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*The Students from Romania in the Third Reich.
1933-1945*

PhD thesis

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Keywords: peregrinatio academica, student migration, cultural transfer, ideological transfer, education, elites, nationalism, Fascism, National-Socialism, anti-Semitism, propaganda.

Abstract

For too long, the historiography on South Eastern Europe was focused only on the geo-political history. In the last two decades we could notice the increased tendency to address the history of this region also from the point of view of the society, culture, ideas and everyday life. It became increasingly important to study not only the elites, especially political elites, but also the study of the groups and individuals, whose role in the evolution of historical phenomena has long been ignored.

The history of totalitarian regimes was treated mainly from the perspective of the political elites, being analysed their decisions rather than how they have been implemented. The fact that these regimes were participatory systems, in which each individual had its role – even if that role was to perform their job, or even to be silent at times when should have protested or acted - was overlooked. We consider that the historiography on the 20th century totalitarian regimes in Europe should pay more attention to the actions of individuals and groups, focusing on the interaction between politics, culture and society.

Culture in general, cultural history and cultural studies also benefited from a growing attention from historians, starting with the 80s-90s. In this period, the study of historical processes and phenomena imposed as an alternative to the national histories. In this context came to life what the Anglo-Saxon historians have called „entangled history”, the French „histoire croisée” and the Germans „Transfergeschichte”, a historiographical trend which takes the idea of cultural transfer as its starting point in the analysis of historical processes. In other words, one can not speak about historical events and processes without taking into consideration the migration of ideas that contributed to, if not determined, those developments. Moreover, the concept of „cultural exchange” was permanently introduced in the contemporary historiography by Peter Burke¹.

In this context the topic of the student migration came to the attention of the historians, as the students were considered to be one of the most important agents of cultural transfer. There is also a growing importance given to the history of education, the migration, the formation mechanisms of the intellectual elite, the history of youth („Histoire de la jeunesse”), the history

¹ Peter Burke, *Kultureller Austausch*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2000; Idem, *Translating Knowledge, Translating Cultures*, in Michael North (ed.), „Kultureller Austausch in der Frühen Neuzeit“, Böhlau Verlag, Köln, Weimar, Wien, 2009.

of mentalities, alterity („Image de l'autre”) etc, in the spirit of the New Global History² and New Cultural History³.

Our work falls into these historiographical trends. We tried to analyze, from the point of view of classical history, but also the history of culture and ideas, from the sociological and anthropological point of view, the topic of the students from Romania studying at German institutions of higher education during the Nazi regime.

It is necessary to pay more attention to the student migration in Germany.

First, historians have addressed topics of diplomatical, political, economical, even cultural history, but without paying sufficient attention to education, which is essential for defining a country's development and its intellectual elite formation. Secondly, it is important for the Romanian historiography to research the contributions and influences the Western universities had upon the formation of the Romanian intellectual elites, especially for the fact that, in the period up to the end of the First World War, the institutions of higher education in Romania were not sufficiently developed, so that most of the Romanian elite was educated abroad. Most of the students from Romania preferred mainly the French and German universities, and secondly the Austrian, Belgian or Swiss ones.

Although an old phenomenon (starting with the Renaissance), *peregrinatio academica* held – especially since the second half of the 19th century - an important role in the elite formation, circulation of ideas, etc. The role of the student migration has grown increasingly over the 20th century. After the World War I, some states appreciated especially its function of cultural propaganda, and encouraged it for this purpose. After the Second World War, it reached a scale not known before. Today, the student mobility is granted with a special emphasis. In order to graduate from a Western university, a student must spend at least one semester at a foreign university.

All this justifies our interest in this topic, in the context of the current development of student mobility, of the fact that today almost every student from the EU studies at least one

² See especially: *Histoire sociale, histoire globale?*, Actes du colloque des 27-28 janvier 1989, sous la direction de Christophe Charle, Paris, Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1993; Bruce Mazlish, *The New Global History*, New York, Edit. Routledge Chapman & Hall, 2006; Georg G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang, *A global history of modern historiography*, Harlow, Edit. Pearson, 2008; *Histoire globale. Un nouveau regard sur le monde*, coordonné par Laurent Testot, Auxerre, Edit. Sciences Humaines, 2008 ș.a.

³ Lynn Hunt (ed), *The New Cultural History: essays by Aletta Biersack*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, USA, 1989.

semester at a foreign university. From this perspective, the German model of university deserves a special attention, since it was the one that favored the most the mobility of both the students and the professors.

The topic of the student migration from Romania to the German universities is especially relevant during 1933-1945, the Nazi time, since the attitude of the German authorities towards them underwent a change: the foreign students became target and tool of propaganda. This is why many of the Romanian students in the Third Reich played the role of agents of transfer for the extremist ideology.

This PhD thesis aims not only to fill in a missing chapter in the history of the academic migration phenomenon. Unlike most of the work on this kind of topic, we focused to a lesser extent on a quantitative assessment of the phenomenon, paying a greater attention to the mechanisms, motivations and effects of the study of young people from Romania at the Nazi Germany's institutions of higher education. We were particularly interested in the logic behind these academical exchanges, as well as in the interests of the two states – which were not by far only cultural and scientific - to encourage the student migration from Romania to Germany. Moreover, the political context of the period covered by our thesis, 1933-1945, determined our research results to be more interesting and more meaningful than we would normally expect from a simple analysis of the migration of the Romanian students to German universities.

This finding has a double edge.

On one hand, analysing the situation of the young people from Romania studying in Nazi Germany allowed us a more complete and complex picture on how Hitler's Germany carried out its cultural and ideological propaganda activities in South Eastern European countries. At the same time, we noticed, without much surprise, however, how politicized was the German system of higher education during the Third Reich and, moreover, how every action and every decision taken by the German authorities was passed through the filter of Nazi political interests and ideological obsessions. In Romania, the situation was similar. The political interests were those who determined the Romanian cultural policy and its cultural and academic relations with other countries. Furthermore, the academic milieu was deeply politicized, and most of the students were nationalist and anti-Semitic, some being members of the extreme right parties. Therefore, the decision of these students to pursue a German institution of higher education not always

relied on scientific criteria or professional interests, but on the sympathy these students manifested towards the political regime established in Germany in 1933.

On the other hand, the turmoil of the period, which makes the research so interesting, makes it also incomplete. It was impossible for us to establish fully the quantity - even at the level of percentage - of students from Romania who studied in the Third Reich. We couldn't visit every institution of higher education in Germany to investigate the transcripts and detect all the Romanian students. Even if we had done this, there would have been also partial results, and the research would have required a much longer period of time. And this is because a large part of the German archival documents from the period 1933-1945 have been misplaced or destroyed during the war.

This PhD thesis has a high degree of originality. We used secondary sources, literature, either to establish the context, or as a model. However, as we have already pointed out, there are no works to deal specifically with the topic of the students from Romania who studied in the Third Reich. Therefore, the primary sources – especially archival documents and university statistics - were the ones truly relevant in the development of this work.

Together with the introduction (Chapter I) and the conclusions (Chapter VIII), the thesis is divided into 8 chapters.

The second chapter aims to provide some features of the student migration during the Modern Era. We were interested mainly in the migration of the young people from Romania to Western universities, especially to those from France and Germany, in the second half of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century. We focused on motivations and pathways of this migration, as well as on the options of the Romanian students who wished to study abroad. Given that most of the political and cultural elite in Romania in that period was educated either at French, or at German institutions of higher education, we considered necessary to offer a brief overview of the two university systems, which were so different and, at the same time, were in constant competition throughout the 19th and 20th century.

The third chapter analyzes the coordinates on which the academic and students exchanges took place during the interwar. We tried to emphasize the characteristics of the German cultural milieu during the Weimar Republic, as well as the Romanian cultural milieu throughout the entire interwar period. This chapter shows clearly that the Nazi cultural and ideological propaganda had its roots in the cultural policies pursued by the Weimar Republic. In addition, the examination of the Romanian academia in this period reveals a large number of similarities between the nationalist and anti-Semitic attitudes of the Nazi authorities, and the same kind of attitudes of the Romanian authorities. Also, the Romanian interwar studentship appears to us as being infected by nationalism and anti-Semitism, so that it is not difficult to understand the attraction the academical milieu of the Nazi Germany exerted on the Romanian youth. This explains the predisposition of the Romanian students to sympathize with the German politics after 1933 and with the Nazi ideology.

This chapter also provides an overview of the situation of the students from Romania studying at foreign universities during 1918-1944, and of the situation of the foreign students enrolled at German universities during the Weimar Republic.

Chapter four examines the peregrinatio academica phenomenon from Romania to Germany between 1933-1945. We focused on the reorganization of the German higher education system after 1933, emphasizing the four aspects which characterized it: the organization based on the "Führerprinzip"; the appointment and elimination of professors based on ideological and political grounds; the politicization of the scientific disciplines through their orientation to "popular", "national" principles; and the instrumentalization of the research in the direction of "the victory of the German people". Then, we addressed in detail the issue of the politics of the Third Reich towards the foreign students. Here, one could notice two trends: on the one hand, the attempt to attract a large number of foreign students at German universities – due to the decrease in their number after 1933, but also due to the major importance these students possessed in terms of propaganda – on the other hand the politicized selection of the foreign students and their use as agents of propaganda.

The migration of the Romanian students to the German institutions of higher education was placed in the context of the development of the political relations between Romania and Germany. The relations between the two countries, initially economical, who later developed, as

an annex to the economical agreements, also at academic level, determined an increase in the number of the Romanian students at German universities. The rise of the far-right in Romania and its success among the students was another reason for the young Romanian people to choose the Third Reich as the place to study. After 1940 and the entry of Romania into alliance with Germany, almost all the Romanian youth studying abroad were enrolled at German institutions of higher education.

In chapter four, we are also describing the formal basis on which the student migration took place – institutions and cultural agreements –, the types of migration – long-term studies, medium-term specialisations and short-term studies – as well as the pathways through which it took place. Here too, the interests related to the foreign policy and propaganda of the two countries were highlighted.

This chapter includes the analysis of the statistics and reports referring to the actual situation of the students from Romania studying in the Third Reich. We pointed out the stages of this academic migration, the German institutions of higher education preferred by these young people, and their professional options.

Chapter five provides as case-studies the situation of the Romanian students at four German institutions of higher education, namely the ones that benefited of the largest number of Romanian students during this period: Friedrich-Wilhelm University Berlin, Technical University Berlin-Charlottenburg, Ludwig-Maximilian University München and Leipzig University. The analysis is not limited to the Romanian students enrolled here, but provides also a brief history of the institutions, focusing on the atmosphere – especially the political one - and the changes that occurred there after 1933.

The sixth chapter returns to the delicate topic of the relationship between the German higher education and the political interests of the Nazi regime. Here, we emphasized mainly the political and ideological component of the student migration from Romania to the Third Reich. We highlighted the profile the foreign student had to have, according to the German authorities: to be male, intelligent, a good professional, active, to express himself publically, to sympathize with National-Socialism and, in general, with the far-right.

This chapter presents also the links – regarding the student exchanges - between the cultural milieu in Nazi Germany on the one hand, and the Legionary movement, the Christian student organizations and leaders of the Romanian Orthodox Church, on the other hand. We identified several ways in which the Romanian students in the Third Reich expressed their commitment to the Nazi Germany: some of them in various reports, accounts and statements (Constantin Săndulescu-Godeni); others made propaganda in favor of Nazi Germany through newspaper articles and writings that were published in Romania (Emil Cioran, Horia Stamatu, Dumitru Cristian Amzăr, Ernest Bernea); in some cases the ideological influence manifested in the way they practiced their profession, some in a very obvious way (Iordache Făcăoaru), others in a more subtle way (Ovidiu Papadima, Constantin Noica).

Finally, chapter seven analyzes the situation of the Jewish students from Romania who were studying at German universities around 1933. We highlighted the effect the anti-Jewish measures adopted in Germany after 1933 had on the presence of the Jewish students from Romania in the German higher education. We also emphasized the differences between how Jewish students from the Reich and Jewish students from foreign countries were treated in the Reich. In addition, this chapter presents the anti-Semitic policies in the Romanian universities, the Jewish students who returned after studying abroad being targets of harassment when they wanted to equalize their foreign university diploma or use it to find a position in Romania.