

The rector of the College of Europe tells **Ian Mundell** about funding, online learning and the importance of the arts

Jörg Monar takes up the rectorship of the College of Europe facing a double challenge. He has to maintain the college's position as a leading institute of post-graduate European studies. And he must do so in a climate of increasingly constrained funding.

What he does not have to do is get to know the college. He has taught – off and on – at the college since 1991, both at the campus in Bruges and the campus in Natolin, near Warsaw. Before taking up the rectorship last month, he was director of its programme on European political and administrative studies.

A specialist in justice and home affairs, external relations and treaty reform, the 53-year-old also knows a lot about the college's competition. He has held professorships at Leicester University (1995-2001) and Sussex University (2001-05) in the UK, and at the Robert Schuman University in Strasbourg. He holds doctorates from Munich university (on the political philosophy of Saint-Just) and the European University Institute in Florence (on the EU's dual system of foreign

In Bruges



LECTURE ROOM WITH A VIEW The College of Europe's Verversdijk building. Below, Jörg Monar. COLLEGE OF EUROPE

The living experience changes the students at least as much as the programme leaves an imprint on their knowledge

policy). A German national himself, he grew up in Baden-Württemberg and went to university in Munster, Paris and Munich. Monar thinks that if the College of Europe is to see off competition from other higher education institutions, it must maintain two distinctive characteristics. The first is its taught programme, delivered by a mixture of academics and policy practitioners from national and EU institutions. "This requires constant updating and adjustment to new issues," he says. The second is its hothouse atmosphere, with around 450 students from 50-odd countries living and working together during the ten-month academic year. "The living experience changes the students at least as much

as the programme leaves an imprint on their knowledge," Monar says. This atmosphere requires cultivation just as much as the academic programme, with the intake carefully monitored to ensure no one nationality dominates. "That's not just a given, it requires constant work," says Monar.

Financial constraints

The academic culture also requires funding, to ensure that the student intake is not made up solely of those with sufficient private resources to pay the €22,000 fee (board and lodging included). Approximately 75% of students receive scholarships from their governments or public and private institutions, but in the current climate of austerity that assistance is being cut back. So too is the college's core funding from national governments and, possibly, the EU budget.

"We are not accepting this passively, we are fighting, but obviously we also have to look for other resources," Monar says. "Private sponsorship is something that we are exploring very actively, with some degree of success, but it is not currently making up for the pressures that we face on the other side."

This funding situation makes it harder for Monar to make big changes, but new initiatives are not entirely



out of the question. The college has recently set up a working party to look at possible developments, although its new rector underlines the tentative nature of the discussions. One line of enquiry involves e-learning, although Monar admits to a degree of scepticism, since it cannot replicate the college's learning environment. "Nevertheless, we felt that as e-learning is a growing part of the market we should at least have a thorough brainstorming on whether there is any potential for the college to open up with what it offers."

Another possibility being explored is a two-year, transatlantic masters' programme, probably organised jointly with a US partner. Students would follow a taught programme in the

first year, then complete a thesis and a traineeship in a US or EU institution in the second.

The working group will also look at options for new cross-disciplinary programmes, modelled on the existing option combining law and economics.

More modestly, Monar would like to add something to the college atmosphere. "We haven't had so much reflection on what Europe means from the point of view of the arts, literature and philosophy," he says. "We have always been focused on the policy-making process, on European integration in a political, administrative, legal and economic sense, which is of course our core business. But Europe is more than that, it has a wider intellectual dimension."

The fight against fragmentation

It might go without saying that the rector of the College of Europe has to champion European studies, but Jörg Monar has identified a particular battle to fight for the discipline. He is concerned that the academic subject is becoming fragmented. As a consequence, professors and students are at risk of losing the ability to take an overview of the European project. "There was a time when you had a more strategic, generalist approach," he says. "Now in many cases you have colleagues who make their careers with a relatively high

degree of specialisation in one field, or even a sub-field."

Monar thinks that more could be done to restore coherence to the subject. "As a discipline, I think that European studies has to invest, through the different associations that exist, through the definition of subjects for major conferences, in a more strategic view of the European construction." Wherever possible, this should be done in a cross-disciplinary way, he adds.

European studies also needs to address its declin-

ing attractiveness to students, who increasingly want to know where a degree in the subject will take them. "An effort has to be made to pass on the message that it qualifies students for a wide range of issues," Monar says. "More and more economic activity has a cross-border dimension and therefore a European studies background – with an understanding of cultural, social, historical, legal, and political differences – can really help with a career. It is not an 'orchid subject', a nice flower but afterwards of no use."

Don't miss out on EV Special Reports. Subscribe today.

SPECIAL REPORT
Climate change

SPECIAL REPORT
EU Studies

SPECIAL REPORT
The future of food

SPECIAL REPORT
Renewable energy

SPECIAL REPORT
The single market

EuropeanVoice 15
10 October 2013

EuropeanVoice 15
4 October 2013

EuropeanVoice 17
27 September 2013

EuropeanVoice 15
4 October 2013

Twenty years

Throughout the year, European Voice takes an in-depth look at some of the main issues affecting Europe. For news, features and the facts on the subjects affecting the headlines, European Voice's Special Reports are your most reliable source.

Subscribe today and you'll never miss out on our unique coverage.

Visit www.europeanvoice.com/tryEV