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The Education of Romanian University Professors in Western Universities

*Lucian Nastasă**

Abstract: From the beginning of the modern era, Western universities played the most important role in preparing the Romanian elite. We cannot talk about a Romanian higher education network before 1864, when the universities of Iasi and Bucharest were set up, to which two more universities were added in 1919 in Cluj and in Cernăuți. Even so, due to the weakness of the Romanian higher education system, for a long time the “other Europe” was the only reliable and respected source of education for the Romanian youth with higher intellectual, social and political aspirations. Relevant is the fact that due to the deficiencies of Romanian higher education, as well as the mirage of Western countries, foreign universities held a monopoly in the formation of the local intellectual elite. One can estimate, without exaggeration, that between 1860-1918, almost all ministers, members of ministerial cabinets, university professors and other high state officials had been educated abroad. Only by taking into account this fact can we explain the rapid transformations of Romanian elites and the gradual changes of all other, more deep-seated layers of society and the way changes of content and spirit in the national culture were possible following Western models, which up to that point were strongly influenced by the Oriental and Orthodox world. The explanation is more complex, not only taking into account the ethno-psychological features of Romanians, but also the post-war strategy of France. In other words, France manifested a profound desire to compensate the decline of French military and economic power with cultural preeminence, encouraging the presence of foreign students in its universities. After 1920 the Romanian students participated in this strategy as the promoters of French customs and lifestyle in their home country. Romanian students were most numerous in the faculties of law and medicine, and they were almost invariably the most represented foreign group in all faculties during the interwar period.

From the beginning of the modern era, the most important role in preparing the Romanian elite was played by Western universities. We cannot talk about a Romanian higher education network before 1864, when the universities of Iasi and Bucharest were set up, to which other two higher education establishments were added in 1919, in Cluj and in Cernăuți. Even so, due to the weakness of the Romanian higher education system, for a long time the “other Europe” was

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the more reliable and elevated source of education for the Romanian youth with intellectual, social and political aspirations.

This is an aspect that I discussed at length in my other publications (See my recently published book entitled *Routes to the scholarly world. Romanian youth and studies in foreign countries, 1864-1944*, Cluj, Limes, 2006) and therefore I will not cover this vast problem area in my present paper. Relevant is the fact that due to deficiencies of Romanian higher education, as well as the mirage of Western civilizations, foreign countries continued for a long time to hold a monopoly in the training of the local intellectual elite.¹ Only by taking into account this fact can we explain the rapid transformations of Romanian elites and the gradual changes of all other, more deep-seated layers of society and the way changes of content and spirit in the national culture were possible, following essentially Western models, which up to that point had been predominantly influenced by the Oriental and Orthodox world.

Attending a Western university has always meant a good indicator of intellectual ambition and high quality preparation. Obtaining a bachelor's or a doctoral degree at a foreign university, as an instrument of one's career, became an essential objective of with high career expectations, an indisputable pedigree regarding intellectual competences and almost a guarantee for social success. As a result, Western Europe constituted a great attraction, the only space which could offer not only the chances of human and intellectual satisfaction, but also sufficiently weighty cultural references and models to play a fertile and mobilizing role, sources of therapy and ideals for „national regeneration”. “In the last twenty years of the past century [that is 19th century – was writing C. Rădulescu-Motru –, the youth of the old Romanian Kingdom had a very clearly defined cultural objective. It had its heart and mind turned towards Western Europe (...). Higher educational institutions from Germany, France and Italy were imitated as much as possible. There was not another more legitimate desire of a young Romanian than to finish his studies abroad”².

It is self-explanatory that woken from the Moldo-wallachian lethargy, ambitious Romanians stepped beyond the simple intention of getting a university degree abroad, their trips transforming into an extraordinary exercise of collecting information and accumulating learning, extended to all aspects of Western European society. In addition to descriptions and evaluations of the universities in Paris, Bruxelles, Vienna, Rome, Göttingen, Berlin, Leipzig,

¹ For how much the Romanian faculty body owes to Western higher education institutions see Lucian Nastasă, *Le rôle des études à l'étranger dans la carrière des professeurs d'université Roumains (1864-1944)*, in *L'enseignement des élites en Europe Centrale (19e-20e siècles)*, under the direction of Victor Karady et Mariusz Kulczykowski, Cracovie, Université Jagellonne, 1999, p.149-158.

² C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Mărturisiri*, ed. Sanda și Valeriu Râpeanu, București, Edit. Minerva, 1990, p.31.

Heidelberg etc, everyday life, economy, the political milieu and various aspects of national cultures were not neglected neither.

A leading role in the formation of Romanian intellectuals in the mentioned time frame was played by French, German and Austrian universities primarily, as well as Italian, Swiss and Belgian ones. I will not insist upon the aforementioned hierarchy, as thorough socio-historical analysis to indicate the quantitative influx of Romanian students to these universities is missing. However, French and German universities were by far the most prominent in granting bachelor and doctoral degrees to Romanian students in languages, history, philosophy, law, natural sciences as well as other technical-scientific subjects preparing for modern professions. In medicine, the most preferred institution was the University of Vienna, especially up to the First World War, and after that the University of Paris. In addition, the fact that the German model constituted the leading reference in setting up Romanian universities, German influence became more and more obvious in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

In fact, starting with this period and up to 1914, the Viennese University was the most important institution of higher education in Central and Eastern Europe, attracting the largest student body from the whole Empire and beyond. It was also the second largest university in the whole Europe, after Paris. An analysis carried out on a sample of Viennese students between 1880 and 1900 indicates that among 1212 students enrolled at the faculty of law, 0.5% were from Romania, out of medical students (1205) 4.2% were Romanians, out of students in the sciences (491) and the humanities (413), 1.2% were Romanians, while Romanian students with Romanian as their first language represented a little more (2.8%) of all Vienna students at that time, due to the fact that many Transylvanian Romanians would declare German as their first language³. Indeed, a lot of Romanians from Transylvania decided to study in Vienna (not in Budapest) in order to escape even the slightest intellectual association with Hungarians, whom they regarded as national enemies of sorts. Moreover, degrees from Austrian universities were valued in professional markets all over the Habsburg Empire.

On the other hand, in addition to Vienna, Austria could pride itself with a whole network of important universities that hosted Romanian students, especially the Universities in Innsbruck and Graz. In the case of the former, between 1867-1918 there were 650 students from today's Romania, of which 621

³ Victor Karady, *De la métropole académique à l'université de province. Note sur la place de Vienne dans le marché international des études supérieures (1880-1938)*, in "Revue germanique internationale", 1/1994, p.221-242.

came from Transylvania, and between 1919-1938 another group of 135 Romanians studied there⁴.

In this context, without treating the German and French academic spaces as mutually exclusive, the theses regarding the weight of one or the other in the political and cultural modernization of Romanian society should be reformulated, taking into account the complexity of interrelations concerned. Because one should avoid implying that the admiration for France and its culture was without reservations, or that the attachment towards Germany was unanimous.

Romanians, to be sure, preferentially studied in France or at other francophone universities. Around 1910 there were only 120 Romanian students enrolled in German universities, compared to 330 in France; 91 in Belgium and 38 in Switzerland (mostly in the French cantons). In 1928 we find only 256 Romanians enrolled in Germany's universities (with an additional 324 in other institutions of higher education), but no less than 2,034 in France, 93 in Switzerland (1930), and 80 in Belgium (1936). In other words, almost five times as many Romanian students studied in centers of francophone academia in the inter-war years. A similar case could be made of Polish students, who were lumped together with "Russians" in the data available prior to 1918. Bulgarians represent another case of outright academic Francophilia. In around 1911 only 135 Bulgarian students attended university in Germany as opposed to approximately 800 at francophone universities. In comparison, data regarding Bulgarian students studying abroad in 1928 shows 216 in German universities and 232 in other German higher educational institutions of the Reich. In the same period, as many as 1,000 Bulgarian students attended francophone universities⁵.

Nevertheless, the qualitative data indicates the continuation of German intellectual hegemony over Central and Eastern Europe. What cannot be proven statistically becomes more complicated as far as elites are concerned, especially those who exerted essential political influence and who played a major political and cultural role in their times. In this case, the German influence was far from insignificant and was certainly not lacking remarkable results. In his speech at the Romanian Academy, made at the 25th anniversary of this institution in 1891, the notable politician, who played a crucial role in the political modernization of the country, Mihail Kogălniceanu, did not insist on the academic environment of his youth by accident: "My whole life, as a young man and as a grown man, I have confessed that I owe who I have become in my

⁴ Cf. Almer, Sabina Helga, *Die Rolle der siebenbürgischen Studenten an der Karl-Franzens-Universität in Graz (1848-1918)*, Diplomarbeit, Graz, im Mai 1992; H. Heppner, *Contribuții la istoria României și a romanilor*, Cluj, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2002, p.125-131.

⁵ Victor Karady, *Student Mobility and Western Universities: Pattern of Unequal Exchange in the European Academic Market, 1880-1939*, in *Transnational Intellectual Networks. Forms of Academic Knowledge and the Search for Cultural Identities*, Frankfurt/New York, Campus Verlag, 2005, p.361-399.

own country to German culture, the University of Berlin, German society, men and great patriots who were instrumental at the rise and unification of Germany and that the fire of my Romanian patriotism started in the midst of German patriotism”⁶. These were the words of someone who, after a short time as a student in Lunéville (France), had to finish his intellectual formation far away from the “hotbed of revolutionary ideas”, in Berlin, in an austere environment, where “education is more profound, morals more innocent and customs more patriarchal”⁷.

The example of the *Junimea* society is more than revealing due to its unrivalled political, social and intellectual prestige between 1866-1918. Titu Maiorescu, the uncontested leader of this group, and who played a decisive role in the direction of Romanian culture up to the First World War, had a strictly German formation (high school in Vienna, university in Berlin and doctoral studies in Giessen), though French culture was not foreign to him (he studied law in Paris between 1859-1861). Although most members of *Junimea* (among them numerous university professors, politicians with ministerial portfolios, high functionaries, etc) were francophone, the tone and ideology of the group originated in a minority (a quarter of the group) who looked at German culture with great admiration, which, due to its consideration for discipline and rigor as well as conservatism, was regarded as the sole model to serve the interests of Romanian society, while the French model was accused of superficiality and revolutionary spirit⁸. Hence, it is not astonishing that Titu Maiorescu, as prime minister and minister of education or rector of the University of Bucharest, contributed to the development of various disciplines in accordance with the German model, resulting in the very framing of the structure of Romanian higher education. It was not accidental that one of the members of *Junimea*, professor Ion Bogdan, was given the task to study the principles and structural models of German schools first hand. He wrote a voluminous report about this in 1886⁹.

However, in addition to these aspects, others must be mentioned as well, generated by a sort of “hidden upbringing” responsible for anti-liberal attitudes that were apparent till the end of the First World War¹⁰. The development of

⁶ “Analele Academiei Române. Dezbateri”, s. II, t. 13, 1890-1891, p.264.

⁷ Al. Zub, *Mihail Kogălniceanu istoric*, Iași, Edit. Junimea, 1974, p.67-103.

⁸ Regarding these issues see C.G. Bedreag, *Quelques aspects de “Junimea de Iassy”. 1863-1872-1885*, în vol. *Omagiu lui Ion I. Nistor, 1972-1937*, Cernăuți, Tip.”Glasul Bucovinei”, 1937, p.121-155.

⁹ I. Bogdan, *Raport asupra școalelor secundare din Germania*, București, Edit.C. Göbl, 1886, V111-260 p.

¹⁰ Konrad H. Jarausch, *Students, society, and politics in Imperial Germany. The rise of academic illiberalism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982; *In search of a liberal Germany. Studies in the history of German liberalism from 1789 to the present*, edited by Konrad H. Jarausch and Larry Eugene Jane, New York, Berg, 1990.

student politics, university elitism, increasing exclusivity, authoritarianism, nationalism of student clubs and organizations, the emergence of a particularly active minority which would instigate to anti-Semitism, antisocialism and the idea of racial superiority — all these trends left significant resonance in the minds of Romanian students studying in Germany who enjoyed local social manners, but who, upon their return to Romania, acted in an antidemocratic spirit. This mechanism became more obvious in the 1930's, when the Third Reich's national-socialist propaganda influenced the public actions of many Romanian intellectuals.

In fact, the effects of the First World War considerably decreased the number of Romanian students studying in Germany, as well as their sympathy for country, since it was not of *bon ton* to claim that one's progress was owed to the losing (and enemy) side in the war. Confessions of this sort are not negligible. Although after the war, some students chose to study in German institutions of higher education also because the costs of living were lower than in France, for instance, their decision was not acclaimed by many of their conationals in key decision-making positions who would sometimes exaggerate their anti-German positions. This is the case of Nicolae Iorga, the famous Romanian historian and political figure, who owed – as he himself confessed until about 1914 – so much to the German academic environment and who in 1906 even started violent demonstrations against using French in Romanian theaters. However, after the defeat of Germany in the war, he showed public resentment to this country, stating straightly that he was an eminent Francophile, and showed disapproval of those wishing to study in Germany.

Still, about 17% of Romanian international students opted for universities of the Weimar Republic in 1928, while 14% others opted for Austrian institutions. Around 1935, after the Nazi take-over, Romania was well on its way to fascism and involved in a policy of “rapprochement” with Nazi Germany, but only 11% of Romanian students studied in the Reich (and a tiny additional proportion of 4% in Austria). Interestingly enough, in 1928, around 75% of the Romanian students enrolled in German institutions declared German to be their mother tongue, and in 1934 this was already 95%¹¹, in all probability members of the German Diaspora.

In fact, the explanation is more complex, not only as regards the ethno-psychological features of Romanians, but also the post-war strategy of France. In other words, France manifested a profound desire to compensate for the decline of French military and economic power via cultural preeminence, encouraging the presence of foreign students in its universities. From this per-

¹¹ Victor Karady, *Student Mobility and Western Universities: Pattern of Unequal Exchange in the European Academic Market, 1880-1939*, in vol. *Transnational intellectual Networks. Forms of Academic Knowledge and the Search for Cultural Identities*, Frankfurt/New York, Campus Verlag, 2005, p.361-399.

spective, after 1920 the Romanian students participated in this strategy as the promoters of French customs and lifestyle in their home country. For example, during the 1927/28 academic year, French statistical reports recorded the presence of 1,182 Romanian students in Paris, who represented 18% of all foreign students. During the 1931/32 academic year the percentage increased to 18.5%, and stayed almost unchanged until 1939. Romanian students were most numerous in the faculties of law and medicine, and they were almost invariably the most represented foreign group in all faculties during the interwar period.

These are but a few contextual elements to the study of Romanian academic migrations, an effort that cannot be conceived as an individual enterprise, but rather as a collective effort based on an articulate and rigorously designed project. Even though it is almost impossible to follow all Romanian students enrolled in western universities between 1860 and 1940 throughout their lives and describe the various paths they took, it is possible to make an attempt to estimate how many persons pursued a professional career on their return from European countries.

Table 1: Romanian University Professors – Place of Degrees (Licentiate's)

		Total			Total
		Arts	Natural Sciences	Law	
Romania	1864-1918	35	37	18	90
	1919-1944	71	84	105	228
France	1864-1918	8	32	32	68
	1919-1944	9	11	12	32
Germany	1864-1918	8	1	9	18
	1919-1944	5	1	1	7
Austria	1864-1918	4	4	2	10
	1919-1944	28	9	8	45
Hungary	1864-1918	2			2
	1919-1944	5	5	11	22
Belgium	1864-1918			3	3
	1919-1944				
Italia	1864-1918	2	1	1	4
	1919-1944	1	3		2
Switzerland	1864-1918			1	1
	1919-1944	1	2		3
Russia	1864-1918				
	1919-1944	2			2
Greece	1864-1918	3			3
	1919-1944	1			1
Polond	1864-1918		1		1
	1919-1944				
Total	1864-1918	63	76	62	201
	1919-1944	123	113	105	341

Table 1 and 2 show some details about the Romanian university professors and their place of university graduation. These tables present in a shortcut the scope of those, who benefited from the European higher education system, returned home and embarked upon careers as leaders in their fields, holding influential positions especially in institutions of higher education and scientific research.

Table 2: Romanian University Professors – Place of Doctoral Degrees

		Total				Total
		Arts	Natural Sciences	Law	Medicine	
Romania	1864-1918	2	3		22	27
	1919-1944	46	39	28	88	201
France	1864-1918	13	37	38	58	146
	1919-1944	14	45	48	16	123
Germany	1864-1918	20	12	15	10	57
	1919-1944	24	11	8	2	45
Austria	1864-1918	3	3	1	11	18
	1919-1944	21	6	7	5	39
Hungary	1864-1918	1			1	2
	1919-1944	5	2	9	5	21
Belgium	1864-1918	1	1	3		5
	1919-1944			5		5
Italy	1864-1918	2	1	2	2	7
	1919-1944	2	6		1	9
Switzerland	1864-1918		3	1	1	5
	1919-1944	1	2		1	4
Russia	1864-1918					
	1919-1944	1				
Greece	1864-1918	1				1
	1919-1944					
Serbia	1864-1918	1				1
	1919-1944					
Spain	1864-1918	1				1
	1919-1944					
Poland	1864-1918	3				3
	1919-1944					
Czechia	1864-1918					
	1919-1944	1				1
Total	1864-1918	46	60	60	105	271
	1919-1944	118	111	105	118	452

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