

**"Engineers have too few opportunities to familiarise themselves
with Europe's cultural achievements."**

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Professor Dr Alexandru Soceanu

1st International Representative of the Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics

Interview questions from **Dr Katrin Neubauer**,

Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics

For an IT professor, looking back into history is unusual. He is always expected to look at future developments. The fact that he is now taking a look in the rear-view mirror has to do with the 50th anniversary.

Professor Dr Alexandru Soceanu, at OTH from 1981 to 2008, on the emergence and challenges of the first international representative of the Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics.



(Prof. Dr.-Ing. Alexandru Soceanu, First International Representative of the

Regensburg Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics)

Professor Soceanu, you are still active in teaching. Where and what do you do?

First of all, congratulations on the 50th anniversary of the Faculty of Computer Science. This marks a truly impressive achievement by all the professors over the course of this time. With half a century as a foundation stone, the next one can only be crowned with academic success.

Now to your question: I have been working at the Munich University of Applied Sciences Faculty 07 for Computer Science and Mathematics since 2008, where I deal with network security.

At the beginning of 2020, you could read about one of your international projects in the F.A.Z.: "Studying IT abroad - despite corona". What was that about?

I had already initiated an online ERASMUS+ project in 2014, www.myDECAMP.eu, and developed it with colleagues from various renowned EU universities. It was the first ERASMUS+ project on the topic of *ICT security* and met with great interest. Thanks to the virtual lab integrated into my course programme, where students can carry out *hands-on* experiments 24/7, we were virtually the first German university to be able to continue our EU online courses directly on the next lockdown day. And the students received their ECTS credits after successfully completing the online courses on offer, just as if they had studied at the respective foreign university. We are still running these online courses today.



(The first virtual laboratory:

Prof Soceanu "built" it back in 1993 together with Kurt Spörl and graduate students)

Americans are quick decision-makers

The keyword "abroad" brings us to the FH Regensburg: When did the Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics appoint a foreign representative and why you in particular?

There's no question of appointing one. It was more or less my idea. When I came back to Regensburg in 1981 after a year as a visiting professor at the University of Connecticut, I was appointed professor at FH Regensburg shortly afterwards. My international experience meant that I wanted to utilise my international connections for the faculty and I did.

How can you imagine the beginning?

Almost Hollywood-like. CeBIT in Hanover had just opened its doors in 1986, one of the world's largest IT trade fairs. I went there in 1987 and happened to meet a *Vice President* of AT&T Bell Laboratories from New Jersey. Without further ado, I discussed with him the possibility of a scientific visit to the most important IT companies on the American East Coast. He thought my idea was great and invited me to come along with my German students in May 1988. My subjective impression, which I had also experienced in the USA, was confirmed once again: Americans are not doubters, but quick decision-makers!

What happened next?

I wrote to DEC, the Digital Equipment Corporation, an IT company at the time with over 120,000 employees and headquarters in Maynard, Massachusetts. They produced low-cost minicomputers. Siemens in Princeton, of course. Also MIT, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Even this world-leading university reacted quickly and positively. And of course the University of Connecticut, where I already had many connections due to my visiting professorship.



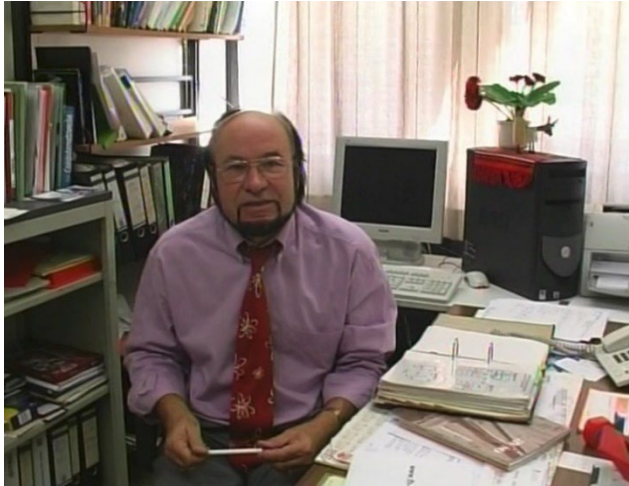
(from left: Prof Soceanu with the first group of German students on the UConn campus, USA, May 1988)

Everything went like clockwork Together with my colleague at the time, Prof Ulf Krupstedt, and 18 students, we boarded the plane with a great destination: a 10-day scientific and cultural tour of the USA. Some of the highlights: the musical *Cats* on Broadway and the White House in Washington. This made it clear to my faculty colleagues here that Soceanu would be our international representative.

There are always anecdotes to tell about such excursions. Which ones do you remember?

<laughs> For example, a scene in a pub. You have to know that: All the students were of legal age according to German law. But things were different in the US state of Connecticut.

Once, after everyone had ordered food and drink, the waiter politely asked me to come to the counter. There he asked me in a whisper whether all the students were 21 years old. If not, he would not be allowed to bring them wine or beer. When I said yes, he was visibly relieved. Incidentally, this law still applies in most US states today.



How were you able to finance the whole trip?

Through the DAAD, AT&T and Siemens! You know, the bureaucracy back then wasn't as suffocating and slowing as it is today.

(Prof Soceanu: Bureaucracy not so suffocating back then)

When did the regular exchange programme start?

This study trip to the USA led to my first student and professor exchange agreement between FH Regensburg and the University of Connecticut. This is a state university founded in 1881 on a huge campus near Hartford, the city where the great Mark Twain lived and wrote. At the beginning, in March 1989, there were just two exchange students who took the famous leap across the pond. One of them is also known to today's students: Professor Rudi Hackenberg. He liked it so much that he stayed there for three years to complete his Master's degree. The other was Christian Calligari, nicknamed Captain, now a doctor and manager at Siemens.

Eastern Europe is added

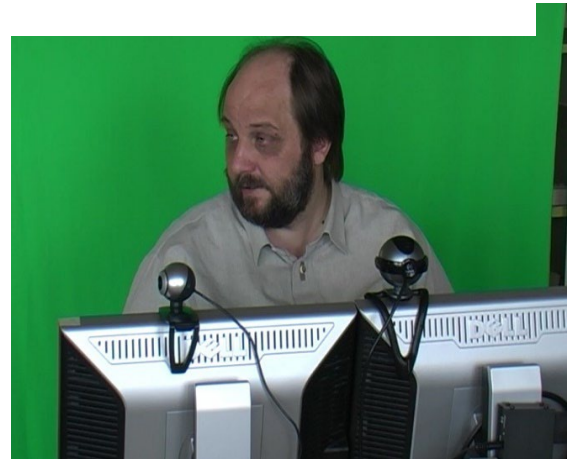
There were huge changes in Europe at the end of 1989. Did this also have an impact on your work as a foreign representative?

Yes, of course. It was a hugely exciting and thrilling time. The EU immediately offered a

number of exchange programmes to support former Eastern Bloc countries to facilitate and adapt higher education reforms, including Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania.

One was TEMPUS, the Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies.

Exactly. TEMPUS even stood on our laboratory door in the collection building for years. At the time, I was the laboratory manager with the expert support of laboratory engineer Kurt Spörl.



In the years that followed, I established many links with local universities, e.g. in the Czech Republic with the University of Pilsen as well as in Romania, e.g. with the University of Craiova and the Polytechnic University of Bucharest, one of the most important technical universities in Romania.

What happened to you after the turn of the millennium?

In 2001 and 2005, we had an unprecedented exchange of students and professors from these countries. Prof Alexander Söder gave me great support. More than 150 Romanian students alone have completed their diploma thesis at the Regensburg University of Applied Sciences with internship semesters at Regensburg companies or even worked on their dissertations. For example Dr Andrei Földi.



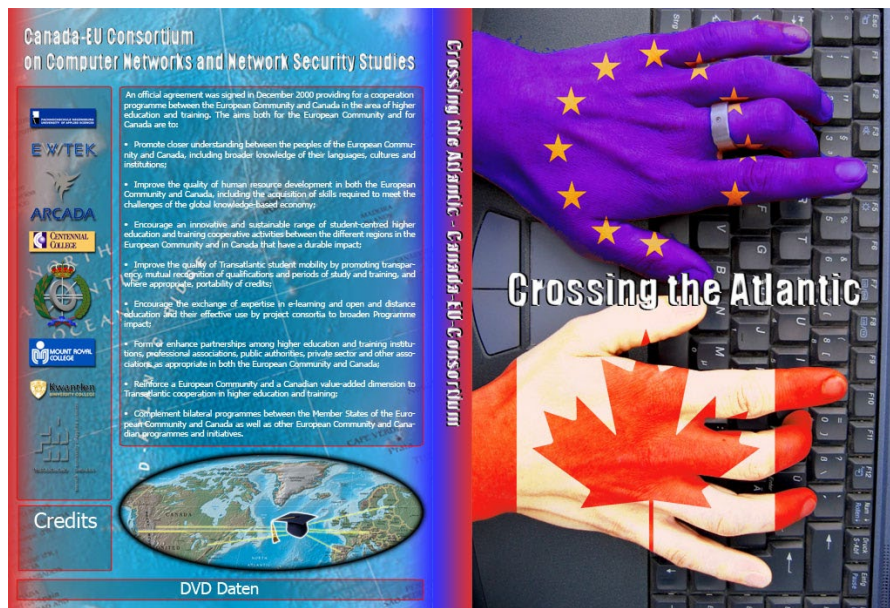
(Dr Andrei Földi)

Today, he is a research assistant and lecturer at the faculty and, as I know, a highly esteemed kicker for the OTH football team. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the team on their runner-up title in 2023.

During this period, the North American continent was also very interested in European higher education.

That's right. The Canadian government launched a comprehensive cooperation programme, "The Canadian European Community Program for Cooperation in Higher Education

Training". I then formed a consortium of several European and Canadian universities with the help of Finnish colleagues.



(Cover of the DVD produced in 2000 about the consortium)

International university connections that continue to this day

Who was part of this consortium?

Eight universities! Three Canadian universities, Kwantlen, Mount Royal and Centennial, the Regensburg and Munich Universities of Applied Sciences, the Universidad Politehnica de Madrid and the Swedish-speaking Arcada University of Applied Sciences and EVTEK, now Metropolia, both in Helsinki.

What was the purpose of this consortium?

We mainly worked on 3 topics: 1. the realisation of joint projects, such as the Implementation of Multimedia Interactive Platform, 2. the joint development of courses in English and 3. the exchange of students and professors. Here too is a recent example of a colleague: the current

Dean, Professor Frank Herrmann, received an invitation from EVTEK to Helsinki and held a workshop there on "Network Logistics Systems".



(from left standing: Prof Alexandru Soceanu, Prof Frank Herrmann)

The TEMPUS programme was replaced by the SOCRATES programme at the beginning of 2005. What did this mean for your work abroad?

There was a lot going on in the EU at that time in terms of academic connections. Finland was miles ahead of us all in terms of internationalisation. That's why I formed another consortium with Finnish colleagues. As part of IPs, the so-called "Intensive Programmes", we worked on topics such as "Improving the Security Knowledge in ICT".

How did this benefit the students?

Groups of at least 10 students from various EU countries, including France, Cyprus and the Netherlands, have taken part in block courses in other partner countries each year. EU professors have taught at these exceptionally efficient and popular events.

So you have successfully worked in the USA, Canada and many parts of Europe, including some Balkan countries. What was the situation with Greece?

That actually came about by chance. At the time, Romania had a lot to do with Greece. And so a Romanian colleague discussed it with me on the phone at the end of the 1990s. I liked the idea and during a visit to Piraeus we spoke to the rector of the TEI Piraeus University of

Applied Sciences. He immediately passed us on to his computer science colleagues and they were simply delighted.

Greek hospitality is legendary. Did you get to know it too?

Of course we did! They immediately invited us to a restaurant with a view of the fascinating harbour. And after a few glasses of retsina, gyros and a sweaty sirtaki, the university connection was made. The focus here was more on socialising with colleagues. Incidentally, TEI Piraeus merged with TEI of Athens in 2018 to form the newly established University of West Attica.

The OTH's IT faculty also has them to thank for its connection with one of Italy's most renowned universities, the University of Padua. Founded around 800 years ago, it is now one of the world's leading research-intensive universities. How did this come about?

Thanks to my international network, I have been receiving invitations since 2001, guest lectures at the University of Padua. Every summer semester since then, even today. This collaboration began with Professor Sergiu Congiu and continues to this day with Professor Nicolà Laurenti. It feels great to give lectures where Galileo Galilei held a chair in mathematics for 18 years.



(Oral examination at the University of Padua: the supervisor Prof Soceanu congratulates his Master's student)

Do you give your lectures in Italian?

(laughs) No, I speak Italian, but I teach there in English!

From Andrea Palladio to Shakespeare and Thomas Mann

Among your colleagues here, you were not only known as an enormously active and committed IT professor, but also as someone who was interested in culture.

I'm pleased if that has remained as a memory. I have always been firmly convinced that engineers have far too few opportunities to familiarise themselves with Europe's significant

cultural achievements. Culture enriches. That's why I launched an initiative in 2005 to organise an annual study trip to Padua with IT students from their final semester.

How did culture come into play?

Quite simply. I had the idea that, in addition to visiting IT institutes such as CINECA, the supercomputer centre near Bolgona, the University of Padua and the Italian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, we could also visit a few culturally rich cities. And believe me, none of our fellow travellers ever yawned.

Which cities were they?

For example, Florence with its architectural masterpieces of the Renaissance, Michelangelo's Davido, the Uffizi Gallery and the Loggia dei Lanzi. Incidentally, this was later recreated as the Feldherrnhalle in Munich on the orders of King Ludwig I. As I am a big fan of the master builder Andrea Palladio, Vicenza and his Teatro Olimpico naturally had to be on the programme. Goethe sends his regards. And of course Venice, that most unusual of cities with its incredible number of sights and mysterious alleyways. An ideal setting for the works of Shakespeare, Thomas Mann and Donna Leon. From next year, it will charge admission for day tourists.

Are you looking ahead?

I will mention just three aspects: Firstly, I am particularly pleased that many of the contacts and agreements I initiated are still alive today and can continue to be utilised in the future. Secondly, what makes me incredibly happy is that this study trip idea of mine has been continued by Professor Rudi Hackenberg with the fantastic support of Claudia Durchholz and Franz Häckl since I left for Munich University of Applied Sciences in 2008. And thirdly, I would be delighted if I could meet the next German student group with supervisors in Padua

again in spring 2024.

I think that's what you call tradition!



(2005, Venice, on the steps of Santa Maria della Salute: 1st row, 2nd from left with cap Prof. Rudi Hackenberg, 2nd row from right with cap Prof. Alexandru Soceanu)