

Academic Reconstruction of South Eastern Europe

Inter-University Collaboration in Teaching, Study and Research



Stabilitätspakt für Südosteuropa
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Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management Network

Regional MBA for South Eastern Europe



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“Summer Universities” programme, with its focus on business set-up, is designed for both students and graduates, whereby graduates receive additional support. “Thanks to research grants from the DAAD, last year five young scholars from South Eastern Europe were able to take advantage of the good resources and research materials available at German universities,” says German project partner Professor Michael Graef from the Technical University (FH) of Worms. The network is also being utilised by faculty members to exchange curricula, research results and methodological concepts. With a joint MBA programme just about ready to launch, the network has been put to good use. During this year’s Summer Academy held in Kladovo, Serbia, the partners made headway by deciding on both the structure and syllabi for the programme. English-language lecture modules are in the planning stages.

Summer School at the University of Zenica in Bosnia

The foundation for the economics network “Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management” was laid during a Summer Academy session in 2008. Since then, 13 universities from Germany and South Eastern Europe have joined the network, collaborating at various levels. Its

High-Quality and Efficient Doctoral Degree Programmes

One step closer to the international graduate programme

The SEEFORM programme, made possible by the DYNET network, has been helping graduate students from South Eastern Europe obtain doctoral degrees since 2004. Graduate degrees gained through this programme, primarily in the student’s home country, involve research stays abroad at partner universities. “Of the three DAAD objectives – reconstruction, internationalisation and three-year PhD programmes – we have attained the first two,” says Rüdiger Höffer, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at the Ruhr University Bochum and network lead on the German side. Five students have earned doctoral degrees through the programme; not all of them finished within three years, however. “PhDs used to take much longer than they do now,” Höffer adds. Four of them

are now working as research assistants at their home universities. The fifth is currently conducting research in Germany. “We’ve successfully shifted from ‘brain drain’ to internationalisation.” South Eastern European civil engineering departments are currently putting together a structured international PhD programme based on the SEEFORM programme. “The project is being handled entirely by the regional universities,” explains Höffer. Academic deans and vice rectors from Serbia and Macedonia will meet in the fall of 2010 in Bochum to discuss how best to bundle the expertise from the participating institutions. “German universities should stay on equal footing with its partners through DAAD’s support of the PhD programme,” says Höffer.

Editorial



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Together, some 200 partner institutions of higher learning from the Western Balkans and Germany are driving improvements in academia throughout South Eastern Europe. After ten years, their efforts have begun to pay off – now in full swing, the rebuilding process has led to greater stability in the region. Despite this progress, however, sizeable deficits still exist, both professionally as well as institutionally. To help right this and informed by recent evaluation results, new country-specific programmes for medical practitioners and lawyers were developed and launched in 2010.

Increased support for doctoral candidates through our networks is another new area of focus. Three teams demonstrate how future executives can be integrated into the reform projects. And for the first time, 20 cultural studies institutes have joined in collaboration. Read here how thinkers engage in open exchange about the recent past, free of nationalistic discourses.

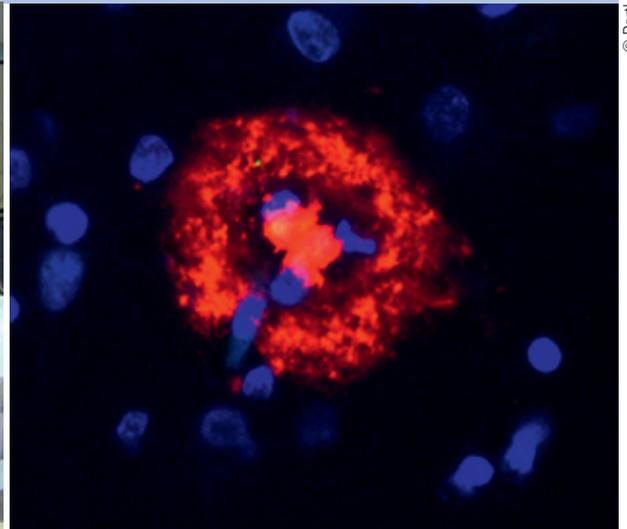
The programme also plays a significant role in the question of the Western Balkans increasing integration into the EU. At an Alumni Meeting that took place in Belgrade, Serbian and German scholars discussed the vision of a common European Higher Education Area. I thank everyone involved for their commitment.

Dr. Annette Julius
Head of the Northern Hemisphere
Department, DAAD

Successful Collaboration



Meeting in Zagreb: Researchers from Germany, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina convene for discussion and exchange



Brain tissue from an Alzheimer's patient: CNS nuclei shown in blue, Aβ plaque deposits in red, pathological features found in those with Alzheimer's

Neurobiological Transfer

The DAAD-sponsored cooperation GAST-IN-SEE explores the connection between Type 2 diabetes and Alzheimer's disease. The cooperation also promotes the creation of standards for medical degrees.

Nearly 30 million people worldwide were diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2007. For years now, scientists and researchers have been searching for the cause of this often debilitating form of dementia – without success. They have learned, however, that other pre-existing illnesses can increase a person's risk of developing Alzheimer's. Epidemiological studies indicate that patients with Type II diabetes have a higher risk of developing Alzheimer's disease later in life. Over the past years, Professor Peter Riederer from the Clinical Neurochemistry Department at the University of Würzburg Clinic and Polyclinic for Psychiatry, Psychosomatics and Psychotherapy, together with his colleagues from the universities of Zagreb, Sarajevo and Tuzla, has successfully identified the influence of Type II diabetes on Alzheimer's using a so-called STZ model. Their results could very well lead to a breakthrough in dementia research.

The work of the Germany-South Eastern European team is part of a project called GAST-IN-SEE (German Action in Science and Teaching in South-East-Europe), a DAAD-funded programme since 2004. The researchers examine the development of the Alzheimer pathology in laboratory animals. The test animals are administered streptozotocin (STZ), a chemical compound that causes insulin resistance, simulating cerebral diabetes. Results have shown Alzheimer's disease developing out of the diabetes. After this initial round of experiments, the team now hopes to determine the earliest point in time at which biochemical and morphological

changes in the hippocampus and cortex begin to occur, and when cognitive loss, one of the first indicators of Alzheimer's disease, sets in. The groups in Zagreb and Sarajevo are currently conducting this leg of the research, supported by expertise in Würzburg.

Getting a handle on the early stages

One of the most common features of Alzheimer's is the accumulation of so-called beta-amyloid plaque between the neurons in the brain. While a healthy brain can break down these protein bits, the deposits in the brain of

a patient with Alzheimer's become insoluble. Brain mass shrinks as a result. Patients with early-stage Alzheimer's experience short-term memory loss and difficulties speaking and understanding speech.

"We've observed cognitive impairment after just two weeks," says Peter Riederer. "And nothing visible had happened in the brain." The first signs of plaque-like deposits do not appear until after three months. "We suspected that the plaques were actually a result of Alzheimer's, not its cause." The fact that performance deficits in the laboratory animals appeared long before the development of plaque confirmed this theory. As Riederer sees it, researchers had simply spent too little time looking into the period before amyloid clumping.

Extra Support for Medical Practitioners

Assessments from 2006 and 2007 confirm the high quality of many of the engineering projects run under the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and their positive impact on collaboration between universities. Evaluations continued in 2008 and 2009, with two projects in the areas of medicine and public health under assessment. Among other things, the results showed that medical standards vary greatly from region to region. They also indicated a dire need for further training.

The response from DAAD was immediate: In 2009 DAAD sponsored a specialist course on minimally invasive surgery and clinic management at the Mannheim University Medical School surgery clinic. "Leading surgeons from South Eastern Europe took part," says Salih Berisha, a Kosovo-born resident physician at the

Mannheim clinic involved in the course. The doctors spent one week in Mannheim learning about modern management and taking part in minimally invasive surgeries, i.e. operations involving small skin incisions. "Although a number of clinics in the region already have the equipment for such procedures, not enough doctors are trained to use them," says Berisha. Course participants were also encouraged to form networks. "Until now there has been very little exchange among them," explains Berisha. A second special call for specialist courses and exchanges for medical practitioners went out in 2010. DAAD selected an intensive course in neurosurgery for medical specialists from South Eastern Europe. The course will be held in November at the University Clinic Erlangen-Nürnberg.

Lively Discussion

The German-South Eastern European partners are also exploring the role of stress as a risk factor in Alzheimer's disease. And indeed, the outcome mirrored that of the STZ model experiments. Reinforced by epidemiological analyses, the overall picture is grim: "Individuals who experience increased amounts of stress between the ages of 30 and 50 are at greater risk of developing Alzheimer's later in life," explains Riederer.

Europe-wide standards for PhDs in biomedicine

The flagship GAST-IN-SEE project began in 2003 when the Würzburg scientist Riederer met a colleague from Zagreb at a conference run by a Croatian pharmacological institute. At the time she was also conducting tests with streptozotocin. Riederer suggested they collaborate and met with another former colleague, Emin Sofic, who had just returned to Sarajevo after several years in the US. Together with Osman Sinanovic from the University of Tuzla, the team applied for and received DAAD funding. Since then they have championed the effort to establish standards for all of European PhD degrees in medicine. GAST-IN-SEE will be applying for an extension in 2011.

The cooperation has always been a productive one. "The South Eastern Europeans are intent on involving as many doctoral candidates as possible in the effort to institute exchange," says biologist Jasmin Bartl, who is working on her PhD under Riederer and is also a member of the cooperation group. The joint research works well. "Once a year we all meet in Zagreb and presents our projects," she says. "And after there are good discussions about the next steps."

The cooperation is active and engaged. The Würzburg researchers invite their colleagues from South Eastern Europe for knowledge exchanges and give talks at partner universities. Doctoral candidates can now receive a dual German-South Eastern European degree. The first holders of such a degree are now teaching in their home countries, obviously seeing a future in research in the region. The Würzburg faction is also helping technological know-how take root in the West Balkan by providing its partners with modern microbiology equipment. Another cause the partners promote is the harmonisation of the medical training within Europe. Professor Zdravko Lackovic, the project lead for GAST-IN-SEE in Croatia, is President of the Organisation for PhD Education in Biomedicine and Health Sciences in the European System, known in its short form as ORPHEUS. Founded in 2005 in Zagreb, the association promotes the establishment of harmonised medical degrees. "We want PhDs throughout Europe to be equal in value," says Riederer. All GAST-IN-SEE partners are members of Orpheus. Würzburg is Germany's first member and has been joined by the University of Cologne.

Europe Closer Together

"Serbia and Germany – Networks for the Future": 200 DAAD alumni gathered in Belgrade to talk about the challenges faced by both university systems in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to present best practice approaches.

What Professor Rüdiger Höffer from the Ruhr University Bochum Civil and Environmental Engineering Department and his project partner Professor Mira Petronijevic from Belgrade presented was a model network. Its members had set up two Masters programmes: "Earthquake Engineering" in Skopje and "Computational Engineering" in Belgrade. After several successful years, the programmes fell victim to the reforms under the Bologna Declaration, with two-year specialisation programmes in Skopje and Belgrade being changed to one-year Masters programmes. Since then both of these South Eastern European universities – like those in Germany – have been working to create greater flexibility between the 3+2 and 4+1 degree structures. In the end, both programmes have remained a success. "Many of the graduates are working as research assistants in South Eastern Europe, others are in Germany conducting research," says Rüdiger Höffer. Together with his partners, Höffer has since set up a structured, bi-national graduate programme in Skopje that oversees the doctoral work of PhD candidates from the entire South Eastern European region.

Another positive trend was also highlighted at the alumni seminar: numerous DAAD networks are now receiving additional funding from the EU. A good example is the Bachelor's programme "Environmental Techniques and Management of Resources" in Skopje. It was set up by Bochum civil engineers, together with the universities of Florence, Vienna and Thessaloniki with special funding from the European Union's Tempus Programme.

The difficulties of integrating Serbia into Europe's higher education landscape were also addressed at the meeting. One problem



Attentive alumni: One of the topics addressed at the meeting in Belgrade was the integration of Serbia into the European higher educational system

is the chronic underfunding of the sciences. Professor Nedeljko, state secretary in the Serbian Ministry of Science, affirmed the government's intention to steadily increase funding for both science and research.

Despite the challenges, however, Europe continues to grow closer together. The bio of Boris Dudas from the Rijeka German Studies Department attests to this fact: Born in Croatia, Dudas began his studies at Novi Sad University in 1991 but left when the war began. A DAAD semester scholarship took him to the Free University of Berlin, where he stayed and completed his doctoral degree. He's now a DAAD alum from a Serbian university. "National identities are not what fuel today's conflicts. It's the attitude toward the Bologna reforms that causes the rift between traditionalists and reformers," says Dudas. He applauded the DAAD's special regional programme and its role in promoting the integration of South Eastern Europe's higher education systems into the European system.

Overwhelming Response in Serbia

"More scholarships for Serbia". It was the slogan used by Germany's Foreign Minister in 2008 to announce the DAAD Special Programme for Serbia. On the heels of Serbia's extended period of isolation, the programme provides greater support for its students and scientists and aims to strengthen the ties between German and Serbian institutes of higher education. With 2009 statistics showing that over 60 per cent of Serbia's students had never been abroad, one of the programme's primary focuses is the integration of young Serbs

into the European sciences community. Since its inception, interest in the Special Programme has grown considerably. The number of applicants for DAAD stipends has tripled and the number of scholarships awarded for research and study stays in Germany has increased by over 70 per cent. In addition, DAAD also supports measures for driving structural change, such as informational trips to Germany for Serbian university representatives and further training for Serbian lawyers.

Dates September – December 2010

- 6.–11.9.** **Workshop**
“Software Engineering Education and Reverse Engineering”,
Ivanjica/SRB
HU Berlin, Prof. Bothe
- 15.–19.9.** **European Doctoral Seminar**
Sarajevo/BIH
U Bamberg, Prof. Wenzel
- 25.–30.9.** **International Student Course**
“Numerical Heat Transfer”,
Kopaonik/SRB
U Hannover, Prof. Dinkelacker
- 26.9.–5.10.** **Study Trip**
“Applied Regional Geography”
in SEE
U Bamberg, Prof. Göler
- 3.10.–9.10.** **Compact Course**
“Parallel Numerical Simulation”,
Belgrad/SRB
TU München, Prof. Bungartz
- 13.–17.10.** **Intensive Course**
“From Molecules to
Functionalised Materials”,
Cluj-Napoca/RO
U Leipzig, Prof. Hey Hawkins
- 23.–24.10.** **Workshop**
“GAST in SEE”, Zagreb/HRV
U Würzburg, Prof. Deckert
- 24.–28.10.** **Summer School**
“Innovation Management and
Idea Development”, Resita/RO
FH Worms, Prof. Graef
- 27.–29.10.** **Meeting**
“Evaluation of the project results
2010”, Frankfurt/Oder
BTU Cottbus, IHP Frankfurt/Oder,
Prof. Krämer
- 29.–30.10.** **Doctoral Student Conference**
“Knowledge Management and
the Development of Regions”
Rousse/BG
FH Worms, Prof. Graef
- 3.11.** **Progress Seminar SEEFORM**
Nis/SRB
RU Bochum, Prof. Höffer
- 4.–6.11.** **Bioethics Forum**
“BIOETHICS – MEDICINE –
POLITICS”, Belgrad/SRB
KU Eichstätt-Ingolstadt,
Prof. Schweidler
- 7.–14.11.** **Workshop**
“General Elections in Bosnia
and Herzegovina: Chance or
Challenge for International and
Regional Stability?”, BIH, IFSH
U Hamburg, Prof. Brzoska



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Straight to the heart of the debate on SEE nations

The workshop “Media and Memoria in South Eastern Europe” held in May 2010 in Ljubljana marked the start of an international debate about cultures of remembrance. The workshop was organised by Slavacist Tanja Zimmermann, Juniorprofessorin at the University of Constance.

What have been some of the upshots of the workshop?

The first meeting helped define which aspects were central to the discourse on the cultures of memory: pan-Slavic movements, Yugoslavian cultures of memory from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during the interwar-era to the Communist period – and the question of how to deal with them today. We asked ourselves which medial strategies have been used to embed common South-Slavic memories in the minds of future generations. We went back even further in time and explored the construction of national memories in the 19th century and how they were revived and how they stabilised during the wartime period of the 1990s. We’re interested in the dialogue surrounding change and transformation; it’s about the representation of memory, its invention, activation and enforcement to the point of false memories. It’s about memory gaps and nostalgia.

Who takes part in the discourse?

Historians, art historians, political scientists, and literary and media studies scholars from both South Eastern Europe and Germany. I made sure scholars from both the younger and older generations had the chance to meet. I did this to draw out the gaps and interruptions in remembrance, as well as to preclude repression. Members of the older generation grew up in a Socialist system; they had a “Yugoslavian mindset”. They experienced the wars and the various nationalisms of the 1990s. For the younger generations, that is already remembrance.

How does the international network fit into the discourse?

The issue of cultural memory challenges nation states and academic disciplines alike. Our network goes straight to the heart of the debate about the formation of national identity in the transnational context. It brings ideological backgrounds to the fore and, unlike other networks (such as the natural sciences or technology), we are forced to breach differences in culture, religion and language. Disagreement and contention is allowed, as long as it’s constructive. It is not about blaming one another; it’s about understanding, and the historical knowledge of others.

How does the younger generation affect the success of the debate?

The new generation is important – they are closer to the European Union. They think in terms of global networks and want ideological openness. They have a pro-West mentality and think less along nationalistic lines.

What’s next?

We’ll be holding yearly workshops, each time held in a different SEE country. At the end of May 2011 we’ll be meeting in the Serbian university town of Novi Sad. The idea is also to give Masters and PhD students the opportunity, early on in their careers, to present their work in an international setting. This will help check overly nationalistic cultural histories potentially in play. At the same time, it also gives these future scholars the chance to meet one another. Establishing collaborative research on an international level also relies on their networking. Hoping to put a stop to the repression of these questions, it is our long-term goal to integrate “Media and Memoria” into regional curricula. We are currently working on an English-language publication. The idea is to broaden the discourse, eventually allowing another image of the Balkan to emerge, even in Western Europe.

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