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The idea of university in the Romanian culture: national aspirations and European models (1848-1918)

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Abstract

The university and the educational system were configured and altogether absorbed by the closed relational, cultural and social-economic-political environment in which they developed as independent phenomena and segments, but also with multiple external determinations, implications and influences. In relation with this social-political-economic level of historical development and also with the spiritual one that faced the objectives and necessities of a certain age, incorporated in the large development and transformation processes of the society, the university was characterized through the particularities of the social organization of education that constituted the content of the educational system in which were absorbed influences, examples and models from abroad.

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1. Preliminary considerations

The history of the university in the Romanian cultural space has a great importance both in the evolution of education institutionalization and in relation with the development of culture according to the political situation of the central and south-eastern Europe. In the preoccupations of the education and university history historiography from our country was not always drawn a distinction between the history of the higher education and the history of the university, the higher education being usually treated as an institutional reality very little differentiated during many centuries. Nicolae Iorga said that the origins of the Romanian higher education began in the 12th century, stating, in the same time, that we can talk about “a higher, already stabilized and functional

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school” no later than in the next century. As a consequence of the Renaissance humanism ideology and the spread turbulence that covered Europe from the religious point of view, in the 14th century, on the Romanian territory too, few attempts regarding the foundation of university institutions started to appear.

2. The Romanian education and the absorption of models at the beginning of the modern age

Our historiography appreciates that towards the end of the 17th century, along with the efforts of constituting a superior school in Bucharest by Şerban Vodă Cantacuzino and the ruler Constantin Brâncoveanu, it was noticed an obvious desire of detachment from the significances of the medieval university.

The preoccupation for the content of education and for the organization of the studies in the academies from the Romanian Principalities is more and more visible starting with the 18th century. Thus, the Renaissance meaning of the Academy is prolonged towards the 17th - 18th centuries, according to the movement that originated in Italy, becoming developed in a new conception about value and content of science education. The studies at the Bucharest and Iași were realized, in the same way as at the European universities, in a classical language (Greek or Latin). The main outcome of the Romanian academies orientation was – as A.D.Xenopol also mentioned – that the elite of our society become acquainted and used with the abstract and scientific notions, preparing the field for a fertile contact with the modern European culture.

The creation of the modern Romanian national state involved the solving of new problems, related to the institutional field. Therefore, the school headmaster Ion Maiorescu, reported in 1861 that it is absolutely necessary a higher education in Romania in order to form a national intellectual group who would have different political and administrative functions in the state. As regarding the higher education, it is registered, starting with 1859, several bills that were supposed to render the ruler sensitive. The fact that the university problem became a fundamental state question is also proved by the content of the message delivered by Cuza on the 6th of September 1959. On this occasion, the ruler showed that up until that moment the higher education had not met all the expectations, had been orientated especially to the liberal professions. Saying that Romania had other needs too, appreciating in the same time the role played by the faculty of letters, science, law and medicine, Cuza argued the request for training specialists in an “economic and administrative science faculty” and also in “agriconomic, industrial and commercial science faculties”.7

From the institutional point of view, the foundation of the University from Iași was a transcript of the provisions of the law from 1851, therefore an inclusion of all the four faculties in one institution that, this time, was called University.

Four years later, on the 4th of July 1864, the ruler Al. I. Cuza signed the decree in which was decided the foundation of the University from Bucharest. In the Report handed by D. Bolintineanu, in which was argued this document, he requested the ruler to approve that all the faculties from Bucharest to bear the name of The University form Bucharest.8

The law on public education, promulgated on the 25th of November/the 7th of December 1864, defined neither the concept of university nor mentioned the role that this institution ought to have in the life of our nation and state.

In the Austrian monarchy, after the Revolutions of 1848, the situation of our education depended on the oscillations between liberalism and centralism. The promises made to the Romanian nation regarding the equality of voting to all the levels of school education were rather formal, because those institutions had not been founded, therefore, neither had the higher education. Although the idea of founding a university in Transylvania was approved by the court from Vienna, yet, it refused to acknowledge its belonging to a nation or another. It was

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2 N., Iorga, L enseignement supérieur en Roumanie, Bucharest, 1931, p.9
not agreed also the initiative about the building by each nation, of its university, the reason being that even a greater separation would be produced among the peoples of the Empire.9

In 1852, the Emperor was against the functioning of an Academia at Cluj (Hungarian) and Sibiu (German) and the Romanians were offered imprecise answers to heir petitions.

In such conditions, the demanding of an institutional background for the higher education (their own academia or university) became a distinct and extremely important subject matter in the national fight of the Romanians in the Hapsburg dynasty. In his speech delivered at Catedrala Blajului, Simion Bărnuțiu directed to a national union of all the Romanians in order to impose the action for constituting their national culture, in the service of the national cause. He advised that through united efforts, national funds for schools, academies, universities, art and science institutes, economic societies etc. had to be gathered. On the same opportunity, the intellectual man from Oradea sustained that “the enlightenment of sciences and arts10” could not be any more the monopole of the privileged classes, but ought to become “a common asset for the entire nation.11”

After the founding of the universities from Iași and Bucharest, the imperials accepted the idea of a university in Transylvania, rather from political considerations: to counterbalance the exodus of young people from Arad to Romania and to make a proof to the new Romanian state of a favourable attitude towards the Romanians from the monarchy. In 1865, Vienna admitted, in the main, the foundation of a new Law Academy for the Romanians – consequently, the forth part from a university and, later, between 1867 and 1872, the Romanians took the necessary steps, at Vienna and Budapest, for institutionalization the access of the young Romanian people to the secondary and higher education in their national language. On the occasion of making The Law of nationalities, in 1867, or on other different opportunities, the Romanian deputies, the intellectuals, the students from the foreign universities solicited a university for the Romanian nation.

The universities founded at Cluj (1872) and Cernăuți (1875) were not in the service of their majority nation but, on contrary, they had as main purpose the Hungarisation and Magyarisation of the Romanians.12 For this reason, both in Transylvania and Bucovina, along with the wish of several national universities, was more and more often met the demand that the Universities from Vienna, Budapest, Cluj and Cernăuți should have Romanian language and history departments.

During the last decades of the 14th century and the beginning of the next one, the Romanian culture knew an ample development regarding the idea of modern university. It corresponds to the same preoccupations from the European and American “university movement”. As in the rest of Europe, in our case too, the common point was the criticism against the old type of university, followed by numerous variants for accommodating the universities to the economic, social and cultural needs of the society. Tightly connected to the phenomenon of industrialism and the modernization of the economic processes, science, the universities became, during that period, factors of maximum importance in the development of the capitalist states13, were subjected to permanent reorganization and were looked for efficient formulas of institutionalization.

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1 Elena, Grigoriu, Istoricul Academiei Domnesti de la Sf. Sava (Contributii documentare), Bucharest, 1978, p. 22-53
3 A.D. Xenopol, Memoria asupra învățământului, în Sebarea scolară de la Iași. Acte si documente, Iași, 1885, p. 104
4 The Petition of the Romanian Youth from Budapest regarding the university that was to be founded at Cluj, in în Telgraful Român, XX,28, (6th/18th of April), 1872, p. 110
5 The history of The University from Bucharest, I, Bucharest, 1977, p. 118
6 T.V. Păcățian, Cartea de aur, I, p. 690-691
7 T.V. Păcățian, Cartea de aur, I, p. 192
8 Simion, Bărnuțiu, Discurs..., Bucharest, 1909, p. 154-155
9 Gazeta Transilvaniei, XXXV, 7 (22nd of Jan – 3rd of Feb), 1872, p.1
10 Gazeta Transilvaniei, XXXV, 7 (22nd of Jan – 3rd of Feb), 1872, p. 1: Al. Procopovici, Doi dascăli bucovineni, in Luceafărul XV, 4-5, 1920, p. 49-50: Ioan, Nistor, Originea și dezvoltarea Universității din Cernăuți, Chișinău, 1927, p. 4
11 J., D., Bernal, Știrile în istoria societății, Bucharest, 1964, p. 407-411 și 495-512
Spiru Haret followed the evolution of each faculty at the Universities from Iași and Bucharest and criticized in harsh terms the quality of the Romanian higher education. He said that, at first, the universities from Romania had a rather modest activity, functioning as a “school superior to high-school”, very little different from it.\textsuperscript{14} It was also invoked the way in which the professors were recruited\textsuperscript{15} and A.D.Xenopol made a realistic connection between the number and the level of primary and secondary schools, the study of urbanization and the development of the universities.\textsuperscript{16}

At the end of the last century and the beginning of our century, became more and more necessary the reference of the Romanian university to the models provided by the German, French and Anglo-Saxon universities. This also represented one of the reasons for the criticism against universities in our intellectual environments. The main themes for comparing were the statute of the professor and the scientific activity from university.\textsuperscript{17} Along with it, observations were also made related to the level of endowment and to the relations of the universities with the state. Most frequently it is mentioned the German and the French model, first for the organization and the scientific activity, the second because of the similitude that existed and the parallelism of different experiments, especially during the last decades of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century.

The phenomenon of politicization was the main point incriminated for the unsatisfactory conditions from our pre-university education. Increasingly insistent was debated the specialization in universities, according to the diversification in science and to the widening of fields with practical application of the scientific research. In agreement with the requests of the economic and social life, were again mentioned the suggestions concerning the increase in number of the higher practical schools, without necessarily propose to be included in the structure of the university. Mihail Kogălniceanu and Titu Maiorescu, two intellectuals who belonged to the German university training, starting with the middle of the 8\textsuperscript{th} decade, indicated as means for the progress of the Romanian society, the education and science development at the standard of the European ones.\textsuperscript{18} They considered the results of the university experiences from Germany, but they also planned the effects of science in the Romanian space particularly for bringing it to the standards of the most advanced nations from our continent.

Mihail Kogălniceanu put his name among those of the founders of universities from our countries, representing the intellectuals and the politicians who contributed to the creation of the modern structures of the Romanian state. He did not impose a certain conception for the establishment of the University from Iași, but he followed all the time its development with a sense of duty appropriate for its founder. He sustained that the university should not develop only speculative and political theories, but also sciences that were useful in industry and commerce. He gave the example of the universities from Strasbourg and Nancy, the two academic citadels, in which the German and the French government brought, after 1870, distinguished personalities of science and culture from those countries. In other words, Kogălniceanu saw the manifesting of the university national mission through the development of science at its highest standards. It resulted, from such a conception, that the University from Iași had to become “the center of science, the energy of the Romanian intelligence” and the professors should demand the apostles’ virtues on the altar of duty, towards the University and the chair.

One of the most famous professors, during this period, both at the University from Iași and Bucharest, was Titu Maiorescu. He was also strongly influenced by the German university spirit and was among the most consequent supporters of the idea of modern university in Romania. On the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of October 1864, he delivered the first inaugural speech at the University from Iași, moment that at Bucharest had been made during Iorga’s rectorship. He contrasted the petty policies from universities to “the most severe and systematic study”. Being convinced of the professor’s mission, he attributed him a very important role in the students’ education.

\textsuperscript{14} Spiru, Haret, \textit{Raport adresat M.S. Regelui asupra activității Ministerului Instrucționii Publice si al Cultelor}, Bucharest, 1905, p. 308
\textsuperscript{15} P. Răcășanu, \textit{Scoala românească în Arhiva, V.}, 1-2, 1894, p.38
\textsuperscript{16} A., D., Xenopol, \textit{Domia lui Cuza Vodă, II}, Iași, 1903, p. 98-99
\textsuperscript{17} M., Kogălniceanu, \textit{Opere, IV,}, 2, Bucharest, 1978, p. 299
It is known the fact that Titu Maiorescu was also a devoted politician, one of the most prestigious orators from parliament. For him, politics was also incorporated in the civic and patriotic attitude of professors and students. He demanded intellectual severeness and discipline in the educational process too. What Maiorescu condemned was “the journalistic politics” that tended to the wrong direction, towards the superficiality of the studying process. Several times, he declared himself in favour of appreciating the professor according to value criteria and not to the political affiliation. He categorically rejected the intervention of the politics in the university life, especially when appointing the professors. “Here, it is not about the political party – he said in one of his parliamentary speeches – but about administration, authority and school discipline.”

Acknowledging the civilizing role played by universities, Titu Maiorescu recommended the orientation of young people towards those faculties and scientific disciplines (especially philosophy and the exact sciences) that directly and immediately contributed to the solving of the modernization necessities from the Romanian society. Altogether, he brought forward the problem of the high scientific and pedagogical competence of the professor and also of the decision factors as regarding the direction of the Romanian education. Although his political adversary, Spiru Haret was appreciated by Maiorescu, especially because he was greatly experienced in schools life and enjoyed much consideration among teachers. A model of academic presence, Titu Maiorescu personalized the highest university conception at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the next one.

At the legislative and institutional level, there were many reforms made after 1864. The reforming activity of Spiru Haret distinguished itself through modernity, profoundness and length. The ideas supported by him, on the modernization of the higher education, were extracted from the most developed European university conceptions, with consideration to the possibility for the applicability to our national necessities.

Spiru Haret established the following three functions to education: “to form good citizens, to assure the knowledge indispensable to each school level, to provide efficient people for the complete and harmonious life of the country.”

A special attention was paid to the social action of school, to providing civic and patriotic education to young people. Due to the fact that school, including the higher education, had well-determined attributions in the country, Haret proposed the maintaining of an equilibrium between demand and offer (especially for the higher education).

Starting from these principles, Spiru Haret also brought forward a rather extended conception on the idea of university. First of all, we must remember the fact that he stated with great determination the desideratum of the modern university, according to the exigencies of that era. He proposed a correct approach of the most valuable innovations for the modernization of the university and he did not reject the experimentation. He saw the university a real cultural-scientific centre that could polarize the entire intellectual life of our country. He suggested that near universities should be organized open and free of charges courses for any scientific department, held by the savants who did not belong to the professorial board. Supporter of the liberal education, he tried to eliminate isolation amongst the diverse faculties, providing the university with a modernization touch. Therefore, he presumed that any student was able to get a diploma after attending certain courses at different faculties also. Making his main preoccupations the needs and the aspirations of our country, this mentor of the Romanian education declared that the science faculty should enjoy the greatest development because, as the advance of the German industry showed, the industrialism was connected to the stage of the scientific research.

In this manner, he suggested the orientation towards the employing in economy of science, referring, of course, to agriculture. Haret did not omit either the problem of university endowment, of professors recruitment and of organizing the social life of the academic population.

Certainly, the three opinions that belong to a founder, a magister and a reformer of the Romanian university are not singular. To them, many others can be added. For example, in a conference from 1892, B.P. Hașdeu

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19 Titu, Miorescu, *Discursuri parlamentare*, V, Bucharest, 1915, p. 353
militate in favour of defending the chairs from dogmatism, he invited the professors to discuss in front of the students the scientific controversies, also learning new modalities of thinking.²¹ Or, Ion Ghica, dominated by an accentuated pragmatism, pleaded for a tighter connection between the scientific thinking and the workshop practice.²² The Board of the Philosophy and Letters Faculty proposed, in 1892, the foundation of a tutorial near each chair, an initiative that was regulated in 1898. In this manner, the rest of the department did not count only for communicating knowledge, but also for creating the research spirit, for teaching the students the scientific method and the intellectual discipline, in order to elaborate personal scientific studies.²³ And A.D.Xenopol, following the line of culture democratization, used the Anglo-American experience of “the university extension”, for providing the large mass of people with “the principles of civilization and for giving the evolution of mankind a wider base.”²⁴ It is extremely obvious, at the end of the 19th century and in the first part of the next one, the participation of the Romanian intellectual to the European debates on the concept of modern university. It took place under the auspices of an intense cultural dialogue with Europe and in the context of modernization the structures, the institutions of the Romanian society. The Romanian university proved to be open to new experiments, innovations, because it was a relatively young institutions and with a continuous ascension, with a certain position and role in the life of our nation.

Through the actions in which was tried the modernization of Romanian universities, more and more young people from Transylvania attended their courses. Taking into account the political and the cultural state of the Romanian nation from Ardeal, The Memorial of the Romanian University Students on the situation of the Romanians from Transylvania and Hungary (1891) fairly noticed that between the Romanian and the Hungarian culture the divergent motifs grew, because it was restricted the access of the Romanians to obtaining any of the scientific and cultural degrees. Especially at the end of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th century, the chauvinist and the Magyarisation tendencies promoted by the government from Budapest intensified the fight of the Romanians from the Hapsburg monarchy for the national education, including for a Romanian university. Iuliu Maniu expressed bluntly, in the Hungarian Parliament (1907) his creed about the national culture and the teaching language in schools: “My Romanian people, as no other in this world, cannot have more cultures... this represents the Romanian culture for my people. For this reason I was and am against the Hungarian language education, because it leads to the destruction of my culture and the culture of the other peoples from my country that speak a different language.”²⁵ The studious youth is more and more encouraged to have activities for sustaining the desideratum for a national university by Tribuna and Luceafărul. The generation of students from the period of the First World War showed an addition of “intellectualization”²⁶, but also the militancy for the national unity cause. The student congresses and the Romanian students societies from different universities represented the cultural solidarity of the Romanian students from all over the world. It was obvious that a university for the Romanians from Ardeal could be obtained only in a unitary Romanian state. The Union from 1918 confirmed and opened the way for the achievement of this ideal shared by the Romanians from Transylvania.

The evolution of the idea of university, from the middle of the 19th century until the First World War, followed the way of the Romanian modern society development. Being in a permanent dialogue with the European “university movement”, the conception about a modern university found value answers in the respect of

²¹ B., P., Haşdeu, Scrieri literare, morale si politice, București, 1937, p. 125
²² Ion, Ghica, Scrieri, III, București, 1914, p. 172
²³ M., P., Spineanu, Contributii la istoria învățământului superior, The Faculty of Philosophy and Letters from Bucharest, București, 1928, p. 45
²⁵ idem, p. 531-532
²⁶ Luceafărul, XI, 16, 1912, p. 443
institutionalization. The Romanian university experience, the national specific, shaped itself into a proper synthesis that would influence the university development after 1918.

Conclusions

In the retrospective view of a society or of one of its domain development, in order to reveal the stages and the registered progress, most of the times it is resorted to comparisons, in which are put in opposition civilisations, cultures, peoples, educational systems, individuals etc., with themselves, with what they represent in different moments of their historical existence. Yet, it is not enough to establish their place, rank, degree of development or their value. Such a finality, comprising of the evidence of analogies, similarities or differences, results especially from the comparison between civilisation and civilisation, culture and culture, people and people, system of education and system of education, individual and individual etc., in a certain moment of their historical evolution, in which the discrepancy or the synchronism, the anachronism or the contemporanism with a certain system of values are proved and validated. In the same time, only in this way, a definite specificity can be evidenced, though the difference ensued from opposition, while the integration in the age, in the world results after discovering the influences, the effects or the taking over of the model.

The education system, functioning as an integrant and, nevertheless, culture producer part, having as beneficiaries smaller communities or the social community entirely, the school contributed to the creation of a spiritual history and geography, become national after extended accumulations, in which the interferences, the influences, the foreign models harmonized with the autochthony in an original synthesis.

It is a common point the finding that the Romanian civilization and culture are “synthesis products” (in which obviously predominates the Romanian ethnicity or national character) being formed and evolving on a geographical area between worlds different as level of civilization development, between two types of culture: the catholic Occident, of Latin culture and the orthodox East, of Slavic-Byzantine culture. In the same space of existence, in the area where the manifested influences of these cultures met, the educational activity, the education, the Romanian school developed. There also functioned, as form of organization, techniques, pedagogical ideas and contents, both occidental ones (Latin-catholic) and eastern (Byzantine-Greek-orthodox) that had initially had a Slavic influence. School in Principalities, unlike that in Transylvania, regardless the influences, the form, always had or got, an autochthonous character, functioning inside the Romanian society, assimilating its evolution directions and reflecting its level of development. All the external forms, the models, the influences became alive and were productive only when they received an adequate support, preserving the artifices and without consequences in a contrary situation.

There were stages in the creation of the Romanian national school (the national educational system) that succeeded in a certain dynamic, unravelling their own values and results, also involving a certain dynamic of models, once with their evolution and regulation in the development of the European educational systems.

In the evolution of the Romanian school, the role of these models, external influences (from the western or eastern world) was evaluated differently, with exaggerations or diminutions.

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