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ROMANIA

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A Former Communist Prison Becomes a Summer School for Post-Communist Enlightenment

By Cristina Merrill

SEPTEMBER 13, 2005

BUCHAREST, Romania – I like to think that I have lived here long enough to earn the right to air complaints about Romania and her people. Readers who have suffered through my personal gripes on a regular basis know that I have taken full advantage of a local's privilege to rant.

Alas, I have been saved from becoming another Mrs. Mortimer, the grumpy Victorian lady recently made famous in Todd Pruzan's "The Clumsiest People in Europe" as an armchair traveler who seemed to take comfort in prejudice and stereotypes. Sometimes it's easier to be critical than positive — and in a country like this, which is undergoing a difficult transition toward democracy, positives are treasures hard to find.

I found my inspiration at last in a summer school, organized by the Civic Academy Foundation, that I attended in July. The foundation is known primarily for having initiated the restoration of a prison, where political and intellectual elites were held during Communism, into a "Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of Resistance." With help from the Council of Europe, under whose aegis it operates, the jail-as-museum is, ironically, one of Romania's best organized (one of the few with proper descriptions and explanatory captions) and — to this date — the *only* one to address, in an organized fashion, crimes committed by Communists in Romania.

Despite the fact that it is located in the city of Sighet, in a northern area that practically borders the Ukraine and is close to Hungary, the museum is a popular draw for tourists and dignitaries. It also houses the International

Center of Studies on Communism as well as numerous seminars and conferences — and, for the last eight years, a week-long summer school for youngsters between the ages of 14 and 18. Many say that none of this would have been possible without the relentless efforts of poet Ana Blandiana, President of the Civic Academy Foundation, which she helped found 11 years ago. Since the 1989 revolution that toppled dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, Ms. Blandiana has led an unyielding campaign to promote democratic values and edu-



Poet Ana Blandiana, president of the Civic Academy Foundation, at the start of the summer school in Sighet.

cate and inform Romanians about their history.

She knows all about suffering. Because her father, a priest, was a political prisoner, as a young girl Ms. Blandiana was discriminated against for being “the daughter of an enemy of the people.” She made her mark despite the ideological labeling, winning international awards and getting published in Romania even before 1989. To look at this soft-spoken woman in her early sixties, whose immense suede-brown eyes reflect genuine goodness born of suffering, is to understand why she couldn’t help but criticize the Communist system, especially during the 1980s, when life became especially difficult. With censors on her tracks, she tried to disguise her condemnations as allegorical writings. For example, one of her poems, translated as “Everything” and published in 1985 in a daily British newspaper by a Romanian correspondent for Voice of America, was an amalgamation of words (“everything” stood for what Romanians had and didn’t have) whose real meaning amounted to the day-to-day misery of the Romanian people. The title was also meant to include all-powerful Ceausescu.

Another term in the poem, “cats,” referred to the time a cat scared the dictator’s guard dog during a visit to an old hospital he was considering demolishing to make way for his gargantuan House of Parliament. Ceausescu felt so scorned by people’s bemused and amused reaction that he apparently decided on the spot to tear down the hospital. It took a protest from Western writers to stop the regime from incriminating Ms. Blandiana. But another children’s poem she wrote, a thinly disguised fable called “Arpagic” (after her tomcat, “Onion”), won her full banishment from publishing. Apparently people had started nicknaming Ceausescu “Arpagic.” That name still comes up in connection to her work. Her books were taken out of libraries, her phone was cut off and no mail got delivered. Instead, a car with informers sat parked outside the house permanently. Thankfully, the 1989 Revolution reversed her misfortune.

To date she has written over 20 volumes of poetry and is this nation’s most celebrated living poet — Romania’s own Vaclav Havel. She briefly flirted with politics, joining the first organized political party right after the revolution, but she soon resigned when she realized that the new leaders were neo-communists who were using her and other intellectuals as a front for legitimacy. Nevertheless, she has accomplished plenty (some say a lot more) without being a politician.

A unique meeting place of mind and memory

Considering the richness of the museum complex (documentation, expertise, passion of organizers) and the selectivity of participants (students and lecturers), the summer school over which she presides every July is the only one of its kind. Researchers of Communism say that no other country, in the former Soviet bloc or elsewhere, has been able to organize anything resembling this school —

a place where students can learn and meditate about their country’s past in the company of renowned historians and academics. It is Ms. Blandiana’s wish that students bring their open minds and no prejudices, in order to avoid the mistakes of the past: “I keep saying that memory is not a problem of the past, it’s a problem of the future, because only when young people understand what their parents lived through can they understand how they ought to live in the future.”

This unique meeting place of minds and memory is a laboratory for forming young historians and leaders in the spirit of democracy. “You have a mission to fulfill,” Mariana Nitelea, European Council director of information in Bucharest, told students on the first day. “This dialogue will help you build a truly democratic society.” Later, speaker Camilian Demetrescu, a reputed sculptor who left Romania in the 1970s, commended students for having “managed to swim across to Sighet, toward the truth. You are the avant-garde that will save Europe.”

One hundred students from Romania, the Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova (areas to the northeast that once belonged to Romania before WWII, but where many still speak Romanian) are chosen every year based on an essay they write in response to a given theme. This year’s theme: “Whether corruption could be considered the worst calamity affecting post-Communist countries.” The presence of “estranged Romanian” students came about as an accident in the first year of the school. The announcement carrying the essay contest was picked up by Romanian-language newspapers in Chisinau and Moldova. School organizers say the written answers were impressive. Since then, every year about a tenth of students are admitted from the area Romanians once called Basarabia. Throughout the time I spent at the summer school, I kept marveling at the astuteness of these students, who stood out because of their heavy, Russian-accented Romanian. Their questions were always on the mark, intense, intelligent.

I was impressed, in fact, by all the students I met in Sighet. Their drive and seriousness reminded me of my childhood here, when doing well in school meant something (one of the few good things about Communism). Aside from the Coca-Cola and Mountain Dew bottles that students would sneak into the lecture room, the accidental cell-phone ring, or the blue and green mascaras worn by some of the girls, I felt I was amid the driven students I once knew and by whom I was challenged. Because of a general lack of incentive, which is fueled by low teacher salaries and abundant Western temptations, the standards of Romanian education have fallen precipitately since 1989 — though Sighet, which serves as an academy of sorts for the bright, is proof that there is hope for the youth of this country. Pauline, a young French photographer who also was my roommate during the school, commented on how serious these students seemed. Practically none left the room during the 45-minute lec-



The students who attend Sighet's summer school are some of Romania's brightest. Photo: Civic Alliance

ture sessions and the following half-hour of questions and answers. "There is no comparison to my friends in France! We couldn't live without smoke breaks."

About ten percent of the 100 students' enrollment applications are based on recorded interviews they have conducted with former political prisoners (or people who knew prisoners). Their work becomes part of the oral-testimony section of the International Center for Studies on Communism. The purpose of this department is to collect as many oral sources as possible for later use by researchers and historians, before the last witnesses disappear. At an oral-history workshop I attended, Ms. Blandiana instructed pupils to "go into interviews with some idea about the subject. Keep in mind that you are dealing with the elderly" — meaning former political prisoners. "Ask them if they know the names of their torturers."

Alina Galeriu, an eleventh-grader from Bucharest, enjoyed herself so much the first time she came to Sighet three years ago that she made sure to apply, and be accepted, as an oral historian the following two summers. "That first year I discovered a different world. Professors and students were of a different quality, to my liking," Alina said, adding that this should also help with her resume. "They promoted and believed in the same values, they were closer to me and what I believe in. I find myself here, I feel comfortable." She said that since an early age she has been interested in history, and the way it is taught. She discovered lapses and ambiguities in Romanian manuals on 20th-century history. "I kept wondering whether [manual writers] were naïve and didn't understand recent history, or they didn't want to write things as they were," Alina said. "I think they're not yet allowed to [write it as is]."

Andrada Balan, a student from the city of Ploiesti who kept asking incisive questions during Q&A sessions,

said that she liked feeling like a "detective" at the conference and in school — after listening to different opinions and points of view, she could create her own ideas. She was two years old when the Revolution broke out in 1989. "All I know is from others' memories. I don't know how objective they are." She said she was grateful for the opportunities and lessons that Sighet's summer school offered. "Instead of wasting time in discos, I prefer to do something unique."

Europe's helping hand, and Konrad Adenauer's

Europe has lent Romania and Ms. Blandiana a helping hand even before admitting the country into the European Union, which is slated to happen in the next few years. Restoration work on the Sighet Memorial was launched with an

initial \$2-million European grant. Much more was needed and raised from donations, which also came from contributors abroad. The Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a German civic outfit associated with Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Party (and funded in part by state funds) covers expenses for the summer-school (travel and accommodations for participants). Named after Germany's first chancellor, this foundation set up office in Romania in 1991 as part of its mission to help "promote democratic development of the process of political, economic and social transformation in post-communist Romania." One of the foundation's main objectives is helping train and promote promising young people, which is why the Sighet summer school is a good fit. Encouraging a strong market economy and an independent justice system are also high on this organization's list. Lately, the foundation has held several high-impact conferences.

So, why is the United States so absent here, at Sighet or anywhere? I always believed that promoting democracy around the globe was our country's main strength. Romania has been without a U.S. ambassador since February, when Jack Dyer Crouch was recalled to Washington to join President George's Bush national-security team. (President Bush just this month announced he intends to nominate Nicholas Taubnam, a rich auto-parts executive from Virginia, as our next emissary to Romania.) Even though this country is likely a low strategic priority for the U.S., maintaining good diplomatic relations is important, as is keeping an eye for talent in countries in which we have an official presence. My friend Cora Motoc, one of the brightest young women I've ever met, applied for an opening with the U.S. embassy early in the year. She didn't get it but was hired instead as program coordinator by Konrad Adenauer. By all accounts, she is making waves at her new employer. Not discovering Cora might not be the end of the world for us, but I

am wondering if this trivial example indicates that we are losing the race to nurture young talent in this country and, possibly, elsewhere.

Dr. Gunter W. Dill, Konrad Adenauer's director in Romania, is impressed with Romania's young people. "They are better qualified than their counterparts in Germany," he said. He noted young Romanians' drive to acquire multiple skills and speak several languages. "The young here feel like Europeans. They have the same sensibilities." Of course, Mr. Dill's organization is in favor of reunification of Christian Europe, and Romania, as an Orthodox Christian country, qualifies on religious terms — thus encouraging a country like Romania to make the most of her potential is in Europe's best interests. Turkey, on the hand, gets no confidence votes from Christian Democrats like him. Dr. Dill said he hopes that as time goes by, and conditions in Romania improve, young talent will dream less and less of emigrating. He sees the role of young people as crucial in helping build a democratic country, for the sake of Romania as well as for Europe. "In the future, the task of schools in the [European] Union will be to prepare students for the new world. Europe will want to know what the role of Romania will be."

Dr. Dill predicts, however, that upon accession to the European Union, things will get worse here before they get better. He is keen on getting out to ordinary people, especially small business owners, the message that they need to become competitive with the rest of Europe or else face extinction under the EU's stringent standards. Part of the impending challenges for Romanians, which he and his foundation will try to address, will be to help them help themselves fix administrative problems. Bucharest's poor road and parking infrastructure, he warned, ought to be addressed soon, before it all collapses. Also, he would like Romanians to understand basic principles of democratic governance and thus rid themselves of leftover Communist mentalities. "I want them to understand that Town Hall is not an authority. It's a service provider."

Sighet: a remote land blessed with natural beauty, if not history

The students who are admitted travel to the Program together (with some getting aboard closer to their city of residence) on an overnight train on the Sunday before classes start. It's a long way to Sighet from Bucharest. The train left the capital at six in the afternoon and arrived at seven the following morning. Teachers and pupils are housed, for the most part, at one of the big local hotels and a couple of bed and breakfasts.

Our morning daze dispelled by Sighet's brisk air, we were able to take in the beauty of a remote land blessed with natural beauty, if not heart-warming history. Sighet sits at the confluence of three rivers that flow in and out of sight, hidden by mountain ranges and rolling hills that smooth into lush meadows only occasionally, as if on

guard. Everything about this place, as with much of the area of Maramures, so dear to my heart, points upward: the wooden church spires, the house gates, the cone-shaped haystacks. Pride of place have kept the market town together, and many ancient traditions intact, despite a rather turbulent history.

Until the end of World War II, Sighet served as the capital of history-steeped Maramures, the northernmost part of Transylvania, an area that has been dragged in and out of Hungarian occupation, decade upon decade. It saw two authoritarian regimes in the 20th century alone — Fascism and Communism. Under the pro-Nazi leadership of Miklos Horthy and with Germany's blessing, in 1940 Hungary annexed the northern part of Transylvania that included Sighet. It was to this part of the world that thousands of Jews had fled Russian pogroms centuries earlier. In Maramures they had thrived, even outnumbering Gentiles in some areas. It was from here that the Horthy regime sent more than 15,000 Jews to Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Elie Wiesel, the Noble Peace Prize Winner, hails from Sighet. In 1944, his mother and younger sister Tipuca were sent from here to Auschwitz in Poland, and killed; he and his father were transported to the Buchenwald death camp in Germany. Only 15-year-old Elie survived. His parental house in Sighet was turned in 2002 into a Memorial House for the Wiesel family and a Museum of Jewish culture.

Only 33 people of Jewish origin now live in this town from a one-time high of 15,000, according to the museum guide. The area where thousands of Jews were forced into ghettos 60 years ago, before being deported, has been slowly rebuilt. The B&B where I stayed is located in the former Jewish ghetto. Only 2,000 Jews came back from camps, and most of them later chose to emigrate. Their abandoned homes were taken over by Romanians and Gypsies. The people I spoke with on the street had no knowledge of what happened there.

Today, the synagogue and a nicely kept Jewish cemetery are just about all that remain from that time. If forgetfulness can be a virtue, then Sighet has found the right formula for reconciliation. A nearby cemetery in Sapanta is known as "the Happy Cemetery." Seventy years ago, a wood sculptor decided to inscribe humorous epitaphs about the deceased, an idea that has been faithfully continued to date by followers. More than 800 graves have such their crosses sculpted out of wood and painted in a special Sapanta blue.

Paradoxes linger from Sighet's colorful past. In town, several churches of different denominations, including a Hungarian Reformed and a Roman Catholic church, co-exist near one another. Rows of pastel-colored, Saxon-type houses give way to residential ghettos built under Communism. Many peasant women still wear the traditional Maramures dress of black-pleated skirts and colorful headscarves — carrying large wooden baskets on their backs to fetch market provisions. Gypsies are no less



The “happy” cemetery in Sapanta, near Sighet, is a major tourist attraction.

proud of costume — men wear black, cowboy-like hats while women, of course, stride about in colorful skirts. Food markets with Soviet-type names (“*agro alimentara*,” meaning food shop with provisions from co-ops) and which no longer exist in most of Romania, operate side by side with Western-run ones. The best cappuccino I’ve had so far in Romania was not in Bucharest but here, at a local “pub.” Black-marketeering is still in people’s blood, it seems. Street and market sellers peddle goods from across the frontier, just as they did until 1989. I bought as a souvenir a popular seller: a tin of Russian-made instant coffee, with an exotic Indian label and name: “Mysore Gold Coffee.” I couldn’t make sense of the Cyrillic wording, save for “Tata Coffee Limited.” Who knows what “daddy” (“tata,” means dad in Romanian) has in store for us? For the good of the planet I’ll keep the container sealed.

Let classes begin

The activities of the prison and of the summer school give a welcome boost to this city of 40,000. Residents seem proud of the museum, though not of the pain for which it stands. The prison was built in the late 19th century and served as a regular jail until after the Soviet occupation, when anti-Communist Maramures peasants and students were brought here. Starting in 1950, more than 100 dignitaries (ministers, intellectuals and religious leaders making up Romania’s elite) from all over the country were brought here by Communists for extermination. About a quarter of the 200 prisoners died here in miserable conditions. Some of the inmates got pardoned and were freed. The penitentiary, known as “The Ministers Prison,” was shut down in 1977.

Upon arrival, students receive a guided tour of the prison, a vivid immersion in Romania’s Communist his-

tory. Each of the 87 rooms on two floors has been organized chronologically under a specific theme, with detailed maps and written captions. For example, the maps room on the first floor traces more than 230 places of imprisonment, including labor camps and deportation depots. During the Ceausescu regime, Romania apparently had at least 15 psychiatric-treatment centers (for rabid anti-Communists) and more than 90 burial locations for victims of the secret police. The museum has rooms (former cells) that describe in detail Romanians’ “arrested” life under Com-

munism: repressions of the church and intellectuals, suppressed rebellions, agricultural collectivization. Special chambers have been dedicated to individual political leaders or intellectuals who died inside them. And, in a nice touch, organizers have put Romanian Communism in perspective by dedicating several rooms to explanations of what was happening in other former Soviet-bloc countries at the same time.

Students are then led to an outside space, where prisoners were once walked, which has been turned into a space for meditation and prayer. A ramp surrounding a landscaped grassy square has plaques on both sides commemorating the names of the 8,000 people known to have died in prisons and concentration camps — Ms. Blandiana and Romulus Rusan, her husband of 40 years and director of the International Center for Studies about Communism, have vowed to collect as many names of the dead as possible. The ramp descends into a cavern with benches surrounding a granite fountain that fills with rain through an open ceiling. Students gather in this mediation space one night during the summer school and read by candlelight poems they have composed. I was touched when a student from Chisinau apologized for not being fluent enough to write poems in Romanian. He read his verses in Russian instead. I heard one of the lecturers sigh and whisper to another: “Isn’t it terrible what fifty years of separation can do? It says it all.”

The headmaster of the summer school, who moderates lectures through a Romanian translator, is Dr. Stéphane Courtois, a senior researcher at the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS), France’s best-known public-research outfit, and the editor of “The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression”, the controversial 1997 book that attempted to catalogue the crimes committed by this regime all over the world. A



The names of 8,000 victims of Communism are inscribed on both sides of the walls of the ramp leading to a space for meditation and prayer.

former Communist himself (he was a Maoist in the late 1960s until 1972), Dr. Courtois has spent years researching his former ideology (much of that time was spent in Moscow, researching the KGB's secret files), turning against it with a vengeance. He and his contributors claim that Communism is responsible for about 100 million deaths worldwide. Close to 65 million people reportedly died in China under this system and another 20 million in Russia.

His passionate criticism of Communism has won him many enemies in France, which is why he says he relates to those who fought the system here and were persecuted. (Indeed, I was surprised to hear that France has produced such a rabid anti-Communist. *Quel horreur!*) He often tells his students, "Romania is not the only country where post-Communism is still strong; in France, we have three Communist ministers!" He cites as an example, the editor of *Le Monde*, who for many years was a Trotskyite and who is one of Dr. Courtois' greatest enemies. "My life for the last 15 years has been a daily battle in France," he told me. "I fight the media, Communists, Socialists, the Administration..." Having studied totalitarianism and written 15 books about it, Dr. Courtois says that Communism was as cruel as Fascism, if not crueler. According to him, the greatest one-time mass deportation in the history of the world took place in February 1944. In just five days, the KGB deported 520,000 Chechens, most of them women, old people and children. Most of the young men were

away, fighting for Stalin's Red Army!

One of Dr. Courtois' main points is that both Communism and Fascism fragmented Europe. It started in 1917, when Lenin tore Russia away from Europe. After 1945, Communism kept East and West divided. "That's why I'm here," he tells students, "to show Eastern Europeans that there are Western Europeans interested in them, who understand their problems. And after, I will go back to Western Europe, to France, to make Westerners understand that there are Eastern European youngsters capable of changing the fate of their country."

Dr. Courtois is not the only Western researcher to teach Romanians about their own history. In fact, two of the best-known experts on Romanian post-war history are English, and both have lectured in Sighet. One is Denis Deletant, a professor at London University whose

book, *Ceausescu and Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989*, was the first exposé of the secret police in this country. The other is Tom Gallagher, a Professor at the University of Bradford and a frequent columnist in Romanian newspapers, whose book published earlier this year, *The theft of a Nation: Romania since Communism*, is a harsh indictment of this country's leadership in the 15 years since the 1989 Revolution. Mr. Gallagher spoke about "democracy and the European Union" at this year's summer session. His advice to Romanians, however, was not to view Europe as "their ticket abroad. Given this country's poor leadership and lack of readiness for Western-type market competition, Romania risks becoming



Dr. Stéphane Courtois, an expert on the Communist regime, is the headmaster of the Sighet summer school" Photo: Civic Alliance.

one of the poorest countries of Europe upon accession into the Union. My fear is that Romania will remain a peripheral, underdeveloped economy, and an exporter of labor," he said.

Foreign expertise on a nation's history is not a Romania-specific phenomenon. Apparently the Russians didn't have an accurate version of their own history until 1993, when historians asked a reputed French expert on the Soviet Union, Nicolas Werth, to give them the rights to translate into Russian the Russian history book he had written, so that they could make it available as a teaching manual. "The most unbelievable thing happened when Nicolas Werth visited Moscow and all [the professors there] asked him to explain things, because they didn't understand that book," said Dr. Courtois at the summer school a few years ago. "That is because Nicolas Werth had written the true version of history, and was writing about facts that had been unknown to them and which they couldn't believe to be true. This goes to show the extent to which Communists destroyed history." Dr. Courtois said that only now Russia, like Romania, is starting to create a new generation of true historians, most of whom are 30 or younger.

In the same spirit of teaching Romanian high-schoolers about the past, lecturers in Sighet took turns speaking about medicine, architecture, industry and youth under Communism. Adrian-Mihai Cioroianu, a dashing young senator, historian and writer — an altogether rising star on the political scene here — charmed his audience with tales about what it was like to be young during Communism. He told students that repression couldn't keep youngsters from wanting a better life and Western things. He talked about his own obsession with American blue jeans. "I kept thinking about escaping," he said. "But the emigrant makes it easier for the despot [back home] to remain in power." He talked about wanting, but not being able to buy, tapes by the trendy musical group, Duran Duran. "Ask yourselves what reality is. I think reality means being able to go to the store and buying such recordings." He added that the stakes are greater today, of course. Western life comes with entrapments and dangerous temptations. "It's up to you how you will color every day of your life." He also expressed hope that young people would make the most of their unique opportunity to remodel their country, as if working with plasticine. "The Nurnberg [trial] of Communism will take place in schools like these, to more lasting effect."

I kept thinking about the pressures young, bright people must face in Romania, and the unfair burden Communists placed on their shoulders. No wonder so many take the road West at the first chance. The sad reality is that their country is still not entirely democratic, thus not allowing talent to rise to the top. Because of endemic corruption, the crooked get rich through grand schemes, while the rest compromise themselves early on in order to survive (smaller corruption). I hear of stories where

students are forced to pay bribes to get better grades or, upon graduating, to get a good job. Professional licenses, even driving permits, are routinely bought this way.

How, then, does one learn right from wrong in this environment, at a time when the pressure to be a consumer, to become rich on a Western scale, encourages blind greed — exactly the kind of dangerous capitalism Communists warned about? "You have been born during a reality without role models," said guest lecturer Dan Puric, one of Romania's most cherished actors and playwrights. The tendency to forget a painful past, and flee, is especially enticing when prospects at home are bleak. "Communism turned everything upside down," said architect Aurelian Triscu. "Even today we have a continuation of evil and a negative inertia. Grayness dominates."

Indeed, confused youngsters (and adults as well) make up their own rules as they go, along, sometimes choosing the easy way. Often they go abroad and commit crimes, in their hunger to get rich fast, to make up for six decades of want, suffering and delays. So far this year, 18,000 Romanians have been sent back home by nations unhappy with their behavior. This poor reputation, in turn, hurts those left behind. Two of the girls I met in Sighet were keen on asking school organizers to host a panel in the future to discuss the phenomenon of "feeling ashamed to be Romanian."

And what kind of rewards await those bright young things who take the hard road, and work hard in school — those who choose to become historians and face the unpleasant truth about the last century? Clara Mures, a young historian who researched the work and life of a famous persecuted writer and religious man, spoke about the pain she felt reading the man's journal and knowing that he never lived to witness the end of the regime. "The most painful moment is when you see them defeated," she said.

Perhaps willingness to seek the truth in today's Romania is a virtue that ought to be recognized. Mr. Puric, a deeply spiritual man and a vociferous critic of Communism ("Some Romanians are descended from Dacian and Roman ancestors, others from Soviet tanks") goes so far as to say that this understanding can result in something close to martyrdom. When I first met him, he told me that because of centuries of pain and domination, even before Communism, Romanians have developed a mysterious and impenetrable soul. He said he sees a special role for this country in the future. "The Western world will civilize us while we will help bring spirituality to them." He told pupils that "This prison, this gathering of sufferance constitutes a church. You are the living bricks of the church. What an opportunity you have to turn your gaze to the heart of this country!" Hopefully, reconnecting with their history will help the brightest of Romanians find their compassion and vitality to rebuild their country — from the inside out. □

Current Fellows and their Activities

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Alexander Brenner (June 2003 - 2005) • CHINA

With a B.A. in History from Yale and an M.A. in China Studies from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Alex is in China examining how the country is adapting to economic and cultural globalization following its accession to the World Trade Organization.

Richard D. Connerney (January 2005 - 2007) • INDIA

A lecturer in Philosophy, Asian Religions and Logic at Rutgers University, Rick Connerney is spending two years as a Phillips Talbot Fellow studying and writing about the intertwining of religion, culture and politics in India, once described by former U.S. Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith as "a functioning anarchy." Rick has a B.A. and an M.A. in religion from Wheaton College and the University of Hawaii, respectively.

Kay Dilday (October 2005-2007) • FRANCE/MOROCCO

An editor for the *New York Times'* Op-Ed page for the past five years, Kay holds an M.A. in Comparative International Politics and Theory from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Tufts University, and has done graduate work at the *Universiteit van Amsterdam* in the Netherlands and the *Cours de Civilisation de la Sorbonne*. She has traveled in and written from Haiti and began her journalistic life as city-council reporter for *Somerville This Week*, in Somerville, MA.

Cristina Merrill (June 2004-2006) • ROMANIA

Born in Bucharest, Cristina moved from Romania to the United States with her mother and father when she was 14. Learning English (but retaining her Romanian), she majored in American History at Harvard College and there became captain of the women's tennis team. She received a Master's degree in Journalism from New York University in 1994, worked for several U.S. publications from *Adweek* to the *New York Times*, and is spending two years in Romania watching it emerge from the darkness of the Ceausescu regime into the presumed light of membership in the European Union and NATO.

Nicholas Schmidle (October 2005-2007) • IRAN

A journalist and researcher for the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, Nick is finishing a Master's program in Comparative and Regional Studies (Middle East/Central Asia) at American University in Washington DC. He is studying intensive Persian — as is his fiancée, Rikki Bohan — in anticipation of his departure for Iran after his marriage in autumn 2005.

Andrew J. Tabler (February 2005 - 2007) • SYRIA/LEBANON

Andrew has lived, studied and worked in the Middle East since a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Fellowship enabled him to begin Arabic-language studies and work toward a Master's degree at the American University in Cairo in 1994. Following the Master's, he held editorships with the *Middle East Times* and *Cairo Times* before moving to Turkey, Lebanon and Syria and working as a Senior Editor with the Oxford Business Group and a correspondent for the *Economist* Intelligence Unit. His two-year ICWA fellowship bases him in Beirut and Damascus, where he will report on Lebanese affairs and Syrian reform.

Jill Winder (July 2004 - 2006) • GERMANY

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