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Leland Conley Burrows

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***The European Centre for Higher Education:  
A UNESCO Effort to Reduce Cold War Tensions and to Promote  
Co-operation in Higher Education in Europe***

Leland Conley Barrows

The UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES) operated in Bucharest, Romania, from September 1972 through December 2011, as a decentralized unit of the Education Sector of the UNESCO Secretariat\*. Its initial Cold War mandate called for it to promote international cooperation in higher education in the Europe Region of UNESCO, a region so defined as to include North America, Turkey, and Israel<sup>1</sup>, and after the 1991 collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Russia itself and other successor states of the former USSR. This definition of Europe was intended to downplay as much as possible the ideological divide that had characterized Europe from the end of the Second World War until 1990. When the Cold War ended, CEPES expanded its activities by engaging in efforts to bring the higher education systems of Eastern and Western Europe closer together by the organization of common reform projects, many of them in collaboration with the European Commission and the Bologna Process.

Cooperation took many forms. From the start, CEPES was called upon to collect and disseminate information including educational statistics. It was also assigned a forum function that stressed the organization of thematic conferences and workshops and the diffusion and application of the results. The preferred method of diffusion was publication; hence, the launching in 1975 of what would become the trilingual quarterly review, *Higher Education in Europe*, which was published regularly until the end of 2009. In addition, CEPES launched five themed series of monographs on various subjects that were published periodically.

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\* This article is a revised and updated version of the paper which the author presented at a seminar titled “UNESCO and the Cold War” organized by the International Scientific Committee for the UNESCO History Project in Heidelberg, Germany, in March 2010. He published the first revision in French as “Le Centre Européen de l’UNESCO pour l’enseignement supérieur (CEPES) dans le cadre de la réaction de l’UNESCO face à la guerre froide” in *GeoPolitica: Revistă de Geografie Politică, GeoPolitică și GeoStrategie* 8 36-37 3 (2010): 210-223. The article is based on written sources and secondary materials, particularly successive versions (1997, 2012, and 2013) of a monograph written by the author on the history and operation of CEPES. A second version, titled *European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES 1972-2011)*, appears as a volume in the *International Encyclopaedia of Laws: Intergovernmental Organizations series*, an imprint of Kluwer Law International. The article and the book reflect the author’s service from 1983 to 2004 as the Senior Editor at CEPES. Having kept in touch with former colleagues, he wishes to express his gratitude to these persons, even though they are not named, for the information that they were willing to share with him.

<sup>1</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Conference of UNESCO included Canada, the United States of America, and Israel within the UNESCO Europe Region in 1976.

The presence of CEPES in Romania prior to 1990 conferred on UNESCO a European presence on both sides of the Iron Curtain that was unique for an international organization based in Western Europe during the years that Europe was split ideologically.

### Origins of CEPES

In addition to the will of UNESCO to found a center like CEPES, there was the determination of the Romanian communist authorities to reach out to the world beyond the confines of the socialist bloc both to traditional friends, particularly France, that had been both a mentor and a sometime ally of Romania, and to the rest of the world, frequently via the organs of the United Nations. Another factor was a deliberate French policy to utilize UNESCO, its headquarters situated in Paris, to further French cultural, linguistic, and, to some extent, political objectives, including the reaffirmation of French influence in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Well before the founding of CEPES, France had been promoting the idea of a Third Force in Europe. During the 1950s, France supported the organization of meetings of the national UNESCO commissions of different European countries. In 1956, France took the initiative in organizing the first Conference of European National Commissions for UNESCO in Aix-en-Provence. Meetings between the French National Commission for UNESCO and the UNESCO National Commissions of certain Eastern European countries followed.

In 1962, Professor Jean Stoetzel, a delegate to the French National Commission for UNESCO, strongly supported the creation in Vienna, Austria, of the European Coordination Centre for Research and Documentation in the Social Sciences.<sup>3</sup> Stoetzel, who had served between 1958 and 1975 as President of the Committee for the Social Sciences in the French National Commission for UNESCO took steps to obtain generous funding for this center from the French government. He served as a member of its Executive Committee from 1964 to 1975. In the words of a Belgian delegate to the Executive Board of UNESCO, this center served as a “meeting ground between East and West”<sup>4</sup>—exactly what would be said, later on, of CEPES.

Higher education, which began to undergo an unprecedented expansion on both sides of the Iron Curtain after World War II, seemed to provide an excellent venue for East-West international dialogue and co-operation. Such problems as access, academic/cultural versus practical education, the links between higher education and employment, continuing education, financing, standard-setting, equivalence and mobility, massification — all were common to both sides. Also, higher education offered the advantage of being more ideologically neutral than other possible areas of cooperation. Moreover, the institutional

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<sup>2</sup> William R. Pendergast, ‘UNESCO and French Cultural Relations 1945-1970’, *International Organization* 30 3 (Summer 1976): 465-468.

<sup>3</sup> The Center operated in Vienna from 1964 to 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Pendergast (1976): 467, 480.

structures of European higher education, both East and West, were strongly statist, and the traditions of higher education in both parts of Europe harked back to the early modern period in European history and in some cases to the High Middle Ages.

Thus, higher education would be a “safe”, but presumably productive, vehicle for East-West European dialogue and co-operation. That was the view taken by UNESCO and its French Director-General, René Maheu, who in 1966 had published *La civilisation de l'universel* (Paris: Lafont-Gauthier), as preparations were being made to hold the first Conference of Ministers of Education of the European Member States of UNESCO (MINEDEUROPE I) that was held in Vienna, Austria, from November 20 to November 25, 1967. Although this meeting was indeed one bringing together ministers of education, it concentrated almost exclusively on higher education, specifically access to higher education.

Backtracking a bit, we note that Romania achieved United Nations membership in December 1955 and UNESCO membership in early 1956. Very soon Romania became active in the affairs of the United Nations system, as it had been in the affairs of the League of Nations prior to World War II. In 1965, Romania was one of eight medium-sized European countries, including Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Turkey, and Yugoslavia, that sponsored a United Nations Resolution on Europe intended ‘...to improve good neighborly relationships among countries belonging to different horizons, as the tripartite spirit of the Resolution envisioned: East, West, and neutral.’<sup>5</sup>

Contributing to this effort was the mathematician, future member of the Romanian Academy, and diplomat, Professor Mircea Malitza, a founder of CEPES, who, at the time was the Vice Minister for United Nations Relations in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to him, the sponsoring countries of this resolution translated it into a ‘real UNESCO plan for Europe’, a first outcome being the MINEDEUROPE I Conference.<sup>6</sup>

Romanians played very active roles in this conference that took place at the same time that the General Assembly of the United Nations was meeting in New York under the chairmanship of Corneliu Mănescu, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The General Rapporteur of MINEDEUROPE I, elected by acclamation by its participants upon the proposal of Ștefan Bălan, the Romanian Minister of Education, was Jean Livescu, the Romanian Vice-Minister of Education, who, as Director-General Maheu recognized in his inaugural address, had chaired the *ad hoc* committee which had met earlier at UNESCO Headquarters to plan the Conference.

In the same address, Maheu suggested that ‘the fact that Europe, which [had] never before been assembled on such a scale and at such a level on any subject [negated] ...a cliché...

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<sup>5</sup> Mircea Malitza, ‘Reflections on the Creation and the Functioning of UNESCO-CEPES: The Personal View of One of Its Founders’, *Higher Education in Europe* 27 1-2 (2002): 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

to the effect that Europe [was] only to a slight extent directly and properly concerned in the action of UNESCO'.<sup>7</sup>

The General Recommendation formulated by this conference, quoted below, is considered to have been the inspiration for the founding of CEPES:

### The Conference

1. *Recommends* that [the] European Member States of UNESCO and the Organization itself:
  - (a) consider appropriate ways and means of promoting activities designed to foster European co-operation in the field of education, ...particularly higher education, taking into account the work already carried out by various national, international and non-governmental organizations and expert meetings;
  - (b) develop the use of existing information services to enable the various experiences in higher education to be exchanged on a wider basis;
  - (c) stimulate educational research in connexion [sic] with problems concerning access to and the future planning of higher education;
2. *Recommends*, moreover [that] UNESCO:
  - (a) ...pursue, in close cooperation with European Member States and taking into account the work of international organizations, further methodological studies and formulate recommendations on the provision of internationally comparable data and the standardisation of educational statistics, terminology and definitions on topics relating to access to higher education;
  - (b) ...explore the possibility of making provision in the Organization's program for a further Conference of Ministers of Education of European Member States.<sup>8</sup>

As recommended, a second MINEDEUROPE Conference met in Bucharest between November 26 and December 3 of 1973, a year and two months after the opening of CEPES. The final report of this conference makes clear that 'guided by the spirit of the recommendations of the Vienna conference, UNESCO made provision..., as early as the Sixteenth Session of the General Conference, for the establishment of a European Centre for Higher Education, which was opened in Bucharest....'<sup>9</sup>

It was probably in 1969 that the Romanian government began to lobby systematically for the creation of a UNESCO higher education center in Bucharest. In the next few years, it would successively obtain the opening, in Bucharest, of a United Nations Information Center (UNIC) in 1970, a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) office in 1971, a

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, Conference of Ministers of Education of European Member States of UNESCO (20-25 November 1967), Draft Final Report, Annex 1, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO, Conference of Ministers of Education of European Member States of UNESCO (20-25 November 1967), Draft Final Report, Annex 1, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO, Higher Education in Europe: Problems and Prospects 17, Paris, 5 September 1973 (unpublished ED 73/MINEDEUROPE II/3).

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) office in 1972, and the United Nations/Romania Demographic Center (CEDOR) in 1974.

On one hand, the stance taken by Nicolae Ceaușescu, President of the State Council of Romania and Secretary General of the Romanian Communist Party, in opposition to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia increased the popularity of Romania in the West. On the other hand, the events occurring in France in May of 1968 and then elsewhere increased the awareness on the part of higher education decision-makers and administrators in Western Europe of their common problems.

For Romania, this period of opening towards the United Nations and its specialized agencies corresponded to a reawakening of Franco-Romanian collaboration. A joint venture linking Renault, the parastatal French automobile manufacturer, had given rise to the launching of the Dacia plant in Pitești between 1966 and 1968. For many years, this plant assembled the “Renault 12” giving it the trade name, “Dacia 1300”. Collaboration between the Société Aérospatiale de France and Industria Aeronautică Română (IAR) of Brașov in the manufacturing of helicopters began several years later.

It was notable that even though the French social upheavals during May of 1968 began while French President Charles de Gaulle was on an official visit to Romania, he did not cut short his stay. One Frenchman who believed very strongly in this Franco-Romanian rapprochement throughout its duration was the Director-General of UNESCO, René Maheu.

The formal 1970 decision to set up CEPES in Bucharest was taken during the Sixteenth Session of the UNESCO General Conference (October 12 to November 14, 1970), but not without difficulty. The Report of the Program Commission that brought together delegates from forty-four countries reveals that several countries, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and the United Kingdom initially opposed the idea, believing that all the functions of such a center would best be assumed by the Paris Headquarters of UNESCO. On the other hand, certain countries other than Romania, particularly Austria and the USSR, wanted to host the Centre.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> UNESCO, 16<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Conference (12 October-14 November 1970), *Rapport de la Commission du Programme*, p. 43; Valentin Lipatti, *Strada Povernei 23* (Bucharest: Editura Garamond, 1993), pp. 166-167). Nevertheless, several of the CEPES directors were recruited from these countries: Two of them were Swedish (Eric Ribbing, 1972-1974, and Carin Berg, 1988-1995); one was Norwegian (Audun Ofjörd, 1978-1980), and one was Scottish (Lesley Wilson, 1996-1999). One director, (Frans Eberhard, 1982-1986) came from Austria, a country that had made a bid to host CEPES. With the exception of Audun Ofjörd, a career UNESCO official, these directors were more or less political appointees. Another director (Thomas Keller, 1976-1978), also a career UNESCO official, came from the Federal Republic of Germany. Upon the retirement of the final CEPES director, Jan Sadlak (1999-2009), who held Polish and Canadian citizenship, an English program specialist, Peter Wells, on post at CEPES as of 2003, was named “Head of Office *ad interim*”, a position he held until CEPES closed at the end of 2011. His lack of enthusiasm for keeping CEPES open and running evokes the original British attitude towards the founding of CEPES. All the interim directors, including Wells, were career UNESCO functionaries. Two of them were French

Obtaining the Centre for Romania, reported Ambassador Valentin Lipatti, the Romanian Representative to UNESCO between 1965 and 1971, was not an easy task.<sup>11</sup> It required him and other Romanian officials to lobby vigorously in several European and UNESCO venues, starting with a meeting of European university rectors sponsored jointly by UNESCO and the Standing Conference of Rectors and Vice-Chancellors of the European Universities, held in Bucharest in April 1970. The 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNESCO Executive Board (May 4 to June 19, 1970) issued a positive recommendation.<sup>12</sup>

At its meeting of October 14 to 16, 1970, the Higher Education and Research Committee of the Cultural Co-operation Council of the Council of Europe endorsed this recommendation. It added that CEPES should be a European center ‘...for information on the mobility of researchers, teachers, and students’.<sup>13</sup>

Summing up, Ambassador Lipatti could report that 1970, which, by coincidence, the United Nations organization had designated as the International Year of Education, had been very fruitful for Romania. We note Lipatti’s presence as an observer in the Meeting of Experts on the Feasibility of Establishing a European Center for Higher Education that met from September 27 to October 1, 1971, at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris and his satisfaction, when, at the farewell dinner offered in his honor by Director-General Maheu upon his transfer back to Romania the next month, the latter asked him to carry back with him the formal letter of confirmation, addressed to the Romanian government, of the intention of UNESCO to set up CEPES in Bucharest.<sup>14</sup>

Over the next year, a series of meetings were held between representatives of UNESCO and of the Romanian government intended to iron out the details and to elaborate the formal Seat Agreement (*accord de siège*). Professor Mircea Malitza, now the Minister of Education of Romania, took a particular interest in the project the remote origins of which he traces back to a chance encounter with René Maheu at the Rio de Janeiro Airport in 1954.<sup>15</sup> Among the responsibilities of his ministry was the refurbishing of the Kretzulescu Palace, in central Bucharest, including a two-story annex, the free use of which as the CEPES office the Romanian authorities had offered to UNESCO.

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citizens: Louis Ziégélé (January-December 1975) and Jean-Claude Pauvert (1980-1981). The others, Dragoș Vaida (September-December, 1974), Dumitru Chițoran (1986-1988), and Lazăr Vlăsceanu (November 1995-1996) were Romanian assistant directors. A list of CEPES directors and interim directors can be found in Barrows, 2013, p. 193.

<sup>11</sup> Lipatti, 1993, p. 166.

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO, 16<sup>th</sup> Session, Rapport de la Commission, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO, Note d’information, ED/WS/217 (15 March 1971), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Malitza (2002): 17; Lipatti, 1993, pp. 166-167.

<sup>15</sup> Malitza (2002): 11.

### Anomalies in the Staffing of CEPES

Nothing was said, at this point, about the assignment of Romanian local staff members to CEPES. Rather, the documents speak of the possibility of other types of professionals, possibly university faculty members on temporary assignment from European universities.<sup>16</sup>

A few days before the inauguration of CEPES, however, an exchange of letters between Director-General Maheu and Minister of Education Malitza elicited a positive response by UNESCO to a Romanian offer of fourteen local employees—Romanian civil servants employed by the Ministry of Education and Instruction—to be assigned on a permanent basis to the center. Their positions were strictly categorized by professional function. Their salaries were to be paid by the Romanian government.

The Romanian local staff at CEPES prior to 1990 included five program assistants and multilingual documentalists, one librarian, three multilingual secretaries, a driver, a receptionist, a general technician, and two housekeepers. These employees had the appropriate academic or vocational qualifications obtained at the corresponding Romanian universities or professional schools. The driver was a former Romanian army mechanic. The housekeepers had only very basic levels of education. What all the Romanian personnel had in common was that they were vetted and approved by the security services (*Securitatea*) of the Romanian government and were required to report on the international staff to the *Securitate* agent(s) charged with the supervision of CEPES.

Almost all the members of the Romanian local staff, including the Romanian assistant directors who held international professional staff status, were members of the Romanian Communist Party and as such were required to participate each month, usually on a Friday afternoon, in the required political-ideological meetings held at the Ministry of Education located two blocks away from CEPES. As these persons never informed their non-Romanian international colleagues of upcoming meetings, the latter were periodically confronted with empty offices and unoccupied desks upon returning from their lunch breaks.

But there were always two members of the Romanian local staff who were never absent on such occasions. ‘They are the two who refused to join the Party’, declared a former Director of CEPES. After the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, she learned that *Securitate* personnel, who were responsible to the Ministry of the Interior and not to the Ministry of Education, held their meetings on Saturdays.

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<sup>16</sup> UNESCO, Réunion d’experts sur les modalités d’établissement d’un centre européen d’enseignement supérieur : Etude de justification provisoire..., Unpublished ED/71/CONF. 31/3, para. 47 (1971), pp. 31-32, and UNESCO, Note d’information, ED/WS/217 (15 March 1971), p. 7.



It also seems that just before the actual inauguration of the Center by Director-General Maheu and Secretary-General and State Council President Ceaușescu, Maheu and Malitza made a further agreement, a so-called “Gentleman’s Agreement” by which the second-ranking international post, that in all but title was that of an assistant director, would always be filled by a Romanian national — a senior academic — who nevertheless would not be permitted to officially hold the title of assistant or deputy director. The reasons for this rather humiliating denial of title to the ranking Romanian international staff member at CEPES (made even more humiliating because he was sometimes called the “assistant to the director”) are obscure; however, the impetus for this action seems to have come purely from UNESCO, where an anti-communist current wished to limit the prestige that the Socialist Republic of Romania might derive from CEPES.

Yet, the intellectual as well as the academic qualifications of the Romanian assistant directors of CEPES were considerably more distinguished than those of all the directors of CEPES except for the last director. The first assistant director of CEPES, Dr. Dragoș Vaida, was an Associate Professor of Mathematics at the Polytechnic Institute of Bucharest. Those who succeeded him were full professors. The last assistant director to serve before the 1989 Romanian Revolution, Professor Dumitru Chițoran (1983-1989), a distinguished specialist in linguistics at the University of Bucharest, had served as Chairman of the Department of Philology and Pro-Rector for Exterior Affairs at the University of Bucharest. Only the last of the CEPES Directors, Dr. Jan Sadlak (1999-2009), could boast comparable intellectual and academic qualifications.

The question of the “correct” title for the Assistant Director of CEPES was summarily resolved with the nomination in 1991 of the Romanian sociologist, Professor Lazăr Vlăsceanu, to fill the position. He simply assumed the title of Assistant Director, and nobody complained. However, when Vlăsceanu retired in 2007, the demand made by the Romanian government that the post still be reserved for a senior Romanian academic, as per the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” of 1972, led to some friction. This Cold War era arrangement was no longer acceptable to the UNESCO Secretariat. All vacancies for international posts at CEPES were now to be truly opened to international recruitment. But because the Education Sector of UNESCO was already considering the possibility of closing CEPES, the Assistant Director’s post was not filled.

A question one might legitimately ask is to what extent the various Romanian citizens, officials, academics, and others who contributed to the setting up of CEPES or who later worked there, were convinced and/or influential communists. In vain does one peruse the 2006 *Report Final* on the communist dictatorship in Romania that was compiled by a Romanian presidential commission chaired by Professor Vladimir Tismăneanu (currently a Professor of Political Science at the University of Maryland at College Park) in search of references to CEPES and its founders.<sup>17</sup> There are none in the main text. However, an

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<sup>17</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu et al, *Report final*, 2006, electronic version available at [http://cpcadcr.ro/upload/Raport\\_Final\\_CPADCR.pdf](http://cpcadcr.ro/upload/Raport_Final_CPADCR.pdf)

appendix titled ‘Biografiile nomenclaturii’,<sup>18</sup> lists Gheorghe Maurer, Prime Minister and President of the Council of Ministers of Romania between 1964 and 1974, and Ștefan Andrei, Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1978 and 1985, both of whom had contacts with CEPES and with the UNESCO Secretariat. Both were favorable to CEPES, Maurer having even formed a friendship with Director-General Maheu thanks to his many trips to Paris, his half-French ancestry, and his mastery of French. He was present at the inauguration of CEPES on September 22, 1972.

On the other hand, the tell-all account by Mihai Pacepa, *Red Horizons* (1987), indicates that when Ambassador Valentin Lipatti had completed his term of service at the UNESCO Secretariat, he returned to Romania to become Assistant Director of the Section on Disinformation in the Office of Information on Foreign Countries (DIE) of the *Securitate*. Here he was known as Colonel Leonte Lipatti and held the title, Director of Cultural Relations, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Pacepa wrote that even though Lipatti was ‘bourgeois... [and the brother of the famous pianist, Dinu Lipatti], he had been recruited and retained by the DIE as a unique exception because of his devotion to Communism, his talent for diplomacy, his perfect mastery of French, and his exceptional understanding of the West’.<sup>19</sup>

Possibly one should class a large proportion of the Romanian officials who supported and even collaborated with CEPES during the Cold War as being among those who, according to the classification presented in *Raport final*, resisted communism through culture.<sup>20</sup>

The opening of CEPES in Romania and the assignment there of a certain number of Romanian local staff members was linked to the possibility for Romania to obtain a major reduction in the annual membership dues that it owed to UNESCO. In offering the free use of the Kretzulescu Palace and the free services of fourteen (eventually fifteen) local staff members, the Romanian government succeeded in reducing the convertible hard currency portion of these dues to zero. Thus, the apparently generous offer that the Romanian government made to UNESCO masked its realization of certain financial advantages.

Romania also obtained hard currency by exploiting the Romanian Assistant Directors of CEPES whose salaries were paid by UNESCO in US dollars (two-thirds) and Romanian *lei* (one-third). In common with the practices of the other socialist bloc countries, Romanian citizens earning hard currency were required to “contribute” a portion of it to their governments. The portion required of Romanians became particularly large after 1980 as the economic situation of the country deteriorated. Thus, the Romanian Assistant Director who joined CEPES in 1983 was required to hand over his whole salary to the Romanian government, both the portion paid in US dollars and the portion paid in

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 645-666.

<sup>19</sup> Ion Mihal Pacepa, *Red Horizons: The True Story of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu’s Crimes, Lifestyle, and Corruption* (Washington, D. C.: Regency Gateway, 1987, rev. 1990), p. 122.

<sup>20</sup> Tismăneanu, 2006, p. 364.

Romanian *lei*. In return, the government paid him a salary in *lei* comparable to what he would have been earning as a senior professor and pro-rector at the University of Bucharest. The government changed the dollars into *lei* at a special rate that yielded more *lei* than the usual black market rate. It then used all the *lei* obtained to pay the salaries of the whole Romanian local staff and to cover the maintenance costs of the Kretzulescu Palace.

### Functioning During the Cold War

After its inauguration on September 21, 1972, CEPES began to function in December of that year with a skeleton staff. The first Director, Eric Ribbing of Sweden, a former Head of the Department of Higher Education in the Swedish Ministry of Education, arrived to begin a two-year assignment during which he participated in the Second Conference of Ministers of the European Member States of UNESCO (MINEDEUROPE II). Indeed, the first meeting organized by CEPES, an *Ad Hoc* Panel of Experts on European University Co-operation, which met in Bucharest from June 5 to June 7 of 1973, provided input for this conference.

It had been established in advance that CEPES would not be divided into smaller sections (divisions, sections, sub-sections) as were the various sectors at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, the CEPES staff being viewed as too small for such a grouping.<sup>21</sup> A further clarification came in 1974 when the CEPES Advisory Committee report of that year stated that ‘...the Center cannot operate as a research center...’ Rather, it is expected ‘...to act as the host institution for the promotion of co-operation in the field of higher education in Europe and for the promotion of research...’<sup>22</sup> Thus, two characteristics for which CEPES would be roundly criticized many years later, its lack of clear internal organization and its brokering function, were clearly established immediately before and after the Centre opened its doors.<sup>23</sup>

As structured, CEPES would broker many activities dealing with various aspects of higher education which would be undertaken by outside specialists on contract or via the synergy stimulated by the various forum activities that started almost from the moment CEPES began to function. Indeed, the debate as to whether CEPES should conduct research on its own or identify areas of research and farm out ideas for projects to co-operating organizations and individuals was really part of a much larger debate regarding the role and activity of UNESCO as a whole, one that began almost as soon as UNESCO itself came into existence.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO, Réunion d’experts..., Unpublished ED/71/CONF. 31/3, para. 45 (1971), p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> CEPES/UNESCO, Report of the Second Session of the CEPES Advisory Committee, Unpublished ED/74/CONF.511/5 (1974) para. 7, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Maassen, Agnete Vabø, with contributions by Ossi Lindqvist, Evaluation of UNESCO-CEPES, Bucharest, Romania, Unpublished draft, Oslo: NIFU STEP Studies in Innovation, Research, and Education (15 December 2005). See, in particular, pp.7-8, 36-37, 51-55, and 59.

<sup>24</sup> See James P. Sewell, *UNESCO and World Politics: Engaging in International Relations* (Princeton: University Press, 1975), Chapters 4 and 5, and William Preston Jr., Edward S. Herman, and Herbert I.

Just as MINEDEUROPE I had suggested tasks for a future CEPES, MINEDEUROPE II defined itself, to a great extent, as a forum for the further refinement of the CEPES program. It urged the Center to pursue the elaboration of a European diploma and equivalence convention, to develop modalities for the mobility of students and teachers in higher education, to propose activities that would further the aims of the Helsinki Process, to develop methods for the international exchange and diffusion of information on higher education policies, and to examine the possibilities of multimedia teaching and learning.<sup>25</sup>

Within these parameters, the work of CEPES consisted of the organization of thematic meetings and workshops in Bucharest and elsewhere in Europe and the preparation of publications, some of them reflecting the results of these meetings or reflecting other activities as they were periodically added to the CEPES agenda. In 1984, for instance, CEPES was appointed Secretariat of the Regional Committee Responsible for the Application of the 1979 UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas, and Degrees Concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region. This one responsibility spawned a particularly large number of derived and related activities and projects including the participation of CEPES as of 2003 in the Bologna [Process] Follow-Up Group. Indeed, writing in 2008, an American researcher, Chris Darling, suggested that ‘...policy drafted by UNESCO-CEPES from 1973 to 1977 led to the elaboration of the Bologna Declaration’.<sup>26</sup>

Over its lifetime, CEPES sponsored or co-sponsored 174 international meetings (50 before 1990) held at CEPES or elsewhere, not counting the periodic meetings of the CEPES Advisory Committee (Advisory Board as of 1995) and the CEPES Liaison Officers.<sup>27</sup> CEPES also edited and published 87 volumes distributed among five publication series, some of them printed in-house, others by Romanian or foreign commercial publishers, including several in collaboration with other units of UNESCO, the International Bureau of Education (IBE), for instance, and in one case, the International Labor Organization (ILO).<sup>28</sup> In many cases, a meeting, a colloquium or seminar, a consultation led to one or more follow-up publications.

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Schiller, *Hope and Folly: The United States and UNESCO, 1945-1985* (Minneapolis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 188-201.

<sup>25</sup> UNESCO, Second Conference of Ministers of Education of European Member States of UNESCO (November 26 to December 3, 1973), Final Report, Part III, Report of Commission II, European Co-operation in the Field of Higher Education: Objectives, Ways, and Means, pp. 16-20.

<sup>26</sup> Chris C. Darling, UNESCO-CEPES: Origins, Accomplishments, and Solutions, Washington D. C. unpublished paper, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> See Burrows, 2013, pp. 155-192, for the lists of all the CEPES meetings and publications of which the author could find a record.

<sup>28</sup> In 1981 and 1987, CEPES compiled two successive editions of an *International Directory of Higher Education Research Institutions* for IBE. A symposium organized in collaboration with ILO titled Relations between Higher Education and Manpower Planning in June 1977 gave rise to seven national case studies that were published in the ILO World Employment Program Research Working Papers series. A comparative synthesis based on this work was published in 1982 in the ILO World Employment Program series as *Higher Education and Manpower Planning*. CEPES continued work in this domain by the

Given the importance that the MINEDEUROPE I and II Conferences and the founders of CEPES imparted to the collection and the interpretation of statistics on higher education, the second meeting organized at CEPES in July 1974 was a Seminar on Planning of the Center's Statistical Activities, organized in collaboration with the Office of Statistics of UNESCO. The outcome of this seminar gave rise to other activities on statistics that led to the preparation of three publications, the first one in 1978, *Statistical Study on Higher Education in Europe: 1970-1974*, a second and more important bilingual (French-English) one, *Higher Education and Economic Development in Europe, 1975-1980: A Statistical and Economic Study* (two volumes), by Petre Burloiu, and the third one, in 1989, a little more internationalized than the first two studies, *Statistics on Higher Education 1980-1985: A Study of Data on Higher Education and Research from the Countries of the Europe Region*, by Valentin Nicolae, René H. M. Smulders, and Mihai Korca.

Over several years, meetings of various kinds were organized on the general subject of higher education and research that gave rise to monographs or articles for the quarterly review, *Higher Education in Europe*, and another set of meetings on the planning of higher education. Thus, a symposium on planning in higher education held in Bucharest in December 1983 gave rise in 1986 to the volume, *Planning in Higher Education: Study on New Approaches in the Planning of Higher Education in Centrally Planned Economies and in Market Economy Systems*, by W. Wolter, a professor from the German Democratic Republic, and Ch. Oehler, a professor from the Federal Republic of Germany. The aim of promoting East-West collaboration was very evident.

The flagship CEPES publication was the quarterly review, *Higher Education in Europe*. It began modestly in 1975 as a reaction to a complaint voiced at the second CEPES Advisory Committee meeting that 'the Centre's activities had started so slowly, that the results were few, and little initiative had been shown'.<sup>29</sup>

In reality, this criticism was aimed at the first CEPES Director, Eric Ribbing, who had only recently resigned. It spurred a program specialist (and future CEPES Director), Jan Sadlak, who had joined the CEPES staff in September 1973, and the next Director, Thomas Keller (January 1976 to February 1978) of West Germany, to begin the production of a news bulletin. An experimental issue appeared in April 1975 and was followed in January 1976 by the regular publication of a typed and mimeographed bulletin titled *Higher Education in Europe* that initially appeared five times a year and then as of 1979 four times a year. Through a slow process of mission creep, the bulletin, as it was first designated, that began simply as a vehicle to reproduce and to diffuse, after translation when needed, news items and articles from other publications, East and West, evolved into a scholarly review.

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creation of a publication series, Monographs on Higher Education [in the Europe Region of UNESCO] in 1978 that between 1978 and 2011 produced volumes having a standardized format on the higher education systems of 22 countries. Several country monographs were revised and republished in order to take account of post-Cold War changes.

<sup>29</sup> CEPES/UNESCO, Report of the Second Session of the CEPES Advisory Committee (unpublished), ED/74/CONF.511/5 (1974), paragraph 7, p. 5.

*Higher Education in Europe* was published in three linguistic versions: English, the lead version, French, and Russian. As of 1979, the issues were themed. Between 1976 and 1982, the three linguistic versions of the review were produced in-house by electric typewriter and stencil duplicator. As of 1983, they were printed professionally by ILEXIM, a state-owned Romanian press. Beginning in 1997, the English version was printed and distributed by Carfax (now Taylor and Francis/Routledge) in the United Kingdom, and, as of 2000, the French and Russian versions were published on-line, the French version being translated and prepared in-house, the Russian version by Logos Ltd. of Moscow.

Between 1979, when *Higher Education in Europe* began to be themed, through 2009, it developed 115 themes or topics. Most of them were derived from CEPES activities, particularly the subjects and the outcomes of meetings and colloquia. The planning of higher education was chosen twice as the theme of a given issue, and research on higher education, four times.

Given both the international and the Cold War vocation of CEPES, the question of what was called geographical (including ideological) balance was always a matter taken very seriously both regarding the assignment of international staff members to CEPES and the selection of participants in conferences, authors for CEPES publications, and, after 1990, consultants for various higher education reform projects. The selection of such persons from the Western countries could generally be undertaken through contacts made by the Director, the other international staff members at CEPES, and the UNESCO Headquarters staff. Prior to 1990, collaborators and authors from the socialist countries usually had to be requested via the so-called Liaison Officers, designated officials serving as resource-person recruiters and information officers in each country, usually mid-level officials in the respective ministries of education or of higher education.

Before 1990, it proved particularly difficult to initiate contacts with the higher education institutions that were closest to CEPES, Romanian institutions. Foreigners were not permitted to enter Romanian institutions without prior arrangements, and these might be difficult or impossible to make. Typically, Romanian citizens were not permitted to have contacts with foreigners unless granted prior permission by the *Securitate*.

In theory, CEPES, particularly its library that was supervised by a Romanian librarian, a local staff member, was open to the public; however, few Romanians before 1990 actually frequented the library. Those who attempted to do so might be turned away by this librarian or possibly reported to the *Securitate*. Other Romanian visitors, students or colleagues of the Romanian professors who served successively as the assistant directors of CEPES, would avoid having any contacts with the CEPES international staff as they entered and left the building unless they were engaged in specific CEPES projects.

The Romanian and the international staff members nevertheless worked together quite harmoniously, but they rarely if ever fraternized outside of work. In addition to worries about the *Securitate*, the differences in status and, above all, salary, could be embarrassing.

Salary differences could be a major source of bitterness when local and international staff members undertook similar or identical tasks, secretarial duties for instance.

From the start, CEPES was mandated to work in three United Nations official languages: English, French, and Russian. Thus, the provision of high quality interpretation for conferences and translation for publications was always an important, difficult, and usually expensive part of the CEPES program. Producing the three linguistic versions of *Higher Education in Europe* was especially crucial and difficult.

In 1983, the CEPES Director, Frans Eberhard, and the newly hired Romanian Assistant Director, Dumitru Chițoran, who was concurrently a Professor of English at the University of Bucharest, negotiated a contract with the University of Bucharest whereby translations would be undertaken by the staffs of the respective language departments. CEPES paid the university for this work according to generous standard UNESCO page rates. For the individual translators, however, the work they did was unremunerated, so-called “patriotic work”, undertaken in addition to their normal (and heavy) teaching and research loads. They might at best receive some token rewards from the CEPES international staff: bags of coffee—real coffee—or packs, sometimes whole cartons, of cigarettes of the Kent brand that circulated in Romania prior to 1991 as a sort of parallel currency. Of course, they might also earn good will or special privileges from the Romanian authorities. In 1984, an English-French translator of half-French origin “earned” permission to spend a summer vacation in France, her first visit there in twenty years.

The Romanian local staff members at CEPES continued to be paid by the Romanian government through 2000. It even increased their number, but salaries remained very low, much lower than what Romanian staff members earned in the other UN offices in Romania where they had a special local/international status and were paid in US dollars by their respective organizations.

As of January 2001, thanks to lobbying in Paris by CEPES Director Jan Sadlak, all the Romanian local staff members at CEPES were granted local/international status entailing salaries paid by UNESCO in US dollars. Unfortunately, this generosity on the part of the UNESCO Secretariat increased the total personnel costs of the center and served in 2009 as an argument for closing CEPES.

Despite the realities of the pre-1990 period, CEPES did indeed bring together scholars, professors, and academic administrators from all over a divided Europe. In April 1985, CEPES helped to initiate the process by which several Eastern European, particularly Soviet rectors whose universities had broken with the Standing Conference of Rectors and Vice-Chancellors of the European Universities (CRE) in 1975, renewed their memberships in this organization.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Andris Barblan, ‘Academic Co-operation and Mobility in Europe: How It Was and How It Will Be’, *Higher Education in Europe* 27 1-2 (2002): 45.

Through its multilingual publications, particularly *Higher Education in Europe*, CEPES helped to diffuse the writings of Western scholars among Eastern European academics (and vice versa). Clearly, the three-language version policy was an aid to diffusion. Subscriptions to the review remained free to subscribers from the socialist countries having non-convertible currencies even when paying subscriptions were introduced in 1985 for certain categories of Western hard currency subscribers. Over the same period, copies of the other CEPES publications were always provided free of charge to persons and institutions in Eastern Europe wishing to receive them, and a certain number of copies of the three linguistic versions of the review were always provided to the Liaison Officers from these countries.

Looking back at his collaboration with CEPES in the 1980's, Adrian Năstase, the Romanian Prime Minister in 2002, referred to CEPES as a 'personal window of opportunity' in an otherwise isolated country.<sup>31</sup>

Although not a stated purpose of CEPES, it did offer a chance to a few Eastern Europeans, prior to 1990, to defect to the West. However, the three cases with which the author is familiar involved UNESCO international staff members. In two of these cases the defections were made to look like the normal transfer of UNESCO international staff members to Paris. The third case, however, the so-called Sorin Dumitrescu Affair, temporarily soured relations between UNESCO and the Romanian government but without unduly affecting CEPES.<sup>32</sup>

Into the early 1980's, CEPES continued to be strongly supported by UNESCO (even though as a decentralized unit of UNESCO Headquarters it did not appear prominently in the program documents the way the UNESCO institutes did) and by the European member states, East and West. During the lead-up to the temporary withdrawal of the United States from UNESCO (1985-2003), the American authorities made it clear that CEPES was one of the "good" UNESCO projects that would continue to receive American support.

As the western powers drew away from Romania in the late 1980's — Mikhail Gorbachev with his policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* superseding Ceaușescu, in Western eyes, as the perceived progressive communist leader — the UNESCO Secretariat began to cut back both the CEPES program and, via attrition, the international staff of CEPES. Certain

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<sup>31</sup> Adrian Năstase, 'The UNESCO-CEPES Jubilee: An Opportune Event for Some Observations about Higher Education in Romania', *Higher Education in Europe* 18 1 (2003): 45. Earlier, as a professor of international law, Năstase had collaborated with Robert Aspeslagh and Dumitru Chițoran, at that time the Assistant Director of CEPES, in the publication of a volume on peace education: *Pax et Libertas Civium: The Role of Universities*, UNESCO Papers on Higher Education, No. 34 (Bucharest: CEPES, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> This affair involved a ranking Romanian UNESCO official, who, in June 1976, while transiting to Bulgaria via Romania on official UNESCO business, was prevented from leaving Romania and forced by the Romanian authorities to submit a letter of resignation to the Director-General of UNESCO, Amadou Matar M'Bow. The latter not only refused to accept Dumitrescu's resignation but demanded that he be permitted to return to his post in Paris. After a two-year standoff, President Ceaușescu permitted Dumitrescu to return to Paris.



Western member states of UNESCO began to suggest that CEPES be shifted from Romania to another Eastern European member state. The declining economy of Romania along with the extreme austerity measures imposed by the Romanian government as of 1983 made living and working conditions in Bucharest increasingly difficult. The urban renewal project, which Ceaușescu imposed as of 1981 and accelerated, particularly in Bucharest, in 1984, and the “rural systematization” project that he launched in 1974 and accelerated in 1988, both elicited the increasing disapproval of governments on either side of the European divide.<sup>33</sup>

In 1984, when the Romanian government abruptly closed the United Nations/Romania Demographic Center, many observers believed that CEPES would be next. The favorable stance on birth control of CEDOR seemed to contradict the pro-natality policies of the Ceaușescu regime. Also, Elena Ceaușescu claimed that CEDOR harbored dissidents.

CEPES, however, was not affected by this closure, probably because higher education in the Europe Region of UNESCO, still very much a matter of the respective national or state governments, was something about which West and East — even Romania — could agree. Also, CEPES apparently continued to be a source of “economies” for the Romanian government. In 1988, when the Romanian authorities scrutinized the costs to Romania of hosting CEPES, the Romanian Assistant Director was able to prove, that, counting the salary he earned and turned over to these authorities, and the costs of the services and the goods that the Centre itself and the international staff purchased in Romania in hard currency, CEPES was profitable.

UNESCO initially seemed to be uninterested, at least at the official level, in Ceaușescu’s very harmful urban development and “rural systemization” projects. In 1985, when the Romanian architect, Ștefan Gane, attempted, through an international association he organized, to obtain the intervention of UNESCO to halt the damage being done to the architectural patrimony of Bucharest, he had no success.<sup>34</sup> However, a new Director-General, Professor Federico Mayor, elected in November 1987, did become interested, probably because a new Director of CEPES, Carin Berg of Sweden (1988-1995), expressed harsh, if unofficial, opinions about both projects while on her visits to Paris.

Over the spring of 1989, out of solidarity with the Belgian-initiated *Opération Villages Roumains* that had recently gotten underway, Director-General Mayor charged a former Algerian Ambassador to Washington and Moscow, Layachi Yaker, with a special mission to enquire in Bucharest about the effects of “rural systemization”. He met at the residence of the CEPES Director with the ambassadors to Romania of several countries that were particularly supportive of *Opération Villages Roumains*: Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Over the next two days, this group toured several systematization sites guided

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<sup>33</sup> Both projects are described in some detail by Dennis Deletant in *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989* (New York: M. S. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 294-319.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

by Romanian officials. One can assume that Ambassador Yaker's mission report was negative; however, it seems to have disappeared from the UNESCO Archives.

By the end of 1989, the UNESCO Secretariat, out of solidarity with the now very strong international opposition to Ceaușescu's policies, was seriously planning to remove CEPES from Romania. Indeed, it had permitted the international staff of CEPES to shrink to three: the Director, the Senior Editor, and the administrative officer. Two other Eastern European countries, Bulgaria and the USSR, were by now openly expressing a desire to inherit the CEPES.

### **After the Cold War**

The sudden collapse of the Ceaușescu regime in December 1989 gave CEPES a new lease on life. The post-communist government of Romania renewed and reinforced the Romanian commitment to CEPES, including increased financial support and the assignment of additional local staff remunerated by it. Although there were some complaints at UNESCO Headquarters that '...CEPES [had] not play[ed] the part it should have... after the collapse of the communist system in Central and Eastern Europe', and there were even some suggestions that CEPES should be closed because it was no longer relevant, the first UNESCO General Conference (October-November 1991) held after the collapse of communism in Europe called for the renewal of CEPES. A report on the future of CEPES prepared for Director-General Federico Mayor by two senior professors, members of the CEPES Advisory Committee, Justin Thorens of Switzerland and Gottfried Leibbrandt of the Netherlands, drew the same conclusion. They recommended that 'CEPES... be maintained and developed even further' and that it... remain in Bucharest.<sup>35</sup>

For the next eighteen years, CEPES prospered in post-communist Romania. Its activities expanded to include technical assistance to the post-communist higher education systems undertaken in cooperation with such partners as the World Bank, the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the Soros Foundation, particularly its Open Society Institute, the Japan Grant for the Reform of Romanian Higher Education, and the Japanese Trust Fund for the Preservation of the World Cultural Heritage. In 1998, CEPES assumed the task of assuring the European follow-up to the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education held that year and as of 2003 was named a consultative member of the Bologna Follow-up Group.

But CEPES was unable to shed its image at UNESCO Headquarters as a Cold War relic. A detailed evaluation of the Centre commissioned by the UNESCO Internal Oversight Service (IOS) in 2005 and undertaken by three experts of the Norwegian Institute for Studies in Research and Education - Center for Innovation Studies (NIFU-STEP)

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<sup>35</sup> Justin Thorens and Gottfried Leibbrandt, *The Renewal and Reinforcement of the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES)—The Report to the Director-General of UNESCO, 1992*, reprinted as ED-96/CEPES/A.B.5.2/Ref.3 (unpublished) August 1996.

concluded that although CEPES was a productive unit of UNESCO, its activities were overly remote from the European higher education goals of the major Education for All initiative and the related Forum on Higher Education, Research, and Knowledge flagship activity.<sup>36</sup> And as Romania moved toward membership of the European Union, there were those at the UNESCO Secretariat who argued that the political justification for the existence of CEPES was rapidly disappearing, despite the continued strong functional justification for its continued existence. It was, after all, undertaking a slate of activities of greater number, variety, and intensity than had ever been the case during the Cold War.

In January 2009, UNESCO Director-General, Koichiro Matsuura, by then nine months away from retirement, announced that he would close CEPES at the end of September 2009. He justified his decision in terms both of cost: ‘Out of a biennial budget of \$2.3 million, less than ten percent [was] devoted to program activities,’ and of politics: ‘CEPES played an essential role in the strengthening of co-operation in higher education in Europe.... But given the new political realities in Europe, CEPES ha[d] fulfilled its role in Europe with success; therefore, its status as a center funded by the regular budget of UNESCO [was] no longer tenable’.<sup>37</sup>

Unfortunately, the Director-General and his advisors failed to consider that CEPES was obtaining extra-budgetary resources despite impediments to doing so that were being created by the UNESCO Secretariat. They also failed to consider that CEPES was rendering direct and indirect services to its stakeholders that could not be given a specific monetary value but were nevertheless valued very highly by these same stakeholders.<sup>38</sup> And they ignored the opinion expressed by the authors of the NIFU STEP report that ‘UNESCO gets “value for its dollars” in the sense that CEPES manages to produce a lot... for UNESCO [in terms of] relevant outcomes for the relatively small amount invested [by it] in CEPES’.<sup>39</sup>

Fortunately, official Romanian attitudes about the role and the value of CEPES had changed. Rather than viewing the center as a source of hard currency, as had been the case before 1989, the Romanian government agreed, via a Memorandum of Understanding signed between Director-General Matsuura and Prime Minister Emil Boc on September 25, 2009, to cover the full costs of operation of CEPES for at least two years if the plan to close CEPES were deferred.

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Maassen et al., 2005, pp. 7-8. Although this Forum was inaugurated with great fanfare in 2001 as a follow-up to the 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, it was not funded by the regular program budget of UNESCO, but by the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency that chose to end it in 2009. Given the focus of the Forum on developing countries and its lack of permanence, Director Jan Sadlak was wise not to have involved CEPES in it.

<sup>37</sup> Director-General of UNESCO to the Prime Minister of Romania (4 February 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Peter Maassen et al., 2005, p. 6. (See footnote 23, above.)

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

The top management of UNESCO, particularly the leadership of the Education Sector, accepted the Romanian offer; however, this leadership began immediately to weaken CEPES by transferring many of its activities to the Division of Higher Education in Paris and by offering generous separation packages to certain members of the local staff who were then not replaced. The Draft Program and Budget for the UNESCO 2010-2011 Biennium then in the making stated that "...a feasibility study [was] to be prepared [by Romanian experts] for the possible creation of a category I UNESCO institute in Bucharest, fully funded by Romania, to replace the existing UNESCO-CEPES. During this two-year transitional period, the Center [would] focus on the higher education needs of the Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern European sub-region."<sup>40</sup>

### Conclusion

What stands out in the train of events leading to the first announcement that CEPES would close as of September 30, 2009, and then, after protests, to the second announcement that closure would be delayed December 31, 2009; and finally to the decision to keep CEPES alive through December 2011 — but weakened — is the speed and lack of transparency of the decisions taken and the bad faith of some of the actors in the UNESCO Secretariat. There were no prior consultations with stakeholders and little if any prior warning to the Romanian government.<sup>41</sup> It seems that Director-General Matsuura and, particularly, Assistant Director-General for Education, Nicholas Burnett,<sup>42</sup> an English and a former World Bank official, deliberately rejected any prior consultations with stakeholders on the grounds that because CEPES was not a Category I UNESCO Institute, like its counterpart in Venezuela, the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC), for instance, but a decentralized unit of the UNESCO Secretariat, its closure, representing nothing more than an internal administrative restructuring, did not require prior consultations with stakeholders or approval by the Executive Board or the General Conference of UNESCO.<sup>43</sup> By comparison, the decision to found CEPES had evolved over a five-year period (1967-1972) with the greatest of transparency and took shape following discussions in several fora.

The real motives for the abusive way that the UNESCO Secretariat announced the anticipated closure of CEPES and then followed through with it are not particularly clear. Personal conflicts and jealousies played a role. CEPES appeared to be overly successful

<sup>40</sup> UNESCO, Press Communiqué, Paris, 6 October 2009; Extract from *Monitorul Oficial* 634 of 25 September 2009 (M. Of. 634/2009); UNESCO, Draft Program and Budget, 2010-1011, revised version, Corrigendum 3 of 35 C/5 Rev. Vol. 2 (October 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Mircea Malitza to Director-General of UNESCO, 11 February 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Burnett served as the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education from September 2007 to October 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Originally a decentralized unit of the UNESCO Secretariat patterned on CEPES, IESALC had opened in 1978 as the UNESCO Regional Center for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CRESALC). In 1997 it acquired Category I UNESCO Institute status and a changed name. Between 1995 and 2008, the CEPES Advisory Board made several recommendations that CEPES be granted the same status, but to no avail.

and more independent of the Education Sector than was acceptable in the eyes of certain of its senior managers.<sup>44</sup> There was, in particular, the negative position taken by Assistant Director-General Burnett. And one must not overlook a comment appearing in the 2005 NIFU-STEP evaluation that ‘if UNESCO Headquarters is convinced that no argument exists for including the needs of European higher education in its educational strategies, the transfer of CEPES to Africa might be proposed.’<sup>45</sup>

While the casual reader might have taken this remark as a joke, others, unfortunately, took it seriously. The intended allocation for CEPES from the UNESCO regular program budget for 2010-2011 was instead transferred to the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Dakar (BREDA) and to the International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) opened in Addis Ababa in 1999.

The future of CEPES thus became very doubtful. When consulted on April 2, 2010, the CEPES webpage only listed four major projects that it would be undertaking during the 2010-2011 biennium: (i) work in favor of the Bologna Process; (ii) a project dealing with the future of higher education in Romania, (iii) a project to develop a method for monitoring graduates of higher education in order to anticipate future curricular reforms, and (iv) the organization of seminars on the qualifications of higher education leaders in Romania—altogether a very weak program. Nothing was said about the preparation of the feasibility study on the creation of a UNESCO Category I Institute specializing in higher education in Eastern and South Eastern Europe to supersede CEPES. Except for a first draft prepared by the Romanian Ministry of Education in March 2009 that the Education Sector of UNESCO summarily rejected,<sup>46</sup> the study in question was never produced.

Upon the July 2009 retirement of Jan Sadlak, the last CEPES Director, Peter Wells, the remaining international staff member assigned to CEPES, took over as Head of Office *ad interim*. He was expected to remain in charge until a new director had been recruited; however, the UNESCO Secretariat seemed incapable of finding the “right” person to fill the position.

Additionally, the Romanian government that took power in October 2009, confronted as it was with economic problems, showed little enthusiasm for the agreement made by the outgoing government by which Romania would fund CEPES over the 2010-2011 biennium. At first non-committal about the post-2011 period, it finally informed the UNESCO Secretariat that it would not fund the whole CEPES budget beyond 2011. Possibly the Romanian authorities expected that the incoming Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, a Bulgarian national elected in October 2009, would be motivated by a sense of Eastern European solidarity to restore the CEPES regular program budget, but she did not do so.

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Maassen et al., 2005, p. 33.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> Qian Tang to Remus Pricopie, 31 March 2009 (D/ED/EO/09/13).

As Head of Office *ad interim*, Wells was a disappointment. He made no effort to save CEPES, failing to rally the many stakeholders that CEPES had at the time. Not being properly informed, many of these did not realize how precarious the situation of CEPES was. Nor did he make any effort to persuade the Romanian authorities that CEPES was worth financing and thus saving. Instead he concurred in the discontinuance of CEPES projects, particularly publication of *Higher Education in Europe*, even though it was not only the longest running of the CEPES projects but had evolved into a world-class scholarly journal and was actually earning some money for CEPES.

To make matters worse, neither Wells nor the Director of the Higher Education Division in Paris, Professor Georges Haddad, responded positively to an offer made by the publisher of the review, Taylor and Francis/Routledge, to assume more of the costs of publishing the English language version,<sup>47</sup> increased responsibility for the identification of contributors and the editing of issues, and even to continue the publication of the review at its expense as a UNESCO-CEPES journal, should CEPES close.<sup>48</sup>

And CEPES did close on the last day of December, 2011. One is reminded of the words of Ambassador Valentin Lipatti: "...diplomacy is one of those professions that gives rise to the least durable of satisfactions. If one can speak of creation in this domain, [it] will no doubt be subject to rapid depreciation."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The Russian version ceased publication in 2006; the French version, in 2008.

<sup>48</sup> The managers at Taylor and Francis/Routledge continued the legacy of *Higher Education in Europe* by founding a new journal titled *European Journal of Higher Education*, but it has no link to UNESCO. Its first issue appeared in March 2011.

<sup>49</sup> Lipatti, 1993, p.205.