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PHD THESIS

**PROJECTS FOR THE MODERNIZATION OF ROMANIAN
EDUCATION, DURING THE FIRST INTERWAR DECADE, IN
THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES AND IN THE WRITTEN
PRESS OF THE GOVERNING PARTIES**

- Summary -

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In the wake of the Great Union of 1918 the issue of the reorganization and consolidation of the new Romanian Kingdom on a new legal and institutional framework and, consequently, the need to undertake urgent legislative and administrative measures toward the genuine unification of the whole country became pressing. Just like the administration or the public health system, education too, which were set up according to the legal provisions of different regimes (Bessarabia being organized in the czarist spirit, Bukovina and Transylvania under an Austro-Hungarian organization), had to be unified. This goal was accomplished during the first decade of the interwar period with the adoption of the law for primary school in 1924, the private education law in 1925, by the Law of 1925 regulating the high school examination, through the secondary education reform of 1928, and a number of legislative provisions on the organization of higher education.

Starting from the way the education system in Romania was organised before World War I and analysing the interwar parliamentary debates, the legislative initiatives and the laws adopted during this period of time, the purpose of this thesis is to follow the evolution of the ideas and principles that served as guiding lines for the Romanian politicians during the 1920s, in order to configure the educational policy and the situation of the Romanian education system at that time. This thesis analyses the debate on the modernisation projects proposed in education during the first interwar decade, approaching the issue of schools and of the education process, as it was outlined mostly in the written press of the political parties governing the country – for a shorter or a longer period – during the first interwar decade, as well as in the minutes of the parliamentary debates during the aforementioned period.

I considered appropriate to make an introspective analysis of what the political parties had as purpose after the Union, in their programmatic document, of what their written press transmitted related to their own accomplishments and to the opposition's actions, as well as an analysis of what the interwar members of the parliament considered it had to happen in education in a period when the Romanian public opinion unanimously believed the education reform had to be rethought.

From the perspective of the general methodological approach, the study method used during the research was the qualitative research, using the in-depth analysis of the documents of the era, of the political programmes, of the articles published in the written press, of the reform

projects, of the adopted legislative texts, as well as of the parliamentary debates. The analysis of these documents retains the fact they have been written for a certain purpose and addressed to a certain audience, analysing the texts from the perspective of their authors, in the social, political and cultural context they appeared. I used the discourse analysis method to identify the changes in the speeches and in the terminology used by the politicians and the intellectuals, referring to the education systems. Furthermore, the synchronic and diachronic approaches allowed an in-depth analysis of the education systems during the interwar period. From the synchronic perspective, I have analysed the main characteristics of the different proposals for an administrative reform, as they were proposed at that time, while from the diachronic perspective, I have monitored their evolution, analysing the changes appeared.

My thesis is structured in four chapters. The first one, “Overview of the interwar national school”, carries out a short incursion in the evolution of the Romanian education before 1918, underlining the primordial role played by the 1864 Law of education, issued by the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza, a law that has lasted for 34 years and gave stability and consolidation to the school institutions from the Old Kingdom, followed by the 1898 Law of Haret, through which education was set on new grounds, organising the actual secondary education and enacting the formation, recruitment and immovability of the teaching staff. The school policy led by Spiru Haret focused on launching an ample socio-cultural and educational movement, known in history as “Haretism”, Haret’s thinking combining the enlightenment’s ideas with the social tendencies of liberalism.

The first practical but rather shy steps taken in sketching the direction for action of the educational policy after the 1918 Union, of building the educational “ideal”, are outlined in the programmatic documents of the political parties. As such, the second chapter of my thesis, “School and education in the programmatic documents of the political parties during the first interwar decade”, approaches school in the political programmes and manifestos. The *Manifesto of the National Liberal Party*, published at the end of 1918, clearly stated the party’s intention of not sparing any effort “with the purpose of decreasing the number of illiterates and increasing the number of schools and teachers, in order to develop secondary education to create an intense professional education and to improve and endow our universities”¹. In its *Declaration of*

¹ Gheorghe Sbârână, *Partidele politice din România 1918-1940. Programe și orientări doctrinare*, Ed. Sylvi, Bucharest, 2001, p. 54.

Principles, the Peasants' Party, set up on 5 December 1918, advocated for "the wide spreading of learning through the setting up of schools in every village, through courses for adults in order to teach them the art of ploughing and craftsmanship, through the formation of a well-trained and well-paid teaching staff; the full organisation of the vocational education and the development of the normal secondary, technical and tertiary education"². The *Work Programme of the Romanian National Party* stated the need for a radical change in all educational branches "taking into account – in the regulation – the evolutionary norms of that time and, mostly, on the one hand, the principle of training as many specialists as possible in the practical branches and, on the other hand, the need for school instruction to finish early so that the youngsters can start a family by the age of 24 the latest"³. The orientation of all efforts towards school envisaged the setting up of an industrial and commercial class, which could contribute to the development of national industry and trade, as well as the setting up of a social class formed by technicians and experts in different fields of national interest. In its programme, the *People's Party* advocated for a reorganisation of education according to the need of giving to the young generation the so necessary practical guidance, insisting on the accomplishment of the active principles of schooling and foreseeing norms for complementary education and adult education "with the purpose of giving to the working classes an education appropriate to the real needs of their way of living". The programme did not omit either the need to establish a fair relation between the theoretical and the practical education, according to the real needs of the region and the skills of the given population, stating at the same time the fight for the improvement of the material situation of the teaching staff, for the administrative organisation and control of education on the backbone of decentralisation, "adopting appropriate measures to decrease the number of different categories of school inspectors, who often dispossess schools of their best didactic forces without bringing in return – through their administrative services – a real improvement to education"⁴. The *Programme of the National Democratic Party* widely depicted the issue of education, in contrast with the *Programme of the Conservative Democratic Party*, which briefly addressed the

² *Ibidem*, p. 128.

³ See *Programul de muncă al Partidului Național Român*, in Gheorghe Sbârână, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134; see also *Istoria contemporană a României. Texte social-economice și politice (1918-1929)*, students' book, Știrban Marcel, Vesa Vasile, Păun Nicolae, Pușcaș Vasile (coordinators), Universitatea din Cluj-Napoca, 1989, pp. 283-284.

⁴ Gheorghe Sbârână, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

desiderata to be accomplished by the public instruction, its message being that public instruction “had to aspire to more than learning”⁵.

Going over the programmatic documents of the political parties and finding out the desiderata to be accomplished in education, I considered of utmost importance to listen to the “echo” and to analyse the extent to which the political parties have accomplished those desiderata and made efforts to attain them, especially in the political discourse expressed in the written press of that time. Consequently, the third chapter of my thesis, “School in the central press of the governing parties”, pursues a classification on sections of the school issue, analysing what was written in the pages of the central press of the governing parties. At a general look, the central liberal press, “Viitorul” newspaper, comprises in its pages articles of political, social and cultural character, simple advertisements, general interest adds, etc. Of great interest is the tendency to insert enthusiastic articles in its content, praising the activity of the liberal ministers, during their mandate at a ministry, while, during the most important period of the opposition, the reform initiatives were denigrated and violently attacked in the written press. As such, during 1922-1926, a period when Constantin Angelescu was in charge of the Ministry of Public Instruction, “Viitorul” newspaper consistently brought to light all the actions taken by Angelescu in order to eradicate illiteracy. Among these actions, a major role is played – in the series of articles published – by the work referring to the building of schools and to the legislative initiatives to organise education on cycles. The alert rhythm of the published articles dedicated to education was retaken in 1928, after Angelescu’s comeback to the ministry, all the attention being this time directed towards the reform of secondary education. Averescu’s mandate, respectively the governing by the Peasants’ National Party, were years torn by criticism; in the meantime, the liberal press published articles outlining the deficiencies of the education system, as well as the inactivity of the governing bodies in taking the necessary measures to augment the cultural level of the masses.

Articles about education and educational policies appeared in the press of the Peasants’ Party as well. “Țara Nouă” and “Aurora” newspapers emphasized the party’s vision about the direction towards which all efforts in education until the first interwar decade should go. The discussions were further taken by “Dreptatea” newspaper, belonging to the Peasants’ National Party. This study also outlines the perspective on school of the other governing parties through

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 194.

the central newspaper of the Romanian National Party in Transylvania (“Patria” newspaper), the central press of the Peoples’ Party (“Îndreptarea” newspaper), as well as the central press of the Conservative Democratic Party (“Românimea” newspaper).

At a general look, one may notice the written press granted quite a large area to the topics related to the role of schools and to the general principles of organisation of the education, underlining the support offered by science to the social organisation of work, as well as the means offered by the human living, insisting on the intensification of the means of spreading science, but also on the school and science orientation in accomplishing their social role. As such, the purpose of school was stated – to give to the community “not simple scholars, remarkable for their erudition, but elements prepared to stubbornly face the harsh struggle of life”⁶. Unlike the old school whose purpose was to “pursue the formation of a group of intellectuals – well prepared in what their knowledge was concerned – who were easily able to handle abstract notions, but who were completely disoriented and powerless in what the imperatives of reality are concerned”, the aim of the new school was “to form social values, taught perhaps with less knowledge, but more thoroughly prepared for life, preferring instead of the scholar – who was unable to make steps in life – the humble individual, endowed with a grain of knowledge, hardened to step alone on the paths of life”⁷. The old school, seen as the “school of passive values”, the “school of the discursive wisdom, of the abstract dialectics, of the intellectual refinement, of the transcendent idealism”, had to be replaced by the new school, which had to take over the task of escaping the passivity and to integrate into the complex of social facts, receiving and giving impulses to the environment.

Given this context, in certain articles, concentrated on organisation principles of the education, the “active school” or the “school of life”, as some specialists named it, had as coordinates the need for the professor to come before the requirements of reality, but also the need for the decision-makers to pursue the real needs and the local needs in the organisation of schools, and also to harmoniously intertwine the theoretical precepts with the practical ones. The university professor I. Simionescu was the one who, in 1921, encouraged the school principals not to be driven by the pride that the schools in the Old Kingdom were the best organised, but by appreciating the schools from the neighbouring territories, which represented local experiences

⁶ „Viitorul”, XXI, No. 6.005 of 25 February 1928.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

that should not be neglected: “there are types of schools, even foreign to the ones in the Old Kingdom, which, if we do not generalise them, we could give them a development that is necessary for the region they function in”⁸.

A very important role in configuring the unifying principles of education was played by Constantin Angelescu, who also established the frameworks of the reform of primary education. His projects and initiatives were centrally placed in the liberal press, while the peasants’ press underlined the strengths of the education reform and the causes underlying the shortcomings in education. As such, while “Viitorul” newspaper considered Angelescu to be “the second Haret” because he continued Haret’s work by strengthening education and culture through the building of Romanian schools, the press belonging to the opposition published articles in which Angelescu was called “the minister of walls”⁹, “the maniac of the void contour”¹⁰, “the petroleum man of fallen walls”¹¹, the liberal government being accused of an “ungenerous domestic policy”¹², making buildings with no teachers, adopting rules leading to violence in universities and causing “the destruction of the entire edifice of national education”¹³.

Emphasizing the opposition between the members of the Liberal and the Peasants’ parties, the press of the Romanian National Party thought that, in 1924, Romania was unsuccessful in setting the foundation of the aforementioned education because “tens and hundreds of opposing ordinances were all issued with reference to... the unification of education. Two governments, since 1920 to present day, had to manifest *two mentalities* in the “unification” of education”¹⁴, therefore reiterating the idea that education was better left to the provinces and not to the central administration.

The period 1926-1927, when the ministry of public instruction was taken over by I. Petrovici, was marked – both in the central newspaper of the liberals and in the peasants’ newspapers – by the criticism brought to Petrovici’s activity, declaring, for instance, that “these few months of activity were enough to classify Ion Petrovici not only as the worst minister of public instruction, but also as the person who has rapidly disorganised school and discouraged

⁸ „Viitorul”, XIV, No. 4.037 of 29 August 1921.

⁹ „Aurora”, III, No. 639 of 7 December 1923.

¹⁰ „Dreptatea”, II, No. 79 of 20 January 1928.

¹¹ „Țărănișmul”, IV, No. 22-23 of 30 September 1928.

¹² „Aurora”, V, No. 1.195 of 31 October 1925.

¹³ „Aurora”, V, No. 1.212 of 20 November 1925.

¹⁴ „Patria”, VI, No. 204 of 25 September 1924.

professors”¹⁵. From the measures imputed to the minister as being measures taken to disorganise school, “Viitorul” mentioned: the closure of eight normal schools (out of which only two were reopened after great struggles); the affairs within the ministry (the attempt to launch the cloth affair, or the Wurmbrandt affair); avoiding the provisions of the law of normal and primary education by granting privileges to minorities against the Romanian community; continuing the work of Hungarization by allowing for students who are not from the same minority or denomination to be admitted to minority schools; the approval of new examinations for certain students who failed in their exams, recommending that the examination should be made as briefly as possible, etc.

One of the topics that has drawn the attention of the press was that of politicking in schools and of the politicization of the ministry of public instruction. A series of articles published addressed the message of removing this institution from under the influence of politics, reclaiming the political nature of certain actions undertaken by the minister or by his subordinates, the way certain commissions were set up, or how some principals or directors had been appointed, often offering the casuistry on which the main accusation was based.

Despite the divergences among the political parties, the unanimous belief of the representatives of the government was that primary and secondary schools are vital to the progress of society, in order to uplift the cultural level in the rural and urban areas. Often emphasizing the rethinking of primary and secondary schooling, leaving from the premise it trains the future minds that will go to university, we have to notice the contribution of the Liberal Party which, as any other party oriented towards an economic policy of consolidation through their own efforts, had a specific view on primary school and rural education, turning the connection between primary school into a “lever for the uplifting of the cultural status” of the peasantry and the economic progress of villages, which will not be carried out as long as “the slavery of darkness covers the villages”¹⁶. The press of the Liberal Party, especially “Viitorul”, praised the party’s programme, the respect and the support for the rural schooling, the increase of the number of teaching staff, criticising at the same time the policy led by the peasants and their lack of interest for the rural education. There have also been opinions considering more appropriate to orient the efforts towards secondary schooling, believing that the role of secondary

¹⁵ „Viitorul”, XIX, No. 5.622 of 23 November 1926.

¹⁶ „Viitorul”, XVI, No. 4.717 of 27 November 1923.

education was to create “the unity of thinking, the unitary soul foundation, which makes no psychical difference between the Romanian education from Bessarabia and the one from Ardeal, between the Romanian education from Oltenia and the one from Bukovina”¹⁷, respectively to orient the efforts towards the university, which prepares the future teachers in secondary and primary schools.

From the point of view of those who described the great actions undertaken in education, the purpose of the Liberal Party and of their actions assumed in this field were gathered around the great reform of the voting, which had already been introduced in Romania, and around a stronger consolidation of the state in all fields of activity. Given the new political organisation of the country and as a consequence of the voting and land ownership rights given to peasants, education had therefore a difficult mission and new duties. The opinion widely spread in the mass media was that “those who have obtained such rights had to be also prepared to exert them”, they have to be “enlightened and to receive a proper civil education”, school being the only one capable of bringing this light and this education. On the other hand, the apportionment of property of the peasants required “that the school should transform young children into enlightened ploughmen, open spirits, accessible to progress, capable of understanding the purpose of things”¹⁸.

Since 1896, Romania had a unitary primary school, the only inconvenient were the years of study, offering little knowledge. Therefore, Angelescu’s draft of a law – which included, this time, the 7-year primary school until the pupils turned 16 – was welcomed because of the initiative of instructing after the first four years. Those who did not enrol at a secondary or vocational school were obliged to attend three years of complementary studies to strengthen their knowledge, therefore being trained in a profession and accustomed to practical activities. As such, school dropout at the age of 11-12 had to be avoided, as children were not yet trained for a profession and neither could they be used in agricultural works, just as it was important to ensure a study form for children aged 4-7 (kindergartens) in order to ensure their preparation for school, to shelter, supervise and give guidance in matters of life and hygiene.

¹⁷ „Viitorul”, XI, No. 3.225 of 9 January/22 January 1919.

¹⁸ „Viitorul”, XVII, No. 4.806 of 15 March 1924.

The law serving as basis for the organisation of the interwar primary education was *The law on the state's primary education and the normal-primary education*¹⁹ of 1924, which regulated the cycles of primary education, the organisation principles and the specific objectives aiming at the increase of the national standard of education in Romania. The 1924 primary education law established the three cycles of primary education: schools for young children (kindergartens), the actual primary school and adult courses; special schools and classes for mentally-challenged children who could be educated; and normal schools. One may distinguish in the law the modern principles that served as a basis for the organisation of primary education, among which the unification of education all across the country, the mandatory and tuition-free character with the establishment of the age stages specific to each cycle, the practical character resulting from the school curriculum, adapted to the pupil's age and environment, having as end objective the increase of the national standard of education.

The law adopted the modern conception according to which early childhood education (kindergartens) represented a stage integrated in the structure of primary education, serving as an attempt to adapt the child to school life, offering to education an articulated structure to ensure the harmonious development of children under the age of 5. An exception should be mentioned: in order to face some realities of the interwar period, when the Ministry considered it necessary, children were enrolled at schools only at the age of 6. Kindergarten was seen as complementary to family education, for the normal development of the children's bodies and senses, in the attempt of teaching them what order, cleanliness, obedience and common sense were, by making use of beings and things from their living environment, of short prayers, songs and poems, stories and games, etc. Furthermore, a certain concern of the legislator may be noticed in stipulating specific objectives in its attempt to increase of the national standard of education by opening the law to adult education, the accomplishment of this objective becoming the duty of several education agents. The 7-grade primary school, in the form given by the legislator in 1924, had as purpose the instruction of children – during the first four grades – with elements of general knowledge, indispensable to those students who wanted to continue with other cycles of education, so that the following three classes could continue, strengthen and complement the general knowledge obtained during the first four grades, “ensuring – at the same time – a special

¹⁹ See *Lege pentru învățământul primar al Statului (școale de copii mici, școale primare, școale și cursuri de adulți, școalele și clasele special pentru copii debili și anormali educabili) și învățământul normal-primar*, promulgated by the Royal High Degree No. 2.571 of 24 July 1924 and published in the „Official Gazette” No. 101 of 26 July 1924.

development to the practical utility education”. Article 56 stipulated that “these three grades settle the close connection between life and school, stimulating the interest and giving advice for one of the practical branches of activity: agriculture and its branches; craftsmanship and trade, taking into account the regional demands; pupils are instructed in a social and national culture, comprising civil education, ethical matters, personal and social hygiene, and sports. The syllabus for these three last grades will vary according to the type of town, to the inhabitants’ occupations and to the interests of students”.²⁰

The 1924 Law regulated also the training of the teaching staff, including in its content the means of improvement under the form of general didactic conferences, cultural circles, courses for the improvement of knowledge, repetition courses, access to school and pedagogical libraries, normal teachers schools and special normal schools.

The law was attacked by the opposition’s press that considered, among many other things, that the number of ages included in primary education foreseen by Angelescu represented a progress for the Old Kingdom, but a downfall for Ardeal, where “the primary education courses lasted for nine years, out of which six years represented the actual primary education, while three years were allotted to repetition school”. During these three years, “apart from cultural knowledge”, pupils were also given “practical advice for the organisation of their future lives”. Boys practically learnt how to plough, how to garden and how to grow grapes, while girls were taught how to darn, how to tailor and everything else that was necessary for their future homes”²¹. Furthermore, the principle of school compulsoriness was fought against, as well as the punishment of those parents who did not send their children to school, as the opposition considered that imposing school compulsoriness should also be accompanied by the creation of possibilities for the peasants’ children to be sent to school, that peasants “should have where to send them and with what to send them”²².

Consequently, while the liberal press of the first interwar decade eulogised the Law of primary education and supported the initiatives of the liberal minister (Angelescu), as well as his efforts to consolidate the Romanian education, the press of the Peasants’ Party often correlated the crisis in primary education not only to the politicians’ lack of interest for education, but also to the lack of financial resources, of school buildings and didactic material, to the less intense

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

²¹ „Patria”, VI, No. 57 of 18 March 1924.

²² „Patria”, VI, No. 193 of 11 September 1924.

preoccupation of decision-makers to increase the cultural level of the masses, but, mostly, to the diminished involvement of the teaching staff in the improvement of schools, which was mainly caused by their poor material situation. The press of the Peasants' Party blamed the government for the erroneous channelling of funds, for the less intense preoccupation towards the improvement of the teaching staff situation, the liberals' priority being to offer learning spaces, where students could learn, which "was not bad"; however, it was high time this objective was complemented by the training and salary policies of those "called to revive these school constructions"²³.

Articles about secondary education had been published in "Viitorul" newspaper since September 1919, giving details about Angelescu's intentions to reorganise gymnasiums to a duration of three years, to set up new gymnasiums in urban and rural areas, as gymnasium was seen as a post-primary school offering general knowledge, complementing the primary school knowledge for those who did not want to pursue any other school, but also it had as purpose to form the training school for students wanting to continue their studies with the normal school, commercial schools, seminaries, etc. Gymnasium was seen as a basis for the actual high school and vocational schools, where students would benefit from specialty training. Secondary schools were considered to be that stage of education which, unlike primary school that addressed to everyone and had an encyclopaedic and popular character, unlike university which addressed to the elites and to a small number, "coincided with the era of moral training" being the one that had the power of creating characters and of shaping souls²⁴. Consequently, the press discourse generally addressed its impulse to direct secondary school towards national ideals and to the inoculation – from an early age – of a disgust for the "anarchic madness" and of a despise for the "brutish apostles", to remove all those opinions "carrying not only the seed of a dangerous internationalism, but also that of dissolution of any order within the state, of any discipline a society can't live without"²⁵.

The debate on the secondary school reform led to a series of debates concerning the selection between classicism and realism. There were opinions that clearly advocated for the absolute need to reintroduce the classical education in schools (the advocates of classicism). There were other opinions militating for a more permissive, more systematic orientation,

²³ „Aurora”, VII, No. 1.589 of 23 February 1927.

²⁴ „Viitorul”, XI, No. 3.225 of 9 January/22 January 1919; see also „Viitorul”, XX, No. 5.687 of 11 February 1927.

²⁵ „Viitorul”, XI, No. 3.225 of 9 January/22 January 1919.

considering that science “had something to say” related to the selection between classicism and realism. Or, on the contrary, there were opinions that vehemently advocated for an orientation against classicism (those were the modernists – the university professor O. Tafrali used to call them “«primaries», i.e. they had a reduced primary culture”²⁶).

In the context of the regulations for the secondary school, one of the first legislative initiatives to become a law was the one concerning the baccalaureate, the debates on this topic leading to strong reactions in the press as well. Given the fact that the initiative belonged to the liberal minister Angelescu, the liberal press presented the motivation for their law and firmly defended the need to reintroduce the baccalaureate, while the opposition’s press tried to identify the inconveniences and the deficiencies of that law, seeing a reasoning mistake in the liberals’ proposal to reintroduce the baccalaureate. Angelescu’s idea – according to which the reintroduction of the baccalaureate would stop the flow of unprepared students who enrol in university studies – was fought against in the press. The arguments used were that he mistook the causes for the effects, that the reason for their lack of education was the insufficient number of high schools, the penury of teaching staff, libraries, laboratories, the high price of books, the speculation referring to the selling of books, the mediocre salaries of teachers, and not the removal of the baccalaureate exam²⁷. At the same time, opinions were expressed that the system should not make a selection, but should rather preoccupy with not producing weak elements and with identifying the causes for the reduction of the education level in schools²⁸. The same attitude can be seen again a few years later, in 1928, when the debate concentrated on the Law of secondary education and on the principles that served as a basis for the future secondary school.

The issue of technical and vocational education was approached at multiple levels and from different directions, both in the specialty literature and in the written press of that time. While the third decade of the 20th century brought positive results especially to primary education – the secondary and university education being inaccessible to large categories of students – “the state attempted and partially succeeded in complementing the students’ instruction graduating 7 or 8 grades, orienting them towards professions, towards vocational

²⁶ „Viitorul”, XX, No. 5.992 of 10 February 1928.

²⁷ „Aurora”, V, No. 987 of 22 February 1925.

²⁸ „Îndreptarea”, VII, No. 16 of 21 January 1925.

schools”²⁹. The liberal press considered it was appropriate to welcome the needs of the technical and vocational education, by publishing articles that mostly focused on the changes proposed in the organisation of technical education on several levels, orienting towards the establishment of priorities at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, as well as on the specificities and needs of the agricultural, forest or wine-growing education, according to the existing needs. Some specialists sketch in the written press a general outline of what the technical and vocational education should represent in Romania after World War I and in the new configuration given by the union of provinces, while others sketch specific level frameworks for education and curricular programmes for the agricultural, forest or wine-growing education³⁰.

Partly, the talks referring to vocational education were oriented towards the setting of the necessary conditions for the organisation of this type of education, while the debate has also included the points of view referring to the upper forum that should organise this type of education. As to the organisation conditions, many thought this type of education had to take into account the discipline for the soul, the professional and scientific discipline, as well as the specialisation. The discipline for the soul contributed to the formation of education and of the human character, developing the spirit for order, work and accuracy, for beauty and respect. The professional and scientific discipline imposed a minimum study of the scientific knowledge in the given profession, it formed the general scientific culture, while the specialisation solved the material need of any class of workers, the need for usefulness in life. The upper technical education, seen as a whole and according to its manifestation in different countries, frequently appears under the form of two systems: one of a purely specialised character (where a major role is played by specialisation) and the system of an encyclopaedic character (where the scientific discipline was the most important). These differences result from different mentalities, from what the purpose of school was, some opting for the formation of an engineer of conceptions, of creations, others for a goal getter, an organiser, a producer. The official newspaper of the Liberal Party underlined the fact that none of the two systems cumulatively accomplished the three conditions set by the special vocational education. One of the systems emphasized the specialisation to the detriment of the discipline for the soul and for the accumulation of

²⁹ Nicolae Păun, „Școlile de ucenici industriali din Cluj în deceniul al III-lea al secolului XX”, in *Acta Musei Napocensis*, XXI, the County History Museum of Cluj-Napoca, 1984, p. 325.

³⁰ See, for details, „Viitorul”, XI, No. 3.224 of 7 January/19 January 1919.

knowledge, while the other system underlined the scientific discipline, but ignored the specialisation and the discipline for the soul³¹.

The role played by the university in the education process is described in both the specialty literature and the interwar written press. From the very beginning of the first interwar decade, „Viitorul” had published articles where the university was described as a knowledge environment. Universities were not only seen as “schools where certain was taught, endowed with the rather material and external part of culture: laboratories, museums, libraries, seminar rooms”, but also as “focal points of national light, the central establishments where the cultural ideals of a people are formed, as well as the spirit of a nation, and where the upper ethnical energies are directed towards the cultural and national progress”. Universities were “those *alma mater* of culture, the springs of the civilisation currents”³².

In its turn, private education was of interest for the written press especially during the parliamentary debate on the reform project of private education proposed by Angelescu. The draft of a law made a distinction between private and state education, established the school categories that could be set as private institutions, also settling the conditions to be accomplished by schools since their establishment, regulating the courses language of instruction, the syllabus and the rules to be followed by the teaching staff. In this respect, the Law stipulated that the school principals and the teaching staff should be Romanian citizens and have the same qualification as those working in state schools, being also obliged to know the national language (Romanian). Private schools did not have the right to issue diplomas, only certificates attesting the studies. Furthermore, they could not receive any foreign financing, unless the ministry gave its consent. Private schools, mostly frequented by students whose parents were of Romanian origin, imposed Romanian as language of instruction, while in the private schools frequented by those students whose mother tongue was not Romanian, the language of instruction could be the students’ mother tongue, these schools being able to enrol only those students whose mother tongue was identical to the school’s language of instruction. However, irrespective of the school’s language of instruction, the disciplines of Romanian language, Romanian history, Romanian geography and civic instruction had to be taught in Romanian.

³¹ See, for details, „Viitorul”, XIX, No. 5.622 of 23 November 1926.

³² „Viitorul”, XII, No. 3.520 of 15 November 1919.

The Peasants' Party thought that "Angelescu's law discriminated the minorities" or, more than that, they said that "Angelescu's law was elaborated specifically to discriminate the minorities". The Peasants' Party defended their programme and declaration, admitting the "right of ethnical minorities to gather in communities, in order to be able to take care, within the Romanian state, of all cultural and educational interest in their mother tongue. The State's duty was to rightfully contribute to all their living costs". Criticisms went on even to consider the positive results obtained as bad signs, believing that Romania became a topic for debate within the League of Nations because of the draft of law proposed by Angelescu (and not because of the request formulated by the representatives of the minorities), commenting that "this does definitely not increase our credit abroad, because even if justice was always on our side, our country gains a fame of troublemaker, similar to those litigants always going back to court, and there are persons who, even though the judges agree with, are considered troublemakers"³³.

Exhausting all topics dealing with the architecture of the education system on stages of formation and specialisations, I considered it was necessary to make an inventory of what was written in the press regarding school administration, especially the organisation of the ministry, of the teaching staff and of the needs implied by the education process as a whole (schools, canteens, dormitories and libraries). One of the major problems, largely debated, was that of the poor material situation of the teaching staff, most of the articles on this topic offering details regarding the discontent of professors concerning the salary, the work conditions, the political manoeuvres and the administrative control of certain commissions and school inspectors, largely presenting statistics and excerpts from the minutes taken during the reunions of the Teachers' Association, from primary and secondary schools.

The study of the written press and of the information offered by the official newspapers of the political parties created the necessary framework and outlined the details implied by the adoption of each legislative project in the field of education, introducing us – at the same time – in the atmosphere of those times. Given this structure, I finally managed to carry out a classification of topics according to clear fields, which I have later on analysed from the point of view of the politicians as well, of those who had the final saying in the adoption or rejection of the drafts of law proposed. As such, the final chapter – "Legislation on education in the parliamentary debates" – outlines, from the perspective of the debates within the parliamentary

³³ See, for details, „Aurora”, V, No. 1.237 of 19 December 1925.

reunions, a review of the consequences of the war, the controversial reactions regarding the reform projects which some wanted to configure on the legislative, political, institutional and administrative levels.

The analysis of the parliamentary debates brings to light the divergence and the diversity of opinions existing among the political parties referring to the means of reforming primary education and to the actual measures that had to be adopted, especially in what regards the compulsoriness and professionalization of primary education. In the context of the debates on the primary education reform, I. Petrovici – the representative of the Peoples' Party – plastically described the education system, saying: "I see in education a body on several levels, but when I look at it I am less impressed by the fact that the upper level is above the lower level, but I'm impressed by the fact that without the lower level, we wouldn't have the upper level".³⁴

The opinions of the members of the parliament were different in what concerns the provisions for secondary school organisation, the modernisation of secondary education being present in the provisions of the 1928 Law, due to the emphasis on the need to adapt the education process according to each student's skills, the non-respect of the students' skills and abilities being also considered a shortcoming of the school. The fulfilment of this need implied the elasticity of the syllabi, which had to be adjusted according to the students' skills, underlining at the same time that the commissions in charge of the syllabi had to be composed of individuals from outside the school, from different branches of activity, professionals in their fields. From the point of view of D. Ionescu (professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Bucharest and senator of Mureş), the teaching method should focus on active school, "which no longer transform the pupil into passive acquirer of what has been shown or said, but is based in the pupil's active request, making them go as much as possible from the auditive or visual reception to a personal activity"³⁵. For these reasons, Angelescu's proposal for reform, carried out under the form of redefining secondary education, establishing the conditions for the transfer of pupils from one grade to another, respectively for their enrolment in a university, for the renewal of the curriculum and of the syllabus, for the emphasis on the importance of secondary education in the educational process, for the clarification of the teaching staff status (the recruitment procedure for teachers in secondary education, the organisation of the capacity examination, means of

³⁴ *D.A.D.*, the reunion of 30 July 1920, the extraordinary assembly of 1920, published in the Official Gazette No. 34 of 7 August 1920, p. 600.

³⁵ *Reforma învățământului secundar*, dr. D. Ionescu, Imprimeriile Statului, București, 1928, p. 34.

transfer, appointment and permanent positions for the teaching staff), for the clarification and introduction of transparency regarding the conditions in which school building shall be erected, for the clarification of the school committees roles, for the orders regarding the setting up of libraries, laboratories, workshops, museums, dormitories, canteens, not neglecting the past situations, applicable to the schools from the neighbouring territories, situations which required an urgent regulation.

The reform of secondary education promoted the open character of the educational process, adaptable to social realities, as well as its compulsory character for all children aged 7-16. It is important to notice the legislator's intention to ensure a formative character to the process of instruction and education, by introducing in the syllabus, next to the literary and scientific disciplines, some disciplines from the field of arts and dexterities, the set purpose of secondary education being the development of the students' intelligence and skills (in the case of gymnasium) and the strengthening of knowledge (in the case of high school), in order to help them form their own thinking and to set up the basis for specialisation studies at the university.

Some members of the parliament considered the Law on secondary education to be a downfall, which separated us from the legislation of developed societies, which included regulations indicating a stagnation at the level of the 1864 Law. Among them, V.V. Haneş and Lotar Rădăceanu criticised the provisions regarding the number of 50 students established for one class, as it was well known the fact that its optimum was of maximum 30 students. From the perspective of Haneş, another error was represented by the fact that the syllabus and the volume of the disciplines to be taught and learnt by the students did not comply with the pedagogical requirements. Another downfall of the law, from his point of view, was the introduction of examinations at the end of each grade, qualifying secondary education as a "totalitarian law, offensive for the teaching staff", as it involved the dependency of the teaching staff on control bodies, the recruitment of inspectors according to subjective norms, professors being at the discretion of inspectors in what concerns punishments and distinctions, the offending elements being considered the means of teaching improvement through conferences and course. Furthermore, the secondary education law was seen by Haneş as an incomplete one, since it

could not legislate on the preparatory year before university. There were also other opinions that converged towards the affixing of this preparatory year to high schools and not to universities.³⁶

Despite its imperfections, the secondary school reform was remarkable because of the premises from which its conception began: the chance to be offered to the child to be able to orient themselves towards a career, the opportunity to choose what is suitable for them, and not form a too early age, but when – more mature – their skills and beliefs began to take shape. Furthermore, the orientation towards vocational schools was encouraged. They were offered a basis similar to theoretical schools, so that parents should not be discouraged in orienting their children towards vocations, which were sometimes considered degrading in comparison with other professions their children could choose from. Education was divided into three cycles: primary, secondary and tertiary, each one of them having both a theoretical and a practical branch. This draft of a law shows the connection between the educational branches and cycles, the possibility for those with vocation to choose – at a certain point – that branch which best suits their personal interests and skills, attempting to create an educational system where gymnasium is the basis for high school and where secondary education can nurture both the theoretical and the practical branch.

In higher education, the modernisation projects resided not only in collaboration projects with foreign universities, but also in initiatives to transform certain upper education schools into faculties, in proposals to set up new institutes and chairs, or to transform certain conferences into chairs. A long debated topic, which had frequently led to parliamentary debates, was that of politicking in education and in administration, especially when referring to the way in which was carried out the recruitment of university teaching staff and administrative staff. In the context of the debates on centralisation and politicking in universities, minister Negulescu's opinion cannot be left out, as it offers a clear point of view, pleading for the strengthening of the university autonomy and for the reduction of the bureaucratic centralism, underlining the fact that the recruitment of teaching staff in higher education represented one of the leading points of the reform in this field. Consequently, Negulescu criticised the centralisation and the centralising tendencies to control universities³⁷. He also considered that the centralising tendency, as well as

³⁶ D.A.D., *Discursul deputatului V. V. Haneş*, the reunion of 28 February 1929, published in the Official Gazette, part III, No. 41 of 6 May 1929, pp. 1.297–1.311.

³⁷ See, for details, P.P. Negulescu, *Reforma învățământului. Proecte de legi*, 2nd edition, Ed. Casei Școalelor, 1927, p. CXVIII.

the shortcomings of the Romanian system came from the legislating method in 1864. The legislator at that time treated the Romanian universities as upper vocational schools, a fact that has also been proved by the very recruiting norms of university professors, stipulated in that law, partial improvements being brought by the laws of 1898, 1901 and 1912.

Therefore, one may notice the shaping of important legislative proposals dealing with the doubtfulness expressed by the laws previously implemented, bringing also an air of modernisation in both education and educational process, maintaining at the same time the traditional values which confirmed the idea of stability and credibility. Some projects imposed before the members of the parliament, being adopted; others, on the contrary, did not raise the interest of the members of the parliament or led to powerful controversies, political prides, which impeded the legislative process.

As to the regulation having the teaching staff as receivers, the parliamentary discourse during the first interwar era concentrated on general problems concerning the position occupied by the teaching staff in schools and universities, but it also approached issues specific to certain regions. In this respect, the major problems noticed during the parliamentary meetings were the lack of teachers, the inappropriate training of the teaching staff as well as their precarious material situation. Most of the members of the parliament thought the low level of schools was the result of the lack of schools and other school-related facilities, as well as the lack of teaching staff or their insufficient formation, caused by the youngsters' disinterest to work in this field due to the precarious material situation of most professors, especially of teachers. One should retain the speeches accentuating the desperate situation many professors got into, because their salary was not enough to cover the basic needs, clothing, food, heat, and rent, many of them giving up the teaching career. Therefore, young people chose a completely different path from the one of teachers.

Apart from the precarious salaries practiced in education, there was also a lack of harmonisation of the retribution on the entire Romanian territory. The project for budgetary retribution harmonisation – thought to be the most important project that approached the issue of salaries in the budgetary system – led, as expected, to fervent discussions during its debate in the two chambers of the parliament. One of the main orators on this theme was Virgil Madgearu who, in his speech, made a retrospective analysis of Romania's situation, stating that “the issue

of budgetary retribution harmonisation is part of the general problem regarding the normalisation of our administrative body”³⁸.

In conclusion, the study and the analysis of the press and of the parliamentary debates on the problem of education in Romania, during the first interwar decade, show that in the configuration of the interwar education, the emphasis was mostly put on the rethinking of the primary and secondary education, due to the fact it was thought they prepared the future minds that would go to university. Still, there were also points of view manifesting for the orientation of efforts towards university, the institution preparing the future teaching staff for primary and secondary schools. As a whole, the unanimous opinion was that the educational reform had to be rethought, taking into account the structure of the rural and urban population (in the rural area, the Romanian population predominated, while in towns the Romanians were mixed with foreign populations). Therefore, one may also notice that, despite the divergences and the critical attitudes manifested referring to the proposed desiderata, a special place among the preoccupations of the governing parties was the will to create an education adapted to the conditions specific to our country, an education that would take into account the situation in which the Romanian state was developing, as well as the needs to be fulfilled.

The educational reform, in its complexity, was mostly oriented towards the adoption of fundamental laws on the organisation of studies in primary, secondary, private, denominational and higher education, towards the unification of education. There was a special attention and a manifest interest to set up and organise new research institutes, foundations or professional associations, or any other aspects referring to the covering of the material needs of the teaching staff, the equipment of school buildings and the purchase of materials necessary for the good development of the educational process. Both the press and the parliamentary debates confirm the opposition of the political parties, the Peasants’ Party often criticised the Liberals’ actions and their reform projects, while the Liberals eulogised these actions.

I have to underline here those points of view emphasizing the fact that all actions to direct education should have as basis the coordination between the measures adopted by the school administrative authorities and the scientific principles. The non-respect of science in certain fields of activity could lead to immediate, serious consequences, while in the field of education

³⁸ *D.A.D.*, the reunion of 15 May 1927, the extraordinary assembly of 1927, published in the Official Gazette, No. 113 of 27 July 1927, p. 3.894, col. I.

and culture “the consequences of errors manifest at a later stage, and when they do manifest themselves – no matter how serious they are for the existence and the future of the entire people – the connection between the effect phenomenon and the distant causes is hard to establish...”³⁹.

The ten-year school-related oeuvre was appreciated at the end of the first interwar decade in the discourse delivered by the deputy V. Rășcanu. He mentioned minister Angelescu’s work in his attempt to unravel these imperious necessities of social and national order, seeking at any costs to have schools and teachers, making an enormous effort, given the country’s population “tired from illness and work”. At the same time, however, the speech also reflected the failures in education, the increase of the number of intellectuals whose destiny is deplorable (our country has reached the point of having *an intellectual plethora*), the lack of libraries and laboratories within universities; therefore “the education of those poor people, the product of a miserable high school, was nothing but an illusion”⁴⁰. Despite the fact that at all levels of education the number of enrolled students and of graduates has increased, a great number of children remain illiterate. As compared to other European countries, the need for education was still unsatisfied in Romania. The statistics at the end of the first interwar decade, more precisely in 1928-1929, showed that out of 3,817,236 children of appropriate age for school (between 5 and 18) only 2,283,211 were enrolled, while 1,534,025 youngsters still did not go to school (they were not enrolled, they dropped out, completely illiterate, even mentally challenged or impossible to educate), out of which 877,447 would have had to be enrolled in a primary school. This was practically impossible because the 21,936 teachers that were needed could not be trained by the normal schools existing at that moment⁴¹. In 1932, Romania had a percentage of school attendance of 59.81% in primary schools, as compared to other 27 countries analysed, being ranked 26, followed only by Turkey, with a percentage of 33%.

Following what historiography itself states concerning the period between the two world wars, it is logical to consent to sketching this period as “an era full of vivacity and creativity, where Romanians from all social classes experienced new ideas, from philosophy to poetry and

³⁹ G.G. Antonescu, *Educație și cultură. Actualități și Perspective*, «Cultura Românească» Institut de Editură, Arte Grafice și Confecțiuni de Hârtie, Bucharest, 1928, p. 240.

⁴⁰ *D.A.D.*, the reunion of 25 January 1929, published in the Official Gazette No. 18 of 14 February 1929, pp. 559-560.

⁴¹ G.G. Antonescu, Iosif I. Gabrea, *Organizarea învățământului în România – Albania – Anglia – Austria – Belgia – Bulgaria – Cehoslovacia – Danemarca – Elveția – Finlanda – Franța – Germania – Grecia – Irlanda – Italia – Jugoslavia – Japonia – Norvegia – Olanda – Polonia – Portugalia – Rusia Sovietică – Scoția – Spania – Statele Unite – Suedia – Turcia – Ungaria*, Ed. „Institutului Pedagogic Român”, Bucharest, 1933, pp. 39-40.

from politics to great businesses. However, it also was a period of disputes and divisions, as Romanians were forced to reorganise institutions that have been set up long before, to reanalyse the pursued traditions and to face the problems of a rising bourgeois society towards urbanisation, a phenomenon that was common throughout Europe⁴².

⁴² Mihai Bărbulescu, Dennis Deletant, Keith Hitchins, Șerban Papacostea, Pompiliu Teodor, *Istoria României*, Editura Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1998, p. 422.