

# Education in Communist Times: the Case of Romania

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**Abstract:** The paper analyses the educational policies in Romania for the period 1948–1989. The purpose is to examine the main features that defined the educational system during the communist period, thus providing the background for a better understanding of the strengths and the weaknesses of education during these years. The paper consists of five distinct sections: (i) legislative reforms; (ii) human, material and financial resources; (iii) access and participation; (iv) educational environment; (v) voice of the pupils and students. Whenever data are available, the paper uses a comparative perspective with other communist countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland), particularly regarding the access to and participation in education. Several achievements in the field of education are present in communist Romania: (i) the positive evolution of participation in education, particularly regarding elementary education; (ii) the campaign to eradicate illiteracy was successful, at least in terms of numbers; (iii) vocational education displayed spectacular increases in the communist period; (iv) the number of students enrolled in higher education increased significantly; (v) expansion of support forms to broaden participation, especially in the higher education system. Nevertheless, there are also a series of negative aspects, such as access and participation of particular groups to education – children with disabilities, children from placement centres, pupils, and students of “unhealthy social origin”. A selection of oral history fragments completes the picture about the educational environment.

**Keywords:** *Romania; education; policies; communism.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *România; educație; politici; comunism.*

## Introduction

This paper analyses the educational policies in communist Romania, from 1948 to 1989. The study relies on secondary data analysis using the available statistics, desk research of the identified papers and a selection of fragments of oral history collected from various sources (books that approached subjects related to communism, archives of oral history available online, etc.). The purpose of the paper is to analyse the main features that defined the educational system during the communist period, providing the background for a better

understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of education during these years. The paper consists of five distinct sections: (i) legislative reforms; (ii) human, material and financial resources; (iii) access and participation; (iv) educational environment; (v) voice of the pupils and students. Whenever data are available, the paper uses a comparative perspective with other communist countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland), particularly regarding the access to and participation in education. The final section gives several concluding remarks on the identified characteristics.

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## Legal framework

The first important legislative reform in the field of education, during the communist period, was in 1948<sup>1</sup>. The reform stipulated the equal access to training for all children and young people, with no discrimination, as well as education in the mother tongue for all national minorities. Overall, the reform aimed, however, to transfer in Romania the pattern used in the USSR (Stanciu, 1992). By this law, the pre-university education was reduced to 10 years, decision with adverse results on the education. However, a positive aspect of the 50s was the enrollment in the primary education of all the children at early schooling age and finishing the alphabetization of the four million illiterates, process which had started as early as 1945 (Rădulescu, 2006). At the same time, however, the young people coming from families whose properties had been nationalised, as well as the young people from rural area of wealthier condition, were banned from attending higher education. The “social origin became a criterion of admission in high school and higher education, replacing the criterion of competence” (Stanciu, 1992, 167).

The Higher Commission for Diplomas was established also by the 1948 educational reform (Sadlak, 1991). Led by the Ministry of Education, its role was to confirm the PhD degrees or the lower titles of “candidates to sciences”, necessary conditions for the positions of professor and lecturer.

The structure of education includes the pre-school education, which is facultative, the elementary school of 7 years, the secondary, and higher education. Education was free of charge, and the first 4 grades were compulsory. As of the fourth grade, the study of the Russian language was compulsory. The same reform stipulated the possibility of establishing special schools for children with physical disabilities<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, children with disabilities were a vulnerable group for the educational

policies and for the social work policies during the communist period, as shown in the following section on access and participation.

This reform together with the Constitution of 1952, established the grounds for the organisation of education based on the integration with production. Compared to the Constitution from 1948, the Constitution from 1952 brings a new element, namely the “organisation of free professional education for the working people, within industrial enterprises, state agricultural farms, stations for machinery and tractors, collective agricultural farms”. The secondary school lasts 4 years and includes four types of schools – high schools, pedagogical schools, technical schools and professional schools. The latter (technical and professional schools) are organised depending on the necessities of production, and the number of students<sup>3</sup> is planned by the Council of Ministers.<sup>4</sup>

The professional and technical education was reorganised in 1955 according to the following structure: i) professional and apprentice schools for skilled workers; ii) technical schools for the graduates of at least 10 years of schooling for technical staff and iii) technical schools of foremen, for the graduates of the professional schools, after at least three years of practice in production.

The 60s bring the free of charge character for all grades. The 7 years’ compulsory education was generalized in 1961/1962, followed by the 8 years’ compulsory education in 1965. The Romanian education expanded significantly quantitatively and diversified significantly, at the secondary and higher level, in 1960–1970. The reorganization of education continues thus in response to the increasing economic industrialization and agricultural cooperatives growth. The “Certificate of study – for 7 or 8 grades – was opening the doors to industry and the urban environment” (Stanciu, 1992, 168).

Another important step in the educational legislative reforms during the communist

period was the law of education from 1968, during the ruling of Nicolae Ceaușescu (who became leader of the Party and country in 1965), that increased the duration of compulsory education to 10 grades. In principle, this law is considered the return of the Romanian education to the European traditions in education, which have been severed by the reform from 1948. At the same time, this law continues the series of reforms aiming to organise education so as students become “militant citizens of the socialist and communist construction”, decisive factor for the “development and blooming of the socialist order and nation”.<sup>5</sup> The same law stipulated the establishment of special high schools (industrial, agricultural, economic). In reality, this law was observed only for some years because, already from the early 1970s, the Romanian schools had been the subject of new transformations, related particularly to the continuous implementation of the principle of integrating education with research and production (Stanciu, 1992). The same law of 1968 also stipulated apprenticeship at the place of work, with a duration of 1 year for the day school and 2 years for evening school. The same law also regulated the post high school education that, in 1–2 years of study, trained the graduates of general high schools to perform medium-level activities, technical or socio-cultural.

The law of education from 1978 marginalized the universal culture, setting the training of the workforce as fundamental objective of the high school education, by continuing the line of educational development in agreement with the demands of the economic production. Nevertheless, quantitative progresses were reported during the communist period: in 1989–1990 the school population was 5,670,000, compared to 1,781,210 in 1938–1939. The number of students related to the total population was much lower, however, than in the other European countries.<sup>6</sup>

In a comparative perspective, in communist Poland, the legislative reform of

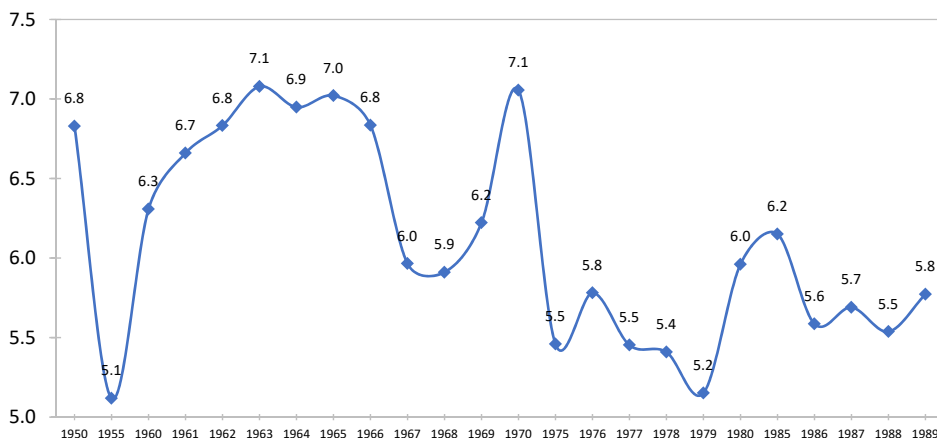
1961 in the field of education remained unchanged (Piwowarski, 1996, 25). By this act, the compulsory elementary education was set to 8 grades (this compulsory level was to be set in Romania in 1965). Likewise, both in Romania and in Poland, all levels of education were free of charge, while a system of financial support was established as scholarships and free accommodation in residence halls (Januszkiewicz, 1973, 33; Muraru and Iancu, 1995, 147). Like in Romania, this form of support was an essential factor for increased access to education of peasants’ and workers’ children (Januszkiewicz, 1973, 33). A common element was introduced in the 70s within the legal framework of education both in Romania and in Poland, but the result was different in the two countries. Both countries introduced the compulsory 10 grades of education. Yet, for the Polish people, this new type of school lacked popularity and they perceived this change as an “attack to the Polish traditions and a threat to the quality of education by the suppression of the four grades of middle school” (Zahorska, 2000, 43). The result was that all components of the school reform failed and, in the fall of 1979, a new curriculum was introduced, which changed the compulsory 10 grades to 8 grades. On the other hand, in Romania, the reform initiated by Ceaușescu to increase the level of compulsory education to 10 grades was not changed. Therefore, in 1990, the compulsory education was 8 grades in Poland and 10 grades in Romania.

## **Human, Material and Financial Resources**

Education was not a financing/investments’ priority during the communist period. In terms of investments, the share of education within the total investments in the national economy decreased continuously, from 1.4% in 1950 to 0.2% in 1989. Even though the

expenditures' volume of the state budget increased constantly during the same period (from 19,073.2 in 1950 to 288,425 current lei in 1989), the share of expenditures on education (from the budget for financing social-cultural actions) decreased from 6.8% in 1950, to 5.8% in 1989 (Statistical Yearbook of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1970, 1980, and 1990). At the same time, compared to the financing of education, the share allocated for research increased after 1980, as expression of the potential contribution to the development of the national economy (Florian, 2014, 8).

Otherwise, the financing of education and research during the communist period is considered to be a null sum game: as the share for education decreases, the share for research increases, and vice versa (ibid.). The problem of education's underfinancing during the communist period was much as pressing as the school population increased continuously during that period. The expenditures for education in Romania were in 1987–1989 among the lowest in Europe – 1.9% – 2.1% of the GDP (compared to Sweden – 7.4%, Belgium – 6.9%, Netherlands – 6.8%).



Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1970, 1980 and 1990

Figure 1: Share of expenditure with education within the total expenditure from the state budget

For the entire period, both material infrastructure (number of schools) and human resources (teaching staff) experienced spectacular increases. However, the increase was not even for all levels of education. For higher education institutions, for instance, the increase of the number of institutions peaked in the 1970s, decreasing thereafter from 51 to 44 in 1988/1989. The number of elementary and secondary schools

existing in 1989 was lower than in 1939, although the number of school children was almost double. The number of students and teaching staff decreased during the same time span (with a peak of increase in 1980–1981). Within the context of the communist countries, Romania had the highest student-teacher rate in higher education in 1989, almost double compared to Hungary.

Table 1: Student-teacher rate, tertiary education

Country	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1987	1988	1989
Czech Republic	7.5	7.2	6.9	7.4	8.1	8.7	9.3	10.0	10.2	10.7	9.2	8.7	9.0
Bulgaria	13.0	13.1	13.4	12.6	11.8	10.5	9.3	9.7	7.5	7.3	7.2	8.0	7.9
Romania	11.3	10.3	9.9	9.9	11.0	11.7	12.8	13.4	13.4	13.3	12.6	13.0	13.5

Country	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1987	1988	1989
Hungary	8.2	8.4	8.4	8.7	8.9	8.9	9.0	8.6	7.9	7.6	6.5	6.5	6.3

Source: World Bank Database on Education.

The material resources such as student residences and canteens have been developed especially to increase access to higher education. Between 1950 and 1989, the number of students accommodated in student residences almost tripled. Thus, from 18,877 students in residence halls in 1950/51 and 31,342 students eating at canteens, the number increased to 60,654 students accommodated in student residences, and 44,445 students eating at canteens in 1989<sup>7</sup>. Other forms of support increasing the participation to education were free syllabuses and handbooks, scholarships and free transportation for students during holidays.

### Access and Participation

Romania displayed a positive evolution in terms of participation to education during the communist period, particularly at the level of the elementary school. The rate of increase was not constant throughout the analyzed period, but exceeded 90% as gross rate of inclusion in the elementary education, which is a success, at least quantitative, of participation to the lower levels of education. These evolutions are partially explained by the campaign to eradicate illiteracy (1946–1956). The results of the campaign “No school-age child outside the school” were noticeable even from the school year 1948/1949, when 92.1% of the children were enrolled in schools (Bârsănescu and Bârsănescu, 1978).

Romania recorded in 1985 one of the best European performances as gross rate of inclusion in education of all levels (related to

the whole population), ranking 5<sup>th</sup>, after Island, Ireland, Spain and France (Dannehl and Groth, 1992, 75). Education was actually the field with the best results among the communist countries (compared to the non-communist countries, for the period 1970–1985) (*ibid.*).<sup>8</sup>

The vocational education oriented towards the economic production also experienced spectacular increases during the communist period, both in terms of the number of graduates of professional schools – from 2.35% of the total number of enrolled children, to 6.7%, with the following absolute values: from 39,250 children in 1938/1939, to 304,533 in 1989/1990. We must mention, nevertheless, that starting with 1978, most high schools became industrial high schools; therefore, a significant part of the vocational education has been developed within high schools (Hatos, 2014, 1701). At the same time, the pressure for industrialization was higher in Romania than in other communist countries, such as the Czech Republic or Poland, which involved a higher need, hence a larger expansion of the access to vocational education (*ibid.*).<sup>9</sup>

Despite the spectacular growth of the number of students enrolled in higher education, Romania has the lowest gross rate of inclusion in the university education, among the group of communist countries. In 1971, Romania and the Czech Republic reported rather similar rates of inclusion, while in 1989 Romania was the only communist country with a lower rate of inclusion in higher education (8.5%) than in 1971. The best performances in this field were reported by Bulgaria (25%) and Poland (19.8%).<sup>10</sup>

**Table 2:** School enrollment, primary (% gross)<sup>11</sup>

Country	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1987	1988	1989
Czech Republic	123.3	126.7	128.8	130.1	128.9	125.4	122.5	120.1	117.2	..	94.1	92.1	92.1
Bulgaria	106.2	104.3	102.1	99.7	96.4	98.3	100.4	103.1	103.7	101.4	106.0	103.8	101.7
Romania	114.5	115.4	108.8	106.7	..	..	..	..	..	..	93.4	92.1	91.0
Poland	98.4	99.2	100.3	101.0	100.9	100.9	100.6	100.5	100.4	100.5	103.0	102.1	100.0
Hungary	98.0	101.0	104.1	105.7	106.2	104.7	104.0	101.7	98.5	97.7	91.7	85.5	83.8

**Source:** World Bank Database on Education. Note: Gross enrollment ratio is the ratio of total enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown.

**Table 3:** School enrollment, secondary (% gross)<sup>12</sup>

Country	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1987	1988	1989
Czech Republic	84.5	84.7	84.7	84.8	86.5	89.3	92.1	93.6	94.8	94.7	93.7	91.5	92.7	91.4
Bulgaria	90.2	91.3	92.5	94.1	95.4	91.1	93.9	92.3	89.7	89.9	100.3	102.0	102.5	99.1
Romania	70.2	70.2	73.1	74.2	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	97.3	98.7
Poland	72.6	73.6	73.7	74.3	75.4	76.0	77.5	79.0	80.2	81.3	85.4	87.1	87.8	88.9
Hungary	74.3	72.7	72.7	72.0	73.1	74.9	76.9	79.5	82.8	84.9	89.0	89.4	88.8	87.4

**Source:** World Bank Database on Education. Note: Gross enrollment ratio is the ratio of total enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown.

The explanations pertain to the low physical access to universities for much of the population, next to a low level of social mobility and a low level of financing for education (Florin, 2014, 11). The evolutions in the field of higher education are also explained by the introduction of evening school and distance learning, starting from

the 50s, as their purpose was to improve the access of students coming from the working class. In the late 50s, the “compulsory percentages” of at least 40% students coming from worker families and 30% students coming from peasant families were replaced by preponderantly academic criteria (Sadlak, 1991).

**Table 4:** School enrollment, tertiary (% gross)

Country	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1987	1988	1989
Czech Republic	8.9	8.4	8.5	9.2	10.2	11.4	13.1	14.6	15.3	16.3	16.5	16.5	16.3
Bulgaria	14.3	15.5	17.2	18.1	19.1	19.5	19.8	22.1	18.3	17.2	20.8	22.6	25.0
Romania	9.1	8.6	8.0	7.8	8.1	8.6	9.1	9.5	10.1	10.6	9.9	9.0	8.5
Poland	13.4	12.8	13.3	14.4	15.2	16.4	17.2	17.2	17.3	17.2	17.4	18.2	19.8
Hungary	10.0	10.3	10.4	10.8	11.2	11.7	12.2	12.4	12.6	12.9	15.7	15.3	14.8

**Source:** World Bank Database on Education. Note: Gross enrollment ratio is the ratio of total enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown.

Alongside the generally positive evolutions in education, some negative aspects are present that influenced

substantially access and participation of particular groups to education during the communist period. They refer to:

- Children with disabilities. Although the 1948 reform stipulated the establishment of special schools for “those pupils who are not able to attend regular schools: sightless, dumb-and-deaf”, actually children with various physical and psychic disabilities, particularly those with severe disability, were marginalized and represented a vulnerable group in terms of access to education and care. Many of them were trusted into state care, in placement centres, such as the orphanage-camp from Cighid, proof of a policy of extermination.<sup>13</sup>
- Children from the placement centres. The lack of a functional system of social protection during the communist period, correlated with the above-mentioned marginalization of the people with disabilities, turned the orphanages from Romania into live examples of a policy of deep discrimination and intolerance. The disastrous results of this policy were revealed to the public opinion only after 1989, by an ample mass-media campaign conducted mainly by western TV stations.
- The pupils and students with “unhealthy social origin”. Particularly in the '50s, personal data or the parents' background, were the criteria of admission or maintenance of the continuity/promotion, particularly into higher education. A significant number of students and teaching staff (particularly from the faculties of humanist and juridical sciences) were forced to give up their studies/jobs. Part of the teaching staff was deprived of liberty due to “political reasons” (Sadlak, 1991).<sup>14</sup>

At Agronomy, nobody asked me anything. They might have known something about my file, but my father told me: I don't want to expose you to a very strict verification of the personal file, because your grandpa died in prison at Sighet. My maternal grandpa A.B., who had been minister, State sub-secretary at the Ministry of Justice. He was one of the

martyrs from Sighet; his name is on the memorial plate from Sighet... (S.S., Archives of oral history of the Third Europe Foundation).

When I registered for the admission exam at Medicine, in the early 60s, there were two categories of candidates. Those who had parents who were teachers, physicians, pharmacists, public officers, economists or accountants were considered as belonging to the small-bourgeoisie class, which was a foolish thing... (it was even worse if the parents were priests, or had unusual professions, they were actually in no position to be admitted) the candidates from the second category, those with “files from the council” didn't even register to the faculty for the admission examination. Just 10% of the seats were reserved for us, the small-bourgeoisie ... in my group there were thousands and thousands of young people from Bucharest who wanted to study medicine ... who were rejected because the entry limit was above the mark of 9, while for the candidates with “healthy social origin”, the admission level was the mark of 5” (M.S.M. in Pârvulescu, 2015, 280).

## Educational Environment

Just like in other communist countries, in Romania education was used as a means of propaganda as well. The cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu's personality, which peaked in the 80s, was visible almost everywhere – in the classrooms where the leader's picture was on the wall, also in syllabuses, handbooks, journals and any other educational publications, events and meetings of the organisations active in the field of education. Linked closely with the propaganda actions, censoring affected substantially all the publications in the field of education, including the student journals, even though their circulation was small. As temporal differentiation, the memories of the people who were students at that time show that the

censoring after 1977 was even more drastic than before the Decree which suppressed the “Directorate of press and printings” (Antonesei, 2004, 139).

The associative organisations in the field of education were a means of control and propaganda in communist Romania. The 1968 Law of Education stipulated that the “Ministry of Education collaborates with the Union of Communist Youth, Union of Student Associations and with the Pioneer Organisation, according to their statutes, to improve the professional training and the civic and moral education of the pupils and students” (Art. 14). The first detachments of the pioneer organisation had been established back in 1949, but in 1966 by PCR resolution, the leadership of this organisation had been officially passed into the responsibility of the party (Bărsănescu and Bărsănescu, 1978). The Romanian Union of Student Associations was established in 1957<sup>15</sup> (ibid.).

The influence of the party in pioneer organisations depended on the level of the particular position – leader of group, of detachment or of unit. Those at class level (group, detachment) were considered democratic, organised under the training of educators/teachers (Szabo, 2012). The positions of unit leader were directed strategically, in direct relation with the influence and connections within the Party (ibid.). Common activities and events were organised at the group, detachment, and unit levels, which included compulsory “voluntary” actions or “patriotic work” such as collecting recyclable materials, cleaning the green areas, visits in factories and plants, growing silkworms, etc. The agricultural works were compulsory for all the students across Romania, from September to October. According to the learning results, groups were organised, in order to become pioneers – the first group included the “best at learning”, excursions and various events marked the transition to the new status, that of pioneer.

“In September 1985, in the middle of the agricultural campaign, a fuel interdiction is imposed, which keeps the busses in the garage (the fuel is reserved for the agricultural equipment), so that the commuting pupils have to walk to school, work in the field and return home just the way they came. Once at home, most of them had to work again, this time for their family” (R.P. in Pârvulescu, 2015, 258).

The content of school curriculum had been changed as to respond to the requirements of the system – importance given to the Marxist-Leninist philosophy and the introduction of the Russian language. In 1977, the school curriculum was “assailed by technical studies – materials’ fiability, technological processes for processing by chipping” coupled with compulsive classes of practice in the machinery workshops – “a tiresome and dangerous work – one of my colleagues lost a finger in those machineries” (V.Z. in Pârvulescu, 2015, 221).

The quality of the university education was substantially affected adversely by the purging among the teaching staff from the teaching areas that were considered “ideological” – school of law, history, economic sciences, sociology, philosophy, psychology, pedagogy (Cosmovici, 2004, 48). Part of the people purged in the 50s, were reintegrated professionally during the period when oppression subsided (1964–1974). However, the feeling of fear and permanent surveillance dominated the entire communist period, particularly within the higher education system (ibid.). At the same time, the faculties with learning at distance or the “workers” faculties (two years, for high school education) also had an adverse influence on the quality of educational results.

Another factor with negative influence on the quality of education was the lack of objective evaluation for different favoured groups, such as the party activists or the favours granted in return for gifts, rare goods offered by the foreign students – “it ultimately came to the situation when the



professor left at his secretary a list of the things he needed. The students were crowding to register quickly, because expensive objects were sometimes asked, some of which didn't even exist in the province" (Cosmovici, 2004, 52). The quality of the pre-university education was also affected by "compulsory" graduation quotas – "curiously, the next autumn, the illiterates were showing up again in the class" (I.P. in Pârvolescu, 2015, 223).

Duplicity or dissociation characterized the results of the propaganda done by education in communist Romania (Szabo, 2012). The formal propaganda within the educational activities/various activities of the pupil and student organisations was dissociated by an opposite discourse within the family and with friends. Under these circumstances, the ideological indoctrination, particularly during the 80s, existed rather as policy objective, than result/effect (Szabo, 2012). In the everyday life, the policy objectives acted as an even more diluted form of sabotage than shown by the official documents (ibid.).

Were we an indoctrinated generation? I wouldn't say so. Personally, I am not even now clear how Nicolae Ceaușescu could allow secondary school pupils to study French, for instance. I was part of this experiment, in the mid-70s: I started French in the second grade of the elementary school (while we started Russian only in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade), at a district school in Craiova. If I got an 8 (eight) at French, this was a family drama; however, if I got a 5 (five) at

Russian, my parents would understand (and my grandparents would even give me more money for chewing gum). So, from early school I was indoctrinated rather by Pif Gadget comic strips than by the party documents. When, at the end of my childhood, I went to Bucharest to compete for admission in faculty, the written paper included some questions about the national conference of the party, which had just finished. I was not able to write the answer. If all the other competitors had known the answer, I would have never got to be dean of the History Faculty (not even student at this faculty). This shows that nobody was reading these, supposedly, compulsory references (A.C. in Preda and Antonovici, 2016, 8).

## Pupils and Students' Voice

This section includes several excerpts preponderantly from oral histories, but also from available survey data<sup>16</sup> which illustrate opinions and aspects of the everyday life in communist Romania, related to the access and participation in education, influence of the associative organisations, "compulsory" voluntariness, precariousness if the resources available for education.

The influence of school on the "importance of protecting the socialist property" is considered more important by the young people of the 80s, than the influence of the youth organisations such as UTC (Union of Communist Youth).

**Table 5:** Moral influence of the schools

Importance of protecting the socialist property	Positive moral influence of the schools (%)			
	Great importance	Medium importance	Low importance	No influence
Extremely important (76%)	68	27	3	1
Great importance (18%)	55	34	9	1
Medium importance (4%)	42	42	13	2
No importance (1%)	34	46	16	3

N=3,894.

**Source:** Centre of Studies and Research for Young People, in Szabo, 2012, 108.

The most important negative aspects about the activity of UTC<sup>17</sup> refer to the lack of adequacy regarding the problems it addressed – e.g. doesn't target the daily problems at the place of work and in school, insufficient attention paid to the leisure and travel activities. The high school pupils were the least satisfied group. Almost a quarter of UTC members that were interviewed were dissatisfied<sup>18</sup> with the activity of the organisation. Still, school is seen as the factor with the highest contribution to the development of universal culture (from a list which includes the influence of families, UTC or self-education (study from 1985, *ibid.*). UTC is credited with the lowest influence on this list of potential factors.

UTC is not considered as an efficient means for the propaganda activities among the young people. The school, however, or the actions organised with the support of schools/teachers, such as debates, discussion, political information, or political-ideological lessons, are much more efficient as means of propaganda.<sup>19</sup> The open questions show that the youth want more sincere and more open debates, more interesting activities, not just the compulsory ones, more free discussions with no fear of consequences, more debates and less presentations, more attractive and more interesting visual propaganda. The reports produced by the same Centre of studies show that one of the problems refers to the leaders of this organisation – UTC leadership is seen as incompetent, superficial, and apathetic.

The class where I was the principal always had the tidied notebooks of “political education” ... I had a rule: I was giving them clippings from papers, which they copied in their notebooks, writing as correctly as possible and as calligraphically as possible. My convention with them was that if they are nice for half an hour, I would read them something “in series”, prolonging it from one week to another. More or less as a joke, I checked my pupils:

they remembered nothing from their “artistic” copying of the paper clippings from Scânteia, but the memories regarding little Cosette would never fade from their minds. This was how I read them during the classes of political education, the books with Alice, *Les Misérables* in an edition for children, *Morcoveață* ... this kind of eternal stories (I.B. in Părvulescu, 2015, 219).

Among the compulsory activities was the attendance of different events dedicated to the celebration of the national day, or of the name days of the party leaders, or to the different artistic activities. The memories about these events show the psychological stress experienced by the participants due to the fear of making errors when performing their role, but also some “flexibility” in participation for some groups:

During the reverential shows, there were several types of acts – dancing, chorus, patriotic songs – and poetry recitals. There were two categories of recitals – some interpreted by adult actors while other, by the children ... we, the children were treated in a different manner ... we didn't have to sit in the sun all day long (like the rest of the summoned people) because we were actually artists, not just an indefinite mass of people. It was true, however, that some children were exploited, and it would happen that they fainted ... As we grew up, it all started to seem boring and annoying, because I realised their absurdity. All you could do was to swallow your frustration and seek internal power to go on because, if, God forbid, you would have turned them off, your entire family would have had problems, you included (A.D., in Malloy, 2012, 104).

The affiliation to associative forms, as well as the participation in their activities was compulsory – “We were all UTM<sup>20</sup> members, although I don't remember having asked it. The meetings lasted until 11 in the

evening, we returned home in darkness, on deserted streets ... and this really was a problem. We were all enrolled in GMA (Ready for work and defence), where we had to obtain particular results in different sports.” (D.P. in Pârvulescu, 2015, 229). At the same time, the affiliation to the Association of Communist Youth could make the “50 hundredths” difference for the assignment to jobs at the end of the faculty (Pârvulescu, 2015).

The strong economic crisis of the 80s had a substantial impact on the availability of electric power and heat in schools and for the population, which affected homework preparation. The lack of food, “cold at home, cold in the classrooms and in laboratories” (Cosmovici, 2004, 58) added to the precariousness of the resources required for different levels of education.

The students, with the coats on, with hats on their head and gloves in their hands, look at me, with blue faces because of the cold. They ceased to take notes. The words I am saying now, freezing inside, come out in steam. As I felt I could barely move my lips, I asked my comrades in sufferance:

– Don’t you want to leave earlier? You can’t write, and I got no more breath to go on...

A boy in the first row answers me, while trembling:

– At home it is as cold as it is here. At least, here we are together (M.P. in Pârvulescu, 2015, 238).

The importance of doing the homework reflected the priority of Romanian, maths, physics, and chemistry in the curriculum.

With much light or little light, the homework had to be done. We arranged them depending on the ... source of light: the most difficult ones, where we had to write most, we did when there was daylight; those not so complicated, at the faint light of the lamp; the easy ones, at candle light (the candle helped my mother make something to eat for the evening).

Romanian, maths, physics, and chemistry had priority, therefore light. On the other hand, geography and biology were to be fumbling in semidarkness and smoke, and the book pages were sprinkled with wax stains from the candle, which like the notebooks, pen, square ruler, and rubber, was one of the compulsory stationeries of the Romanian pupil in the golden era (L.B. in Pârvulescu, 2015, 20).

## Conclusions

This material analyses the educational policies in Romania for the period 1948–1989. The study relies on secondary analysis of the existing statistical data, on desk research of the identified papers and on a selection of oral history fragments. The paper examines the legislative framework and provides a brief analysis of the resources (human, material and financial), next to data on access and participation in education, from a comparative perspective with other communist countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland). Based on the identified fragments of oral history, the paper includes the opinions of the pupils and students from the communist period, particularly concerning the educational environment.

Alongside a series of negative aspects (referring to access and participation of particular groups to education – children with disabilities, children from placement centres, pupils, and students from “unhealthy social origin”), the education in communist countries had experienced several successes, as follows:

- Romania registered a positive evolution of the participation in education during the communist period, particularly concerning the elementary education. In 1985, Romania had one of the best performances, at European level, as gross rate of enrollment into education at all levels (related to the whole population).

- The campaign to eradicate illiteracy was a success, at least in terms of numbers. The results of the campaign “No school age children outside the school” were visible even starting with the 1948/1949 school year, when 92.1% of the children were enrolled in schools.
- The vocational education displayed spectacular increases during the communist period, both in terms of the number of graduates from professional schools – from 2.35% of the total number of enrolled children, to 6.7% – and in absolute values, from 39,250 in 1938/1939 to 304,533 in 1988/1989.
- The number of students enrolled in higher education also increased significantly. However, Romania had the lowest gross rate of enrollment in university education, within the group of surveyed communist countries.
- The expansion of the forms of support to broaden the participation, particularly in higher education, by scholarships, accommodation in student homes, free meals in canteens, free school books, free transportation during holidays.

All these successes were obtained under conditions of rather poor financing, which reflects the fact that education was not a priority of the funding/investments done during the communist period. The problem

of underfinancing of education during the communist period was much too pressing as the school population increased continuously throughout this interval.

Although almost 30 years have passed since the 1989 revolution, which has changed deeply the educational reforms of the communist period, the study is useful for understanding the generations educated by the communist schools. Moreover, also the generations that were, one way, or another, part of the educational system: teaching staff for all levels of education, members of the central and local administration, etc. Beyond the statistics, the paper also presents the learning environment, as described by the pupils, students and teaching staff who lived in that period. It shows opinions about the associative forms, about the influence of the party, about the educational effects of the economic crisis of the 80s, about the compulsory voluntarism, etc. From this perspective, additional efforts are required for the systematic collection of oral histories regarding various aspects of the everyday life in communism, which could benefit from the coordination and scientific analysis of multidisciplinary teams consisting of historians, sociologists, and representatives of the different social sectors from communism – education, healthcare, and employment.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This reform abolished the sociological education in Romania, which was re-established subsequently in 1965–1966 – Department of Sociology reinstated within the Faculty of Philosophy. In 1977, the Department of Sociology is suppressed by political decision. The sociological training was limited to specialisation in the final years at the Faculty of History-Philosophy of the Bucharest University, to post-graduation courses and to the system of PhD studies, at the Academy of Socio-Political Sciences (former “Ștefan Gheorghiu”). Source: History of the Department of Sociology, Faculty of

Sociology and Social Work, Bucharest University, [http://sas.unibuc.ro/trecut\\_ro](http://sas.unibuc.ro/trecut_ro).

<sup>2</sup> Art VIII of Decree 1948: Special schools will be established for the children that are not able to attend regular schools: sightless, deaf-and-dumb.

<sup>3</sup> Art XVIII of Decree 1948: Duration of the studies in the higher education institutions is of 3–4 years.

<sup>4</sup> The same institution also set the number of seats for doctoral studies.

<sup>5</sup> Law 11 of 13 may 1968 regarding the education in the Socialist Republic of Romania,

published in the Official Bulletin no. 62 of 13 May 1968.

<sup>6</sup> For more details, see the next section on Access and participation.

<sup>7</sup> Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1970, 1980 and 1990.

<sup>8</sup> The comparison involved the per capita consumption of energy, the volume of passengers in the international air transportation, participation to education, life expectancy and the value of the foreign trade, in USD per capita.

<sup>9</sup> The same source also mentions nationalist considerations among the explanative factors for the development of the educational policies in Romania.

<sup>10</sup> Source: World Bank Database on Education.

<sup>11</sup> Duration of the elementary education is of 4 years in all listed countries, except Poland (6 years). Source: World Bank Database on Education.

<sup>12</sup> Duration of the secondary education is of 8 in Hungary, Romania and the Czech Republic, of 7 years in Bulgaria and of 6 years in Poland. Source: World Bank Database on Education.

<sup>13</sup> The Institute for Investigation of Communist Crimes filed in June 2017 a penal claim at the General Prosecutor Office regarding the inhuman treatment, during the communist period, of the residents from the hospital-homes at Cighid, Păstraveni and Sighetul Marmatiei, whose result was the death of at least 771 children.

<sup>14</sup> The same source mentions the following names: P.P. Panaitescu; Victor Jinga; Mihail Manoilescu, Alexandru Marcu, Nichifor Crainic, Gheorghe Strat and Petre Tomescu. At the same time, the following members of the Bucharest School of Sociology have been arrested: Anton Golopenția, Victor Rădulescu-Pogoneanu, Mircea Vulcănescu, Traian Herseni, Octavian Neamțu, Lena Constante, Harry Brauner, Gheorghe Retegan (Rostas, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> As of 1974, it was renamed as the Union of Communist Students from Romania.

<sup>16</sup> Surveys conducted by the Centre of Studies and Research for Young People, and cited in Szabo, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Elvira Cîncă “Image of the youth about the activity of the Union of Communist Youth” in The youth, a strong social force 2/80 CCPT in Szabo, 2012, 109.

<sup>18</sup> The proportion also includes non-responses.

<sup>19</sup> Buburuzan, Leon. “Opinii ale tinerilor despre eficienta mijloacelor de propaganda” (Opinions of youth on the efficiency of propaganda measures) in Tineret cercetare actiune sociala 2/1985, cited in Szabo, 2012, 112.

<sup>20</sup> Union of the Working Youth (UTM) was the name of Union of the Communist Youth (UTC) during the period of the Romanian Popular Republic.

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**Annex 1: Children enrolled in education of all degrees in 1938–1990**

School year	1938/'39	1950/'51	1960/'61	1970/'71	1980/'81	1985/'86	1986/'87	1987/'88	1988/'89	1989/'90
<b>Education / total</b>										
Units	15,879	21,078	23,890	26,861	29,766	28,961	28,679	28,297	27,975	27,327
School population	1,781,290	2,319,196	3,195,229	4,364,652	5,584,821	5,592,344	5,488,087	5,541,688	5,562,631	5,544,648
Children in kindergartens	90,787	199,096	354,677	448,244	935,711	864,332	836,225	828,079	831,108	835,890
Total pupils	1,664,014	2,067,093	2,768,563	3,764,523	4,456,341	4,568,214	4,454,688	4,556,568	4,572,058	4,544,251
Students	26,489	53,007	71,989	151,885	192,769	159,798	157,174	157,041	159,465	164,507
<b>Pre-school education</b>										
Kindergartens	1,577	5,435	7,375	10,336	13,467	12,811	12,548	12,251	12,169	12,108
Enrolled children	90,787	199,096	354,677	448,244	935,712	864,332	836,225	828,079	831,108	835,890
<b>Elementary school and middle school</b>										
Schools	13,654	15,342	15,110	14,958	14,381	14,076	14,046	13,895	13,768	13,357
Enrolled pupils	1,575,477 94.67%	1,779,208 86.07%	2,346,343 84.74%	2,941,265 78.13%	3,308,462 74.24%	3,030,666 66.34%	3,017,339 67.73%	3,027,196 66.43%	2,974,555 65.05%	2,981,810 65.61%
<b>High schools</b>										
High schools	408	343	587	831	971	981	981	981	981	981
Enrolled pupils	49,287 2.96%	93,255 4.51%	251,144 9.07%	505,891 13.43%	979,741 21.98%	1,226,927 26.85%	1,196,949 26.86%	1,228,490 26.96%	1,271,588 27.81%	1,346,315 29.62%
<b>Professional education, professional schools</b>										
Schools	224	546	519	403	603	753	747	764	788	798
Enrolled pupils	39,250 2.35%	99,257 4.80%	127,224 4.59%	195,941 5.20%	139,758 3.13%	287,818 6.30%	257,196 5.77%	278,003 6.10%	313,717 6.86%	304,533 6.70%
<b>Apprenticeship at work</b>										
Enrolled pupils	-	-	-	85,731 2.27%	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 1990, National Commission for Statistics.