





Report of a Study Trip to Romania
for 20 teachers of history, geography and civics
organised by the Netherlands Atlantic Association
15-22 October 2008

Preparatory Meeting

Tuesday 30 September
Academiegebouw, Utrecht

Lecture: 'Romanian Politics after Ceausescu' by Dr. **Dorin Perie**, Lecturer Romanian Language and Culture, University of Amsterdam

Lecture: 'Romania Today' by **Olaf Tempelman**, former correspondent of *de Volkskrant* in Romania, and author of *Roemeense lente ('Romanian Spring')*

Study Trip

Wednesday 15 October
Welcome Dinner
Hotel Opera, Bucharest

Migration in the European Union and Eastern Europe

Report of a lecture by Prof. Adrian Pop, National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, 15 October 2008.



The Romanian membership of the EU (European Union) in 2007 made Romania not only a new border country but also an open labour source for the Western European countries.

Growing demand for labour forces, originating in demographic changes in the wealthier EU states, have a strong impact on for example Moldova as a source and Romania as both a source and a transit country. Of the Moldovan inhabitants 600.000 are working abroad (Italy, France, and Germany) and 1/3 of the Moldovan G.N.P. can be attributed to these emigrants. A lot of them are listed as Romanians because Romania offers them Romanian passports on behalf of the Romanian-Moldovan historical and cultural links.

In the slipstream of these Moldovans a lot of Romanians leave their country, thus minimizing the labour force of Romania itself. These shortages occur in sectors like construction and healthcare. Chinese

employees fill the gaps in their turn, often arriving in Romania via the so-called Eastern Route. This route passes the Ukraine-Moldova border and is a poorly protected one in a frozen conflict region: Transnistria (see map). Lots of illegal and criminal immigrants from (Central) Asia who reach Moldova follow this route.

The Mediterranean Route via Bulgaria is a favourite gateway for migrants from Turkey and the Middle East.

In a relatively short time Romania has been transformed from a closed society, since the nineties, to an open border country. This lingers Romania and other EU members with a lot of problems concerning labour market, migration and integration. Romania doesn't have a well developed system for the reception and integration of immigrants, like the Western European countries have.

The EU initiates policy on both peacekeeping in Transnistria and incentives on stimulating circular migration of Romanians abroad to help this new EU member.

Hans van Paddenburgh (SG de Amersfoortse Berg, Amersfoort)

Thursday 16 October

Sightseeing tour; Visit to Parliament; Visit to museum
Bucharest

A personal impression of the capital city of Romania

After the visit to the Houses of Parliament we travelled back to the old city centre with our guide, followed by a walk through this part of the city.

Again we saw a chaotic scene with almost exclusively car-traffic. Although some cycle paths had been created they were hardly used. This 'modern' fleet of cars slowly dragged itself forward into or out of the city centre. Rows of two or three cars constantly stopped by numerous traffic lights and zebra crossings. There were no car parks, no parking meters and one consequently saw countless cars put away chaotically and at the most inconceivable places, which did not enhance the city with its buildings draped with gigantic boarding. During the tour the always kind and enthusiastic guide informed us extensively on the Greek Orthodox church, the ancient Roman city walls, the old National Bank and the oldest Brewery of the city where we enjoyed our farewell diner later on.

They were no or hardly any walking areas, promenades, and care free zones with pavement cafes, as we know them, although some streets were being converted to create this leisurely atmosphere.

We were further more struck by the aid teams that got stuck in the clogged traffic, the many stray dogs, the litter and the numerous dangling electricity cables between the grey neglected buildings, equipped with a lot of air-conditioning systems which were visible from the street.

On the way back, at some distance from the old city centre we saw pauperized and badly maintained huge apartment buildings and some scattered underground stations, which did not show throngs of people weaving in or out of the stations on their daily commute. As we noticed before they only prefer to travel by car.

What sticks in our minds is a scene full of dynamics, hectic and disorganization with a nevertheless friendly, optimistic, well dressed, telephone armed and well-groomed population full of confidence in the future.

Bucharesti.....- a violent yet understandable contrast to Brasov and Sigu (the latter ones clean and organized rebuild with a certain vision). According to our expert guide, these admittedly smaller towns still have a 'Deutscher Bürgermeister' and Bucharesti a Romanian mayor.

Speaking about organized, spending public money!

Gerard Huis in 't Veld (Pius X college, Almelo)

Report October 16th: Meeting with a member of the Romanian Parliament

The first thing that drew our attention was the fact that this MP was rather young. He talked about Romanian politics in an open way. For instance, one of the first things he mentioned was that he thought that there were too many MPs in Romania. On a total of 22 million inhabitants there are 469 MPs.

The Romanian government is currently thinking of changing the electoral system. The idea behind it is to make sure that the smaller parties will also be able to take part in the government.

Nowadays 45% of the Romanian population lives in rural areas. The last few years many young people have left the smaller towns either to try to find a job in the cities or to leave the country and work abroad. Those people send a lot of money to relatives in Romania. In one of these as much as 7 billion Euros. The reason for many youngsters to move to Bucharest is clear: 30% of the GDP is earned in the capital city.

A few days after our visit the elections were to take place and the topics for that event were:

1. Agricultural reforms and EU subsidies
2. Wages of teachers and medical personnel
3. Infrastructure
4. The Judicial system

The first point is especially urgent because this year, according to the MP, not a single farmer had received any money from the EU. The agricultural system has to be reformed in order to make use of EU subsidies.

The second point is urgent as well because medical personnel do not earn much. As a consequence bribes are common in order to get medical treatment. We were told that most people however pay extra money (bribes) with a smile because they know doctors and other medical personnel do not earn enough.

Besides the fact that teachers do not earn enough in Romania the MP pointed out that there was another problem. Many young people leave school before they have finished the 8th grade. Even worse: in the countryside not everyone goes to school. Especially the children of the gypsy minority often do not attend school. We talked a little more about the problems concerning the gypsies. He stressed that the problems were not a racial issue.

The third point is of importance especially because Romania only has 250 kilometres of highway. The total surface area of Romania is 238,391 square kilometres. One can easily understand that the Romanians have a lot to do to improve the way people can travel in this country.

The fourth point was important because trials can last as long as 5 or 6 years for a relatively simple case. This problem influences all sorts of areas. For instance: if the government wants to nationalise/expropriate a piece of land in order to build a road, the whole situation cannot be solved within a reasonable amount of time.

Gephard Prenger (Pius X College, Almelo)

A visit to the Aleea Alexandru 22, Bucuresti, România

Situated at the crossroads of Eastern and Western civilizations, Romania has suffered from a multiplicity of influences through the ages. The most important argument for building the modern concept of the Romanian nation was identified in the merging of the Roman civilization with the local Dacians, at the beginning of the first millennium A.D. From then on there were multiple influences, from East and West: Hungarian and Greek, Turkish and Jewish influences, Slavic and Tartar touches, Roma presence, but also German and French impresses marked the two millennia for which the progressing concept of the Romanian national character had to be taken into consideration.

That Romania's location is still a deciding factor for the present appeared on 16th of October 2008 at the meeting with representatives of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Bucuresti, at the home of the deputy ambassador Hans Sandee, Aleea Alexandru 22, next to the *Ambasada Tárilor de Jos*, as is the official name for the Dutch Embassy in Romanian.

The Dutch embassy is a medium-sized embassy, with about thirty employees specialized in politics, economy and environment, justice and internal affairs, nowadays no more defence personnel but still a politic attaché and of course a consular department. This is how Hans Sandee opened his speech about the political situation in Romania. He summarized the interior situation of Romania in the formula: unstable – there are many problems that aren't being solved- stability. Politics are aimed at persons and attaining short term successes. There is a permanent conflict between the president and the prime minister of an ultra minority cabinet that is supported by the socialists (the former communists). This results in practice in little decisiveness, certainly in the field of justice.

As foreign affairs are concerned Romania adopts a pragmatic attitude. Since Romania joined the European Union in January 2007, it has followed the policy of the E.U.

There are, however, four exceptions to this political line. Romania takes its own course in the field of

- Serbia: Romania entertains good relations with Serbia (therefore it hasn't recognised Kosovo, also because it doesn't want to create a precedent: there are quite a lot ethnic Hungarians in Romania, Transnistria (it was conquered by Romania in 1941, but in 1990 the Pridnestrovic Moldavian Republic was unilaterally proclaimed, a mini state recognized by no other country in the world, and internationally still considered part of Moldavia, even though Russia with its 14th army supports the independence of Transnistria.)
- Moldavia (situated between Romania and Ukraine, more or less Bessarabia, since 1917 part of ((Greater) Romania and since its "liberation" by the Red Army part of the U.S.S.R. Since 1991 independent as "Republica Moldova", recognized by Romania): the majority of the Moldavian population is Romanian, Romanian is spoken and many Moldavians are in the construction industry in Romania. Romania wants to have Moldavia admitted to the European Union soon, while the European Union wants to keep its distance.
- The Black Sea region: in which a number of frozen conflicts have to be tackled according to Romania.

- Supply of energy: the Romanian president doesn't want his country to be too dependent on Russia. To his mind the government is too flexible towards Russia.

In 2007 Romania's dream came true by its entry into the European Union. Yet, much still has to change. As Europe is seen very positive in Romania, the means of pressure work. Romania is more or less under legal restraint in the field of justice and corruption. To enforce improvements Romania might be denied entrance to the Schengen Agreement that enables free traffic of persons in the European Union and also to the Euro. Dutch policy adopts a critical attitude towards Romania, yet the Dutch help Romania in various fields.

The second speaker was Marjolein van Delen, head of the Economic Department of the Embassy. Her central theme was: Romania as a gateway to Europe. What the river Rhine is for the Netherlands, the Danube is for Romania. At this moment 90% of the Chinese consumer export is shipped to Rotterdam, Antwerp and Hamburg, of which Rotterdam covers Europe up to Austria.

Constanza is the Romanian port at the Black Sea. This port is connected with the Danube via the Danube canal. Constanza may develop into a great rival of Rotterdam because the route to China via the Bosphorus – Black Sea- Constanza and the Romanian roads and railways is shorter and therefore less expensive. It is true the connections now are still inferior (Romania has only 200 km of motorway and its railways need repair.) and Rotterdam is a much safer place now. Is Constanza then really a threat for Rotterdam? Most certainly. But, if the Netherlands do not get involved in the development of Constanza, the Dutch will miss the opportunity to become market leader in bringing trade facilities.

Peter Hoek (Murmellius Gymnasium Alkmaar) & Renée Schreuder (ROC Midden-Nederland, Amersfoort)

Friday 17 October

Visit to secondary school 'Mihai Viteazul'; Visit to EGEA Bucharest (cancelled)

The visit to the school for secondary education "Mihai Viteazul" in Bucharest.

The visit that we paid to the school 'Mihai Viteazul' in Bucharest consisted of 3 parts:

- an introduction to the Romanian Educational System and this specific school
- attending a few lessons in groups in different subjects: history, geography and music
- a tour through the school guided by students of the school.



A beautiful facade built between 1921 - 1928 inhabited the Mihai Viteazul Lyceum, a building with two stocks and a cellar. In communist times this school was outstanding and it still is. The name refers to Michael the Brave, the king who united the three kingdoms of the old Romania in the times of queen Elisabeth of Great-Britain in the 16th century. Behind those walls we got a warm reception in the old library on the first floor covering half the building with all walls filled with books, in wooden compartments under glass doors. The catalogue and the codes on the books are all handwritten. In this library neither Theun de Vries' nor Ceausescu's collected works were included, but many 19th century authors and books were present. The headmaster,

an English and a music teacher welcomed us with cookies and coffee and the headmaster's explanations.

In the lecture of the headmaster and a few colleagues we learned a lot about the **school system in Romania**, which is quite different from the Dutch system at some items and a bit complicated for us. After grade eight students are separated to follow one of the 2 routes:

- the lyceum (lower and higher cycle) of 4 years for the smartest students to prepare for university or other tertiary education.
- the 'Arts and Trade Schools' for vocational training; this takes 2 years and after that students can follow the Completion year and the last 2 years of Lyceum higher cycle.

The largest part of the curriculum in all primary and secondary education is compulsory and established by the government. Only in the highest grades a few subjects are optional like a second foreign language (English is in the national curriculum) or philosophy. That makes it possible to enter university without restrictions like we know in the Netherlands.

Mihai Viteazul is a very prominent theoretical high school for Lyceum: lower and higher cycle. The school tries to connect tradition and modernity in preparing the students for university in Romania or abroad. Their ambition is to be the best in as well natural and social sciences as in sports and individual development of their



students. Apart from the lessons for the core curriculum the school offers extra-curricular activities like excursions, theatre, sports competitions, ICT, exchange programmes with schools in e.g. the USA, a school radio, a school paper called "Pumpkin", and they run an ecological foundation (every summer into the mountains with a teacher; marking paths and cleaning the environment).

The objectives of this school are high: to create a safe and pleasant learning environment, progressive development: intercultural education, education for democratic citizenship and a cultural expedition; business education (working experience for one day a year).

Mihai Viteazul can reach the top because they are supported by the parents and they have only highly qualified teachers that work with highly motivated students. The Union of Parents participates actively in the school. Pupils, parents and teachers, everyone craves for education and knowledge. Nevertheless the pupils come from all social strata.

To be able to enter this school the students have to get very high marks in 8th grade for the national tests in the hope to be selected by the computer that compares all potential students.

Walking through the school corridors and classrooms we became a little sad. The school was very sober or in some ways even poorly accommodated. But, the less there is material for



the eye, the more happens in the mind and they had a beautiful auditorium.

We visited a **History lesson** unexpected. A small classroom with high, small, unpainted, closed windows. Twenty-six

pupils aged around 16 were following this one-hour-a-week lesson. They were anxious to follow the explanation with the answers in their notebook. The textbook had thin pages, where the print of the other side showed through. Babylonians and Hammurabi were the subject. There was a small blackboard the teacher used and some pupils were asked to come to the blackboard and write their answers. Their backpacks hung on the chairs and the only adorning was a clock above the blackboard and a board with hooks for the coats. The floor was of bare wood. This teacher didn't speak English, but his pupils did. When the teacher handed out scarcely readable copies and dictated questions, we asked the teacher via one of the pupils if there could be a possibility to question each other. When the teacher agreed there was a very lively two-sided questioning about history, school and Romania.

The other group has visited a **Geography** class in a classroom which to our surprise was equipped with a modern 'smart board' used by the teacher to explain the Romanian landscapes. Here, also, the teacher didn't speak English but it was nice to hear that he tried to include a link to the Dutch landscapes for his students. What seemed to be the biggest difference with the way we usually work in our classes was the fact that there were hardly any students' activities. Students followed the explanations and took notes. I really envied the teacher for the smart board and was daydreaming about all the extra options that this board might bring for a lesson about landscapes!

After the lessons some students gave us a tour around the school. This was a really nice conclusion of our visit, because they were very nice students and were open and enthusiastic about their school and education. It was a very interesting morning!

Ellen Marrenga (KSG De Breul, Zeist) & Riekske de Koning (De Meergronden, Almere)

Saturday 18 October

Trip through the Carpathian Mountains to Sighișoara

Today's program was a day of travelling into the inland country of Romania, Transylvania. We had a long drive through Walachia and the Carpathian Mountains. Our goal of this day was the medieval town of Sighișoara . On the way, we visited Peles Castle, the monastery of Sinaia, a town visit to Brasov and of course Bran Castle, related to Dracula.

Walachia, with the capital Bucharest, is most Romanian of all provinces. It lies in the south, between the Carpathian Mountains and the Danube. The area at west of the Olt, was ever a Roman province (Dacia Inferior). This area was in former days the border area between Christianity and Islam. Of Islamic influences present is nothing to recognise anymore.

A ride through the Carpathian Mountains is an enormous event. The landscape of the Carpathians, which covers a third of the country, has enormously much to offer. These mountains were formed millions of years ago as a result of an enormous collision between the two tectonic plates, where also the Alps and the Himalaya arose of. In earlier times they formed the longest volcano chain in Europe, but there is still but one extinguished crater concerning. The Carpathians have the form of an 'U' of the northwest to the south west. Successive processes of sedimentation, geological shifts and constant influences have created impressive mountain peaks above wooded slopes.

The geology of the Carpathians exists from three different layers. The outer layer keeps everything together, further there a crystal layers and there is an volcanic layer. The mountains are rich to ferrous metal, marble and crystals.

The road between Bucharest and Transylvania runs by the Prahova-valley. The town of Sinaia is the beating heart of this beautiful valley. Sinaia developed itself as a mundane cure harbour after king Carol I let a castle build here, Peles Castle (Castelul Peleş). After

mounting the Romanian throne in 1866, Carol started with construction. The last hand was laid in 1914. The castle is an bizarre mixture of German neo-renaissance and neo-gothic architecture. Within it is decorated in its whole with dark woodcarving, many weapons and all kinds of chambers with an international style (for example the Turkish chamber). The castle was used as a summer residence of the royal family.

The town is named after the 17th century monastery of Sinaia. It was founded by the ruling prince of this region, Mihai Cantacuzino after a pilgrimage to the monastery of the holy Catherine on the mountain Sinai. The oldest building on the grounds, a beautiful small church is dated 1695 and is placed on a inner court of the monastery. The larger of the two churches standing there, is from around 1900 and is in the neo-Brâncoveanu-style.

From this point, we went to the town of Braşov. In German it is called Kronstadt and it is one of the most beautiful Saxon towns of Transylvania. During the communism period of the country the town was in the grip of the industrialisation, which remains are found everywhere around the town. The medieval centre however has remained intact. The heart of the town is the town square. Here you can see the Lutheran Maria church, but it is better known as the 'black church' because its walls are blackened as a result of an enormous town fire in 1689 which took the lives of 3000 people. In front of the church there is a statue of John Honterus (1498-1549) who as a preacher spread the word of Luther. In this town you can also find the first Romanian school dating of 1495.

The town reminds of the Saxon origin everywhere. There are a lot of signs in German and the style of a lot of buildings resembles German houses. At this moment, the mayor of the town is a descendant of an Saxon inhabitant.

The journey of this day ended in Sighişoara, a 13th century citadel. It is like by entering the gate to the citadel, you go back in medieval times. After a long day, it ended here for us with a good meal and a comfortable bed in an beautiful inn.

Simon Wolfs (Sintermeertencollege, Heerlen) & Ad de Zeeuw (Corderius College, Amersfoort)

Sunday 19 October

Visit to Sighişoara ; Visit to Sibiu

Sighişoara/Schässburg

After a long night (until 7.30 A M!) we had breakfast in the vaulted dining room of 'Casa Wagner'. This hotel is situated within the walls of the upper city on the hilltop overlooking the lower city of Sighişoara.

In a cold but healthy morning temperature we started a guided tour in this upper city or citadel. The most elevated plateau of the hill was originally crowned by a Roman fortress of the 2nd century AD. Nowadays we find here the Gothic Church of the Hill on the site of an earlier Romanesque chapel. A 17th century wooden stairway of 175 steps leads to this platform from where the visitor is offered a splendid view over the old and new city.

The upper city was founded by 'Saxon' (German speaking) farmers, traders and artisans in the late 12th century at the request of the king of Hungary. Most of the fortifications of this 'Schässburg' date from the 14th century and are relatively well-preserved. The wall towers are mostly named after the guilds responsible for their maintaining and guarding. The Clock Tower, symbol of the city, overlooks them all. It protected the main entrance and hosted the city assembly. In the early 17th century the tower had a clock and in 1648 a carillon mechanism was added to it that included wooden statues symbolising the days of the week.

Since 1899 the tower has held a historic museum. It has coins, weapons, a pharmacy and a scale model of the upper city. Quite remarkable is the attention given to the engineer Hermann Oberth, who worked with Werner von Braun on the construction of V1 and V2 and later on helped the Americans to the moon.

Within the city walls we find also the House of Dracula, where Vlad Dracula was born in 1431. The medieval citadel of Sighișoara has been registered on the UNESCO World Heritage list. At 11.00 AM we left this romantic place that offered us a good impression of medieval Transylvania and its inhabitants.

The journey took us through a hilly landscape with colourful German villages in a characteristic style. Along some of the famous fortified churches (e.g. Slimnic/Stolzenburg) and the modern ruins of an industrial communist past. In the afternoon we arrived at Sibiu/Hermannstadt for a stay at the hotel 'Continental Forum' and an extensive city tour by our well-prepared guide Alex.

Bas Aarts (Pleincollege Bisschop Bekkers, Eindhoven)

Sibiu

On Sunday afternoon we have had the opportunity to visit the town of Sibiu (**Hermannstadt** in German) which was the largest and wealthiest of the seven walled citadels built in the 12th century by German settlers known as Transylvanian Saxons. The riches amassed by its guilds paid for the construction of both impressive buildings and the fortifications required to protect them.

Sibiu's Old Town retains the grandeur of its earlier days when rich and powerful guilds dominated regional trade. Like Sighișoara and Brasov it has a distinctly Germanic feeling. Sections of the medieval wall still guard the historic area, where narrow streets pass steep-roofed 17th century buildings with gable overhangs before opening into vast church-dominated squares such as Piata Mare (Great Square) and Piata Mica (Little Square). The seven walled citadels populated by the Saxons of Transylvania were known in German as the **Siebenburgen**.

The other **Siebenburgen** citadels are located in the towns of: **Bistrita** (Bistritz), **Brasov** (Kronstadt), **Cluj** (Klausenburg), **Medias** (Mediasch), **Sebes** (Mühlbach), **Sighișoara** (Schässburg)

At the Piata Mica is situated the Pharmacy history museum because of the opening of the world's first homeopathic laboratory in 1797 by Samuel von Hahnemann. Sibiu is home to the first hospital in Romania (1292), the first pharmacy (1494) and the oldest museum in Romania: the Bruckenthal Museum opened in 1817. The first book in the Romanian language was printed in Sibiu in 1544

For hundreds of years, this walled town in the heart of Transylvania was one of the most powerful and prosperous strongholds in Europe. Surrounded by imposing walls Sibiu's original fortifications included 39 defensive towers, five bulwarks, four gates and five artillery batteries.

Although the entire network is remarkably well-preserved, the best-maintained section is the south-eastern side which has been reinforced several times throughout the centuries since attacks most often came from that direction.



At the centre of the town are three beautiful squares. The **Piata Mare** is the site of the Roman-Catholic church and the Bruckenthal Museum where you will find one of Romania's most important art collections. The square is linked to the **Piata Mica** by a passage beneath the Council Tower. This second fortified square was home to the town's most prestigious master craftsmen who lived in rows of arcaded houses along the north and east sides. Today small shops, cafes and businesses line the square which is worth visiting for the excellent views over the town. The

third square, **Piata Huet** is dominated by the Evangelical Cathedral.

Bruckenthal Palace (*Palatul Brukenthal*)

Built between 1778-1785 by a Viennese architect in a refined late-baroque style. It is now the home of the **Bruckenthal Museum** (*Muzeul Brukenthal*), the oldest and one of the finest art museums in the country. The palace was built by Baron Samuel von Bruckenthal to serve as his official residence and house his collections of Romanian and Western art, 16th - 18th century religious sculptures and icons, stamps and coins, as well as an impressive library. Over the years, the collections have been enriched through acquisitions and donations.

Piata Huet is home to a mix of gothic buildings dominated by the **Evangelical Cathedral** (*Biserica Evangelica*). This impressive structure, featuring five pointed towers was built in 1520 on the site of an old Roman basilica. At the opposite of the church you can also find the city's only fully German school, the **Samuel von Brukenthal Gymnasium**, which exemplifies the city's proud German heritage.

Orthodox Metropolitan Cathedral (*Catedrala Ortodoxa Mitropolitana Sf. Treime*)

Constructed between 1902-1906 on the site of a former Greek church, it shares a similar style with Saint Sofia Cathedral in Istanbul, Turkey. The interior is dominated by a massive gold chandelier and features neo-Byzantine decorations.

Jacques Mulder (Pleincollege Sint Joris, Eindhoven)

Monday 20 October

Departure from Sibiu; visit to farm

The day ahead of us is going to be one of enjoyment and leisure, but in the morning when we leave Sibiu we know nothing about that at all.

It starts in the early morning when we get the wakeup call from literally hundreds and hundreds of crows. A magnificent 'mis en scene' against the background of a rising autumn sun.

After breakfast we start the journey. The trip from South Transylvania to Walachia is going to take hours and hours, while we descend from Sibiu -800 meters above sea-level - to Bucharest along the old Roman road through the Carpathians which leads along the Gorges of the river Olt.

The way back to Bucharest starts off with some typical Romanian scenes: while leaving Sibiu we see a shopping mall – mostly DIY stores! –, a second hand car market and a motorway still to be accomplished with EU- money, and without any warning we find ourselves watching the waste and desolated land with a flock of sheep in the fog in the Romanian countryside. The change of scenery takes only three minutes!

With our coach we drive a secondary road, rather small. In the near future a freeway will be build from Hungary to Istanbul/ Turkey, running trough Romania. That would be a relief for many businesspeople because the condition of the roads in general is bad to very bad and jam-packed with cars. Until then one has to use the existing roads which leads us alongside little hamlets. Poverty strikes us very badly when we pass the dwellings of the gipsy's who live at the boundaries of the hamlets and villages. One sees cows, sheep, gipsy carts torn by horses, chickens and turkeys around all the houses ore what one dares to call a 'house'. The autumn leaves, the pumpkin-crop and the headscarves of the gipsy women bring colour in the Romanian landscape. The nature is still of an unknown splendour and widely untouched. The highest peak of the Transylvanian Alps is Mount Moldoveanu, 2554metres, which is all the time in the background.

In the neighbourhood of the town of Brezoi we pass many sawmills. At last we stop in a tiny village in a hilly region where a community centre and a school are. In front of the school is a big billboard which says that the school was build with EU-money out of a 'damage-fund'. There is no time to discover what damage was done here by whom ore what, because there is an urgent need by most of the 20 passengers to use the outside toilet of the school. There is no toilet paper but because many of our companions have travelled before, we know how to cope with that minor problem.

A lady of that mountain village leads us first to the EU-cows stable, brand new and sparkling and empty: the cows are still in the mountains. Then we walk on to a very remote peasant/ cheese maker where we try his fresh cheese (feta). The cheese maker is very proud of the achievement made by his hamlet to fill the only kettle it possesses with enough cows' milk to make cheese for the weekly market in another, nearby village. We have to try the cheese and eat big lumps of the local feta. The taste of the cheese is for most of us a big experience: (too) salty.

The Romanians call this region 'communa perisani', a kind of national park on a historic spot. (In the year 1313 the Walachians defeated the Hungarians on this very spot.) We have to drive all the way back to pick up the mayor of the town of Brezoi to have lunch with him at a resort of his nephew/ cousin. As we find out the mayor, the landlord and the tour operator belong all to the same political party. That trip still frightens us (Ria more than Mirion) because the thing we drove on had no more width than a bridle path. The coach driver is fabulous: he drives his coach and the passengers calmly to the lunch appointment. After a lovely lunch we drive on to discover that the coach can cross a shallow part of the river. In no time we are back on the main road to Brezoi were we drop the mayor of.

Within the reach of Bucharest one can find hotels, fuel stations and many lorries driving the same winding road. According to the program we should have seen bears, wolves and foxes in the afternoon but because of the interference of the mayor the only thing left was the road to Bucharest. From the wild animals we only saw the sad remains: the furs. About 50 kilometres north of the capital the national road becomes a freeway which leads you straight into Bucharest. Here the landscape is much less interesting and most of us only wake up to find out that we are stuck in the daily Bucharestian traffic jam.

Mirion Salemink (Montessori College, Nijmegen) & Ria van Beusekom
(Sintermeertencollege, Heerlen)

Tuesday 21 October

Visit to a vocational secondary school 'Sfantul Pantelimon'; Geographical tour of Bucharest

Technological vocational high school 'Saint Pantelimon' in Bucharest

The school borrowed its name from the neighbourhood in which it is located.

The school is quite popular, while it is easy to reach by public transport.

There are almost 1200 pupils, 50% boys and 50% girls.

The pupils are trained in the following fields:

- It
- Mechanical
- Electrical
- Chemical

There are also classes in football. When we compare this type of school with our Dutch educational system, we would call it a mix of the VMBO and the MBO.

We were kindly received by the director of the school and his deputy (neither of them spoke English) so the two English teachers were the interpreters and played therefore a prominent role during our visit.

Our visit was well prepared, one classroom was specially equipped to receive a group of 22 teachers, the table was set for coffee and cakes, and for each of us a green portfolio with information about the school, including a special disc for this occasion, was prepared. This was the first time that such a group of foreign teachers visited the school.

The programme was as follows:

09:00-10:00 Introduction of the school
10:00-11:00 Attending lessons
11:00-12:00 Discussion with teachers and pupils

Introduction of the school was about:

- The national education system
- The structure of the professional and technical education
- The lower and upper secondary education.

The vocational and technical education are organized in two educational routes:

1. Lower course - two years
Upper course - two years
2. The progressive forming route:
Lower course - two years
Additional year - one year
Upper course of high school - two years

- The vocational and technical education ensures the first three levels of training.
Level 1: training through arts and trade school.
Level 2: training through the additional year.
Level 3: training through the upper secondary high
- The objectives, goals and principles of the technical and vocational education.
- Qualifications and curriculum technical and professional education.

Attending lessons

In groups of four with a teacher of the school we observed practical lessons in chemistry, electricity, engineering, ct. Teachers and pupils informed us kindly about what they were doing.

Discussion with teachers and pupils

Many questions (and answers) of the pupils about the future of themselves in or outside Romania, and about Romania and the EU. One boy was very clear about the role of the EU in Romania: it was not an issue for him.

The discussion with the teachers was about the conditions of the profession and the difficulties of bringing up and teaching a group of children of which most of them were living with their grandparents, because the parents are working abroad, Spain and Italy, to earn a living. Also the influence of TV and the internet was a subject of discussion.

Conclusion

It was a pleasant visit. The teachers who could communicate in English were very open towards us and were curious about Holland and our way of life and our way of teaching of course. The other teachers were 'ordered' to attend the meeting but did not understand much of the discussions. The school building was old and in great need of maintenance, but everywhere in the school were plants, well kept by the pupils. We noticed that when working with machinery and also with chemicals, the safety of pupils as well for teachers got very little attention, but maybe that has also to do with the lack of money. We visited a country that is struggling with a lot of problems of which we have seen only a small part. In the education field is also a need for a lot of things, but the contact between schools from different countries can mean a lot, both for the privileged and for the not so privileged ones. We went home with the idea that we, the privileged ones, have little to complain about... for a short while. Last week we were in action/strike for better conditions for teachers!!!

Lies Ruiter (Het Baarnsch Lyceum, Baarn) & Ginet Gebert (Nova College, Amsterdam)

Bucharest by day, an infrastructural nightmare

"Remember, Bucharest is the worst part of Romania!" These words were the last spoken by our guides before they jumped out of the bus after showing us the outskirts of Bucharest; the place where the city suddenly changes into flat countryside.

What we had seen and heard made us feel a little sad. Indeed, like our guide's told us, the country (and Bucharest as well), "had a great potential, but the people have really to believe in it". Their conclusions were right though, we had found that out, during the two hours' bus trip. Some of aspects of the guide's conclusions will be explained more explicitly later. Our colleagues sometimes were asking everything that came into their mind. We have tried to transform the information into four categories:

A living city

In 1960 Bucharest had one million inhabitants; now it has an official total of 2.5 million. (During our trip through Romania we got different information on data which varied between 2.2 and 2.5 million inhabitants.)

Normally on an ordinary day there will be over three million people in the city. Many people who work in Bucharest live in neighbouring villages and towns, because they can't afford the rents in Bucharest. A larger group have a semi-illegal status.

Others facts our guides mentioned were that Bucharest had become an expensive place to live. Land prices have gone up to 2000 Euro per square meter.

They gave a personal example of what the consequence were of the high land prices. One of the guides is a lector and he earns 300 Euro a month, but the rent for his apartment in a so called Communist bloc is 500 Euro each month. How he could afford his apartment was, what he called, his so called "secret". The apartment is still far from the dream that every Romanian seems to have: A house on a lake next to a forest.

Traffic, the time real issue

During our trip through the town we drove on the central axis of the city: The Darcia Boulevard. The ride on that road was a demonstration of one of the biggest problems of Bucharest: the inner city had become one big traffic jam. In our opinion it resembled the situation in Asian cities. The main roads of Bucharest were built to have about 100.000 cars. But after the decline of the communist regime the number of cars has increased from 300.000 in the early nineties to 1.2 million nowadays. Solutions to solve this huge problem take too much time according to our guides. "That's typical of our political system", they explained us. Once a decision has been made the work progresses very slowly because for the constructors the payment by the government was not enough.

One example: What is desperately needed is big parking places, because there isn't enough space for all the cars. A commercial option is not a real solution because people don't want to pay for their parking place. Furthermore the government doesn't have the money to build these places because the land prices in Bucharest are too high. The result is that people park their cars everywhere.

Public transport is not a real solution at this moment either. Buses and trams are already "fully packed with passengers." They are held up by the daily traffic jams.

One of the other problems is that there is no taxation system for cars. The politicians who want to be (re)elected will not dare to propose these measures for the risk of losing potential voters. We have also found that Romanian drivers are not very disciplined.

Curious for us to find out that the ring around Bucharest, which is a one lane road only exists on the map. Some parts haven't been finished yet and other parts cut town areas in two parts instead of going around them. The result is that this ring around Bucharest causes daily big traffic jams as well. The government is now thinking of constructing another, wider ring around Bucharest. The problem is the government has to buy land from private investors. This will make the ring far too expensive.

Environmental problems

One of the souvenirs the Ceausescu era has left behind is enormous polluted areas in the countryside. People think pollution is a problem for other persons to solve. Romania doesn't have a selective waste system, where renewable resources can be extracted from the waste. That has to do with the mentality of the average Romanian; he/she has become a super individualist. This seems to be the reaction to the collective ideas from the past. Our guides told us that every person in Communist era had to collect two kilos of paper each month as part of a recycling program. Due to feelings of resentment people throw away garbage everywhere. The countryside is littered with plastic water bottles. Another example was shown to us: A small canalized river in the north of Bucharest is used as an open sewer for a large part of Bucharest. This river flows out into the river Danube. The sewage water from household as well as from industrial plants is untreated. Experiments by the University of Bucharest have shown that the water of the river Arges, a side river of the Danube pollutes

the Danube. The water of the Danube contains no living organisms. One of the solutions for this ecological disaster is the building of a large sewage plant which will be in operation not earlier than 2011. Not only will it treat the sewage water, it will be able to produce biogas as well.

Bucharest, one large building site

The industrialization during the Communist era which started in the sixties doubled the number of inhabitants. All those new inhabitants had to be housed and so big apartment blocks were built. These apartment blocks were an icon for modernism which was propagated during the Ceausescu-era. These apartment blocks were built in a way that they hid the old, bourgeois buildings from earlier times. These blocks have eight levels on which each level has five apartments with two or three rooms each. Most of these apartments nowadays are privately owned.

The buildings look derelict because nobody feels responsible for the building as a whole. The result is that most parts of the city give the visitor the feeling that the city is in decline. It makes you feel sad. Every building looks huge, grey and above all dirty.

Nowadays there have been private initiatives. But the outlook is very grim. "Every piece of land in Bucharest will be developed", our guides told us. "Big investment companies will develop plans", they told us. The owners of these large companies are politicians or people that have a lot of political influence on politicians. Bucharest at the moment seems to be one massive building site. In the outskirts of Bucharest big shopping malls and other commercial projects are built. The building develops alongside with the infrastructure. The buildings are often finished but lack the roads, electricity cables and other infrastructural necessities. Most of these projects are built on former farmland which was bought for a scratch in the early nineties by private investors. These investors now want to earn lots of money. The price per square meter of land rises thirty percent yearly. The example of a successful investor is the owner of the local football club. He has even founded his own political party, the New Generation Party. He is considered to be the richest man in the country according to the guides. He owns more than five billion dollars and is also owner of Euroest, a large investment company in Romania. You will see huge blue billboards with the name of his company everywhere in the countryside. The land surrounding these billboards is undeveloped because nobody, including foreign investors, can afford to buy the land because the price per square meter is too steep.

In former times the communist blocks were once the modern '*walls*' of the city, but nowadays private houses are built in front of these '*walls*'. These houses are far from the city centre and lack essential infrastructure. This is a negative side effect of the economic growth which was, according to our guides, 85% over the last few years. These houses have been built in areas where large industrial complexes were located. These former industrial areas are also used by foreign investors to build their warehouses on. The largest foreign investment companies are French, German, Italian and Austrian. It is interesting to notice that there are no separate zones in these new areas.

The quality of these new buildings is claimed to be very poor our guides told us. "Our best men are now working in Spain and Italy. In our country people working here at the moment lack experience. We also import people from Turkey or China to do the work." To stop this crisis the building sector has try and stop highly skilled Romanian builders from going to work in other European countries. One way to keep them in Romania is to raise the salaries substantially.

The chaos in the building sector was illustrated by a few examples:

The Ria Grand Hotel (1500 rooms) was built on a site of a former farm where vegetables were grown. It is the largest hotel in Europe. But...the location of the hotel is too far from the central area of Bucharest. The decision to build this hotel was made on the day of abdication of the former mayor.

Another example was Lake Cismigiu an artificial lake that was constructed near the Ria Grand Hotel. The lake was to be used for recreation purposes. The lake never contained water except some rainwater because the lake can't be filled by the Danube river water because it is far above the river level. The constructors seem to have forgotten that water doesn't tend to flow upstream. Now there are plans to reconstruct this dry lake as a hippodrome or a racing course.

These two examples were given by our guides. The guides were very critical on issues concerning the city. But in their opinion there was at least one positive asset that hasn't changed: the beer was still cheap!

Conny Verjaal (Mencia de Mendoza Lyceum, Breda) & Nicolaesz Vlaming (Het Amsterdams Lyceum, Amsterdam)

Wednesday 22 October

Visit to Center for Independent Journalism, Bucharest

Centre for Independent Journalism (1994)

We were received by **Manuela Preoteasa**, manager and journalist of Hot News.ro, and **Michaila Dunga**, the deputy director of the Centre,

Michaila Dunga's introduction pointed out the following three main issues:

- the role of the media during the revolution.
- the independence of the media
- helping people to learn to look at the media in a critical way and training the media.

The role of the media during the revolution

This was, of course, the simplest issue: there was no role for the media, because there were no Rumanian media. The only sources of information about what was going on in the country were Radio Free Europe and Voice of America. The press, such as it was, was strictly controlled by the state and the party.

Immediately after the revolution there were about 1000 newspapers. Now the amount is limited to about 500.

The independence of the media

This is a very complicated issue. Do independent media exist?

At first the centre was subsidised by the government of the USA. Now it is financially independent. The finances are based on fundraising projects, financed by NGO's; the Dutch embassy also donated money. In order to live up to their name, they don't receive money from the government or private enterprises. Nevertheless, they set themselves a wide range of tasks, including campaigning for media legislation, for freedom of access to information of public interest, media ownership, assistance for professional associations, a code of ethics and a statute and, of course, practical training of journalists.

The centre supports programs for social integration of minorities such as the Roma and public health.

Most of the newspapers have financial problems, especially on the local level. Some papers are supported by private investors. One TV station is owned by the state and controlled by parliament. The commercial TV concentrates on subjects as criminality, accidents, soap series and human interest. In other words, they limit themselves to infotainment.

They go on to point out the following problems:

- the low level of news consumption, linked to deep seated distrust of politics and politicians because of corruption and unreliability due to constantly changing political programs. These are the main reasons why journalists focus on persons rather than parties of programs.
- Young people watch television, but not to get information about what is happening politically; they don't know how to select information and television is not used for information.

After these introductory observations there is time for our questions.

Is there such a phenomenon as confessionally or ideologically coloured media?

No, in Romania the media are largely in the hands of tycoons, who are governed by economical interests. They are in the same boat as whoever or whatever party supports their interests. Exceptions are small orthodox and Roman Catholic publications. There is a role for independent journalists to reach the young over issues like the development of building and spacial planning getting more and more controlled by extreme capitalism. A possible new approach can be found on the internet. A good example is HotNews.ro.

What is the position of women in journalism?

There are very few women in leading positions in journalism. Many go to the better paid jobs in PR. Most students of journalism want jobs as TV anchorage.

Also in politics and in society as a whole, women are being discriminated against. Although during communism there was official equality that starts to be a problem in developing capitalism. There is not a strong feminist movement because of lack of interest, lack of civic spirit.

The role of censorship, cartoons and satire.

There is a satirical weekly magazine. Of course there is self-censorship (no official censorship – there is no press law) because of financial pressures. There is lack of political debate, because editors are in the pocket of tycoons, who work very subtly to discourage investigative journalism. A problem that becomes very apparent when investigating the Securitate. This organisation has been profoundly investigated, but finding evidence is very, very difficult: files are destroyed or cannot be found, because the tycoons and others are in the way. The usual line is: "We are all guilty, so don't dig!" The present powerful people were somehow involved in the Securitate. Eventually they will grow old and be pensioned off. But in the meantime they set a bad example for people growing up now, thinking this is the normal way to do things.

After two hours we say goodbye, very impressed by the enormity of the task these two very enthusiastic women set themselves. We wish them all the success they deserve.

Aart Snoek (Vechtdal College, Hardenberg) & Marion Frank (CSG Leo Vroman, Gouda)