

IMPOSING CONTROL AND MECHANISMS OF ESCAPE: EDUCATION IN COMMUNIST ROMANIA DURING THE STALINIST PERIOD

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An overall look over the secondary literature on elite formation in the Communist period in Eastern, South-Eastern and Central Europe can ascertain for the difficulty of the newly founded communist regimes to create a “new class”¹ that would carry on the process of installing communism. Since one of the finalities of the Communist Cultural Revolution was the creation of a new elite and its final target was the making of a “new man” this study drawing on the internal archives of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) focuses on several elements of the communist reform on education, the mechanism of control that the state imposed on it, the policies and ideologies that guided the education in the effort of making the Communist elite, the type of “man” the communists wanted to create.

After 1947, the Romanian professorial corpus was purged in order to adapt the higher and public school education to the needs of the Communist ruling Party. The old institutional structures, such as the students associations, were dissolved and replaced with pro-Communist organizations. Although the student bodies grew after 1948, many students were strongly discriminated and even expelled from universities due to their *bourgeois* social origins and “reactionary” views. The technical departments of the universities became predominant and the social origin of the students changed gradually in favour of the peasants and workers. At the pre-university level one can notice an effort of the state to quickly enforce the Soviet model and to overcome important problems like the illiteracy or the attachment of the common people to the religious values that were transmitted also through public education.

After 1948 the children of the *kulaks* suffered discrimination because at this moment the Communist leadership raised the question of expelling them from the important school institutions only on class reasons. The governmental decision-makers considered that these children had to be guided only towards industrial production and physical labor in order to change their inherited social and political “wrong views”. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the First Secretary of RCP – named Romanian Workers’ Party (RWP) at the end of February 1948 – in the postwar era, admitted that sometimes a natural *dekulakization* is preferable. “There are some cases, a few – Dej said – when they [the children with kulak fathers] break [the bonds] with their [*reactionary*] families or when they could have a good influence over their parents.” However, the situation of those politically stigmatized teenagers worsened because the natural *dekulakization* was neglected.

Theoretically, the cohesion of the Romanian families was hard to break even under major pressures; nevertheless, the discords between relatives were unavoidable and appeared soon after 1948. The Communist regime encouraged the

¹ Milovan Djilas, *The New Class. An Analysis of the Communist System*, New York, 1969.

physical separation of children from their parents presumably more hostile to the political system². In such conditions of systematic feud many young people wanted to get rid of this mark of disgrace such as the social origins' stigma. They wanted to exculpate themselves. Usually, the children who came from bourgeois families or other alleged *enemies of the people* could not become members of the Union of Working Youth (UTM).

There were cases when some pupils and students with problematic social origins denied their roots in order to adapt or integrate easily in the social and political system. Trying to turn circumstances in her favor Ana Calmanovici, a daughter of a merchant from North Eastern Romania, wrote a letter to the Communist leadership in which she said: "I am a student both at the Maxim Gorki Institute and Pedagogical Sciences Department. My father was merchant and sold wines and wood in Piatra Neamț until 1947. I came from the petty-bourgeoisie milieu and I had suffered the mean influences of the wrong middle class views. But since I arrived in Bucharest I abandoned those milieus. (...) I entered Maxim Gorki Institute being attracted by the idea that I will receive a Communist education. (...) Then I entered the Pedagogy and Psychology Department in the belief that I would fight better against my bourgeois education". In order to prove her break with the petty-bourgeoisie past, Ana Calmanovici also invoked her last vacation spent far from her own parents³.

One do not know if Ana Calmanovici cloaked her beliefs but definitely for many young people to turn one's back on their own family and past was very traumatic.

Recently, Dumitru Popescu, former student at the Bucharest Academy of Economic Sciences between 1947-1951, suggested that before 1950 the main concern of the majority of his colleagues was not the political activity within their Faculty but to pass the exams and to do the best in order to rise in professors' esteem⁴. To all appearances, initially, their level of expectation concerning the new political regime was limited. However, they had a strong desire to achieve something remarkable and hoped for a successful career: a well paid job as banking expert, governmental financial adviser or, at the worst, high-school teacher. But when they discovered that the apolitical attitude was not enough to rise from the ranks rapidly after the graduation, Dumitru Popescu and his mates changed their mind. Consequently, the young students sell their souls to the devil, and their motto became: *Let's wheel and deal!* And the opportunity came in 1950 when a group of officers from the Ministry of Internal Affairs visited the Academy in order to enroll students for supplying the Communist newspapers with "buds" which were not contaminated by the "bourgeois fertilizers", someone less bounded with the old capitalist society. The students changed sides: from a moral position of political

² For the Czechoslovakian case, see Otto Ulč, *The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the Young Generation*, in "East European Quarterly", t. VI, 1972, no. 2, p. 210.

³ Central Historical National Archives, Central Committee's Chancellery of the Romanian Communist Party Fund (hereafter: ANIC, CCC – RCP fund), file 149/1950, pp. 13 v.-14.

⁴ Dumitru Popescu, *Cronos autodevorându-se... Memorii*, vol. 1, București, 2005, p. 78.

disengagement they became Communists, as Dumitru Popescu and his group of followers did. They accepted the “conscription” for the ideological army of the Communist Party, the censored press. Moreover, the operation of head hunting was coordinated by Iosif Ardeleanu, the leader for decades of the General Direction of the Press and Printing Offices, the official name of the Communist Censorship in Romania. This system of selecting persons for Communist journals, experienced in other higher education institutions, too, was a success because almost all of the students kept fit for the ideological trainings and remained faithful to the Party. To speak plainly, being in Party’s good graces meant they made more money, enjoyed many privileges because with the newspaper’s badge had priority over the other colleagues from the Bucharest Academy of Economic Sciences. More and more integrated in the agitprop system Dumitru Popescu became in a decade vice-minister of Culture in the Communist government and, after 1965, a sort of ideologist, very close to Nicolae Ceausescu, the last Romanian dictator. However, in his memoirs, Dumitru Popescu estimated that in 1950 he was a sort of victim of an unscrupulous draft⁵.

Another student who attended higher education institutions (both Philology Department and an ideological school of Literature) during the same period, Al. Săndulescu, considered himself retrospectively, in 2002, trapped by the Party, too. But his case is different. His father, former teacher, fought in the Romanian army during the anti-Soviet war and baptized faithless Russian children, and as a result was sentenced to 25 years of jail in 1951. Al. Săndulescu, as a student, had to recognize the legitimacy of the class struggle which crushed his own father⁶. He came to a moral deadlock but, on the other hand, being student at an important ideological Department he had one’s will: an important fellowship, money, access to a better canteen, and also got a teaching assistantship. Moreover, later became employee at one of the biggest State Publishing House, *Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă* (ESPLA) and he could support his family which was terrorized by the political police. Unlike Dumitru Popescu, Al. Săndulescu did not follow a political career; on the contrary, he was fired from ESPLA and for few years remained unemployed.

The case of the young Transylvanian Romanian Dumitru Micu – later one of the most important literary historian – is more interesting because it illustrates the strange mixture and symbiosis between religion and Marxism-Leninism. Dumitru Micu attended between 1945-1948 a renowned high school in Cluj ran by the local Greek Catholic Diocese where the professors – almost all clergymen – taught him to defend the Church and Christian religion against all kinds of Atheism, included Marxist Atheism. Paradoxically or not, under the influence of sermons and religious readings, Dumitru Micu sincerely embraced some principles of the Left and at the end even the main Communist ideals such as Collectivization⁷. He wanted a new world, a new heaven, as predicted the Gospel, and asked himself:

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 83-84.

⁶ Al. Săndulescu, *Operație pe cord deschis*, București, 2002, pp. 92-111.

⁷ Dumitru Micu, *Timpuri zbuciumate. Reconstituiri subiective*, București, 2001, p. 90.

who knows? May be the Communist system is God's instrument for destroying the old bourgeois world? The latter order meant for him: backwardness and poverty in the countryside, and a ceaseless fight and social tensions generated by the private property.

Although Dumitru Micu was a Christian, he thought that he could maintain religious faith even among Atheists and under an Atheist regime and consequently swung between two beliefs: the Christian and the Communist one without any hesitation due to ethical considerations. He became a Communist Christian student. Dumitru Micu did not perceive himself as a deserter from a moral principle as long as his teachers – the Greek Catholic priests – were satisfied and had a sigh of relief that, through him, they won the Communist Party's favor. When he realize that from the RWP's point of view the school had to train citizens freed from the prejudices of religion it was too late: his bishop, Msgr Iuliu Hossu, was in jail and his teachers were expelled from high school.

In order to limit and undermine the teachers' moral authority and autonomy the Communist authorities decided to control them also through school children organizations using the Soviet model. Immediately after 1947 the opponents of the Communist school reform noticed that the newly founded Romanian Pupils' Associations Union (UAER) represented an anarchist action, a serious stand up against teachers, schoolmasters, and parents. For example, the Communists needed the Pupils' Union's help in order to track down the bourgeois teachers who still used at classes the old and forbidden textbooks and ignored the official Marxist-Leninist oriented manuals. For the same purpose the Ministry of Education put into movement the school inspectorates. The use of prohibited textbooks was another mechanism of escape under the totalitarian regime but more often this was not an act of defiance. Simply, especially in the first year after the beginning of the Education Reform, the textbooks approved by the Communists were not printed or the Publishing houses did not deliver them to the schools' storehouses.

For the Soviet Ministry of Education the first priority after 1920 was to introduce teachers to progressive methods of education, and political confrontation or ideological coercion of the teachers was to be avoided at all costs⁸. Sheila Fitzpatrick accurately noticed that this approach was too subtle for many local soviets and education departments, which often put much cruder political pressure on the school than the Education Ministry desired; and it offended militant Communist organizations like the Komsomol – which constantly provoked political confrontation with the teachers – and the League of the Militant Godless⁹. Unlike USSR, the Union of the Working Youth (UTM), the Romanian homologue for Komsomol, and UAER did not assume independent significant actions which could defy the Ministry of Education or the RWP's Central Committee, being in most cases obedient executioners. Moreover, in Romania the Communists did not found any Association or League of the Militant Godless, but only a Society for the

⁸ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921–1934*, Cambridge, 2002, p. 19.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

Spreading of the Science and Culture whose purpose was to bring into question and compromise the Christian Church's views especially in regard to science and nature.

However, the aggressiveness towards Christian feelings of the schoolchildren and students was obvious in 1948. An Internal Affairs Ministry's (MAI) informative note of 16 August 1948 pointed out that in various villages of the Gorj district (Southern Romania) in front of some schools were placed crosses with alleged anti-Soviet and chauvinistic inscriptions (in fact these crosses commemorated the Romanian soldiers who died during the 1941-1944 war against USSR). Trying to avoid a predictable break out of a peasants' rebellious attitude MAI document suggested that both the district Party Committee and the borough mayoral council had to carry on a "clear up work" among the poorer and working-class peasantry in order to mobilize them to pull down all of the controversial commemorative monuments. This initiative of "enlightenment" failed and the authorities abandoned the hypocrisy and decided to intervene with harshness. In the summer of 1948 around many schools took place dramatic events which horrified the pupils and their parents. The small religious monuments and statues situated in front of the educational institutions or in the schoolyards were pitilessly demolished and the icons and crucifixes within the classrooms were razed, sometimes ostentatiously, by school inspectors, teachers or party members. Moreover, zealous teachers forbade schoolchildren prayers which usually took place before the classes¹⁰. The aggression against the schoolchildren's religious marks and symbols continued also outside the school. Both the schools principals and local Communist authorities hindered the pupils who wanted to attend churches on Sunday in the fall of 1948. Consequently, in some regions where the population had strong religious feelings the parents refused to send their children to school and this event worried to the highest degree the Central Committee of the RWP. Such tensions occurred at the same time with the launching of the campaign for the annihilation of the illiteracy and the members of the Central Committee feared that this important political initiative will be partially compromised. For this reason at the end of November 1948 the RWP's Secretariat decided to stop at least temporarily the Atheist offensive and began assiduously to find the more convenient scapegoats. Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej and the other members of the Secretariat roughly criticized especially the leadership of the Ministry of Education, and suggested that within the department survived saboteurs of the Education reform whose behavior was a petty bourgeois one. In reality Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej and his comrades gave evidence of an infinite hypocrisy because the employees of the Ministry of Education and the local party members put into practice Soviet-style secularization measures decided exactly by the RWP's Secretariat members.

According to Randolph L. Braham, the Campaign for Literacy assumed paramount importance after the nationalization and collectivization programs had

¹⁰ ANIC, CCC – RCP fund, file 58/1948, p. 49 et sqq.

been launched, i. e., 1948–1949. Ever-increasing needs for skilled and semiskilled workers in field and factory prompted the Communist Party and government to reorganize the literacy campaign on a more rational and institutionalized basis¹¹.

However, it must be stressed that this campaign had an important political and ideological dimension. It was a part of the so-called Communist Cultural Revolution and the Romanian Communists did not deny that through the agency of such policies for significant diminishing and even total liquidation of the illiteracy they intended to eliminate the obstacles which stopped the complete imposing of a Communist regime and the creation of a “new man”. “The illiterate man cannot be influenced by our politics” – was an often used slogan by the official propaganda at that time.

This campaign prepared in accordance with the Ministry of Education’s conceptions encountered the reluctance and even the hostility of some schoolmasters and teachers¹². Many of them were removed immediately after 1945 from cities’ schools on political basis and transferred in rural areas where the illiteracy rate was much higher. Here they hardly could find a decent dwelling and were ill-remunerated; moreover, they were compelled to hold many supplementary courses for the illiterate population without being paid.

In the rural areas were also sent young and politically “reliable” teachers, but they, like the reactionary teaching cadres, did not wish a repartition at peripheral schools and remained without financial support. Many times they refused the appointment and resigned or were dismissed; probably the total number of the teachers transferred to countryside schools between 1948-1949 exceeded 10 000¹³.

The leadership of the Ministry of Education labeled such behaviors as grave defiance and even “sabotages”¹⁴. For the Communist leadership this was also a good pretext to resort to another purge among the teaching body, and these disobedient teachers became collateral victims of the literacy campaign.

The propaganda did not mention anything about the enormous price of the Campaign for Literacy: the great disturbance generated by the large-scale resignations, dismissals, abusive or punitive transfers, and toil and voluntary work. Moreover, one can also notice that these reprisals produced a climate of fear, facilitating the political control over the public education.

Even if the official statistics related to the educational level from 1950s onwards were forged, the expansion of general schooling is obvious. The obligatory period of schooling years increased after 1948, but the teaching was consistently imbued with Communist ideology. However, due to the teachers from the old bourgeois school, some of the pupils managed to avoid the ill-fated influence of the propaganda and maintained their personality and spontaneity.

¹¹ Randolph L. Braham, *Education in the Rumanian People's Republic*, Washington, 1963, p. 15.

¹² ANIC, CCC – RCP fund, file 58/1948, p. 18.

¹³ *Stenogramele ședințelor Biroului Politic și ale Secretariatului Comitetului Central al PMR 1949* (hereafter: *Stenogramele*), vol. 2, București, 2003, p. 52.

¹⁴ ANIC, CCC – RCP fund, file 58/1948, p. 24.

The mandatory bibliography of the school children encompassed only the Socialist Realism works, but some teachers discretely recommended forbidden readings especially of the interwar Romanian literature considered “decadent” by the Communist view. In this way they could protect at least a part of the young generation which was on the verge of being totally subjected to the official ideology.

For example, in the 1950’s, Tudor Vianu, a well-known Philosophy and Philology professor, held classes and gave examination in his private dwelling for a few students, including his son¹⁵. But this type of classes offering a choice for a small group of Romanian teenagers did not develop into an alternative culture capable of defying the Communist system, like in Hungary (1956) or in Czechoslovakia (1968).

Although the Philology Departments were purged, some reactionary professors survived and the Communist leadership needed also a special school for the creation of a new and reeducated writers. Thus, at the beginning of 1950s “Mihail Eminescu” Literature and Literary Critics School was opened. This institution of higher learning looked like a garrison with high walls and barbed wire. It was conceived like a system of brain washing and its students were stuffed with much food, but also with ideology and huge mandatory bibliography, especially Socialist Realism literature. However, unlike a few zealous students who wanted to adapt themselves entirely to this brain washing system, many of the young students attending classes were hesitant and they had irksome dilemmas. One of these students who sank into thoughts was Marin Ioniță. In his memoirs he confessed: “I discovered that some of my colleagues showed a sort of an unspoken and hidden resistance to the system which probably was perceived also by our supervisors”¹⁶.

In its effort of destroying the former social structures the RWP leadership did not neglect the academic and university milieus. The status of the professorial body decreased as a result of the state pressure and the autonomy of the Universities was suppressed so that even one of the most obedient and opportunistic intellectual like Mihai Ralea, university professor of Psychology, decided in 1955, during a period of cultural “thaw”, to send a report to the leadership of the RWP in which he grieved about the appointment of the educational institutions’ principals exclusively on political criteria¹⁷. Mihai Ralea also evoked the decline of the scientific production due to the fact that the main University had only one publication for all its departments and its issues were not published at regular intervals¹⁸. The situation was even worse rather than in the case of Soviet university professors at the beginning of the 1920s. The Soviet government exercised censorship, but permitted the re-establishment of private

¹⁵ Matei Călinescu, Ion Vianu, *Amintiri în dialog*, București, 1994, p. 69.

¹⁶ Marin Ioniță, *Kiseleff 10. Fabrica de scriitori*, Pitești, 2003, p. 20.

¹⁷ ANIC, Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party – Propaganda and Agitation Section fund, file 76/1955, pp. 14-15.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

publishing in the early 1920s. Seemingly, the Soviet scholars appear to have been comparatively little affected by the censorship, in contrast to Soviet writers of fiction and drama¹⁹. In Stalinist Romania all these categories of intellectuals had to be at the censorship's beck and call alike and must be inspired preeminently by the Russian and Soviet Literature.

It is true that, as Cătălin Turliuc said: "a strong element of Sovietization in the domain of culture was the large-scale introduction of the Russian language in the Romanian schools"²⁰, but both the teenagers and the adults boycotted the newly imposed subject matter. Without doubt between 1945-1963 the Russian language was in the good graces of the Communist regime and at the official level it was not perceived as a foreign language. Meanwhile the other languages (French, English, German) were neglected. But the effective penetration of Russian in the Romanian schools was made more difficult because of the lack of skilled teaching cadres. Neither the few teachers sent by the USSR, nor the small number of the Romanian-Soviet Institute graduates could solve this deficit in the first years of the Communist regime. Even when qualified teachers appeared, many young Romanians learned Russian reluctantly. Besides, from time to time some of the teachers sent to rural schools were threatened by the pupils' parents. Thus, Russian did not represent the most important incentive for the spread of Communist propaganda.

The nationalization of the Church-ran schools at the beginning of August 1948 marked dramatically the destiny of many faithful children. Some of them wanted to dedicate to a monastic life or to attend the Seminaries or the Theology Departments. But the Communist atheism started to dominate the public sphere driving away religion; moreover, in Bucharest the Faculty of Theology was separated from the other Departments and became a sort of ghetto in which the Christian Orthodox students lived under severe supervision. Consequently, their contacts with the other students were sporadic.

At the beginning of 1948 the Communist leadership demanded the students' loyalty and complete adhesion to the new regime: "the students must know who the enemies and the friends are" was a current slogan²¹. But both the Theology students and other religion oriented young scholars were searching for a spiritual shelter and found it in the center of Bucharest, at the old Antim Monastery, where well-known intellectuals and clergymen hold their conferences on Christian topics within the framework of the *Burning Bush* Association (*Rugul Aprins*, in Romanian), the name of a famous religious and cultural movement initiated by Sandu Tudor, an interwar Christian writer and journalist who became an Orthodox monk at the end of 1940s. After the Communist takeover there was a strong connection between the monastic clergy of Antim and intellectuals, including

¹⁹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-1934*, p. 83.

²⁰ Cătălin Turliuc, *Romania's Sovietization. Socio-cultural Aspects*, in *Sovietization in Romania and Czechoslovakia*, eds. Alexandru Zub, Flavius Solomon, Iași, 2003, p. 58.

²¹ Ioana Boca, *Studenți în anii '50*, in "Anuarul Institutului Român de Istorie Recentă", t. 1, 2002, p. 207.

students who felt under the weather due to the fact that the government banished the teaching of Religion in all Romanian schools. The *Burning Bush* movement could be considered also a sort of literary and religious discussion club.

After 1948 the Group of Antim ceased to meet regularly at the Monastery but at the middle 1950s they took again the sittings especially in private dwellings from Bucharest. Other generation of students joined the spiritual meetings but after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution such reunions were framed “dangerous” and drew the political police attention. In the Summer of 1958 the priests and the students who attended the *Burning Bush* reunions were arrested. There was a significant difference between *Burning Bush* and Petofi Circle. The first did not demand democratization and did not organize political demonstrations, but it embodied the intellectual freedom.

Immediately after the suppression of the traditional students associations almost all students were enrolled or were matriculated under pressure or joined opportunistically the National Union of Romanian Students (UNSR), the only accepted organization. Many of them fell into the trap due to the sly tactics of the Communist authorities which encouraged them to cherish illusions concerning the apolitical character of the UNSR. In fact, the government and the Party never allowed free play in the case of UNSR, an association whose life lasted only one year. At the beginning of 1949 significant Communist leaders alleged that almost all of the young Romanian Fascist enlisted in the UNSR²² and that others joined the organization just for material advantages like ration cards²³. All these charges provoked the dissolution of UNSR and the foundation of a class basis association: the Union of the Working Youth (UTM). Afterwards the Communist officials launched a threat: “Those who do not enter UTM must be reeducated and determined to form cultural circles.”²⁴

The so-called “improvement of class composition in schools and universities” became an obsession for the Communist leadership: in 1949 the Ministry of Education forbade the admission in the institutions of higher learning for the children who belonged to the so-called “capitalist exploiting elements”. And the same thing happened two years later in the case of pupils’ admission in the eighth grade. Despite this absurd class based discrimination the number of poor peasant and working class students’ rate did not increase rapidly between 1948-1952. Under these circumstances, in the summer of 1952 the acute problem of the improvement of class composition in schools and universities again seized the attention of the Communist leadership which was worried about the fact that the “healthy” youth (from the political point of view) could be contaminated by the presence in the same schools of the “undesirable” children – sons and daughters of “capitalist exploiters”. Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej warned that the Communist Party could not rely on undesirable elements after their graduation. He expressed the fear that these “inimical elements” who graduated institutions of higher learning will

²² ANIC, CCC – RCP fund, file 1/1949, p. 5.

²³ Ibidem, file 45/1949, p. 9.

²⁴ Ibidem.

penetrate the state bureaucracy and they will sabotage building socialism²⁵. Dej identified, as well, the guilt for this situation: one of the scapegoats was Gheorghe Vasilichi, an old Communist leader.

In order to hinder the admission of the “undesirables”, the authorities divided the children in sociopolitical categories. Initially, in a Report expressing the most drastic limitation prepared by Leonte Răutu, the frightful chief of Propaganda Section of the Romanian Communist Party’s Central Committee there were 4 categories. His radical proposals of restriction stirred even the reaction of Dej himself who declared that: “it is not advisable to lay it on with a trowel”. Although the First Secretary of RWP imposed only 3 categories of children the effects were as well ravaging. Usually, the surveys and the other statistics prepared by the Ministry of Education officials suggest that putting into practice the restrictive measures caused dramatic situations.

The proportion of “undesirable” children admitted in the eighth grade severely decreased: from almost 21,000 pupils only 4 (0.01%) belonged to the third category²⁶. Probably in order to protect the international image of the Communist Romania these severe and absurd limitations were not included in the law adopted by the Great National Assembly, the Romanian pseudo-Parliament. Although the discriminatory provisions did not appear in the Official Gazette, the Communist Party included it in a Directive concerning the necessary measures for the improvement of pupils and students class composition, a top secret document which remained unpublished.

Roughly, the school inspectors and principals of the learning institutions strictly observed the Directive. After 1947-1948 the principals of the prestigious high-schools were removed or to the best of one’s expectations, doubled by deputies who were loyal to the totalitarian regime. A few old and skilled principals who kept their jobs after this purge admitted shamefully that “we accustomed ourselves [to the new political circumstances] and we made compromises against our conscience in order to save at least what we could. Now we have nothing: we lost both the school and our honor”.

Only Stalin’s death in March 1953 brought a slight relaxation of these limitation measures. Nevertheless, only in August 1953 the Party leadership tried to find a way out and decided that the change of the discriminatory Directive was necessary in order to create possibilities of admission for the praiseworthy pupils whose origins were problematic²⁷.

The crucial importance of the Education Reform was brought into relief by Gheorghiu-Dej himself: “The Ministry of Education is not a part time job of four hours. It is more important than the State Security Ministry because we had to

²⁵ Ibidem, file 66/1952, p. 13.

²⁶ Ibidem, Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party – Propaganda and Agitation Section fund, file 37/1953, pp. 18-19.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 1.

destroy the enemy from the cultural domain, we had to train the future teaching cadres and also to educate the working class”²⁸.

On January 31, 1949 during the sitting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Secretariat, Vasile Luca, one of the most influential leader of RWP, estimated that Gheorghe Vasilichi, the minister of Education at that moment, showed “sentimentalism” towards the class enemy and also was all wrong when he imagined that the character of the “unreliable” intellectuals could change for the better. And Vasile Luca added that: “The cadres problem is one of the most important because there [at the Ministry of Education] the Department kept going with the old reactionary staff which put into practice our Education Reform. It would be better to appoint and hire unskilled but devoted personnel that can and is good at imposing the educational reform”.

These statements were almost identical with Stalin’s slogan – “Cadres decide everything” – proclaimed in 1935 and cited by Sheila Fitzpatrick²⁹. Moreover, this similarity shows how deep was Romania’s dependence on Soviet model. The successes of the Party in enforcing the Soviet pattern are due mainly to the pre-existence of this model.

In the 1960s analysts like R. Braham observed that particularly the students presented a continued disdain for the indoctrination programs expressed by apathy and indifference. Taking into consideration such elements we could conclude that the Romanian case is somehow similar with the East Germany case as described by John Connelly³⁰. Both in Romania and East Germany higher education failed to contribute to the destabilization of the Communist regime, in contrast with the Polish and Czech cases. Connelly questioned the view of unimpeded and complete Sovietization of Education in Eastern Europe and attempted to show that behind a façade of uniformity separate national traditions continued through the Stalinist period, creating different contexts for politics and for societal experience. The institutions and programs created after 1948 in Eastern Europe higher education were almost identical, what varied were the people who operated within them. So, the John Connelly’s point is that higher education policies of the Stalinist years created preconditions for the behaviour of intelligentsias in the Czech lands, East Germany, and Poland during the crises that shook the region after 1956. In both Poland and Czech lands students acted as destabilizing forces throughout the post-Stalinist era, in contrast to East Germany and Romania. Within the latter there were few students’ demonstrations in the fall of 1956 rapidly nipped in the bud by the Police and Party apparatus. Why did the Romanian students not rebel? The Romanian historians still did not find the adequate and convincing answer. But Dennis Deletant, a British scholar and an expert in Romanian Studies, reviewed after 1989 three explanations for the Romanian passiveness: one was that the

²⁸ *Stenogramele*, vol. 2, p. 39.

²⁹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front. Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*, Ithaca and London, 1992, p. 149.

³⁰ John Connelly, *Captive University. The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945–1956*, Chapel Hill and London, 2000.

Romanians were by nature timorous, conditioned by their history under the foreign imperial rule of the Ottoman Turks, the Habsburgs, the Russians and the Soviet Communists, to adopt a defensive stance rather than come out in open revolt; the second, that passiveness was engendered by Orthodoxy; and the third, that the secret police, the *Securitate*, was extremely efficient³¹. Dennis Deletant and other historians underlined the fact that Communist Romania was one of the harshest dictatorships in Eastern Europe and that the intellectual elite suffered large scale repressions. However, as Deletant concluded, all three explanations have some truth in them, but they are not entirely valid either in themselves or as a complete answer to the question.

In Poland a relatively cohesive professoriate remained in place and frustrated Communists' attempts to instill a new consciousness in working-class and peasant students. Unlike the Polish case, in Romania the old professoriate was severely purged and those who survived were not necessarily united by a common political and intellectual culture. The lack of solidarity characterized also the students' milieu in the 1950s. Some intellectuals suggested that during the Communist period Romanians did not overcome their own clichés about national fatalism and their resignation expressed as: "It can always get worse"³². Moreover, at the beginning of the 1960s the younger intelligentsia chose to avoid tension and confrontation with the Communist authorities which distanced Romania from the Soviet imperial power. Some students, as well as many Romanians, perceived those years, especially 1964-1968, as a new period of "national awakening" which would lead to the country's independence from Soviet rule. From this point of view, liberal and dissent manifestations among students could seem imprudent and risky, defying both the Communist Romanian government and a majority of countrymen with anti-Soviet feelings. Or, the *Securitate* knew that it could reckon on "passivity", especially if the regime espoused at least one popular cause, for example, an anti-Russian stance³³.

³¹ Dennis Deletant, *Fatalism and Passiveness in Romania*, in Dennis Deletant, Maurice Pearton, *Romania observed. Studies in Contemporary Romanian History*, Bucharest, 1998, p. 333.

³² Cited by Carmen Firan, *Survival through Culture in a Surreal Romania*, in "East European Quarterly", t. XXXIV, 2000, no. 2, p. 260.

³³ Dennis Deletant, *Fatalism and Passiveness in Romania*, p. 333.