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20 Years Of School Textbooks' History In Romania (1989-2009)



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20 Years Of School Textbooks' History In Romania (1989-2009)

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Introduction

In most cases, the historical description of an issue begins with its origins. However, history can sometimes surprise us. For example, the transition of the Eastern European states from capitalism to communism and then back to capitalism has taken theorists by surprise. This aspect encourages tackling the school textbook issue by taking into account the evolution of the last 20 years and not the first textbooks of the modern Romanian state.

These past 20 years have been very dense, though, as the transformations that have occurred during this period have a high relevance for the contemporary Romanian school. We have chosen to present the issue of current textbooks by using two possible frameworks:

- a. the historical perspective on the development of Romanian textbooks after 1989;
- b. the option for pluralist models in Romanian textbooks after 1989 (examples from history and economy textbooks).

Historical Perspective On The Development Of School Textbooks In Romania After December 1989

After 1989, textbooks have undergone a reforming process, which was at first little coordinated by specific policies, but conducted under the coordination of a specialized organism after 1995, an organism specially created to ease the transition to multiple (alternative) textbooks.

The evolution of Romanian school textbooks is linked to the reform process in the educational system. In summary, the stages of this process are the following¹:

1990-1995: Preparing the reform

After four years of dialogue between the Romanian Government and the World Bank, a reform project for the primary and secondary school was put together (RO-3724), the most extensive project of this type in Central and Eastern Europe judging by the financial allocation and coverage. The project involved a 50 million USD loan (payable in 20 years at a 7% interest rate). The Romanian Government was to contribute with 23.5 million USD, while 25 million USD were to be received from the European Union through PHARE, as a non-refundable loan.

¹ For a description of the evolution of the reform process, see Mihaela Singer "Curricular reform from design to implementation. Balance at the beginning of the millenium", in L. Vlăsceanu (coordinator) *The School at a Crossroad*, Polirom, Iași, 2002, pp. 130-149 and Alexandru Crișan (coordinator), *Four Exercises of Education Policy*, Humanitas Educational, 2000+ Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, pp.24-27.



Several components linked to the major goals of the project have been designed and have functioned within the project: curriculum, teachers training, assessment and evaluation, school textbooks, occupational standards and school management

Several important changes have occurred in the system during this period:

- The possibility for high schools to choose their own educational profile; thus in January 1990, most high schools became theoretical high schools (from mainly industrial ones);
- Reducing the mandatory learning period from 10 to 8 years;
- Reducing the working week from 6 to 5 days;
- The elimination of the mandatory school uniform.

The textbooks used in this period were mainly the same that were used before, only without Ceausescu's picture, which had been a mandatory element at the beginning of each textbook. The great majority were still crowded, with small letters, printed in a single colour and on low quality paper. These textbooks were unattractive and difficult to read.

There were, however, textbooks that could not remain unchanged during this period, namely the textbooks for social-humanistic subjects. Subjects such as: Economic Knowledge (9th grade), Social-Political Knowledge (10th grade) and Political Economy. The Political Economy of the Romanian Communist Party (11th grade) could not have remained in the education plans. They were replaced with Logics (9th grade), Psychology (10th grade) and Economy (11th grade). The contents of the Philosophy class, taught in the 12th grade, were changed and a special textbook was created in 1990. The Humanitas Publishing House (newly founded on the ruins of the former Political Publishing House) contributed to this effort by publishing *Philosophy Lessons*. Shortly after that, the first restructured philosophy textbook was written, bringing a new perspective on how the subject should be studied.

Textbooks for new subjects were also written during this period:

- Civic Culture, a secondary school subject, with a textbook published in 1994;
- Human Rights, a 9th grade optional subject, with a new textbook published in 1995.

1996-2000: The comprehensive systemic reform.

This is the period when the reform project for the primary and secondary education is actually carried out. The National Framework Plan was created, new curricula were made for all subjects and auctions for alternative textbooks were held.

The textbook market is put together (not without difficulty). In a few years' time new textbooks for all grades are published on the basis of the new curricula. Textbooks are of an improved quality: they become learning instruments with special graphics and are printed in colour. For each subject, the Ministry of Education purchases three alternative textbooks, on the basis of the scores received at the auctions. The alternative textbooks are translated in Hungarian and German. In 1996 Civic Education begins to be taught in 3rd and 4th grade. The first alternative textbooks for this subject are published.

The 2001-2009 period represents the slowdown and even the stopping of the reform, sometimes returning to old methods and taking measures that would discard previous achievements. Policies to continue the reforms are missing, allowing unfavourable decisions to be taken. Long term strategies in education are missing.

However, there have been some attempts to continue the reform in this time span. We offer some examples:

- 2005 - Publishing the *Report on the State of the Education System* – report which shows, through its indicators, where we are, as well as evolution tendencies.
- 2006, 2007 - The project *Needs and Priorities for Change in Romanian Education* – this was the basis of development and modernisation for pre-university education.
- 2008 - Setting the strategy [*Education and Research for the Knowledge based Society*](#) by the Presidential Commission for the Analysis and Policy Making in the Educational and Research Field. Singing the National Pact for Education by all the parliamentary parties' leaders on the 5th of July



2008 and then by the Romanian Academy and 22 trade unions, student associations and the parents' association.

- 2009 - Dialogue attempt between the powers of the state to continue the education reform (influenced by the electoral campaign, though). From the textbook point of view, a return to traditional, conservative models can be noticed in the textbooks promoted.

The Option For Pluralist Models In School Textbooks In Romania After December 1989

The single model paradigm has functioned for a lot of years in the Romanian education system. Almost 50 years of communism have determined important changes in the strategies of handling issues promoted in textbooks. Everything had to be interpreted in a partisan manner. The evaluation of any theoretical position had to be made from the standpoint of a "valid" theory, which was the communist ideology. Due to this state of affairs, everything that was present in textbooks represented the officially accepted point of view and any other position was considered wrong by default. This way of writing textbooks could not be replaced immediately after 1989. Many textbook authors have continued to search for the "truth", generating many disputes regarding the way it had been presented. Pluralist models have been promoted gradually, as even the idea of alternative textbooks imposed on them the effort to make the possibility available (in teaching, learning and evaluating).

We now move on to present the evolution towards pluralism in the case of school textbooks for Economics (high school education, textbooks for the 10th and the 11th grades) and for Romanian History (secondary education, textbooks for the 8th grade).

Economics Textbooks

To identify how the transition was made from a unique approach to a pluralistic one regarding Economics as a high school discipline, we turned to a brief review of existing student's books for between 1989-2006, taking into account the three periods considered in the development of post-communist school textbooks. The textbook from 1989 was set as a benchmark and the analyse followed the following points:

- a. to what extent information is offered to students from the axiological perspective in textbooks after 1989;
- b. whether the authors of textbooks considered it appropriate to provide students with alternative references, and if they did, what type of sources appeared the most (press articles, world-renowned economists, public figures, other economics textbooks);
- c. the extent to which various schools of economic thought are presented to students.

Economic science, as presented in textbooks for high school students, appears rather as something given, but, as in any social science, its truths are not perfect. A short presentation of various schools of economic thought is a good sign of a pluralistic approach. Even if the entire content of the textbook presents economic science in its mainstream version, a review of other schools of thought puts the student in a position to critically assess the strong and the weak points of each theoretical approach.

Some new generation textbooks also focus in the same way on the presentation of various systems of economic organization. The fact that market economy exists, that one learns about it through daily interactions and at school does not imply, however, the universality of the concept. It is important for students to be familiar, at least theoretically, with other types of economic organization, and to be able to understand the process during which the transition from subsistence economy to market economy was made, to understand that market economy is an alternative to planned economy.

Communist Textbooks

The 1989 textbook is strongly ideologised. Its structure is an interesting one though, as the book is divided in two sections: a considerable section of the textbook is devoted to socialist economy, while the other one is devoted to capitalist economy. The section dedicated to socialist economy presents all the issues from a Marxist perspective with reinforcements from Nicolae Ceausescu's speeches.



"I believe - highlighted comrade Nicolae Ceausescu - that in our socialist society, no one should, and no one could earn an income without work, by exploiting and appropriating the labour of others, by actions of speculation"².

The economic truth is strongly distorted by the party's "truth", the information coming together with the ideological idea of "good" as defined in the communist system.

The section dedicated to capitalist economy presents mathematically correct concepts such as profit or salary, although completely ignores issues like inflation or unemployment. Beyond the accuracy of mathematical formulas, phrases incriminating the capitalist order appear in every lesson, reinforced by the interpretations of Nicolae Ceausescu:

"Comrade **Nicolae Ceausescu** stressed in his 1988's Exposure that *developed capitalist countries have undergone a process of accumulation of wealth in the hands of an increasingly smaller group of people who have become richer, and of increase in the number of poor, whose basic minimum conditions of work and life are not guaranteed*".³

Textbooks from 1990 to 1995

The textbooks studies from this period are unique textbooks, each being a republication of the preceding, with the addition of one or more chapters. First, it should be noticed that the content had been adapted to the new realities, there being present problems such as unemployment, inflation, transition to market economy in Romania.

The approach is neutral from an axiological point of view, the textbook providing information on economics, not a predefined idea of "good" related to it. Although other sources of documentation are not explicitly recommended, the book provides at the end of each chapter fragments belonging to famous economists for students to comment. Here are some examples:

John Kenneth Galbraith: *"As long as it is considered that the economic system works, ultimately, in the interests of the individual – that it is subordinated to his needs and desires – we can presume that the role of economic science is to explain the process through which the individual is served [...]"*⁴

Milton Friedman: *"Viewed as means of achieving political freedom, economic relations play an important role in the dispersal of power. The type of economic organization that directly generates economic freedom, namely competitive capitalism, also promotes political freedom because it separates economic power from political power and thus allows a balance between the two"*.⁵

Students are given problems to solve, texts and tables to interpret, this kind of tasks creating the premises of a flexible, pluralist approach, free of a need for a single, absolute and nonnegotiable truth.

Textbooks from 1996 to 2000

Textbooks from the following period are alternative textbooks, not only bringing a wider set of problems and applications, but also showing the evolution in time and space of the economic activity and economic theory. Economics is presented as a social science that evolves over time through different schools of thought and adapts itself to different types of realities.

For instance, the 2001 textbook published by Antet Publishing house makes these aspects clear from its first two chapters, which are devoted to "Economy as a Social Science" and, respectively, to "Economy as a Real System". In the first chapter economical schools of thought are listed from physiocracy, the English Classical School and its representatives such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Robert Malthus, John Stuart Mill, and continuing with protectionism, the theory of value labour (Karl Marx), the neoclassical school, the marginalist Austrian school, the school of Lausanne (general equilibrium theory), the Cambridge school,

² BURTAN, Florin (coord.). *Economie politică. Politica economică a Partidului Comunist Român. Manual pentru clasa a XI-a*, Editura Didactica și Pedagogică. București, 1989, p 128.

³ Ibidem, p. 50.

⁴ GHIȚĂ, Paul Tănase (coord.). *Economie. Manual pentru învățământul liceal*. Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R.A. București. 1995, p.8

⁵ Ibidem, p.19)



Keynesianism.⁶ The second chapter is focused on real economy and economic systems are briefly presented here: the natural economy, the economy of exchange and the free market economy, the system of command economy, mixed economy and transition to market economy⁷.

In this generation of textbooks there is a great emergence of several resonant names for economic science: Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Robert Malthus, John Stuart Mill, Paul Samuelson, Michel Didier, R. Fogel and D. North, Turgot, Gilbert Abraham Frois, Paul Heyne.

In addition, all textbooks from this period have consistent chapters on of Romania's integration in the European Union and on international financial bodies, drawing attention to an economy that tends to become global, that relies increasingly on interdependencies and that has both advantages and disadvantages for the stakeholders. Both free market principles and the role and capacity of national states to deal with the international economic environment are analysed.

Textbooks from 2001 to 2009

A selective bibliography was introduced at the end of the textbooks printed in 2002 and 2006, making the reference to other recent readings in a more explicit way than before (using both local and international literature as reference sources). The textbook thus becomes a support material for the study of economics, and not an absolute source of truth concerning economic science.

Another sign of moving towards a pluralist approach is the introduction of texts from a totally different register than before, namely from the economic press, sometimes in its online version. For example, the textbook from Niculescu Publishing house (2006 [10]) contains at the end of each chapter a section called "Press on. . ." containing fragments from economic press articles on current issues, challenging students to interpret contemporary economic realities by using theoretical knowledge gained during classes:

"From 2003 until now, in 2006, a real brand cult has been developing. Romanians discover promotions, a diversification and stratification of brands. Exigency, security, accessorizing, pragmatism, all these become keywords in the purchase behaviour of Romanians. The characteristic verb now is TO ACQUIRE. Over the last years, Romanian buyers have evolved from simplicity (in 1996), to availability (in 2000), to stability (in 2003) and finally to exigency."⁸

"At mid-year, Romtelecom lost nearly 200,000 subscribers, from 4.3 to 4.1 million subscribers, compared with the similar period in 2004. And other alternative operators have won market shares from 4.1%, at mid-year last year, to 10%, and 430,000 subscribers at the end of 2005, according to ANRC. Among these stand out RCS & RDS and UPC Astral Telecom, which provide triple-pay packages (TV, internet and telephone through the same wire)"(Vali Barzoi, Deutsche Telekom has caught a wire, but it wants more, in Capital, no. 9 / 2006."⁹

Although veiled, the pluralist message is quite clear: economy is a reality that we live, that we read of and write about using both academic and less academic sources, and any person familiar with the economic reality and language may issue opinions, estimations, forecasts that can be taken into consideration.

In conclusion, there is a positive trend the process of democratization in terms of learning economy at high school level, with progress from one generation of textbooks to another. Without being complete yet, the transition to a pluralistic approach is clearly distinguishable.

History Textbooks

The study of 8th grade Romanian history textbooks has aimed at achieving a comparative analysis of the textbooks written between 1989 and 2009, by focusing on how two major themes of the history of the

⁶ CAVACHI, Ioan. *Economie. Manual pentru învățământul liceal*. Editura Antet. București. 2001, p.8-9.

⁷ Ibidem, p.14-15.

⁸ GAVRILĂ, Ilie. *Economie. Manual pentru clasa a XI-a*. Editura Economică Preuniversitaria. București. 2006, p.24

⁹ Ibidem, p.71.



Romanians are described in each book: the genesis of the Romanian people and the communist regime. The study of the two themes has pursued:

- a. the content presented to pupils;
- b. different approaches, as signs of pluralism.

There has been no new auction for history textbooks for secondary school after the year 2000. Under these conditions, the comparison has been made directly between the textbooks used during the communist regime and the ones used today.

Romanian History is one of the fundamental subjects taught in Romanian schools. History has been and still is a subject tested in national assessments. Given the fact that history has been used as an instrument of propaganda in the communist period, by distorting and remodelling the information so as to serve the interests of the Communist Party, the analysis of the way the content of textbooks for the 8th grade has changed, after returning to democracy, becomes meaningful. The topics included in the present analysis have been selected by taking into account the falsification of the history during the communist regime and pursuing the development of several of the most controversial and rewritten events in the history of Romanians.

The genesis of the Romanians: the centralized Dacian state and the continuity thesis vs. the immigration thesis

In the 1989 textbook, the genesis of the Romanians is put in Marxist terms, as being the result of a class antagonism in the ancient Dacian society. Therefore “the cleavage of the Dacian-Getic society in antagonistic classes has led to the formation of the state, as the dominant class, the nobility, required an instrument which would ensure its reign and the possibility of exploiting those who worked”...“the Dacian state is a military monarchy...it is politically centralized, the whole Dacia being submitted to the will of the king”¹⁰. Moreover, after being conquered by the Romans, the society will divide again in two antagonistic classes, with the Roman conquerors as the dominant class.

The presence of two classes in Dacia is also mentioned in the textbooks written after 1989 (nobles and common men), but there is no mention of class exploitation. Burebista unifies all the tribes and becomes king, but does not establish a centralized state. After the Roman conquest, Dacia is not seen as being exploited by the dominant Roman class, but as being a “Roman province” where the locals will undergo a Romanization process.

Unlike the 1989 textbook, where only the continuity thesis is presented and sustained, all the other textbooks present the context and the dispute between the continuity and, respectively, the Romanian immigration theses. While the continuity thesis speaks about the formation of the Romanian people north from the Danube and of the contribution of the migrant people, the immigration thesis considers that the Romanian people has formed south from the Danube and has then immigrated to the land left unoccupied after the Dacian-Roman wars. The genesis of the Romanians is presented in a pluralist manner, as the four textbooks sustain and argue in favour of the continuity thesis, but also present the challenging vision and its arguments.

The communist regime

There are major differences in the way the communist regime is presented. For the 1989 textbook, this theme represents an occasion to worship Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife, as the personality cult being a common presence in textbooks.

The textbooks written after 1989 divide the communist times in two major periods:

- a. the Dej period or the Stalinist period, when the Romanian society has undergone the Stalinization process
- b. the Ceausescu period or the period of national-communism, of the dynastic regime or the neo-Stalinist period.

All textbooks mention the single party, the planned economy, the five year plans, the repression, the political crimes, the political prisons and the forced labour centres (Pitesti, Gherla, Sighet, the Danube – Black Sea canal), the Stalinization and the reverse process, the detente period, the personality cult of Ceausescu, the economic decrease, the fall of the communist regime and the revolution in 1989.

¹⁰ DAICOVICIU, Hadrian, TEODOR, Pompiliu și CÎMPEANU, Ioan, *Istoria Antică și Medie a României. Manual pentru clasa a VIII-a*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București 1989, p.33.



134051-LLP-1-2007-1-IT-ERASMUS-EVC

However, there are significant differences between the way these aspects are presented and the periods divided:

- The 1992 Didactica si Pedagogica Publishing house textbook gives a global view of the facts, highlighting the international context and linking the characteristics of the Romanian communism to the evolution of the Romanian – Soviet relations. It divides the Ceausescu period in three: the détente period 1965-1971, the personality cult period 1971-1980, the economic fall period 1980-1989. It only briefly mentions the events that occurred in 1989 in Romania, choosing to emphasize the fall of the communist regimes throughout Europe.
- The Sigma Publishing house textbook speaks of propaganda as means of legitimising the party and its actions, and also as means of social control. It links the re-education experiment at Pitesti with the obsession for creating the “new man”. It divides the Ceausescu period in only two stages: the consolidation period, a détente period when the tactics of “weakening the screw” was applied (1965-1974), and the cultural revolution and the economic fall period (1974-1989).
- The Teora Publishing house textbook puts little emphasis on the international context, highlighting the main events and changes within the country. It is very interesting to note the four-period division it makes of the Ceausescu regime: 1965-1971, 1971-1980, 1980 -1987, 1987-1989. It also mentions the dissidents of the 1980s and their actions: Paul Goma, Gabriel Andreescu, Ana Blandiana etc. The 1989 revolution is extensively described and the events in Timisoara are explained.
- The Humanitas Publishing house textbook sees the expansion of the Soviet influence as being a result of the abandonment of Eastern and Central Europe by the Anglo-Americans. It defines the principles of *political Stalinism* – the single party sustained by the political police, *economic Stalinism* – centralized economy based on state ownership, and *cultural Stalinism* – ending all relations with the Occident and applying the Soviet model – “proletcultism”. The Ceausescu regime is described as neo-Stalinism or dynastic socialism and it is divided in two periods: the détente (1965-1974) and the dynastic socialism – after 1971/1974. It mentions the systematization plans of towns and villages and the numerous demolitions. It also mentions the dislocation of the rural population and their forced urbanization.

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134051-LLP-1-2007-1-IT-ERASMUS-EVC

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