Spiru Haret and his concerns in setting the bases of physical and sportive education within the national education system. Legislative and organizational analysis

Lucian Popescu*®

“„Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Faculty of Sports and Physical Education, 3 Toma Cioama, Iași 700554, Romania

Abstract

The legislative and organisational reforms implemented by Spiru Haret in substantiating the national education system and, implicitly, physical and sportive education, explicitly reflects the greatest part of the pedagogical, sociological, social and political ideas supported throughout time by means of a laborious scientific, didactic, parliamentary and ministerial activity. On this background, we started from the assumption that there is no general working perspective which follows the continual thread of the previously stated theme; thus, we purport to examine from a present-day perspective the literature review on this issue (general and specialised studies), while analysing at the same time a series of documents (in particular collections of laws) with a view to draw a study aimed at supporting this continuity. This research has the goal to highlight the legislative and organisational implications of the field of physical education and sport in the context of political, social and cultural changes characterising the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Through the contents and the distribution of materials, our aim was to assess, as realistically as possible, the outstanding contribution brought by the great minister in setting the grounds and promoting corporal education (gymnastics and sportive games), both as part of the educational curriculum (as an instructive-educational activity), and outside it (as a social activity).

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Keywords: axiology; education; governance; learning; legislation; organisation; sport.

* Lucian Popescu. Tel.: +40-0721213013.
E-mail address: lucian_popescu2009@yahoo.com
1. Introduction

The analysis of the legislative and organisational aspects of physical education and sport in our country appears as an integral part of the general modernisation process occurring in education, especially in the second part of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. Some aspects of this problem have not always been appreciated as deserved; they were either not analysed to the full extent of their complexity, or, the significance of the facts and events was not correctly interpreted, on political and ideological grounds. Major preoccupations in substantiating corporal activities (gymnastics – physical education and sporting games – sports) as an integral part of the national education system (curricular and extracurricular), were manifest in the legislative and organisational reforms made by Spiru Haret. Since the Minister Haret is considered to be “the true organiser of physical education and sport in school and extracurricular activities”, a discussion on this subject is self-evident. Therefore, we consider necessary a vision that includes several legislative and organisational “benchmarks”, specific to the field of physical education and sport, namely: a) the evolution of reforms and the organisation of physical education within the national education system, stating from the Law of Public Instruction (1864) to the Law on primary and normal-primary education in 1893, respectively 1896; b) the time of the great reforms made by Spiru Haret (1896 - 1910); c) the consequences of the laws promoted by Haret in strengthening the national education system and, implicitly, physical education and sport. This study equally aims at supporting a balanced and nuanced approach, able to avoid “patterns” and “labels”, providing the true perception that modern Romanian society had on the notion of physical education. As a research method, we proposed to present the information for each “benchmark”; moreover, at the end of the intervention we will focus on the comments and conclusions that drawn on the contribution made by the Minister of Public Instruction and Cults, Spiru Haret, in substantiating the national education system, and, implicitly, physical education and sports.

2. The evolution of the reforms and organisation of physical education within the national education system, starting from the Law of Public Instruction in 1864 and continuing with the Law on Primary and Normal-Primary Education in 1893, respectively 1896.

The Law on Instruction in 1864, approved by Royal Decree no. 1850 of 25 November 1864 and promulgated on 5 December 1864 (Hamangiu, 1941, pp. 48-80) was initiated by the Minister of Instruction in the person of Mihail Kogălniceanu.

Structured into two parts and 418 articles, the law stipulated that “instruction be public and private” (Chapter I, General Provisions, article 1). Under articles 2, 3, 4 and 5 are presented the forms of education, respectively: primary – primary schools in rural and urban communities; secondary – high schools; secondary schools and seminaries; technical profile schools, beaux-arts and vocational schools; secondary schools for girls; higher education – faculties of letters; mathematics, physics and natural sciences; law and medical schools.

Gymnastic was also among the subjects of study provided in the curriculum for secondary education (Chapter III On the organisation of secondary instruction, section II). In this respect, the legislature stipulated that each boarding school should own gym equipment for keeping in good physical shape, and the physical exercises should be carried out during the break time (Article 173). According to the legal text, gymnastics (physical education) became an object of study in Romanian Schools and opened the way for this discipline to the school, providing it with a legal framework to be later applied. By adopting the law, the mission that physical education was about to have within the national schools was to develop, promote and refine the physical and moral forces and abilities, as well as the intellectual capacities of the students, depending on their age and sex particularities. However, this approach remained at the level of intention. One of the greatest problems was the absence of skilled staff, since gymnastics was taught, according to the research carried out, only in a few secondary schools and high schools in the country, and in inadequate conditions. “Instability regarding gymnastics teaching – and its status of optional subject of study – lasted until 1878, when it was introduced as compulsory subject of study in secondary schools, without being accompanied by corresponding syllabuses (C. Lascăr and I. Bibiri, D. Ionescu). In order to improve the teaching process as regards the teaching of gymnastics in schools, starting with the 17th of January 1879, the Minister of Instruction, C. Cantili introduced the new methodology regarding the temporary appointment of teachers in secondary schools, high schools and vocational schools. According to the document, the teaching positions were
fulfilled following a contest, whose topics contained notions of anatomy, movements’ hygiene and gymnastics methodology (Ionescu, 1939). The organisation of body (physical) education in schools during this period was carried out in parallel with the introduction of military training. This phenomenon, already in place in France and Germany, was in fact aimed at strengthening the organisation of the state. Based on a functioning procedure, military instruction in secondary schools consisted in: handling the weapons, shooting the target, organising the military structures – companies, battalions, appropriate uniforms and the discipline corresponding to such an education. After the War of Independence (1877-1878), General Doctor Carol Davila advocated for this type of activity, which ended in the organisation in the Romanian schools, starting with 1879, of the units of "small infantry" ("micii dorobanți"). Subsequently, it was found that the school militarization was actually a deviation of a pedagogical nature and the exaggerated military training program involving the students led to changes in certain social objectives.

The last regulations applied to this first stage consist in the provision regarding the conditions a candidate should meet in order to fulfil a gymnastics teaching position, published in Monitorul Oficial no. 194 of 3 December 1889, respectively no. 19 of 26 April 1890. According to the first document, the candidate was required to present a diploma granted by a special fencing and gymnastics school, as well as a certificate stating the length of the studies and the graduation year. In addition, the candidate also had to demonstrate (by means of another certificate) that (s)he had taught didactic lessons. In order to confirm the knowledge and competencies necessary to teach physical education, the candidate had to pass an examination consisting in practical lessons of fencing and gymnastics. The second document stipulated, in addition to the provisions of the first, that the candidate presented demonstrative lessons with the students of the respective schools, lessons held in the presence of an examination committee, lasting for four consecutive sessions, with the pupils enrolled in the classes I to IV, and for which they received separate grades. These methodological requirements failed to be complemented by an effort supported by the state in order to train the teaching staff within this field. There was a single private school – managed by G. Moceanu, the first gymnastics master (professor of physical education) in our country, functioning within the Romanian Central Society of Weapons, Gymnastics and Shooting in Bucharest, set up in 1867.

In essence, the introduction of physical education in the Romanian schools, for this first stage, could be defined as the time of uncertainty of this field of study.

The Law on primary and normal-primary education of 23 May 1893 also called Take Ionescu Law (Monitorul Oficial, part I, no. 40 of 23 May 1893, pp. 1100-1106). The general characteristic of this law consisted in the organisation of primary education, diversified in hamlet schools, inferior and superior primary schools, and complementary and repetition primary courses. Summarising the content of the law, we notice the following: primary education was compulsory and free for the children with ages between 7 and 14 (Chapter I, article 1); among the subjects of study for primary schools gymnastic games were also included (Chapter II, Primary education, Section I, General provisions, article 17); normal schools were classified as “state establishments”, designed to train the teaching staff of urban and rural schools (Chapter III, article 35); for training the teaching staff of rural primary schools, the syllabus comprised, besides other disciplines, "gymnastics and gymnastic games" for boys only (Chapter III, Normal Schools, Section II, Normal schools for educators, articles 40-41); the same provision was also stipulated for training the teaching staff of the urban primary schools (Chapter III, Normal schools, Section III, Normal schools for educators, article 45).

The law was an important step forward in organising and legislating physical education in Romanian schools. Consequently, gymnastics was formalised as a subject of study in primary education (up to that moment gymnastics was only taught in the secondary level). At the same time, syllabuses were elaborated for each class, by specifying the application directions. As far as the primary school curricula are concerned, they were not different from the primary-normal ones; they added, however, the subjects of "gymnastics" and "gymnastic games". In the schools for girls, the program was adapted by the gymnastics master, who excluded the exercises that were not adapted to sex particularities. For the normal schools of educators and tutors, due to the lack of patriotic spirit still guiding the politicians at the time, gymnastics was associated with military instruction. As a consequence, for grades I-IV, gymnastics and military exercises were practised two times a week; in the fifth grade, these activities were carried out one hour a week (Ionescu, 1939).
Regarded as a whole, physical education (gymnastics and gymnastic games) practised in an organised manner within the school program and independently – outside school, was generally aimed at the complex training of the students.

The *Act modifying the law on primary and normal-primary education of the 1 September 1893*, law issued on 30 April 1896, also called *Petru Poni Law* (*Monitorul Oficial*, part I, no. 24 of 30 April 1896, pp. 756-761).

From the perspective and requirements of the moment, the law was designed to eliminate the differences between the rural and urban primary education, and to establish positive provisions regarding the appointment and transfer of the teaching staff.

The *Take Ionescu Law of 1893* restricted the primary instruction for children in rural areas, since not all townships, according to the legal text, had an inferior primary school. Additionally, the law furthered the contradiction between villages and towns – rural and urban areas – constituting an obstacle in the way of most children of school age, limiting their access to the secondary and superior schools.

The *Petru Poni Law of 1896*, to which the future minister Spiru Haret also contributed, attempted to remedy the shortcomings of the law of 1893 regarding primary education, based on the founding principle of the *law of 1864*, which promoted equal education for children in rural and urban schools.

A particular significance of the law of 1896 consisted in the establishment, for the first time, of kindergartens for children and courses for adults, with a deep impact on the substantiation of a national education system.

As regards physical education, the text of the law of 1896 did not bring any substantive modification compared to the law promulgated in 1893.

3. The Period of the great reforms made by Spiru Haret (1896-1910)

Although he did not write theoretical studies of a didactic character, the field in which Spiru Haret distinguished himself in particular was that of educational politics; he was perceived as a specialist interested primarily in study and expertise rather than in politics. From this perspective, his political involvement was relevant much later, in March 1889. To that date, he carried out his activities within the education system as a mathematics teacher, while occupying other positions also: member in the *Permanent Instruction Committee* (1882); general inspector of schools (1883); general director of the Ministry of Public Instruction (1885). On the political scene, his first intervention in the Parliament took place on the 9th of March 1896, as a *rapporteur* for the *Law on building primary schools and establishing the House of schools*. Gheorghe Adamescu emphasised the remarkable contribution made by Spiru Haret by adopting this law, his ideas comprised in previous projects constituting the source of this institution, whose main purpose was to: “help townships in building the locations for primary schools and equipping them with the necessary furniture and teaching materials”. Also called the *Law on the House of Schools*, the legislative act was intended to create the adequate framework for improving the material structure of the education system, an extremely important link in the context of the education reform. At the same time, the law provided the teaching staff with the opportunity to apply for and obtain material support from the state by means of an adequate system of loans and credits (Cristea, 2001, p. 94).

His next parliamentary intervention took place on the 8th of April 1896, and it was occasioned by the *Report on the law of primary and primary-normal education*, developed under the ministry of Petru Poni.

The laborious work carried out by the ministry administration and the positive results obtained in implementing some educational strategies, constituted the grounds for his appointment as minister of Public Instruction. During his three mandates as a minister (1897-1899; 1901-1904; 1907-1910), Spiru Haret radically changed the destinies of Romanian education, as a genuine reformer of the Romanian school at all levels. His legislative creations – the *Law on secondary and superior education of 1898* with subsequent additions in 1901, 1903, 1908 and 1909 and the *Law on vocational education of 1899* constitute the foundation of national education, based on essential aspects such as: the extension of secondary education from seven to eight years old; the clarification of the reports between the two cycles of the secondary education and the distribution of the second cycle into classic, real and modern; the adaptation of the structure of professional education (degrees, profiles, different length of the studies) to the economic fields and the environment conditions and to the specificity of each school level; a wider opening of the superior education to social practice, demonstrated in particular through the organisation and functioning of the *Pedagogic seminar*. 
As follows, we will present a short analysis of the law of 1898, which had a positive impact on the development of physical education in secondary school and in training the specialised teaching staff.

The Law on secondary and superior education of 5 April 1898 (Monitorul Oficial, part I, no. 283 of the 24 March 1898, p. 9986-9997) had the following main characteristics: secondary education was carried out in secondary schools and high schools for boys, while for girls, in the secondary schools of 1st and 2nd degree (Chapter I, General provisions, article 1); secondary and superior education was free for all children of Romanian citizens (article 2); high school was structured into eight classes, respectively the first four classes (V-VIII) and the last four classes (IX-XII), and gymnastics was studied among the subjects of study (Chapter II, Secondary education, Section I, Organisation, article 3); the secondary schools corresponded to the first four high school classes (V-VIII), and the curriculum was identical (article 4); in the secondary schools for girls (level I and II) lasting for 5 years, gymnastics was also among the objects of study (articles 5 and 6); secondary education teachers (for the "literary or scientific group") were recruited on the basis of the profile of the subjects of study - "gymnastic and gymnastic games" were in the curriculum for both groups - (Chapter II, Section V, article 22). As regards the inclusion of the gymnastics masters, the law provided expressly that admission at the exam for gymnastic ability was contingent on holding a graduation certificate from a special school, Romanian citizenship and completion of the military service (Chapter II, Section V, article 30); in order to occupy a teaching position in the secondary level (secondary schools and high schools) a tenure examination was introduced. Among the subjects of study, letter S provided for the introduction of "gymnastics and gymnastic games" and the teaching staff members acquired the name of masters. The tenure examination consisted in the completion of two tests: the first one, a practical test which required the candidate to held three practical lessons with secondary level students; the second part – written, consisted in assessing the teacher’s knowledge in the field of anatomy and physiology, with application in the body movements. The candidates were given two hours for the completion of the written task. This test was qualifying, and the lowest admission grade was 7.50. Those admitted were provisionally appointed for a period of three years, after which they received a definitive title (Article 75).

Considering that one hour a week was not enough for the students' physical education program, in addition of the law of 1898, the law of 1908 brought by Haret decided upon the introduction of sports classes for secondary schools, high schools and secondary schools for girls. (Ionescu, 1939, p. 77)

Together with the promotion of gymnastics in schools, the minister also acted for the introduction of the game of rounders ('oina') within the education system. Rounders was a national sport, spread over large areas and "deeply rooted in the masses of Romanian countrymen, where the game was played under different names and with different variants" (Kirițișescu, 1964, p. 532).

In order to put in practice this approach, the minister asked the gymnastics masters to initiate a promotion campaign and immediately move on to teaching the game to the school children; the game involved the movement of the entire body, it developed the children's address, their vision, precision and initiative.

4. Consequences of the legislation supported by Haret to the substantiation of the national education system and, implicitly, to physical education and sport

The legislation proposed by Minister Haret in reforming the national education system had to be strengthened through the application of organisational measures.

In school and teaching activities, the measures provided by law led to the improvement of the instruction-educational process of the students and to that of training and specialising the teaching staff. Significant results were obtained in the following directions:

a) Inclusion and strengthening gymnastics within the curricula, as a compulsory subject of study. As envisaged by the Minister, the full and harmonious education of the young necessarily had to include physical education; school had to provide not only intellectual education, but also physical and moral education.

b) The adequate design of school syllabuses in line with the teaching realities. In this regard, the Minister appointed a commission composed of the most famous gymnastics masters, with a view to develop the syllabuses for secondary schools, high schools, and secondary schools for girls. The syllabuses were identical for the schools...
for boys and those for girls; the syllabuses were designed for each school grade and it specified the methodology to be
used for their implementation; the time allocated for teaching gymnastics was one hour a week for each grade.

c) The creation of the specialised teaching staff. The teaching staff authorised to teach “gymnastics and
gymnastic games” was structured as follows: elementary school teachers for rural primary schools; school teachers
for urban primary schools; gymnastics masters for secondary schools, high schools and secondary schools for girls.
In order to build an advanced type of education, the Minister introduced – for the secondary cycle – the
authorisation examination, where the candidate was required to be a graduate from a secondary school and from a
special school. Setting the average of 7.50 as the lowest grade for the admission in the authorisation examination
and the appointment of the candidate with a definitive title following three years of practice with a temporary title
constituted the premises of modern specialised education.

As regards extracurricular activities, major achievements were recorded in the following directions:

a) The establishment of annual school contests for rounders. Acknowledging the importance of games from a
physiologic point of view and guided by the model of the English education system in which sports enjoyed a solid
base, Minister Haret decided to introduce annual rounders contests among the students of the secondary schools,
those of the normal schools, seminaries and primary schools within the education system (Decision no. 18328 of
this measure, the game of rounders spread rapidly, becoming extremely popular both among the students and among
the adults.

b) The initiation of national school festivities. The purpose of these cultural activities was to develop moral
education among the pupils, students, youth and adults – a sense of patriotism. The events usually carried out on the
10th of May – The National Holiday, involved gymnastics demonstrations and national finals in rounders

c) The establishment of the medal “Reward of Labour” [Răsplata muncii]. This distinction represented the
culmination of the efforts made by school teachers and gymnastics masters in promoting the national education in
rural areas (Report of 3 October 1898 addressed to His Highness the King for the establishment of the medal

d) Initiation of school trips. The school trips made during the holidays constituted an excellent way to develop the
young people’s initiative; they also had a very positive influence from a hygienic and instructive point of view
(Circular no. 173 of 9 January 1903 addressed to the principals of high schools, seminars, normal schools, girls
176-177).

e) The establishment of school camps for well-deserving students. Starting with the month of June of year 1904,
Minister Haret organised a school camp at the Sanatorium in Predeal, designed for the recreation of the
conscientious students. During the holidays, the 100 students practised among others gymnastic exercises, games,
dances and trips, all activities being conducted by teachers and gymnastics teachers (Ionescu, 1939, p. 60).

f) Specialised training for the teaching staff. At the initiative of Minister Haret, starting with the year 1904, the
gymnastics masters from the secondary schools organised annual conferences on various topics in the field of
physical education and sport: proposals, amendments, means by which physical education could obtain better
results; the spread of gymnastics and the game of rounders in the rural areas; the introduction of national dances in
schools; the establishment of special private schools aimed at forming and training the specialised teaching staff in
charge of teaching physical education in school. Later, with the support of the Minister, two schools were created –
one in Iaşi, within the “Society for Gymnastics, Sport and Music”, and the other in Bucharest, within the “Society
of Physical Education Forward”.

Additionally, in 1909, under the guidance of the Minister, our country witnessed for the first time the
organisation of an official gymnastics course, organised with the gymnastics masters currently active; the course
was held during the summer and it lasted for 4-6 months. The participants in the course had the opportunity to
further their knowledge on anatomy, physiology and hygiene applied in gymnastics; gymnastics theory and
methodology; a theoretical and practical course in swimming, military and shooting instruction. The courses were
taught by a doctor, an officer and two gymnastics masters. The course was designed to train adults in an activity
field, based on the study certificates; at the end of the course, participants could obtain – following a graduation
examination – a certificate granted by the Minister, which authorised them to participate in an authorisation
examination for public schools. The graduation exam consisted in two written tests (one in anatomy, physiology or hygiene – upon choice; the other in gymnastics pedagogy), an oral test (on the subject of physical education) and a practical test (to assess the candidates’ skills and competencies in teaching gymnastics in the schools for boys or girls).

   g) The spread of physical education in rural areas through the organisation of cultural clubs and courses for adults.

The cultural clubs (Decision no. 10825 of 21 February 1902, The Works of Spiru C. Haret, volume II, 2009, pp. 138-142) were designed to contribute to the specialisation of the teaching staff in rural areas and the broadening of their knowledge: the increase in the moral state of the people in rural areas by cultivating the beautiful feelings, and the material state, by enriching their mind with practical knowledge.

The activities were carried out inside the club, with the participation of elementary teachers on subjects related to their teaching activity. Thus, discussion topics included the results obtained in the education and instruction process; analyses of the books and articles on topics within the field of education and instruction; practical lessons accompanied by discussions, etc. The public meetings carried out in the presence of an audience included speeches – speeches preceded or followed by choirs, gymnastic moves, national games, recitals, drama performances, etc.

The courses for adults (Circular no. 43266 of 31 August 1902, The Works of Spiru C. Haret, volume II, 2009, pp. 164-165) were established based on the Law on primary education of 1896, which stipulated the following under article no. 34: “Urban and rural townships can establish, on their own expense, courses for adults on the subjects of the primary course. (...) These courses will last for two hours a week at least and can only be started in the presence of at least five auditors in rural townships and at least ten auditors in urban townships”. The courses for adults carried out in the rural areas were conducted by elementary teachers, while those in the urban areas were held by instructors. The activities were subsidised, and the aim of the courses was to spread general knowledge among the illiterate. According to the available information, 995 schools for adults were established, within which gymnastics, rounders and national dances were promoted among other activities. The courses for adults were aimed at building the knowledge, skills and abilities for practising physical exercises, encouraging the citizens to socialise and contributing to shaping their personality etc.

5. Conclusions

The contribution of the Minister of Public Instruction Spiru Haret to the substantiation of the national education system and, implicitly, to physical education and sport has a special significance. Starting from the difficulties in the enforcement of the law of 1864 – among which, the absence of regulations, appropriate school curricula and syllabuses, and the unclear and erroneous methodology in recruiting the teaching staff – particularities leading to the establishment of a general state of chaos within the entire education system, and reaching a position that enabled him to reform every useless aspect to that date, Spiru Haret managed (during his mandate as a ministry) to implement two important laws. The two laws – the Law on secondary and superior education of 1898 and the Law of vocational education of 1899, had significant consequences: the limitation of the purely theoretical scope of education; the practical development of education; the assigned national character of education – bringing the school closer to the people, developing the feeling of national solidarity; the instructive – educational character of education.

If in schools the effect of the measures taken materialised in the adequate design of school curricula adapted to the teaching realities, in the reorganisation of the tenure examination for occupying the teaching positions, in establishing gymnastics as a compulsory subject of study in the syllabus, in the introduction of rounders school contests, in the organisation national school festivities and school trips, in the organisation school camps for well-deserving students, in the organisation of conferences and specialised courses for gymnastics masters and the permanent training of adults, in the extracurricular activity, the greatest achievement was the spread of popular education, relying on tools such as schools for adults, cultural clubs, the establishment of the medal “Reward of labour”, the popular culture magazine “Albina”, etc.

Through his legislative and organisational achievements, Spiru Haret proved the importance and necessity of physical and sportive education – as a fundamental part of the national education system, its instructive-educational,
physiologic and social role – by carrying out an intense activity to develop and promote physical education in schools, by spreading it in the rural and urban environments and by creating a national sport (the game of rounders). At the same time, we notice that, for the first time, physical education was directed and promoted – in a conscious and methodical way – both in school and outside it, entering thus the national education politics.

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