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In this issue:

**Regional Co-operation in Higher Education in Central and South
Eastern Europe**

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From the Editors

This issue of **Higher Education in Europe** is based on and publishes much of the proceedings of a major international conference organized by the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education. The event in question was the ["International Symposium Organized by UNESCO-CEPES and the Elias Foundation on Central Europe-South Eastern Europe: Inter-regional Relations in the Fields of Education, Science, Culture, and Communication"](#) that was held in Bucharest, Romania, from 19-22 April 2001.

The scope and the outcome of this Symposium, as described and commented upon in a summary report which was written by Stefan Messmann and Leland Barrows, are far broader than the specific topic of this issue of the review, "Regional Co-operation in Higher Education in Central and South Eastern Europe". In fact, only one of the four main topics covered focuses primarily on co-operation in education in Central and South Eastern Europe. The three other topics refer, respectively, to co-operation in science and technology (S&T), to cultural co-operation with particular reference to lessons from the past, and to co-operation with regard to communication *i.e.*, the media. Of course, as the reader will discover, these three topical areas strongly imply education, particularly higher education, specifically, "the universities, as the most trusted interlocutors of civil society".

The description of the Symposium, as evoked above, accomplishing many of the tasks of the usual "From the Editors" piece, we refer our readers to it for the usual short introductions to authors and articles. Suffice it to say that the political importance of the Symposium was underlined by the presence, at the opening session, of H. E. Ion Iliescu, the President of Romania, who delivered a short address in which he evoked the complementarity of the objectives of the Symposium and of the regional foreign and educational policies of Romania. The Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Koitchiro Matsuura, also transmitted a welcoming message to the Symposium*.

A major theme running through the seven articles based on the presentations made during the Symposium is that the subregion of Europe in question is really two subregions: Central Europe, including those countries or parts of countries that were once part of the Habsburg Empire, and South Eastern Europe - the Balkans - comprising countries and parts of countries that, until the Nineteenth Century, were under Ottoman domination. The most recent experience of unity of the two subregions is that of the communist era, running from the end of the Second World War, to about 1990, including for most of the countries concerned, membership in the Warsaw Pact and COMECON. The heritage of this period, although not fully forgotten, has become irrelevant given the general striving for admission to the European Union that tends to emphasize the separateness of the countries concerned while focusing their individual sights on Brussels, despite the existence of numerous European Union assistance programmes intended to stimulate sub-regional co-operation. The generally expressed hope of all the participants in the Symposium is that somehow this common quest for European Union membership might become more of a unifying factor instead of one stimulating divisiveness.

Of the three articles making up the "Tribune" section of this issue, the first two carry forward some of the themes of the previous issue of **Higher Education in Europe** (No. 1, 2001) on "Globalization: A New Paradigm for Higher Education Policy" particularly those relating to the use of the information and communication technologies in higher education both for transnational delivery and for backing up delivery in traditional institutions and programmes. The same themes also appeared in several of the presentations made during the Symposium.

In the first article, Sylvia Van de Bunt-Kokhuis of the Netherlands makes a pitch in favour of the electronic delivery of higher education courses by higher education institutions and consortia in "the North", *i.e.*, the developed Western countries, to institutions and individuals in "the South", particularly the countries of tropical Africa. While she argues cogently that in many cases on-line delivery might allow for rapid catching-up in certain countries and cases, she recognizes that certain severe problems in "the South" relating to cost and infrastructure would make easy communication and the use of computers difficult, if not impossible. Moreover, there are problems of course-content. For instance, providers of on-line learning should avoid falling into the trap of "monoculturalism"; rather they should adapt their courses to local cultural conditions if they hope to have a successful impact upon learners. And even with success in this domain, there is little guarantee that the "digital divide" between the wealthy and the poor nations will not worsen.

Terry Goodison of the United Kingdom, while retreating from globalization and concentrating upon higher education in his country, examines the question of partnership (or lack thereof) between the delivery of higher education by traditional means and via ICT at a distance. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and the funding councils, particularly the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), have determined that the ICTs are powerful means for improving teaching, learning, and assessment. They are requiring that British higher education institutions introduce and make extensive use of ICT-assisted teaching and learning so as to cover a substantial portion of all instructional activity in traditional institutions. Moreover, several national initiatives are underway: a Learning and Teaching Support Network, a Generic Learning and Teaching Center, and particularly, an e-university that will operate commercially, out-sourcing its activities to a core of selected traditional institutions. While university teachers welcome the improvements to teaching and learning that the ICTs can bring, they fear their use as a mere cost-cutting and personnel reduction device by bureaucrats and the threat thus posed to traditional universities.

The whole question is interesting and will be picked up in a later issue of **Higher Education in Europe**, No. 4, 2001, on "Virtual versus Classical Universities: Conflict or Collaboration".

The third "Tribune" article, while focusing on traditional higher education, is of indirect relevance to the question of the efficiency of distance learning. Adriana Need and Uulkje de Jong of the Netherlands examine the question of the extent to which a student's learning environment; *i.e.*, how well he or she fits into the institution into which he or she enrolls, affects the outcome of his or her studying. They conclude that students "have little to gain in carefully selecting a local study environment". What makes the difference is the individual study habits and abilities of students. Although the authors only considered traditional students in a sampling of traditional Dutch higher education institutions, it is intriguing to think that the evidence accumulated would indicate that for motivated students, it would make little difference whether or not they studied in traditional institutions or at a distance through the services of a virtual university.

We conclude the issue with the usual "Book Reviews and Studies" section. Of the six books reviewed, two deal with distance and "cyber" higher education.