

Party Education and Cadre Schools in Communist Romania. Some Preliminary Considerations

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Abstract: The present lines raise the question of the necessity of a thorough study of a largely ignored chapter in the history of Romanian communism, namely the system of party education and cadre schools. If in a first phase, in Romanian post-socialist historiography, the orientation towards the research of the extremes of the system, of terror and repression has prevailed, nowadays it is at least as necessary to understand the mechanisms by which the communist system was perpetuated and regenerated. Party schools were more than mere instruments of indoctrination, manipulation and propaganda, they represented key institutions that fully contributed to the construction of the system itself.

Keywords: political education, party schools, cadres, Romanian Communist Party

Rezumat: Materialul de față ridică problema necesității studierii unui capitol mai puțin cunoscut din istoria comunismului românesc, anume sistemul învățământului de partid și al școlilor sale de cadre. Dacă într-o primă fază, în istoriografia românească post-socialistă a predominat orientarea către cercetarea extremelor sistemului, a terorii și represiunii, în prezent este cel puțin la fel de necesară înțelegerea mecanismelor prin care sistemul comunist s-a perpetuat și regenerat. Școlile de partid au fost mai mult decât simple instrumente de indoctrinare, manipulare și propagandă, ele reprezentând niște instituții-cheie care au contribuit din plin la însăși construcția sistemului.

Cuvinte-cheie: învățământ politic, școli de partid, cadre, Partidul Comunist Român

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In Romanian post-socialist historiography there has always been a tendency to underestimate the significance and importance of cadre schools and party education in general. Party education was rather perceived as a constitutive element of the field of indoctrination of communist party members with a prefabricated propaganda “not intended to create new values, but to transfer doctrine from the relatively limited circles who possessed it to the wider population who did not”¹. In other words, this parallel, independent political educational system was conceived from the very beginning in the form of an institutional network designed to politically socialize², in a time marked by an extensive and radical social and political revolution, a new elite capable of administering the party and build-up the new socialist society³.

The party schools have been, therefore, not only simple instruments for disseminating political values or the dogmas of the Marxist-Leninist ideology in an indifferent or even hostile popular mass, but rather a veritable set of institutions for the political training of adults and capable of forging a new ethos and a revolutionary consciousness⁴, without which the radical project of transforming the society was doomed to failure. In the end, by assuming the Marxist-Leninist worldview, the whole system of party education was managed to form and transmit a new way of thinking and understanding the world. It was a way of thinking that started from the premise that any question has only one correct answer, derived from the proper application of the only “true” theory, capable of correctly interpret and fundamentally change the world⁵. Last but not least, during the overcoming of the stage of

¹ Cristopher Read, *Culture and Power in Revolutionary Russia. The Intelligentsia and the Transition from Tsarism to Communism*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1990, p. 139.

² David Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis. Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination and Terror under Stalin, 1927-1941*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2011, p. 13.

³ Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind. Higher Learning among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1997, p. 19.

⁴ Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Soviet Political Schools. The Communist Party Adult Instruction System*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1967, p. 2.

⁵ Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State. Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 122-133.

“revolutionary breakthrough”⁶ of Romanian society by the Romanian Workers Party (RWP) at the beginning of the 1950s, during the 1960s and 1970s, due to what Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu has called an “academizing”⁷ process, they gradually transformed themselves from institutions intended for the political-ideological training and/or perfecting the cadres so necessary for the command and execution apparatus of the party during those first years, into true entities for training, promotion, management and reproduction of a new, privileged “state nobility” which was the communist *nomenklatura*.

The idea of organizing a party education system that would overlap or duplicate the traditional education system has raised from the very beginning a series of problems of a particularly complex theoretical and practical nature. From a theoretical point of view, in Marxist-Leninist logic, the policy of establishing special institutions intended to shape a new political elite of proletarian origin through a process of selection and upward social mobilization, a process encouraged and financed by the party-state, could simply not be justified, because Leninist theorists rejected from the start the very idea of the need for an *elite*: in Lenin’s view, all party and state institutions were to become “schools of communism”⁸ where people, in mass, would learn to manage the economy, society, politics and public affairs. In Leninist terms, the “dictatorship of the proletariat” was perceived as a necessary and transitory historical stage on the way to building a classless society, the purpose of the proletariat in this phase being to exercise leadership directly, as a class in itself, in order to abolish the exploiting classes and to establish communism⁹, and not to replace the dominance of the old elite or bourgeois bureaucracy with a newly created, proletarian one. Towards the middle of the last century, however, it was already clear that this is exactly how things

⁶ Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development. The Case of Romania, 1944–1965*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1971, pp. 210–221.

⁷ Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, *Intelectualii în câmpul puterii. Morfologii și traiectorii sociale [Intellectuals in the Field of Power. Morphologies and Social Trajectories]*, Iași, Ed. Polirom, 2007, p. 15.

⁸ Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power. The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1990, pp. 30–31.

⁹ David Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization. Ideas, Power and Terror in Inter-war Russia*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 18–20.

had happened, very “logically”¹⁰ according to Moshe Lewin, during the 1930s in the USSR (the phenomenon of bureaucratic degeneration was analyzed and vehemently criticized by Lev Trotsky¹¹, especially in his writings after 1935), and so they would happen in the newly established popular democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, but in a faster pace and almost simultaneously. As a result, this problem was simply ignored or camouflaged under the rhetoric of the need to continuously “strengthen” the ranks of the party from an ideological and political point of view, that is, to “raise” new cadres loyal to the regime.

On the other hand, from a practical point of view, the social discrimination that granted priority access to party education to citizens of proletarian, worker and peasant extraction¹², automatically generated not only a drop in educational standards – given the extremely precarious level of intellectual training of students – but also concrete difficulties of a logistical nature regarding the organization of party schools especially at the local levels: the premises for the courses were often unsuitable, the lecturers called to give courses were overwhelmingly only vaguely trained from a political point of view, the materials of study were either missing or simply just not understood by students so that the political education lesson was reduced to “processing” some articles from the party press, the accommodation spaces were insufficient, etc. All these “lacks”, according to the language of the time, although apparently constituted as many brakes on the way to the rapid formation of a new political elite devoted to the regime, paradoxically have helped the party to create opportunities¹³ for a wide category of citizens and to carry out an accelerated social and political promotion of the most loyal workers and peasants, direct

¹⁰ Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), *Making Workers Soviet. Power, Class and Identity*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 382.

¹¹ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism. Its Origin, Growth and Dissolution, Volume III, The Breakdown*, (translated from the Polish by P.S. Falla), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978, pp. 191-194.

¹² Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, *Intellectualii...*, p. 84.

¹³ Vadim Volkov, “The concept of *kul'turnost'*. Notes on the Stalinist civilizing process”, in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism. New directions*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, pp. 216-217.

beneficiaries of the system¹⁴. As Peter Kenez has pointed out, this reality was both a source of strength for the system, allowing its perpetuation and ensuring its reproduction, and – in the long run – one of weakness¹⁵, since the clash between the reality of the emergence of a corrupt bureaucracy and the initial egalitarian ideals of the Bolshevik Revolution ended up haunting Stalin's successors for a long time not only in the USSR, but also in the other countries that emulated the Soviet model¹⁶.

In post-socialist Romanian historiography, the victims of terror and repression of the communist regime institutionalized in 1948, *i.e.* the old intellectual, political and economic elites destructured and later destroyed in prisons, have benefited a special attention and a thorough investigation. On the other hand, the new communist elite, the administrative bureaucracy, the “new ruling class” (to quote the title of Milovan Djilas' book) or the party *nomenklatura* was described in very general terms, *in corpore*, usually with derogatory accents, rather than a fluid social body, mobile both horizontally and vertically, generated and reproduced permanently by the party education system through the political socialization carried out in cadre schools.

What makes the Romanian case singular is the weakness that characterized the Communist Party in the years between the two world wars: regardless of whether on August 23, 1944 the Romanian Communist Party has had more or less than 1000 members (some internal documents of the party advance even the figure of “about 700”¹⁷, the State Security records suggest¹⁸ a number between 796 and 918, and more recent research suggests that “there were definitely more than a thousand”¹⁹) it is certain that, throughout the

¹⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front. Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 150.

¹⁵ Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State...*, p. 128.

¹⁶ George W. Breslauer, *The Rise and Demise of World Communism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2021, p. 90.

¹⁷ Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker. The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001, p. 74.

¹⁸ Dinu C. Giurescu, “Partidul Comunist Român” [Romanian Communist Party], în *Istoria Românilor* [History of Romanians], vol. X, București, Ed. Enciclopedică, 2013, p. 505.

¹⁹ Adrian Cioroianu, “Au fost mai mult de o mie, sau despre ce înseamnă a privi și cealaltă parte a baricadei” [“They Were More than One Thousand, or About What Does It Mean to Look From the Other Side of the Barricade?”], în Adrian Cioroianu (editor), *A fost odată ca niciodată. Partidul*

interwar period, the party was deprived not only of a concrete social basis and genuine popular support, but was almost completely absent, except for some socialist ideas that it propagated in the 1930s in some anti-fascist intellectual circles, from the great debates of ideas that had animated the political and cultural life of the time.

This weakness and lack of real influence of the party in Romanian politics in the period between the two world wars, as well as the almost insurmountable difficulties encountered in the institutionalization process of its power in the years following the moment of August 23, 1944, derives from a triple marginality that characterized the illegal activity of the party: after its ban in 1924, following the disturbances in Tatar-Bunar, but also because, accepting Lenin's 21 conditions, it had chosen from the very beginning "not the integration into the system, but specifically its destruction"²⁰, the party was located not only on the periphery of the international communist movement (1) and on the periphery of the Romanian political system (2), but also – extremely serious for a party that claimed to represent the interests of the broadest popular masses – on the periphery of the political Left in Greater Romania (3), having almost no political impact among the working class – itself a quasi-minority²¹ of the country's population: "pretending to speak on behalf of the working class, the Romanian Communist Party was only a spokesperson for theses and directives formulated outside Romania and found, most of the time, in flagrant contrast with political common sense and the evident interests of the party"²².

Additionally, the elite of this almost insignificant radical party, deeply Bolshevized and Sovietized²³, incoherent, insular in

Comunist Român, 1921-2021. Pentru o istorie dezinhăbată a „viitorului luminos” [Once Upon a Time. The Romanian Communist Party, 1921-2021. For an Uninhibited History of the "Bright Future"], Iași, Ed. Polirom, 2021, pp. 15-30.

²⁰ Stelian Tănase, *Elite și societate. Guvernarea Gheorghiu-Dej, 1948-1965*, [Elites and Society. The Gheorghiu-Dej Governance, 1948-1965], București, Ed. Humanitas, 1998, p. 26.

²¹ Lucian Boia, *Strania istorie a comunismului românesc (și nefericitele ei consecințe)*, [The Strange History of Romanian Communism (and its Unhappy Consequences)], București, Ed. Humanitas, 2016, p. 14.

²² Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate. O istorie politică a comunismului românesc*, [Stalinism for all Seasons. A Political History of Romanian Communism], Iași, Ed. Polirom, 2005, p. 118.

²³ Stephen White, John Gardner, George Schöpflin, *Communist Political Systems*, (2nd edition), New York, Macmillan, 1987, p. 56.

relation to its host-society²⁴ and isolated from the other socialist party, was a disjointed one, ground by internal rivalries and endless factional struggles²⁵, a split elite between “local undergrounders”, “Muscovites”, and those in prisons. Completely subjected to the Kremlin, it resembled with other elites of all the parties “installed in power by Soviet leverage”²⁶. This underground elite, which lived and was formed in clandestineness, exile, prisons or, after 1943, in prison camps, was the one that assumed all power in the state with the moment of the proclamation of the Romanian People's Republic on December 30, 1947.

On the other hand, the party's rank-and-file members, sympathizers, conspirators and so-called “road companions” constituted what political scientist Vladimir Tismăneanu has identified as a “messianic sect” in the interwar Romanian political landscape. Party discipline, centralism, dogmatism, sectarianism, clandestineness, the Stalinist obsession of the “Trojan horse”, the enemy sneaked inside and the “clandestine machinations”²⁷ undertaken by him, doubled by consuming feelings of insecurity, mistrust and mutual suspicion – what Alain Besançon once called “the feeling of permanent siege” – constituted the formative matrix for the mass of party members that took over political power in Romania after the end of the Second World War due to the international context, and not due to an authentic internal revolutionary process²⁸.

²⁴ Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development...*, pp. 131–148.

²⁵ Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker...*, pp. 70–74; see also Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's statement from “Stenograma ședinței Biroului Politic al CC al PMR din ziua de 29 noiembrie 1961” [“Transcript of the meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party from November 29, 1961”], edited by Liviu Pleșa, Elis Neagoe-Pleșa, in *Dosarul Ana Pauker [The Ana Pauker File]*, vol. 1, București, Ed. Nemira, 2006, p. 92, and also the intervention of Alexandru Drăghici at the same party session.

²⁶ Joseph Rothschild, Nancy M. Wingfield, *Return to Diversity. A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II*, (3rd edition), New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 132.

²⁷ Gábor Tamás Rittersporn, “The Omnipresent Conspiracy: On the Soviet Imagery of Politics and Social Relations in the 1930s”, în J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (eds.), *Stalinist Terror. New Perspectives*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 108.

²⁸ To quote the famous illegal Communist Party member (and later political prisoner) Belu Zilber, “those in Bucharest only existed just because Stalin decided so”; Romanian real socialism has represented, in Zilbers' view, nothing more than the consequence of the Soviet “conquest”; see Belu Zilber, *Actor în procesul Pătrășcanu: Prima versiune a memoriilor lui Belu Zilber [Actor in the Pătrășcanu Trial. The First Version of Belu Zilber's Memoirs]*, București, Ed. Humanitas, 1997, p. 33.

After 1945, these people, completely unfamiliar with the functioning of the institutions of a democratic state, who lacked both the vision and the skills or knowledge necessary to ensure the functioning of the central and local administration, started the most ambitious and radical revolutionary social and political project in postwar Romanian history, fundamentally changing both the “social order” and the “state order”²⁹. Belu Zilber’s observations are revealing from this point of view:

“what could a few men do, whose only occupation was to hold a conspiratorial meeting, to learn pamphlets by heart, once at the head of a European state, when thousands of problems were crowding for solution? First they filled the country with meetings, then proceeded to build the monolithic party. That much they knew, that much they did. The rest followed the formula: «we do as our Soviet comrades»”³⁰.

Being probably aware of the precariousness of the political culture of the members of the party he led – many of them being communists with the name only³¹, given that from August 1944 to January 1948 the number of party members increased from 1000 to almost 800,000³² – Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej emphasized as early as 1945, during the first national conference of the PCR, the imperative necessity in terms of “lifting the political level of the cadres and the entire party”³³, for this purpose being needed both “1. The

²⁹ These explicit formulas are mentioned as such by the Constitution of the Romanian Peoples’ Republic from 1952.

³⁰ Belu Zilber, *Actor în procesul Pătrășcanu...*, p. 34.

³¹ In his memoirs written in 1974, communist veteran Gheorghe Vasilichi has appreciated that “these hundreds of thousands of new party members were not yet and could not be called communists, because a communist is not made in one day or overnight. Just being in the party and through studying Marxist-Leninist theory for a long time, and also through gaining great work experience one can be called a communist”; see Gheorghe Vasilichi, *Memorii [Memoirs]*, volume II (manuscript) – Arhivele Naționale ale României [Romanian National Archives] – Serviciul Arhive Naționale Istorice Centrale [Service of National Historical Central Archives] (A.N.R. – S.A.N.I.C.), Fond Institutul de Studii Istorice și Social-Politice [Fund of the Institute of Historical and Socio-Political Studies] – XVII, Dosar nr. 60, f. 4.

³² Mihnea Berindei, Dorin Dobrințu, Armand Goșu (editori), *Istoria comunismului din România. Documente. Perioada Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1945-1965) [History of Communism in Romania. Documents. The Gheorghe-Gheorghiu-Dej Period (1945-1965)]*, București, Ed. Humanitas, 2009, p. 565.

³³ Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, “Raportul politic al Comitetului Central la Conferința Națională a Partidului Comunist Român” [The political report of the Central Committee at the National

reorganization of the entire party education [...] based on the thorough study of Marxism-Leninism" as well as "2 Reorganization of the party university for a period of 6 months, with a permanent auditorium", and "3. Organization of cadre schools in addition to regional ones, also with a permanent auditorium"³⁴.

In fact, between 1945-1947 the organization and functioning of party education at the local levels has had a rather fluid, improvised and non-unitary character than an organized and systematic one, similar in fact to the very organization of the institutional structures of a political party that was then in full process of aggregation (at that time this process was called "party building"³⁵). At the founding congress of the Romanian Workers Party from February 21-23, 1948, the same Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej emphasized again the importance of political and ideological education for the formation of the party's basic cadres: "due attention must be paid to party education in order to raise honest and verified, at the same time solidly prepared from an ideological point of view"³⁶. As time has demonstrated, cadre formation has proven to be more complex and arduous than the initial hopes and expectations expressed by party leaders, a fact which was later officially acknowledged³⁷.

Conference of the Romanian Communist Party], în Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, *Articole și cuvântări* [Articles and Speeches], București, Ed. Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1951, pp. 71-72.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ Regarding this issue, the same Gheorghe Vasilichi remarked in 1974 that, after 1945, "we had inherited a poorly developed country, destroyed by war and isolated on an international scale, with a small number of communists able to lead, with no experience in the art of leadership of the state, or even of a Communist Party, grown enormously in a short time, with powerful enemies [...] Communists and in general sons of the working class, being the poor class, did not have the opportunity during the bourgeois regime to learn to run industrial and commercial enterprises, banking institutions, or the state in general, as the sons of capitalists and landlords did – and yet they took power and began to rule by learning and learn by ruling. They have also taught others, but they have also learned from others and that is their strength. They learned – as they say – in the heat of battle, on the go." – A.N.R. – S.A.N.I.C., Fond Institutul de Studii Istorice și Social-Politice [Fund of the Institute of Historical and Socio-Political Studies] – XVII, Dosar nr. 60, ff. 7-8.

³⁶ *Congresul PMR, 21-23 februarie 1948* [The Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party, 21-23 February 1948], București, Editura P.M.R., 1951, p. 95.

³⁷ *Rezoluții și hotărâri ale Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român volumul II 1951-1953* [Resolutions and Decisions of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party volume II 1951-1953], București, Ed. pentru literatură politică, 1954, pp. 437-438.

At the same time, at the central level, with the political influence of the party elite far exceeding its organizational capacity³⁸, on March 21, 1945, the Workers' University of the Romanian Communist Party was established³⁹, following the Soviet model of the "Sverdlov" Communist University (later renamed after the name of one of the founders of the Romanian Social-Democratic Party who defended the cause of the revolted peasants in 1907 - "Ștefan Gheorghiu" Higher Party School), as a higher education institution. In 1950 the duration of studies was one year; until 1956 the admission of students was strictly based on the recommendations developed at the level of the regional party committees and the evaluation of the personnel file⁴⁰.

In parallel, based on a decision of the Central Committee of the party, the Central School of Lecturers was established in October 1948 (renamed in July 1949 as the "A.A. Zhdanov" Higher School of Social Sciences⁴¹), "with the aim of training cadres necessary for the party to fight on the ideological front"⁴². According to the provisions

³⁸ Gabriel Asandului, „Școlile de cadre ale PCR din teritoriu în primii ani postbelici (1945-1948)” [Romanian Communist Party's Local Cadre Schools in the First Postwar Years (1945-1948)], în Sorin Radu (coord.), *Învățământul de partid și școlile de cadre în România comunistă. Context național și regional* [Party Education and Cadre Schools in Communist Romania. National and Regional Context], Iași, Ed. Universității „A.I. Cuza”, 2014, p. 48.

³⁹ Gabriel Asandului, “Învățământul de partid în România comunistă. De la Universitatea Muncitorească la Școala Superioară de Partid „Ștefan Gheorghiu” (1945-1966)” [„Party Education in Communist Romania. From the Workers' University to the «Ștefan Gheorghiu» Higher Party School (1945-1966)”, în *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „A.D. Xenopol”* [Yearbook of the “A.D. Xenopol” History Institute], Iași, nr. 49, 2012, pp. 189-204.

⁴⁰ Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură, “Reorganizarea P.M.R.-ului după modelul P.C.(b.) al U.R.S.S. și crearea nomenclaturii C.C. al P.M.R. în Republica Populară Română (1949-1954)” [“The Reorganization of the R.W.P. according to the Model of the C.P.(b) of the U.S.S.R. and the Creation of the Nomenclature of the C.C. of R.W.P. in the Romanian People's Republic (1949-1954)”, în *Totalitarism și rezistență, teroare și represiiune în România comunistă* [Totalitarianism and Resistance, Terror and Repression in Communist Romania], coord. Gheorghe Onișoru, București, Ed. C.N.S.A.S., 2001, p. 247.

⁴¹ Gabriel Asandului, “Party Studies in Communist Romania. The Superior School of Social Sciences «Andrei Aleksandrovici Zhdanov» 1948-1958”, în *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „George Barițiu” din Cluj-Napoca, Series Historica* [Yearbook of the “George Barițiu” History Institute from Cluj-Napoca, Series Historica], no. LII, 2013, pp. 145-163.

⁴² “Hotărârea Biroului Politic al C.C. al P.M.R. privind transformarea școlii de lectori «A.A. Zhdanov» într-o școală superioară de științe sociale cu durată de 2 ani (Iulie 1949)” [“The decision of the Political Bureau of the C.C. of R.W.P. regarding the transformation of the «A.A. Zhdanov» school of lecturers into a 2-year higher school of social sciences (July 1949)”, în *Rezoluții și hotărâri ale Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1948-1950* [Resolutions

of the above-mentioned decision, the recruitment of students for the "A.A. Zhdanov" Higher School of Social Sciences was to be carried out from "the ranks of party activists with ideological and cultural training, preferably graduates of party schools"⁴³. On the occasion of the transformation into a Higher School of Social Sciences in 1949, the duration of studies increased from 6 months to 2 years, and then in 1954 it was extended to 4 years. Also since 1954, both the graduates of the "A.A. Zhdanov" school and those of "Ștefan Gheorghiu" received the title of candidate in sciences (the Soviet equivalent of the scientific title of PhD), being assimilated with the graduates of traditional higher education institutions.

According to the political scientist Vladimir Tismăneanu, the difference between the two educational institutions was a structural one: if the "Ștefan Gheorghiu" school had been created with the aim of educating and training a new generation of young communists capable of administering the party and the state, representing a veritable "nursery" of cadres for the party, the main objective of the "A.A. Zhdanov" school was to train activists and propagandists for the party ideological apparatus, this institution representing an instrument of ideological training and regimentation for those who had not experienced either the war, nor the underground party life⁴⁴.

In the summer of 1958, based on decision no. 558 of August 26 of the Central Committee Secretariat of the Romanian Workers Party, the two higher education party institutions were merged, at the central level remaining to function, until 1989, only the "Ștefan Gheorghiu" Party School (since 1966 the Academy), which organized three-year courses (bachelor level), four-year courses (postgraduate, later doctorate), but also two-year courses for journalists, or one-year courses for agitators and propagandists.

These two higher party schools unified in 1958 have represented, from the beginning of their existence, the upper level of organized party education in Communist Romania. In their complementarity, on the occasion of the second anniversary of the

and Decisions of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party, 1948-1950], București, Ed. Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1951, p. 124.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁴⁴ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate...*, p. 148.

proclamation of the Peoples' Republic, on December 30, 1949, the so-called evening Universities of Marxism-Leninism were inaugurated. Having a duration of studies of one and a half years, these universities were placed under the Central Committees' authority, being organized next to the party committees in the cities of Bucharest, Cluj, Iași, Timișoara and Târgu-Mureș, their purpose being to raise the "political level and ideologically of the basic cadres of the party apparatus, of the leading cadres of the state apparatus, of the administrative tops of the state enterprises, of the mass organizations"⁴⁵, without their so-called "removal from production".

On a hierarchical lower level than these party institutions of higher education were placed the secondary party schools, with a duration of 3 or 6 months, which operated alongside the county (later) regional party committees in the main cities of Romania: Bucharest, Cluj, Timișoara, Iași, Craiova, Galați, Constanta, Brașov, Ploiesti and Târgu-Mureș (in Hungarian language). Secondary party education also included, apart from these 11 secondary schools, the 3-month party courses that operated in addition to 28 county committees, respectively the study circles of the history of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of the Soviet Union, staggered over two years and open both to those who had already graduated from party schools and wanted to complete their political-ideological training, and to those who, on the contrary, were preparing to be admitted.

The first step, the elementary one, of party education was intended for simple party members and aimed at their acquisition of the "party line", *i.e.* their political literacy under the guidance of a propagandist, based on reading and discussing of some topics published in the "Scântea" newspaper, within current political circles or evening party courses (in villages), respectively evening party courses in factories.

Starting with the year 1950-1951, the two higher party schools "Ștefan Gheorghiu" and "A.A. Zhdanov", the 5 evening universities of Marxism-Leninism, as well as the 11 party secondary schools began their courses on September 15, at the same time with the beginning of the school year, and included, at all levels, from

⁴⁵ Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură, *Reorganizarea P.M.R.-ului după modelul P.C.(b) al U.R.S.S...*, p. 247.

elementary to higher, a number of 249,125 registered students, all of them being party members⁴⁶.

In the current stage of research, it is extremely difficult to appreciate how many graduates the system of party schools has produced during the entire Communist rule in Romania. Who were they, what was their professional and political trajectory after graduation, how did they change their careers after 1989 are open questions to this day. What we do know for sure is the fact that, for instance, during the first 25 years of its existence, the Medium Party School from Timișoara has formed a number of 6941 “cadres with responsible jobs in party organs and organizations, mass and social organizations, from economic, industrial and agricultural units, comrades who work with enthusiasm, dedication and selflessness for the implementation of party policy”⁴⁷.

By analyzing the case of this school, whose archive has become accessible for study, one may draw relevant conclusions regarding not only the entire national system of party education and its network of cadre schools but, more important, to the ways into which power had been exercised by political elites throughout communist rule. For sure, the policy-making process knew a very high degree of personalisation especially during late Gheorghiu-Dej era, and thus the party elite (or nomenklatura) was not involved into the decision-making process, but fact is that this elite had been entrusted to apply and control the ways into which policies formulated “from above” were being implemented: from this perspective, as Florin Abraham has noted, the party elite appears to be a *de facto* power-holder in both party and society⁴⁸.

Secondly, by studying internal documents created by Party Schools during their existence, it becomes more and more clear the fact that the Communist Party’s main function vis-a-vis peasants and workers, once set in power, and especially during those first

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 245.

⁴⁷ Arhivele Naționale ale României – Serviciul Județean Timiș, Fond Școala Interjudețeană de Partid Timișoara [Romanian National Archives – Timiș County Service, Fund of the Medium Party School Timișoara], Dosar nr. 149/1973, f. 12.

⁴⁸ Florin Abraham, “Învățământul de partid și elitele regimului comunist din România. Pentru o agendă a cercetării” [“Party Education and the Elites of the Communist Regime in Romania. For a Research Agenda”], în Sorin Radu (coord.), *Învățământul de partid...*, p. 18.

years, “was to offer the opportunity for upward mobility (a process not recognized in Marxist theory)”⁴⁹. Indeed, in a very short time stretch, party schools have managed to create a loyal party and state bureaucracy, who owed everything to the Communist Party. Many of them were coming from social or ethnic categories previously excluded from public life.

“What used to be a paucity of sources has become an embarrassment of riches”⁵⁰ J. Arch Getty once wrote in regard to archival sources. Indeed, the archive of the Medium Party School from Timișoara contains a wealth of extremely diverse documents, indispensable for the analysis not only of its history and activity, but also for the party’s cohort of beneficiaries and for the understanding of how actually the new elite has been created: of the greatest importance, from this point of view, are the students’ personal record files, autobiographies, characterizations, recommendations, course syllabi, the detailed lists of both students and lecturers (including their age, gender, social origin, level of study, etc.), various reports and accounts written by the schools’ management regarding day-to-day activities, and so on. These documents provide the necessary basis of understanding of the personnel dynamics, political trajectories followed by the schools’ graduates (at least 3 of them have become ministers in the early 1980s) and the ways into which personal relations between them have shaped the local/regional networks of power inside the Romanian Communist Party.

Last but not least, the evaluation of the courses taught at the Medium Party School from Timișoara may offer important clues regarding the type of knowledge and skills the party leaders considered necessary for the graduates to achieve and develop. On a deeper level, one can decode even the political core-values learned by the schools’ graduates and the extent to which the party has managed to create a faithful, obedient cohort of activists.

⁴⁹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Shortest History of the Soviet Union*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2022, p. 6.

⁵⁰ J. Arch Getty, Oleg. V Naumov, *The Road to Terror. Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, p. xi.