



THE WIKO IN THREE MONTHS SILVIA MARTON

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Soon after arrival at the Kolleg, one is caught up in a delicious rhythm, with seminars, lunches, meetings, and discussions with the Fellows and the staff, sightseeing and museums, ordering books at the library, pieces of advice, and suggestions about what to do and how to do it in Berlin. And then eventually one starts to work, once the novelty of the

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setting has been interiorized. It took me a few weeks until I started to “feel” the Wiko atmosphere and to really enjoy it. It was not easy for me to join such a distinguished society that had already established a dynamic of its own well before my arrival. Encouragement and extremely friendly attitudes helped me to overcome my initial timidity.

I finally started to feel at ease when I was told (I will not divulge the source ...) that one can say even stupid things at the Wiko as long as these stupid things are intelligent ...

The main parts of my work that I was able to accomplish here were related to the comparative method (in history and political science), to modernization theories, and to the lately much-debated character of citizenship in Romania and Eastern Europe during the mid-19th century. These topics interest me, since my research analyzes the debates on institution-building and the consolidation of the Romanian nation-state in the parliamentary debates of 1866–71, in the light of some key concepts of political science. Its overall objective is to identify major themes that preoccupied the representatives of the nation (with a special focus on the solutions proposed by the liberals); to analyze the most important questions and arguments that constituted the political body; and to examine the laws that built the nation. The secondary literature I was able to read during my stay at the Kolleg will help to complete my inquiry and see whether there was a specificity in the Romanian nation-building process, given that one can identify a sort of “standardization” of the processes of national identity-building.

The Kolleg’s scientific environment gave me the opportunity to pursue my reflections on the *pathologie temporelle* connected to the Romanian historical analysis’ tendency to deal more politically than analytically with the nation-building process, under the very comfortable umbrella of national determinism, following a highly triumphalist pattern of explanation. This pattern of explanation is indebted, even today, though to a much lesser degree, to a reductive ideological interpretation (partly inherited from communist historiography). A number of works adopt a national determinism and emphasize the struggles of the elites to acquire and consolidate state unity during the 19th century. The state-centric perspective is dominant, whereas modernization is considered to have had successive, linear, self-evident sequences in Romania.

For this type of historiography, the present, where events take place, is sold out (it does not exist!) in the name of the past and in the name of the future: the decision-making processes, debates, and controversies of the present are neglected and considered minor details, since the past and the future are known and since they determine each other in a self-evident way. The difficulties involved in the nation-building process, the controversies and

ambiguities that accompanied it, are unproblematic for this kind of analysis. The consensual aspects are overemphasized, such as the will of the representatives of the nation and of the elites to maintain the political unity of the state and of the nation and to gain independence, whereas the setbacks and lapses are considered minor accidents (most often caused by external factors).

During my stay, I managed to write an academic article; to write two book reviews (for the *Romanian Political Science Review*); to prepare my presentation for the Oxford Symposium on “(Trans-)Nationalism in South East Europe” held on 17–19 June 2005 at St Antony’s College, University of Oxford; to prepare the courses (including photocopies) I teach at the Department of Political Science at the University of Bucharest.

Academically speaking, I established important and interesting contacts at the Centre Marc Bloch and at the Berliner Kolleg für Vergleichende Geschichte Europas. I met researchers from the Technische Universität Berlin who work on similar topics (notably on the analysis of parliamentary debates). All these exchanges were a source of great help and stimulation for me. My future collaboration with the Centre Marc Bloch is very probable.

Far more meaningful for me was the experience itself of being in the scientific environment of the Kolleg. I am indebted to the contacts and discussions with many of the Fellows of the Kolleg, to their remarks, questions, and reading suggestions.

The *Dienstagskolloquia* were particularly enlightening for me through the variety of the topics and their high intellectual standards. As one guest once put it, during these seminars one can get an exquisite false sense of understanding. The presentations during the seminars and the lively discussions that usually followed them gave me the opportunity to realize how good and enriching it is sometimes to be reminded of one’s own ignorance, as frustrating as this most often may (and should) be. As Ruth HaCohen noted during the round of questions right after her Tuesday presentation, nobody admitted to being a specialist, and yet each and every presentation always triggered good questions and comments. I had the feeling of living for three months among a group of exquisite amateurs ... And only on rare occasions did I have the feeling that the interdisciplinary setting of the Kolleg made dialogue somehow uneasy. This is a performance in itself.

It is difficult to add anything new about the logistic and academic support of the Kolleg. They all made it possible for the three months I spent here to be a remarkable encouragement for my further academic career.