

ICWA LETTERS

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young professionals to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. An exempt operating foundation endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

TRUSTEES

Carole Beaulieu
Bryn Barnard
Richard Dudman
Peter Gethner
Kitty Hempstone
Thomas Hughes
William E. Knowland
Samuel Levy
Stephen Maly
Mildred Marcy
Peter Bird Martin
Joel Millman
Carol Rose
John Spencer
Edmund H. Sutton

HONORARY TRUSTEES

A. Doak Barnett
David Elliot
David Hapgood
Pat M. Holt
Edwin S. Munger
Richard H. Nolte
Albert Ravenholt
Phillips Talbot

The Institute of Current World Affairs
THE CRANE-ROGERS FOUNDATION
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755

CPB-6 1997
EUROPE/RUSSIA

Christopher P. Ball is an Institute Fellow studying and writing about Hungarian minorities in the former Soviet-bloc nations of East and Central Europe.

Part II: "Romanian Elections: November 3, 1996"

The Day "God Gave a Brain to the Romanian People"

BUDAPEST, Hungary

December 1996

By Christopher P. Ball

INTRODUCTION

The second half of our¹ stay for the Romanian elections was in Nagyenyed² (Auid), where my friend Sándor Mezei lives. In this section I hope to provide the reader with a better feel of the issues and lives of the people at the local level.

GRANDFATHER

During my first year in Budapest, Sándor and I became extremely good friends. Soon after, however, his grandfather became ill and Sándor moved home to help the family: Sándor's sister, Grandfather, and Grandmother³ Sándor's parents divorced when he was still a child and they left him to be raised by his grandparents. The father left Ceasescu's Romania for Sweden and the mother moved to her hometown in the mountainous Szekler regions of Transylvania. The mother visits regularly, but (until the changes in 1989) the father was able to send only goods and money on occasion to help the family.

Grandfather is well known in the region for the wine he made and for being an exceptionally upright and good man, a former teacher,



*From left to right: Sándor Mezei,
Fellow Chris Ball, Daniel McAdams*

1. Please note that the other American, Daniel McAdams, was with me in Nagyenyed during the period covered by this report.
2. Again, throughout this report I give first the town name in Hungarian, then the Romanian name in parenthesis. This warrants footnoting because in future reports when I write about trips to Romania where I mostly deal with ethnic Romanians, I will probably reverse the order since my memory of the place will then be Romanian name first, then Hungarian. Those wishing to locate these cities on a map ought to look for the Romanian city name.
3. In order to avoid confusion, rather than use the family members' real names, I simply refer to them as Grandfather and Grandmother, which is how everyone refers to them in Hungarian (*Nagyapa és Nagymama*) anyway.

and for frequently helping those in need (often dissidents in the Nagyenyed prison) throughout the Communist regime. After I first met Sándor I had heard of Grandfather from friends and various acquaintances, but never had the chance to meet him in person.

While I happened to be visiting in August 1995, Grandfather became sick with what were thought to be minor stomach problems. For a week or so he stayed home in bed, hoping to avoid the hospital where he was sure he would die. Finally, he conceded that his illness, was much worse, and agreed to go to the hospital.

As the doctor (a family friend) led him off to the hospital he stopped in the kitchen to welcome me into his home. He stood upright to shake my hand, smiling gently with his eyes. His pallid skin and sunken cheeks betrayed his feigned strength, however, revealing just how weak he had become. He turned around, now slouching over in pain, and was helped out of the room by Sándor and the doctor. That was the first and last time I had the chance to meet Grandfather.

At Sándor's request I went to see the hospital and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) where Grandfather was kept. Because it is beyond the scope of this report, I won't linger on the horrible state of Romanian hospitals. Nevertheless, I feel that a few comments are required.

To begin with, the place reminded me of the hospital in Alexander Solzenitzin's "Cancer Ward," and was just as depressing. It was reasonably clean, though a new paint job was sorely needed. It was overcrowded and the whole time I was there Sándor could not get any of the nurses to attend to Grandfather in the ICU. The nurses' break room, which I passed on my way in, was full of nurses, however, sitting and smoking cigarettes over coffee and gossip. Smoke floated gently from the break room, into the hall and open rooms of patients. I guess they were just too busy to look after patients.

The ICU itself was a small room with drab-colored walls and chipped paint. There were two windows on the far wall, both yellow in color and spotted with flies. In this one room were five different patients, none of them being tended to. It was dimly lit and the only medical equipment present had been rolled in from other wards.

When I was there it was fairly quiet and I dared not enter the room out of respect for the patients. Sándor pointed out some of the patients and told me of the horrors of the night. Many of them, left unattended, just moaned in pain. One in particular began to scream, though. It seems his loosely bandaged stomach wound had burst open, spurting blood onto the wall and floor near his bed. The doctor arrived, told the patient to hold the wound closed with his hands and went off nonchalantly to finish his rounds. Some time later the

doctor and a nurse returned to attend to the patient who had been screaming in pain the whole time. No one in the ICU slept for those few hours.

I left the following day. Grandfather passed away sometime during my train trip home.

"BETHLEN, A BÖRTÖN, ÉS BOR"

After Grandfather died, Sándor moved home without finishing his university course in Budapest. We rarely met after this. It is therefore always a treat to me when I am able to visit Sándor and Grandmother. The sister has now moved off to Germany.

Sándor has always managed to stay on top of things in Nagyenyed. He is well treated, due in part to Grandfather's lingering reputation but also because of the wine the family has always made—and Sándor continues to make. Life in Nagyenyed, it seems, has its own logic. Sándor once commented: "Grandfather always told me that in Nagyenyed the three B's were all-important: *Bethlen, a Börtön, és Bor.*" This refers to Transylvanian Prince Gábor Bethlen, the Nagyenyed prison (*börtön*, in Hungarian) and wine (*bor*, in Hungarian). Throughout Nagyenyed's history, these three things have played an important role, the last two especially under Communism. Sándor always kept them in mind and they seemed to have served him well.

The first B, Prince Gábor Bethlen, is often considered the greatest Transylvanian Prince. He was Prince from 1613 to 1629, but during that time managed to work well with the Turkish occupiers of Hungary, who also exerted strong control over many of the decisions of the Transylvanian leaders. Although they were technically independent, Transylvanian rulers were indirectly subservient to the Ottoman Empire. In other fields, like foreign policy, Transylvania was under the direct control of the Ottomans. For a Transylvanian Prince this meant a difficult juggling act between domestic and foreign affairs. Bethlen not only managed relations with the Ottomans well, but was also popular enough to be elected King of Hungary for a short period (1620-1621). For Nagyenyed, however, he is especially important because the town houses the well-known Gábor Bethlen College (founded 1662) where many of Transylvania's finest Hungarian and Romanian intellectuals, writers, poets and other cultural leaders studied. It is still operating and respected today.

The second B, the Nagyenyed prison, is one of Romania's larger prisons and was used to house many dissidents during Communism. After WWII, many of the former members of Romania's Fascist group, the Iron Guard, were placed in this prison⁴ and it quickly became one of the maximum-security prisons in Communist Romania. It also became famous internationally during this

4. Deletant, Dennis. *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989*. Hurst and Co. London. 1995. p.28.

period for testing drugs on prisoners.⁵

The last B, the wine, an admittedly brighter topic, also grew in importance under Communism. Because a Communist economy is planned and does not rely on supply/demand for the allocation of goods,⁶ informal bartering usually occurs on large scale to compensate. Thus, if your father or, in Sándor's case, Grandfather makes a luxury good like wine you are better equipped to avoid problems with police, bosses at work, teachers, etc. Sándor has thousands of stories about how he supplied his superiors with wine in exchange for better working conditions and even a promotion during his mandatory military service.

The economy in Romania has not improved in many ways, although the central planners are gone. This means bartering still occurs and wine as a tradable good has remained a valuable commodity for Sándor and his family. Today, however, one difference does exist: it is possible for him to sell his wine as well, thereby supplementing his family's meager income.

ELECTION PREPARATIONS

I visited the local office of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania⁷ (RMDSZ, for the Hungarian acronym) where Sándor now works.

There I spoke with several workers and volunteers. They all had similar stories to tell.

Fehér (Alba) county, where Nagyenyed is situated, is largely ethnic Romanian and only 16 percent Hungarian. As a result, there are few RMDSZ offices and each must serve a large region. Prior to elections, the office workers and volunteers have to visit every single Hungarian home in their region and explain to the locals *how to vote*. Most are simple peasants, which means they will gladly vote for the RMDSZ but may not fully understand how to. This takes some explaining.

There are several different political parties in Romania. Each party has its own symbol (like the elephant and donkey in the United States) and this is actually where the confusion begins. The RMDSZ symbol is a tulip (a traditionally Hungarian symbol). The workers and volunteers literally had to take sample ballots to each home and help the peasants identify the tulip on Parliamentary and Presidential sample ballots. They would then have the person practice on a sample and, if correctly done, leave it with the family as an example. After all this, they had to make the rounds once again a few weeks later for those who inevitably lost their samples or had for whatever reason become confused since the first visit.

"Things are a lot better this year, though," one volun-



RMDSZ leaflet reads: "Your vote also counts!"

5. Ibid. p. 43. Note: This practice seems only to have lasted a few years during the early years of the Communist regime. It appears to have ceased after coming under heavy criticism by the U.N.

6. Goods under such a system are dictated from the central planning board and prices are only set later for accounting purposes. Prices are completely arbitrary under such a system.

7. It will be recalled from Part One of this report that the RMDSZ is the political party of the Hungarians in Romania.



CONTRACT CU ROMÂNIA

Cunoaștem problemele, temerile și speranțele Dumneavoastră, ele sunt și ale noastre. Nu peste mult timp, la alegerile generale, puterea va sta în mâinile Dumneavoastră. Veți vota. Trebuie să o faceți în cunoștință de cauză. Dacă o veți alege și va veni la putere, Convenția Democratică din România va îndeplini cu strictețe următoarele obligații, pe care și le asumă cu fermitate, în baza unor studii realiste, responsabile și îndelungate:

CDR's Contract with Romainia. Note the key, which is the CDR's political symbol

teer explained to me. "Last election year the RMDSZ didn't run a Presidential candidate. We told our voters to put a stamp on the *tulip* for the Parliamentary elections and on the *key* for the Presidential elections.⁸ A lot of them couldn't remember it, got confused and later confessed that they just put the stamp on the *key* since it was on both ballots. Others put stamps on both the *tulip* and the *key* for the Parliamentary elections, thus invalidating their ballot.

"This year the RMDSZ ran György Frunda as a presidential candidate. We know he wouldn't win, but the voters only had to find the tulip [on both ballots] and didn't have to worry about the rest. Things went much more smoothly when I talked with them and I think they will be able to remember it on election day."

Despite all the efforts, on the night before the elections peasants came in a thin but constant stream to ask questions. Through evening gossip sessions so common in villages, many of them had managed to confuse themselves until they could no longer agree where they were supposed to place the stamp. One woman's ethnic Romanian neighbors had told several local Hungarians that they should put the stamp not on the *tulip*, but on the symbol designating the extreme-nationalist Greater Romanian Party. Knowing this couldn't possibly be true, but now no longer sure whether the tulip was good either, the woman came down the RMDSZ office to ask again where they were supposed to put the stamp.

The RMDSZ office was not the only one to have such basic "technical" problems. The office of the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR) had the same difficulties. The head of the CDR in Nagyenyed had been elected Mayor during local elections last summer. He was a young guy with a friendly face and a good sense of humor. He and Sándor (now also serving as city councilor), had worked together in local affairs and become friends to the limited extent an RMDSZ officer and a CDR politician can become friends. Sándor even expressed regret over this, once saying: "I think he and I would be much closer if there weren't this political barrier between us, which we both have to maintain because of our jobs. He's a smart guy. He's honest and one of the few local politicians here who understands how to get things done."

The Mayor, Horatiu Mihai Josan, told us that the CDR also had to go to each house individually and had encountered many of the same symbol problems. The CDR, according to the Mayor, was in a better situation than the other parties because they had the "Contract with Romania", which the voters appreciated and would remember on voting day. These "Contracts" were kept fresh in the voters' memories because the CDR had taken over many county positions during the local summer elections and had implemented localized "Contracts" with each city.

8. The key is the symbol for the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR). This is the party that won the elections. Generally, their platform best agrees with the values of RMDSZ and thus the RMDSZ always advises its voters to support the CDR candidate when no RMDSZ candidate is available. This is how, consequently, the CDR got the whole RMDSZ vote in the Presidential run-off between the CDR candidate, Emil Constantinescu, and incumbent Ion Iliescu.

9. It will be recalled from Part One that this is openly modeled after the Republican "Contract with America."

The Mayor explained the Contracts to us: "We began by holding a large public meeting where we discussed our plans and explicitly stated the objectives we planned to achieve within 100 days. Then, in exactly 100 days, we held another meeting and went through our list of objectives. We showed the ones we achieved and explained why we were unable to meet the other objectives. We then talked about what we would do in the next 100 days."

Sándor later confirmed that the locals had been extremely impressed by the local Contract and that the Mayor had met his stated objectives (something rare in Romania). He said the mayor and his party had earned much respect among the people with the Contracts and their fulfillment. Assuming the same was true in other CDR-controlled counties, Sándor speculated that it should greatly help the CDR in the national elections.

Mayor Josan also explained that the International Republican Institute's (IRI) seminars on campaign management had made a huge difference. According to him, these seminars played a major role in providing the opposition parties with the skills required to win local elections in the summer: "Of the seven counties where we took part in the IRI seminar, six of them became CDR-led after local elections," explained the Mayor. Those same skills, he felt, would also lead them to victory at the national level. Upon his invitation, we agreed to have coffee with him the morning after the elections to either celebrate or mourn with him.

THE BEER BUSINESS

Finally, Sándor arranged for us to meet with Petru Danut Fufezan, one of the town's more active members of the Roma-

nian Hearth, the "cultural" arm of the xenophobic Greater Romania political party. More interestingly, though, Mr. Fufezan owns the Crown Beer factory.

After a tour through his factory, he sat us down in the conference room to talk and sample a few beers. A large man with a boyish face, Fufezan sat across from Daniel and me. Cases of beer occupied the table's center. He began to tell us about the business as he poured the first glasses full.

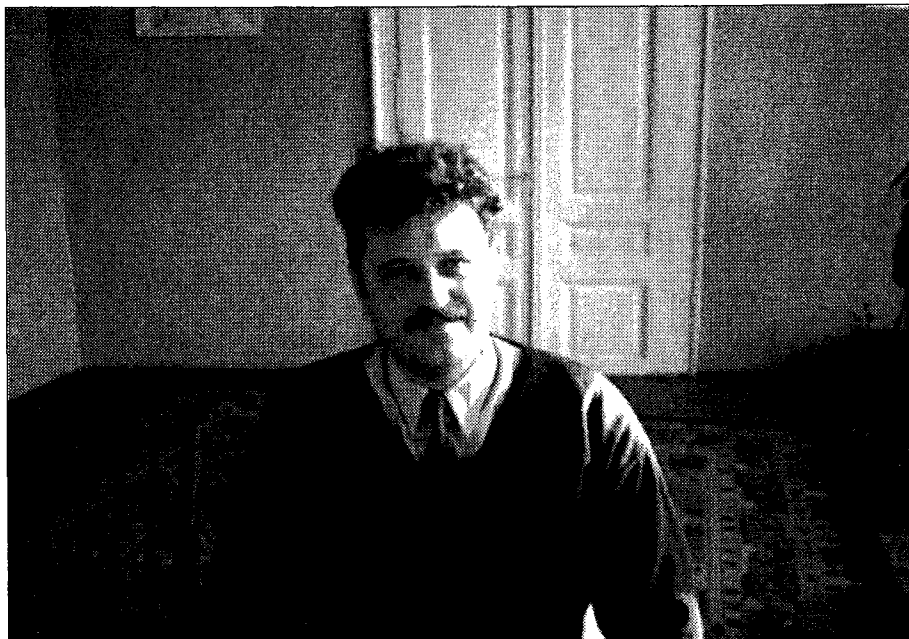
Together with 13 friends, Petru began the beer factory in 1991. Since then Crown Beer had become a regional success, something he attributed to his basic marketing strategy. He explained: "People like our beer because it is cheap and good. We priced it below the other beers and have tried to maintain a high quality. No matter how poor people are, they deserve good beer." Simple, but effective.

Demand has consistently confirmed that his strategy works. Initially Petru and his partners aimed for a small, 2,000-to-3,000-hectoliter-capacity factory. After one year, however, they expanded to 10,000 hectoliters to meet demand. The following year they expanded to 20,000 and again to their current 50,000-hectoliter capacity. They are considering another expansion this year or the next.

Despite this success, Petru was not happy. Because of declining wages and growing taxes, arrival at the breakeven point has continued to be delayed longer than expected. High taxes, however, seemed to be the largest concern for him. He explained: "Now there is a general 55 percent consumption tax on beer and only 50 percent on wine, which is encouraging our customers to substi-



Petru Danut Fufezan, director of the Crown Beer factory. the picture was taken during our discussion (and sampling) of the beer business.



Mayor of Nagyened, Horatiu Mihai Josan. Picture taken over morning coffee, the day after elections.

tute wine for beer on the margin." Furthermore, he said, there is a value-added tax (VAT) of 18 percent on beer, a 38-percent revenue tax and finally an end-of-the-year 10 percent tax on any profit he might have managed to earn. All of these taxes have been added since 1991, making it increasingly harder for him to stay in business and hire the new workers he needs to expand production. The business environment, except for inflation and some banking laws, has only gotten worse in Romania since 1991, according to Petru. "That's why I am voting for Constantinescu in the elections and not Iliescu. The CDR has a much better economic plan," he added.

This last piece of information seemed to me most interesting. I had heard similar stories about taxes and banking problems, but was surprised that he would vote for Constantinescu. After learning of his business problems I suspect many other business people voted for economic reasons as well. Iliescu had always enjoyed strong support from nationalist parties, but the fact that Petru and other supporters like him were voting Iliescu out suggests that the benefits of a better business environment outweighed any discriminatory interests they might have had against other nationalities. It makes me wonder, though: If Iliescu had been reelected, would he have been daring enough to further economic reform without other political-social changes? That question, however, will have to remain a theoretical one.

THE DAY "GOD GAVE A BRAIN TO THE ROMANIAN PEOPLE"

The following day we went to the Mayor's office for morning coffee and an update on the election results. By

that time, with exit polls and a majority of the votes counted, it was clear that the CDR had won the Parliamentary elections and Constantinescu had done well enough in the Presidential race to justify a runoff between him and Iliescu.¹⁰

The office was small, but somehow mayoral. The old wooden floor was partially covered by a red throw-rug and the mayor had a large mahogany desk on the far side of the room. A few pictures lined the walls and the large window behind his desk kept the room naturally lighted. The mayor was not there when we arrived, but we were shown in and given a coffee for the short wait.

Minutes later, the mayor burst in gaily. Without looking our way he crossed the room to his desk, exclaiming: "We fucked them!" He grabbed his cigarettes, came over to us, shook our hands and sat down for coffee.

His face was tired and unshaven, but there was a definite brightness in his eyes. He and the office staff had been up all night following the election results and celebrating. He shook his head slightly and smiled: "God gave a brain to the Romanian people. They threw them out!"

Interestingly, Mayor Petru commented that the one well-established independent TV station, Pro TV, was the only one to broadcast live. The others still used recordings and showed Iliescu in the most positive light possible, helping him maintain an image of leadership in the face of defeat. "Most [of the news channels] showed rehearsed images of Iliescu. Only Pro TV was willing to show his actual expression when the news came in. His

10. In the end, Constantinescu won the Presidential runoff as well.

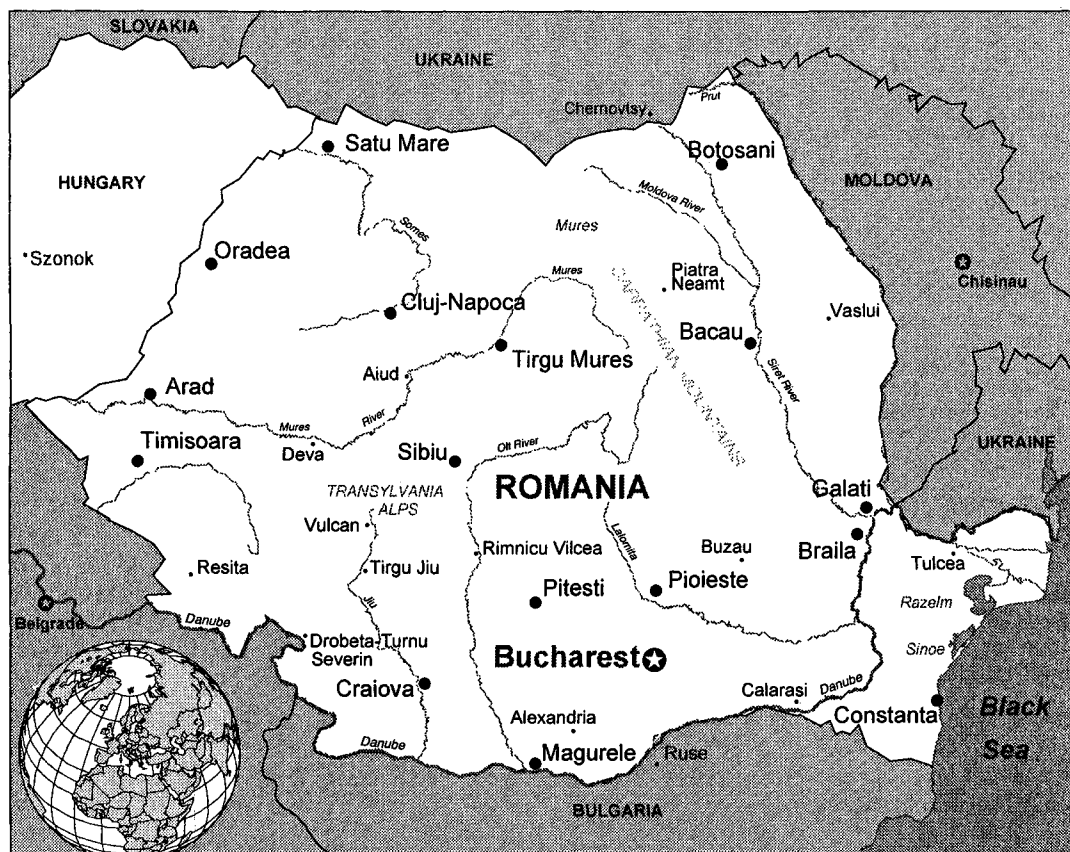
face reminded me of the expression of disbelief on Ceausescu's face when he was dragged before the [military] court [in 1989]."

According to the Mayor, two external factors had made a big difference. The first was the IRI seminars. The second was the role Pro TV had played in general. It is partially owned by German investors and run with local staff. Throughout the election, it had been the only TV to carry out objective journalism and not simply favor Iliescu the way many of the still-state-owned stations had. Because it is widely considered to be objective, it is also widely watched by all Romanians (both ethnic Hungarians and Romanians). Such a station had not existed at the time of the 1992 elections, leaving only "official" (*i.e.*

state-controlled) channels as information sources.

We left the Mayor to his work and wished him well. He had much to do in this new Romania. He looked forward to it all with an eye toward finally putting things back on track in his homeland, so long off course.

On our way out of Romania we stopped in several cities to talk with other politicians and local representatives. Everywhere the story was the same: excitement, disbelief, and more hope in the eyes of Romanians than I have ever seen. The discussions were now focused on the future and on who would form the new coalition.¹¹ The people were ready for change. Their country had dragged its feet long enough. □



11. In the end, the three-party coalition, composed of former opposition parties looks like this: CDR (30 % of Parliamentary seats), Social Democrat Union (13 %) and the RMDSZ (6 %).

Institute of Current World Affairs

FOUR WEST WHEELLOCK STREET
HANOVER, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03755

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Institute Fellows and their Activities

Adam Smith Albion. A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is studying and writing about the republics of Central Asia, and their importance as actors within and without the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. Degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Christopher P. Ball. An economist, Chris Ball holds a B.A. from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and attended the 1992 International Summer School at the London School of Economics. He studied Hungarian for two years in Budapest while serving as Project Director for the Hungarian Atlantic Council. As an Institute Fellow, he is studying and writing about Hungarian minorities in the former Soviet-bloc nations of East and Central Europe. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

William F. Foote. Formerly a financial analyst with Lehman Brothers' Emerging Markets Group, Willy Foote is examining the economic substructure of Mexico and the impact of free-market reforms on Mexico's people, society and politics. Willy holds a Bachelor's degree from Yale University (history), a Master's from the London School of Economics (Development Economics; Latin America) and studied Basque history in San Sebastian, Spain. He carried out intensive Spanish-language studies in Guatemala in 1990 and then worked as a copy editor and Reporter for the *Buenos Aires Herald* from 1990 to 1992. [THE AMERICAS]

John Harris. A would-be lawyer with an undergraduate degree in History from the University of Chicago, John reverted to international studies after a year of internship in the product-liability department of a Chicago law firm and took two years of postgraduate Russian at the University of Washington in Seattle. Based in Moscow during his fellowship, John is studying and writing about Russia's nascent political parties as they begin the difficult transition from identities based on the personalities of their leaders to positions based on national and international issues. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Marc Michaelson. A program manager for Save the Children in The Gambia, Marc has moved across Africa to the Horn, there to assess nation-building in Eritrea and Ethiopia, and (conditions permitting) availing and unavailing humanitarian efforts in northern Somalia and southern Sudan. With a B.A. in political science from Tufts, a year of non-degree study at the London School of Economics and a Master's in International Peace Studies from Notre Dame, he describes his postgraduate years as "seven years' experience in international development programming and peace research." [sub-SAHARAN AFRICA]

Randi Movich. The current John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, Randi is spending two years in Guinea, West Africa, studying and writing about the ways in which indigenous women use forest resources for reproductive health. With a B.A. in biology from the University of California at Santa Cruz and a Master of Science degree in Forest Resources from

the University of Idaho, Randi is building on two years' experience as a Peace Corps agroforestry extension agent in the same region of Guinea where she will be living as a Fellow with her husband, Jeff Fields — also the holder of an Idaho Master's in Forest Resources. [sub-SAHARAN AFRICA]

John B. Robinson. A 1991 Harvard graduate with a certificate of proficiency from the Institute of Kiswahili in Zanzibar, John spent two years as an English teacher in Tanzania. He received a Master's degree in Creative Writing from Brown University in 1995. He and his wife Delphine, a French oceanographer, are spending two years in Madagascar with their two young sons, Nicolas and Rowland, where he will be writing about varied aspects of the island-nation's struggle to survive industrial and natural-resource exploitation and the effects of a rapidly swelling population. [sub-SAHARAN AFRICA]

Teresa C. Yates. A former member of the American Civil Liberties Union's national task force on the workplace, Teresa is spending two years in South Africa observing and reporting on the efforts of the Mandela government to reform the national land-tenure system. A Vassar graduate with a juris doctor from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Teresa had an internship at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg in 1991 and 1992, studying the feasibility of including social and economic rights in the new South African constitution. [sub-SAHARAN AFRICA]

Chosen on the basis of character, previous experience and promise, Institute Fellows are young professionals funded to spend a minimum of two years carrying out self-designed programs of study and writing outside the United States. The Fellows are required to report their findings and experiences from the field once a month. They can write on any subject, as formally or informally as they wish. The result is a unique form of reporting, analysis and periodic assessment of international events and issues.

Author: Ball, Christopher P.

Title: ICWA Letters -Europe/Russia

ISSN: 1083-4273

Imprint: Institute of Current World Affairs,
Hanover, NH

Material Type: Serial

Language: English

Frequency: Monthly

Other Regions: East Asia; Mideast/North Africa;
South Asia; SubSaharan
Africa; The Americas

ICWA Letters (ISSN 1083-4273) are published by the Institute of Current World Affairs Inc., a 501(c)(3) exempt operating foundation incorporated in New York State with offices located at 4 West Wheelock Street, Hanover, NH 03755. The letters are provided free of charge to members of ICWA and are available to libraries and professional researchers by subscription.

Executive Director Peter Bird Martin
Program Administrator Gary L. Hansen
Publications Manager Ellen Kozak

Phone: (603) 643-5548
Fax: (603) 643-9599
E-Mail: ICWA@valley.net

©1996/1997 Institute of Current World Affairs, The Crane-Rogers Foundation.
The information contained in this publication may not be reproduced without the writer's permission.