

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 371 975

SO 023 353

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 TITLE Post-War-History and Unification of Europe in Textbooks. The Romanian Experience.  
 PUB DATE Jun 92  
 NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the European Seminar on Post War History and Unification of Europe in Textbooks (Berlin, Germany, June 1992).  
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS Communism; Content Analysis; Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Historiography; \*History Instruction; \*History Textbooks; Marxism; \*Modern History; \*Social Change; Socialism; Teacher Education; Textbook Bias; \*Textbook Content; Textbook Research  
 IDENTIFIERS European Community; \*Rumania; USSR

ABSTRACT

This document surveys the changes in the content of history textbooks in Romania from the end of World War II to 1991. Post war Romanian education is examined through the education laws of 1948, 1958, and 1975, and at the syllabi and textbooks used. The textbooks are relevant for such an analysis because they represent the main material support of didactic information. The study examined 15 editions of middle and high school texts published from 1957 to 1991. History teaching followed the same stages as the entire social and political life of the country. The specifics of history teaching depended on the degree of implication of the political factor in the elaboration of objectives, adequate content for attaining the objectives, and the methodological framework. The first stage of the post war education system in Romania began with the Education Law of 1948 through which Stalinist viewpoints on society and history emerged. By the mid 1960s Romanian history texts no longer placed the Soviet Union in a key role. During this period topics after World War II were grouped as: (1) the capitalist states; (2) "popular democracies," the socialist or communist countries; (3) national liberation movements in colonial countries; (4) the international communist and working class movement; and (5) science and culture. The 1991 textbooks reflect the elimination of value judgments from the titles, groupings of problems facing human society as a whole, and the growing recognition of the importance of individuals. (DK)

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Post-War-History and Unification of Europe in Textbooks  
The Romanian Experience

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POST-WAR-HISTORY AND UNIFICATION

OF EUROPE IN TEXTBOOKS.

THE ROMANIAN EXPERIENCE

"Changer l'enseignement  
de l'histoire, c'est un  
peu changer la société"  
André Ségol

The past couple of years were marked by dramatic changes as far as politics, economy and culture is concerned. We not only think at the former Iron Curtain, but also at the fact that Europe has regained her awareness. The problems raised by the idea of forming an European military task force other than the NATO forces, represents only one aspect of a much wider and more fundamental abandonment from previous ways of thinking international relations. Such a new position asks for a common effort aimed at the reframing the European unity, consisting in the integration of former socialist countries. This fact is, however, dependent on the ability of Europeans to adapt themselves at the new situation. From this viewpoint, the mutual understanding of the particular problems and peculiarities are one of the major prerequisites in the creation of the new Europe. The instrument that can be considered as having the greatest chances in reinforcing the ideal of a new Europe are the history textbooks. But, in order to act as instruments of understanding other people, they have to be redesigned, especially in Eastern Europe.

1. The situation of Textbooks in Romania

The people in Eastern Europe have been under a special kind of cultural influence - in the broadest sense of the word - which they could hardly escape. The influence was official established and the central institution which contributed to the creation of a "new man" (the official slogan used to describe the human personality of the socialist society, at which everybody should have aimed) was

the school. Therefore, history-teaching - that was the subject matter which dealt mostly with the social and political dimension of the individual - had to undergo a special process of "readjustment" in order to fulfill its "duties". This situation was due to the fact that history could very well overwhelm the educational ideal which was established at the level of political decision, where nothing looked like democracy. We shall start by analysing the mechanisms and forms of ideological distortion which functioned in the teaching of contemporary world history in Romania.

### 1.1. Diagnosis

Like any other textbooks, the history textbook represents, if not the general accepted point of view about the issues in debate, at least an official point of view of it and it is possible to identify what is supposed to be the result of the teaching of a certain content. It is obvious that the educational ideal was well far from reality. Another distortion was introduced by the educational ideal itself (this problem shall be later looked upon).

In post-war Romania, formal education has passed through several stages, which can be well identified and analyzed by studying the education laws (the most important are those of 1948, 1948, and 1975). At the level of content, the bulk of information can be observed in the syllabi and textbooks used during the communist era. The relevance of textbooks for such a kind of analysis is due to the fact that it represents the main material support of didactic information.

#### 1.1.1. General approach

The 15 editions used for making our observations (given the fact that in Romania we have one single textbook for each level, it was not so difficult) were:

- for the sixth form (middle school) : 1991;
- for the seventh form : 1957, 1966, 1975;

- for the tenth form (high school) : 1958, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1975;
- for the twelveth form : 1978, 1987, 1991.

The teaching of history in the Romanian school was, and still is, done in a cyclical system of teaching, by resuming at the higher levels the elements which were studied at the previous levels. The content differs in the emphasis put on the formative dimension (i.e. the political education), at the cost of the informative dimension. The teaching of history has also followed the same stages as the entire social and political life. As already stressed, the specificity of history teaching depended on the degree of implication of the political factor in the elaboration of objectives, the setting up of the adequate content for attaining the objectives and the methodological framework.

#### 1.1.2. The Soviet Influence

The first stage of the post-war educational system in Romania was settled through the Education Law of 1948, by which history as a subject matter has been profoundly changed. The most important shift was the emergence of Stalinist viewpoints on society and the past, present and future of mankind. The necessity of constraining the new type of society has determined radical changes:

- a very harsh criticism of the historiography of the years before 1945, who was baptised as "cosmopolite";
- the substitution of the old textbooks with simple translations of Soviet textbooks;
- the introduction of special teacher training programs ( an admixture between in-service training and regular courses and seminars) for the so-called bourgeois teachers who were compelled to try to cope with the new way of thinking history;
- this action of remodelling both the subject matter and the teachers was based also on translations of Soviet teaching indications, which stressed that history in school had as its pinpoint the

development of the "/.../ marxist - leninist outlook of life /.../" in the personality of children.

- the "readjustment" of some historical facts, in order to give a historical basis to the soviet - romanian "friendship" (e.g. the part of the slavs in romanian history).

The presence of Soviet elements in the spiritual life of Romania was reinforced through some institutions; the most significant of them were: the Maxim Gorki Educational Institute for Russian Language and Literature (founded 1945 in Bucharest); the Institute of Romanian + Soviet Researches (founded 1947 in Bucharest); the Romanian - Russian Museum, with subsidiaries in 27 cities. But the most significant feature of the Soviet control over the Romanian teaching system was that the Russian language was imposed as a compulsory foreign language on all the school-children ( the adults had to learn it too); a brief mention should be made concerning the existence of Soviet counsellors at the Romanian Universities (especially at the Faculties of History). This situation came to its end in 1956 (but more evidently after 1965) when new textbooks were written by romanian authors.

### 1.1.3. Data presentation (Romanian textbooks between 1957 - 1991)

One of the definitions given to content analysis is the following: "Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematical and quantitative description of the evident content of communication". The elements that were taken in account are:

- the year of publication of the textbook;
- the topics;
- the objectives stated in the textbooks;
- the aim of the subject;
- the main elements of content;
- special remarks about Capitalism, Socialism, the Soviet Union, Europe;
- the elements of didactic discourse: historical sources, visual

materials (didactic discourse meaning all the elements that encourage a directive learning and/or underlie selfeducation).

#### 1.1.3.1. High school textbooks

High school textbooks have been published regularly at the beginning of each schoolyear, together with translations in German, Hungarian and Russian (these translations were stopped in the early eighties); sometimes, variants were published as well in French, English, Italian. Beginning with the schoolyear 1978 - 1979, this subject matter had the title "Fundamental Problems of Modern and Contemporary World History", which shows to some extent the search for a well definite and univocal criticism. In 1990, the old nomination ("Modern and Contemporary World History") has replaced the old title.

#### 1.1.3.2. The Topics

The topics that were constantly integrated were:

- (a) The capitalist states after World War II; with some variants: "Contemporary Capitalist World"(1978); "The Situation of the Main Capitalist Countries in the Post-War Period"(1987);
- (b) The popular democracies after World War II; with variants: "The socialist countries after World War II"(1967); "The triumph of popular-democratic and socialist revolutions in a group of countries of Europe, Asia and America"(1978); the latter will be completed with the formula ".../The construction of socialism and comunism";
- (c) The national liberty movement in the colonial countries; with the variant "The dissolution of the colonial system of imperialism. Problems of the developing countries";
- (d) The international communist and working class movement after World War II;
- (e) The development of contemporary science and culture.

Before presenting the titles of the 1991 edition, which affects

major changes, there are some remarks that have to be made. In contrast to the 1958 edition, in which the Soviet Union post-war history represented a separate topic, by the mid sixties this topic was integrated in the one which dealt with the history of socialist states. This shift represents the disappearance of the official key-role of Soviet Union as "the headlight of the world". Of course, this change, at the level of the school discourse, didn't mean the disappearance of the real political role of the USSR; it is also a part of the new national history movement started by Ceausescu in his time. The fact that these changes had a political and not a scientific base is proved by the fact that the entire Romanian history was influenced by it. As an example, we mention that at the same time when the national traditions of the working class (not solely those of the Romanian workers) were rediscovered, the influence of the Slavs in the emergence of the Romanian people was replaced by other elements (the Dacians and the Romans). The appearance of a topic dedicated to the international communist movement (seen as a series of independent movements which share "mutual interests") reinforces our opinion that it was the Stalinist model - focused on the Soviet Communist Party - that was repelled; the solution applied was the elaboration of a new model which didn't try to argue with the system. On the contrary, the nationalist discourse was an element who had to point the validity of socialist society. It also transformed the rest of the world in an indefinite vague medium. It is, thus, not surprising that Europe doesn't appear as a unit. At that moment, Romania was between two forces (but in fact they were at least partially symbols): the United States and the Soviet Union.

Another problem is the significant shift from the title "Popular democracies" to the title "Triumph of Popular-Democratic and Socialist Revolutions". As far as the first title is concerned, the intention to create a particular vocabulary is obvious. Because



the western world was a democratic one (and had specific traditions) and naturally used this word, the socialist system had to be better than that. It became not only a "democracy", but it also became "popular". The terms are usual, but their connection was new and had to give specificity to the political system. The latter title shows the expansion of a vocabulary and linguistic formulas who had to cover the erosion at the conceptual level and at the level of reality. There is an enthusiastic marching forward who had to be counterfeited. Abaroque argumentation shows the greater difficulty in creating thrustworthy justifications.

There are also signs of acceptance of the new realities. The theme "Fundamental Characteristics of International Relations after World War II", whose content was initially thought as a part of the theme referring to the capitalist countries, appears isolated in 1978. We consider that this topic can be related to the opening of the détente period inx the East - West relations.

The 1991 schoolbook for modern and contemporary history has the following topics:

- (a) The general situation of the world in the post-war period;
- (b) The decolonisation after World War II; Problems of the developing countries;
- (c) The main traits of the evolution of international relations after World War II;
- (d) The development of contemporary science and culture.

The changes that were introduced by the new textbook can be considered as positive, but only by taking into account the previous situation; they are related with:

- the elimination of judgements-of-value from the titles; it is a very important step towards a new kind of approach to history-teaching, in which the presentation of all elements which make an event, and their integration in schemes, can give an opportunity

- for the construction of personal judgements-of-value;
- the grouping of the information in connection with the great problems of the society as a whole, or of a great part of it;
- for the first time in the history of post-war Romanian textbooks, were introduced the criteria which helped selecting the different contents. In this particular case, the functioning criterion was the "/.../ wide and longstanding influence which the given events have had on the lines of evolution of humanity".

#### 1.1.3.3. The Objectives

The objectives of teaching contemporary history have been constantly formulated in terms of knowledge. The students should have known things about:

- the way of evolution of the mankind;
- the fight of the people for liberty and the necessity of these fights;
- the direction of the development of history, which in the 1958 textbook was seen as being "/.../ the transformation of the whole world into a new house common to all free and equal people,/.../the socialist society".

The accumulation of this knowledge should have prepared the students to become "active and conscious fighters for progress and socialism".

#### 1.1.3.4. The 1991 Objectives

The 1991 textbook tries to introduce new objectives by:

- accentuating the individualistic side of the human personality instead of the enrollment under the sign of class battles;
- admitting that the ideal of progress belongs to the whole mankind and not only to one political ideology.

Nevertheless, the formulation of these objectives shows that the socialist system managed to viciate fundamental terms and concepts for a democratic society. Formulas such as "fight for social and national liberty" or "scientific understanding of the phenomena

occurring in society today" cannot convince teachers, nothing to say about students. Besides the fundamental problems of the school reform, we have to add the problem of linguistically reforming the objectives of history teaching.

#### 1.1.4. Europe in Romanian Textbooks

The textbooks we have analysed contain but few explicit data about the European world. The term as such appears for the first time in connection with terms like "capitalism", "socialism", "imperialism" "democracy", "internationalism". The field of references is constituted as follows:

- as "European civilisation", defended by the Red Army from the "savagely fascism" (only in the 1958 edition);
- as "little Europe"; the concept is equated with the European Community and it used only in the 1958 edition, that is shortly after the appearance of the E.C.;
- as "European Community" (in all editions after 1958);
- as "European Community of Coal and Steel" (in the 1978 and following editions);
- as the "area of triumph of popular-democratic revolutions" (in the 1967 and following editions);
- as way of acting for peace, and in relation with the Helsinki Conference (in the 1975 and following editions);
- in other contexts in which we have phrases like "the presence of American monopolies; "the relations of the USA with the European countries".

The rather slight appearance of the geopolitical and cultural reality that is post-war Europe is not surprising. The membership of South-East Europe to a system with oecumenic pretentions - who had to be accomplished if not in practice, then in theory, and if not today, then tomorrow - had lead to a perfect functioning of the Iron Curtain in what concerns the political and spiritual relationships with

Europe, in spite of the official propaganda who tried to hide the major gap created ideologically and politically. The solution adopted was the reorientation towards other spaces - the Muslim world, Africa, Asia - in other words, the Third World, which, of course, finds its autonomous place in the teaching topic.

### 1.2. The practical reality of the using the textbooks

After the 1989 events, there was a clear outlook of a new perspective of the issues in debate. The previous discussed elements presented, when taken in account the daily reality of history teaching, another dimension. The teacher was forced, against his will and knowledge, to teach a content whose message was, at the best, deprived of any significance to him. For most of the time he avoided the controversial chapters in order not to teach something he didn't believe in. This is why we have to face a certain informal or unofficial inefficiency in the presentation of this part of the textbooks. On the other side, the student, fascinated by a world he only heard about, refuses emotionally and intellectually to participate in what he considers to be more or less false (the media had a great role to play in the opposition of the students against an ideologically structured learning). These things are of an even larger interest as the official power did not keep its promises. The festivist character of the communist regime made quite frequently these contradictions to come out.

### 2. The necessity of elaboration of a new outlook on textbooks

Beginning with 1990, history as science and as subject matter underwent terrible debates. Some opinions, objective or not, went so far as to refuse everything that has been done in this field during the last decades.. The regain of the proper status of this subject matter in school and in society presupposes a vigorously sustained reformation.

An important component of this reformative approach consists

in the necessity of elaborating a new outlook on textbooks. For this, we should take into consideration:

- (a) the scientific and ideological values suggested by the textbooks (for this reason we need a proper selection of the suggested criteria);
- (b) the informational and especially the formational objectives which a textbook is interested to promote;
- (c) the optimisation of the learning of a subject through the textbook.

After a short period of correcting and completion of the old textbooks, we need experimental and theoretical researches on the base of which we should be able to design new textbooks. In the same time, without neglecting our traditional background, we should integrate our reform in the general frame of European educational reform which could lead to a possible concept (and application) of a "learning offer" made by history. \*

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\* paper presented at the European seminar "Post-war History and Unification of Europe in Textbooks. Prospects after the End of the Cold War"; Berlin, June 1992.