

An OPEN EXCHANGE

Scholars from formerly communist-bloc nations receive an education in democracy through Rutgers and Central European University.

by Bill Glovin



Rutgers political science professors Jan Kubik (left) and P. Dennis Bathory traveled to Budapest through an exchange agreement between Rutgers and Central European University. Behind them is the Danube River and Parliament.

The scene could not have been scripted better for a friendly drink between three professors discussing the future of an exchange program between Rutgers and Central European University: a floating restaurant on the Danube River cutting through Budapest, with the magnificent Parliament building reflecting the late afternoon sun on the opposite bank. Only a few blocks away from Parliament, a construction crew was busily renovating the buildings that will soon allow CEU to relocate its main campus from the outskirts of Buda to the central business district of Pest.

The construction and the discussion between Rutgers political science professors P. Dennis Bathory and Jan Kubik and CEU's history professor Istvan Rev underscore, respectively, the rapid expansion and innovative programs that have marked the five-year history of CEU.

Founded in 1990 with a \$230-million endowment from financier and former Hungarian citizen George Soros, CEU has become one of the most important institutions of higher education to emerge in this region since the fall of the Soviet Union, says Bathory. With more than 400 students from 29 countries and campuses in Budapest and Prague (and a third opening this fall in Warsaw), CEU's mission is to educate students from different backgrounds in a framework where they can study together, learn from one another, and become the policymakers, leaders, and teachers of a future, democratic central and eastern Europe.

"It's difficult for a higher-education institution to operate in this part of the world due to political and legal considerations," points out CEU's Rev, who is building the university's archival collection. CEU, which fully funds all students and offers social science degrees in eight graduate programs, is chartered and accredited by New York State. "About 60 to 70 percent of our faculty comes from abroad, Rev continues. "The language of instruction is English, and students receive a degree that is recognized in the United States."

CEU's connections to the United States include exchange programs that teach democracy firsthand by bringing CEU scholars to American universities and American professors to CEU's campuses. The exchange between Rutgers and CEU was initiated by Benjamin Barber, Walt Whitman Professor of Political Science and director of Rutgers' Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy. CEU also has exchange agreements with Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Columbia, the University of Chicago, and UCLA.

"Our evolving relationship [with CEU] has provided Rutgers with an infusion of first-rate graduate students whose intellectual and cultural backgrounds offer a unique perspective to our program," says Bathory, who, along with Kubik, helps administer the exchange. "In return, we provide CEU students with access to contemporary social scientific methods and the technology to implement those methods, and introduce them to the current intellectual and academic

questions concerning democratic transition."

Rutgers' Bathory and Kubik are using their last afternoon in Hungary to get better acquainted with Rev after spending five days on exchange at CEU. There, they lectured and interviewed prospective candidates for the second year of the exchange agreement that will bring another group of CEU graduate students to Rutgers this fall. Later, the two professors are set to meet with János Kis, chairman of CEU's political science department and a leading intellectual in the Alliance of Free Democrats, part of Hungary's coalition govern-

ment. As an informal part of the exchange, Kis and Béla Greskovits, deputy head of CEU's political science department, visited Rutgers in the past year to deliver talks. And Joanna Regulska, director of Rutgers' new Center for Russian, Central, and East European Studies, visited the Budapest campus last January and the Prague campus in May for an ongoing CEU-sponsored faculty seminar.

Among the six CEU students who came to Rutgers during the first year of the program were Marat Akopian of Georgia and Arkady Toritsin of Ukraine. After completing their coursework at Rutgers, they will return to CEU for one year to conduct their doctoral research but will come back to defend their dissertations. If they receive their doctoral degrees, they are obligated to return to the region for four years or pay back their tuition in full.

Before coming to CEU, Akopian worked for a bank in Moscow and Toritsin taught at a high school in Kiev. Both were disappointed with their education and were unsatisfied with their prospects for professional

growth. For them, CEU is the opportunity of a lifetime.

"At CEU, I was able to develop the interpersonal relationships with students and professors that helped me form better opinions and sharpen my arguments," says Akopian.

When he has completed his education, Toritsin plans to return to Ukraine. "I hope to teach at a university, but most positions are occupied by former Communists who have little understanding of free-market economies and the democratization process," he says. "Things are changing so fast. I cannot know what the future holds for me." Still, with his degree from CEU and his training in political science at Rutgers, Toritsin feels he can make an important contribution to the future of his country. □



A panoramic view of the city (top) from Castle Hill in Buda. Renovations, which are almost complete on this old building (above), will allow CEU to move its main campus to downtown Pest from the outskirts of Buda.