couple of years were "esoterical and theoretical," and Manev expected courses would

Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) students who traveled to Dubrovnik, Croatia, to study abroad for an academic term at RIT's partner the American College of Management and Technology.

become more practical. However, with time, "I pretty much realized, this was it."

He taught himself about what was happening in the world by reading publications such as *The Financial Times*, *The Economist*, and *The Wall Street Journal* at the university library. "Fortunately I had access to what was happening in real time," he recalls.

Through that reading, he saw he had major shortcomings in his education on topics such as finance and management. "They were pretty wide gaps. I could figure out I didn't know much."

When it came time to graduate, Manev didn't pick up his diploma. "That was a statement, a way to protest."

After graduating in 1987 he worked in Bulgaria, but was trying to get to the United States to study further. Once the Iron Curtain fell, U.S. universities were interested in bringing in students from Central and Eastern Europe, and he wound up at University of Minnesota-Duluth for his MBA, before getting his PhD at Boston College.

His introduction to U.S.-style higher education was something of a shock. Within a few days of his arrival at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, he'd had lengthy talks with the dean and associate dean. It was a sharp contrast to his time in Bulgaria, where he recalls trying to get approval from the dean to bring a group of students to an international trade fair, and she scolded him for bothering her.

Even in the Eastern European classroom, "it was a very conservative system. The professor preached, like a priest," and didn't want to be disturbed by questions from students, says Laszlo Frenyo, who has held a wide range of positions in the Hungarian higher education system and now is dean of faculty at McDaniel College Budapest and president of Hungary's Strategic Committee of the Higher Education and Research Council.

Before the collapse of communism, "there wasn't much space for students to have a voice, for faculty to have a voice," Matei recalls. There were strict relationships between governments and universities in Central and Eastern Europe. Universities were controlled and funded by the state, and something as simple as purchasing a chair required approval from the Ministry of Education.

When the Iron Curtain fell, "nobody really believed the Soviets were going to leave the country," and it took time for them to join in reform efforts because "it seemed like a bit risky business," recalls Frenyo, who was deeply involved in university reform as part of the Hungarian Rectors Conference.

Among major changes that were enacted in Hungary in 1993 were the reestablishment of university autonomy, establishment of a national accreditation system, and the return of the PhD program to universities, Frenyo says. During communism, the Academy of Sciences handled the PhD program.

MCDANIEL COLLEGE

Rebirth in the Former Yugoslavia

FOR COUNTRIES that once comprised former Yugoslavia, internationalizing higher education has been doubly hard. Not only did the region have to contend with the collapse of communism in the region, it was rocked for nearly a decade by violent wars.

Now international higher education can have an impact in helping to bring peace to the area. "Higher education has a role in changing perspectives in the way people think about one another," says Jim Myers, associate provost of international education and global programs at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), which has campuses in Kosovo and Croatia.

One prime example is RIT's campus in Dubrovnik, Croatia. It's a stunning coastal city, and its old town is on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The city was shelled by Yugoslav forces during the war. At the time, Yugoslavia was composed of Serbia and Montenegro.

In 1997, just two years after the war in Croatia ended, RIT opened its Dubrovnik campus at the behest of the Croatian government, offering dual U.S. and Croatian degrees in hospitality and information technology.

Shortly after the school was created, a U.S. Agency for International Development grant was used to fund a controversial program—bringing Montenegrin students to study at the school.

The Montenegrin students had a "pioneering spirit," Myers says, and quickly became popular with their fellow classmates, taking part in activities and being elected to the student government. "It was the best imaginable outcome in building bridges."

Since that time, RIT has opened a campus in the Croatian capital, Zagreb, and added undergraduate and graduate business courses.

In 2003 RIT opened American University of Kosovo (AUK), in the capital, Pristina, with a variety of graduate and undergraduate programs.

RIT is unusual for the region because it focuses on hands-on work experience mixed with classroom learning. "We have an applied orientation in education. The history of education in Eastern Europe has largely been theoretical," Myers says. It has about 1,000 students in the region. Faculty is a mix of locals, expatriates, and RIT professors who travel to the region for a quarter or semester.

Edin Heric, a native of Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, said he chose to study international hospitality in Dubrovnik because "I wanted something different than an education in Balkan-curriculum style."

He also appreciates the connections he's developed and new perspectives he's been exposed to.

Heric spent part of his junior studying in Rochester, then did a co-op in Colorado Springs, and now is getting his MBA at the New York campus. His goal is to move to the Dominican Republic with his fiancée and enter the hotel industry.

Chris Provenzano, a junior majoring in political science at the Rochester campus, traveled the opposite direction and spent two months in Kosovo this summer.

He spent his first month interning at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, before taking classes. The experience stoked his interest in diplomacy and international relations, "especially coming from a conflict that was so fresh," Provenzano says. "Everything there was about rebirth."

Brian Bowen, vice president for academic affairs at AUK, often works with master's students on their dissertations. They tend to be in their 40s and were schooled under the communist-style of education. Now they're "very appreciative" of the educational style at AUK. "It's a bit like a mini-America in the Balkans," he said.

Western-style Universities Created

Once communism collapsed in Hungary, a number of higher education providers set up shop there, and some were of questionable quality, Frenyo recalls. But McDaniel College Budapest and CEU have both thrived since they were established in the mid-1990s.

Another early entrant into the region's higher education scene was the American University in Bulgaria, which was established in Blagoevgrad in 1991 in an effort by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Bulgaria's local and national governments, and the Open Society Institute, founded by Hungarian-born investor and philanthropist George Soros.

AUBG gets high marks from the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, and this year's graduates have gone on to study at places like Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, and Colombia University, says David Huwiler, president of AUBG.

The school is patterned after a traditional, residential liberal arts college in the United States, and has about 1,100 students. In the coming years, Huwiler expects to have 1,300 to 1,400 students enrolled.

"It's no longer quite the risk it was choosing AUBG as it was in 1991," Huwiler says.

Orlina Boteva, education abroad adviser at the University of Maine, knows that firsthand. When she graduated from high school in Bulgaria in 1998, many pushed her to attend a traditional Bulgarian university, but she was set on AUBG. "The buzz at the time was that this school was up and coming."

The Bulgarian educational system relied on rote learning rather than critical thinking, so it was a big shift for Boteva to write essays and express her opinion. At AUBG she majored in history, and then got master's degrees in history and higher education at the University of Maine.

AUBG's first diploma was issued by the University of Maine, and many of the courses are the same between the two schools. AUBG is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, as well as by the Bulgarian National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency.

Another Western-style university in the region is CEU, which was founded with the initial goal of aiding the transition from communism to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. It, too, has close ties to Soros.

With its founding, another goal of CEU was to "jump start education, especially in social sciences, which had withered under communism," says Peter Johnson, CEU's vice president for student services.

The focus was on graduate students from the region who at that time "had few opportunities to pursue a Western-style graduate degree," Johnson says.

Budapest also is home to McDaniel College Budapest, which was founded after educators and entrepreneurs from College International Inc. came to the United States, looking for a college that would

A Perspective on Communism's Collapse and European Higher Education

By Elaina Loveland

Christian Bode is the former secretary general of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). He was appointed at DAAD in 1990 and witnessed and assisted the transformation of higher education in the formerly communist region in Europe firsthand.

"LOOKING BACK TO THESE ROARING NINETIES I see light and shadows," says Christian Bode, former secretary general of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). "Many of those who had been on the go could now make for the West. Many young (and elder) scientists left the country—not too many of them returned."

Also, the number of Russian students left the former Soviet Union and came to Western Europe. "The number of Russian students in Germany rose to more than 10,000; all Eastern European countries amount to more than 50,000)," Bode says.

The dynamics of how European countries dealt with the collapse of communism in the region were varied. "There was a great difference between the Middle-eastern European countries (from Balticum south to Balkans) on the one side and the former Soviet Union on the other side," explains Bode. "The former ones were 'coming back home' into the European house; the latter one unfolded into 15 new states, which are still seeking their new identity."

Bode notes that the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe marked the division between the old and a new way of doing things. "The old order was destroyed—also the many positive sides of it: the high prestige of education and science "intelligentia" and culture," Bode says. "The new order had difficulties to establish itself: the economic situation deteriorated in most countries, the state subsidies decreased, money

start a U.S.-style liberal arts program in the Hungarian capital, says Thomas Falkner, provost and dean of the faculty at McDaniel College in Westminster, Maryland.

Launched in 1994, the original idea was to offer a two-year program in Budapest, followed by two years at McDaniel's Maryland campus. But after the events of September 11, 2011, it became a challenge to get visas for the foreign students, so McDaniel Budapest evolved into a four-year campus, Falkner says.

As U.S.-style universities were taking root, public universities in Central and Eastern Europe were gradually evolving, adding more English-language classes and working to draw international students.

But vast differences still could be found. Anna Muller, who now is a lecturer with the Center for European Studies at the University of Florida, graduated from the University of Gdansk, Poland, with degrees in history and political science in 2000 before studying at the University of Notre Dame and Indiana University.

She sees big differences between her education in Poland and that at universities in the United States.

In Gdansk, an education in history covered events year by year. In contrast, the students she teaches now "seem to be missing a lot of background," she says. In Poland, students avoided lectures when possible, because they were usually dry. "They're more entertaining here," she says, with a dialogue between the instructor and students.

Here, classes are resource rich, with books, handouts, access to professors, and access to the Internet. "Not only did we not have the Internet, we didn't have books," she recalls. If a professor told the class they needed to read a particular book, the students would have to track it down and make copies. "We never had almost unlimited access to libraries" or interlibrary loan, though things have improved.

Universities Evolve

Things have evolved at universities throughout Europe, and the mobility of students and faculty have improved with the introduction of the Bologna Process and ERASMUS Programme.

It "stimulates mobility to help build an integrated labor market, a more competitive economy, and some kind of European ethos," Matei says.

The changes also paved the way for dialogue among university officials from the 47 countries that are part of the Bologna Process, he says, as well as increased interaction among students. "It created a lot of freedom," he says.

Many universities in Central and Eastern Europe have added courses in English. In Hungary, having classes taught in English as well as German have drawn international students, particularly to study subjects such as medicine and veterinary medicine, Frenyo says.

These days many universities have a strategy for internationalization, but the impact has varied greatly both by university and by country. For example, few international students study in Romania, Matei says.

In contrast, the United Kingdom drew more than 500,000 noncitizen students in 2010, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and Germany and France each attracted more than 250,000.

Among the former Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic led with less than 35,000 noncitizen students, while Hungary and Poland each had about 18,000.

Although there is far more mobility, Justyna Giezynska, who runs the international higher education consultancy Studybility in Warsaw, helping Polish universities internationalize and foreign schools enter the Polish market, still sees big differences between East and West.

Christian Bode

DADD

started to prevail over ethics (as in the West), corruption (also in the education sector) grew into new dimensions, many new private institutions (mostly in economics, law, humanities) played an ambiguous role, old nomenclatura politicians, mafiosi, KGB-people robbed the state (Russia, central Asian countries), religious and ethnic tensions grew, and nationalisitic tendencies in the newly independent states destroyed former divisions of labor."

Bode says that while West European states and the European Union tried a lot to help internationalize and all of these states "finally joined the Bologna process (or rather: signed the paper" does not offer a final solution. "Signing papers and learning new vocabulary is not yet a new spirit or a new reality," Bode says. "Most of the so called reforms had to be made with the 'old boys' who didn't leave or could not be fired and it didn't really change their minds, attitudes and practices. The new generation (and there are, of course, fantastic young brains) resigned, emigrated, or accepted the rules. Many of those who returned from successful study abroad did not return to the academic sector but found much better paid jobs in industry and business (which is essentially, internal brain drain).

Countries in the former Soviet bloc, including the former Soviet Union itself are still trying to internationalize since communism's collapse in the region. According to Bode, Russia is now announcing a new internationalization policy and growing interest in foreign talents. "But is still far from a really welcoming culture," Bode says. "The number of Germans studying in Russia is decreasing. Foreign languages are probably less taught and learned than in the cold war period: German (for many, it is the first foreign language) is decreasing, and English is not yet widely spread. Bureaucratic hurdles for exchanges and cooperation (for instance, recognition of foreign degrees) have grown instead of fallen."

A lot has changed, and many countries and universities in the former communist region in Europe have become more open and have embraced internationalization—but there is still more work ahead. "Despite of all reform rhetoric of governments and university presidents, I have the impression that it will take one more generation to modernize the higher education system in the former Soviet Union successor states according to Western/international standards. All neighbors and friends need a lot of patience and good will."

ELAINA LOVELAND is editor-in-chief of *International Educator.*

Giezynska, who is a Polish native, left Poland in 1990 with her family and settled in California. She graduated with a degree in cultural anthropology from University of California, Santa Cruz, before getting a master's in political science from Georgetown University. She's now working on her PhD in anthropology with a thesis on how international students influence the management of higher education for Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan.

During her university years in the United States, she spent a semester in Budapest in 1998 at the Budapest University of Economic Sciences (now called Corvinus University of Budapest) to learn more about the region she came from.

Jacob Malsam (far left) overlooking Schronbrunn Palace in Vienna, Austria, with Vytas from Lithuania, University of Illinois student Joe (far right), Vytas from Lithuania and Olga from the Ukraine and exchange students from the University in Bruno.

In Budapest, she found the Hungarian students had little interaction with Giezynska and students who were there as part of the ERASMUS program. She attributes it to the fact she and others from the West "had very different spending power. Even now I can see that division still exists between Western countries and Central and Eastern Europe.

"The program is supposed to be about evening out the possibilities to move," but she still sees plenty of room for improvement.

And the treatment of students can still be an issue. She sees too much bureaucracy when students need to get paperwork completed. "Customer service doesn't exist. The student is a petitioner, not a client."

Christine Mueller, who teaches German at the Warsaw University of Technology, has had similar experiences. The German native studied both in Germany and Poland during her university years and graduated with a degree in history in 2005. In Germany she was able to study what she wanted, while Poland's curriculum was far more structured, and she appreciates the differences in each system.

She also sees changes in that in the past, ERASMUS students who came to the region focused on Eastern European studies, whereas today there is interest in subjects such as economics and law.

The opportunity to study in the former Eastern bloc has had a major impact on students such as Hannah Bambrick, who is a junior majoring in nursing at the University of Maine. She studied for a semester at AUBG in the fall of 2010.

"It's a hidden gem of a place," says Bambrick, who was surrounded by classmates from a wide range of countries. Her roommates were from Russia and Kazakhstan. While there she saw Roma—who still are subject to a great deal of prejudice—denied health care. Now she wants to go into the Peace Corps or work as a nurse overseas. Without her time at AUBG, "I don't think I would have had this strong a desire."

Jacob Malsam, a fourth-year student at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida, is currently studying at the Brno University of Technology in the Czech Republic. The two schools have an exchange program, and Malsam jumped at the chance to study in Brno because of its excellent computer science program and central location, which makes it easy to explore the region.

He's in classes taught in English with ERASMUS students from across Europe. "Everyone has their own backgrounds and it's pretty neat to be able to learn from them and share my own perspectives and knowledge."

Embry-Riddle Professor Andrew Kornecki is a Polish native who was instrumental in setting up exchange programs with both the Brno University of Technology and AGH University of Science and Technology in Krakow, Poland.

"We want to provide an opportunity for students to realize we are living in a global world," Kornecki says.

While many exchanges between universities in the United States and Central and Eastern Europe are relatively recent, some date back decades. Remarkably, the University of Warsaw and Indiana University linked up back in the 1970s, when a University of Warsaw history professor began seeking a partner university in the United States. A contact at the U.S. State Department connected him with various U.S. universities, and ultimately an American Studies Center was created at the University of Warsaw, while IU formed a Polish Studies Center, recounts Padraic Kenney, director of the Russian and East European Institute at IU, as well as head of the Polish Studies Center.

The two universities have done annual student and faculty exchanges since that time, Kenney says. "Indiana University has had an incredibly intense focus on

DOSHISHA UNIVERSITY

deeper knowledge of the world, especially Russia and Eastern Europe, since the 1940s," says Kenney, and close connections remain.

One of those who took part in the program back in the early 1990s is Tomasz Basiuk, who received his PhD from the University of Warsaw and until recently was director of the American Studies Center.

Basiuk graduated from high school and started university in the United States while his father was a Polish diplomat in New York, then transferred to the University of Warsaw. Even then, some of his classes in the English department were taught by Americans who were there from IU as part of the exchange, or were taking part in the Fulbright program.

Even during that time there was ready access to American literature and films. "There wasn't really censorship within the university within the department," he recalls.

Today the university offers a wide range of courses in English, and foreign students come from the United States, Europe, and Asia. "Some departments set up a replica of their regular curriculum," but taught in English, Basiuk says.

Increasing Competition

The increased competition for international students, and increased mobility within Europe, has impacted Western-style institutions in the region. Initially, those who had the abilities and language skills flocked to the schools in Hungary and Bulgaria.

But demand for a Western-style education changed markedly when Central and Eastern European countries joined the European Union. Hungary was among the first wave of former communist countries to join in 2004, while Bulgaria joined in 2007.

"Many Bulgarians who would have been coming to AUBG now go elsewhere in Europe," Huwiler says.

Today many students at AUBG come from the former Soviet Union. Huwiler recalls that in 2007 there were three Russian alums. This year, about 50 entered the university. The Bulgarian language and culture are similar to that of Russia, and the former Soviet Union has few Western-style universities.

Things have also changed at CEU, which primarily drew students from the immediate region in its early years. Now the school has about 1,500 students from about 100 countries. About 20 percent are from Hungary and 10 percent are from the United States, Johnson says.

With that diversity, students find "I am neither a majority nor a minority. I am a citizen of the world," Matei says.

Many of the students from the developing world have never been outside their home country before, he adds. Some students come from areas prone to conflict, such as Israel and Palestine. At CEU "it's a safe place for people to debate issues in a respectful way." **IE**

SUSAN LADIKA has been a journalist for more than 20 years, working in both the United States and Europe. She is now based in Tampa, Florida. Her last article for *IE* was "Transforming Lives" in the November/December 2012 issue.

Overcoming Reunification's Unique Challenges

During the Cold War, Germany held a distinctive position in Europe as the only country divided between East and West. When the Iron Curtain was torn asunder, the country had to revamp universities in the eastern part of the country, while maintaining contacts with its former communist allies.

"We had to keep the bridges, not tear them down," says Nina Lemmens, director of internationalization and communication with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

One of the first things the country did after the Berlin Wall fell in late 1989 was to evaluate all the faculty members at universities in eastern Germany, says Klaus Dicke, who until recently was spokesman for the Universities Members Group of the German Rectors' Conference. "Some professors stood the test and became professors of the renovated university system," particularly in fields such as physics, chemistry, medicine, and German language.

Professors in fields such as law, economics, and political science were replaced, mostly with those from the western part of the nation. In scientific subjects such as biology and chemistry, "there was a very good teaching tradition in the former GDR (East Germany)," Dicke says. As the higher education system in eastern Germany was revitalized, modern buildings and equipment were installed.

At Friedrich Schiller University Jena, where Dicke has been rector since 2004, the number of students has boomed, from 5,000 in 1990 to 21,000 today. In the past, most students came from within an 80-mile radius of Jena, but this year the majority of the new class of freshmen came from the western part of Germany or from other countries.

The university has been particularly successful attracting foreign students to study subjects that are research intensive, such as optics and physics, he says.

Both individual universities and DAAD have worked to draw foreign students to the country, and 2011 was the first year the number of foreign students exceeded 250,000.

Altogether, more than one-tenth of Germany's university students came from other countries, particularly China, Russia, Bulgaria, Poland, and Austria.

Dicke says the ERASMUS program has had the biggest impact on fostering exchanges.

While the Bologna Process has encouraged mobility by making university degrees comparable, he says it can be hard for students to squeeze in study abroad if they need to complete their bachelor's degree within three years.

To draw foreign students, DAAD makes appearances at about 200 fairs each year, and has offices in a number of foreign countries. DAAD's goal is for every German university student to have an international experience. About half are expected to study or intern abroad, Lemmens says. For others, the hope is to have "an international experience at home by meeting international students."

The interaction with international students enriches the lives of German students, the university where they attend school, and society as a whole, Lemmens says.

Dicke says the presence of international faculty and students is crucial for scientific research, and for non-scientific subjects they introduce different perspectives. "For the creativity and flare of universities, it's quite important to be international."