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# **“Fatherland” and “Nation” for Schoolchildren Textbooks and the Concept of Nationhood in Romanian Schools**

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Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “nation” is the main pattern of identification for the people living in Europe, and education received in schools has strengthened this identification. Of course, we know that nationhood is not the only way people identify themselves, or the groups they belong to, and we also know that the concepts on nationhood have varied a lot during these last two centuries. When asserting a certain national identity, people usually do not refer only to the human group forming a nation, but also to a certain territory. In fact, each community, including national communities, legitimates itself through the relationship with a geographical space, which is considered to be its primordial matrix, generator of its identity. Therefore, the construction of identities implies necessarily the activation of concepts and affects towards this territory, which is usually defined as home of the ancestors, as Fatherland or Motherland. This territory can overlap with the state where the respective community lives, but may also include regions belonging to other states, or be completely outside the respective state.

In the following, we will sketch the evolution of these two concepts in the Romanian culture, with special reference to the way they were presented in schoolbooks. The reasons for

our choice are obvious. Schoolbooks certainly do not include the most elaborate versions of these concepts, but the fact that they were written for schoolchildren forced the authors to be as clear and straightforward as possible. Besides, schoolbooks had a larger impact on the minds of most of the population than any of the high standard academic debates on nationhood and/or Fatherland.

For many reasons, especially determined by the nature of our analysis, we have deliberately chosen to emphasize mainly the limits of the period envisaged (the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 1990s). In this respect we will only highlight some of the basic elements for the interwar period and for the Communist period, opening the floor for further analyzes. Thus, the main point of our discussion will be the comment of the textbooks published in the last ten years.

Our analysis will pay attention not only to history textbooks, but also to schoolbooks used for teaching literature, civics, and geography. And for a further analysis, we suggest an overview through music textbooks, and drawing, and gymnastic classes.

We do not intend to remain at the level of definitions. Textbooks provide various definitions and explanations for the concepts of nation, nationality, and citizenship. Some of these definitions may represent only mandatory social and political requirements, better or worse assimilated by the schoolbook authors. Even in democratic societies, definitions can be the expression of the textbook authors' opinion about the problem according to their level of knowledge/understanding, or can express what the authors think that the society and the authorities expect them to write on this topic. Therefore, although comparing definitions may be fascinating, e.g., to see what an author has understood from Anderson, Smith or Geertz, or to find the way they have puzzled the information, we intend

to go beyond definitions, and to investigate how theory is translated into concrete educative messages. School education is not only a question of learning theories, definitions, and/or points of view. It is a question of socializing and integrating children in a community. Shaping the minds of pupils is usually due not to theoretical approaches, but to a complex of images, signs, and symbols dressing the definitions (or existing beside the definitions). Textbooks dispatch in a very simple and accessible way concrete statements and assertions about the Fatherland and the Nation, and these statements and assertions are more persuasive in generating the feeling of nationhood than the boring message of definitions. Whether we like it or not, textbooks (and usually the most successful) provide a sort of fast-food information easier to be consumed. In this respect, our investigation will try to outline the way the concepts of nation and fatherland became tools for national education and parts of the collective memory shaped in school.

First definitions appear in the geography textbooks. According to Florian Aaron, a famous 19<sup>th</sup> century teacher at Sf. Sava College in Bucharest and prolific textbooks author, “the nation is a great society composed of a number of families who talk the same language and share the same customs and habits”.<sup>1</sup> The same scheme is used also by other geography schoolbook authors, as for example Iosif Genilie, teacher at the same College: “The nation is a huge society, composed by all people of the same descent, language and ancestors.”<sup>2</sup> This German definition of the nation prevails throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron Florian, *Manual de geografia cea mică*, București, 1839, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Iosif Genilie, *Printipuri de geografie sau începuturi de geografie statistică, politică, fizică și astronomică. Pentru tinerime școlilor publice*, București, 1841, p.45.

The concept of *fatherland* is considered older than that of *nation*, and therefore did not need definitions or qualifications. For Florian Aaron, “the Motherland is the common mother of all people living in this place”.<sup>3</sup> Up to the 1860s, the affiliation to the fatherland was obtained either through birth or through living in the respective fatherland. In the 1860s, the affiliation to the nation “to which belongs the soil of the fatherland where it lives”<sup>4</sup> becomes the main criterion. For a history schoolbook author,

fatherland is called that country, where the people living it is its own master and has the power to regulate as it pleases its own interests; the country in which the inhabitants have the same language, the same habits, the same connections of blood, kinship, and mutual love.<sup>5</sup>

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some schoolbook authors feel the need to distinguish between *people* (*popor*) and *nation*. For Zaharia Antinescu, the people are all inhabitants of a country, while “all the people who live together in a country and talk the same language form together a nation”. Yet, sensitive to the fact that the Romanians lived in several states, the same author adds that the Romanian nation “is formed by all the Romanians living on earth”.<sup>6</sup> The tendency is to add

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<sup>3</sup> Aaron Florian, *Catihismul omului creștin, moral și soțial*, București, 1834, p. 97.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, *Micul catehism sau datoriile omului creștin, moral și soțial pentru școlile primare urbane și rurale de ambe-sexe*, București, 1869, pp. 46-47.

<sup>5</sup> Grigorie Cristescu, *Manual de istoria Românilor pentru școlile primare urbane și rurale de ambe-sexe*, Iași, 1877, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Zacharia Antinescu, *Geografia României și a țărilor învecinate pentru usul claselor primare urbane și rurale de ambe-sexe*, Ploiești, 1876, p. 16.

new features to the definition of nationhood, as stated in a reader from 1871: “of the same nation are the people who have their country, have the same origin, speak the same language, have the same religion and the same customs”.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the readers contain the sharpest definitions:

Romanian is all human born from Romanian parents and who keeps with the Romanians, i.e. keeps with the Romanian law, with the Romanian language, with the Romanian religion, and with the other Romanian customs. I unite myself and keep with all what have the Romanians, and I will fight together with them when the aliens will try to make us lose one of these saint things, left by our ancestors. I am Romanian and I love all Romanians as my brethren... And those who are not united with the Romanians by these links, are and are called foreigners.<sup>8</sup>

This exclusiveness is the rule after the 1860s. Although the authors acknowledge that Romania is inhabited not only by Romanians, but also by people of different nationalities, they insist that the Romanians have more rights in and on the fatherland.

In our country live about 5 million Romanians... But besides Romanians, in free Romania live also several aliens, such as Jews, Hungarians, Greeks, Russians, Bulgarians, Germans. Yet Romania belongs only to the Romanians, and only they have the right to own it; because our ancestors have shed their blood to defend it for more than 1700 years against many terrible enemies who tried to take it from them.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> C. Grigorescu, I. Creangă, V. Răceanu, *Învățătorul copiilor. Carte de cetit în clasele primare*, Iași, 1871, pp.56-57.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, 1875, p. 107.

In the General Council of Public Education there were expressed opinions that pupils of other religions than the Orthodox, i.e. Jews, Catholics, Lutherans, etc., were not Romanian, but foreigners; although such extreme opinions did not penetrate into schoolbooks, the tendency towards exclusiveness is clear in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and prevailed up to World War I.

At the end of World War I, the provinces inhabited by Romanians, which had been under Russian and Austrian-Hungarian rule, joined the Romanian nation-state into what was called Greater Romania. The national unification, and the new vigor of nationalism due to the World War determined new accents in the definition of nationhood and fatherland. As for example, for Ioan Lupaș, one of the leading historians coming from Transylvania, national life is the result of following factors:

1. **the geographical factor**, i.e. **the country or the territory** of the people whose history we want to know; 2. **the ethnographic factor**, i.e. **the race or the breed of the humans** who form the people; 3. **the religious factor**, i.e. **the faith or confession** to which belongs the people; 4. **the rational factor**, i.e. **the language of the people**; 5. **the traditional factor**, i.e. **the customs, habits and historical memories** of the people; 6. **the juridical factor**, i.e. the laws and social **institutions** under whose protection the people has developed; 7. **the moral factor**, i.e. **the national conscience**, without which all other factors are weak and insecure. This national conscience is the idea the people shapes about its value and historical calling. It gives life to all other constitutive factors.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ioan Lupaș, *Manual de istorie pentru școlile secundare*, 1921, p. 5.

Although Greater Romania contained a variety of national and confessional minorities, and although the new Constitution from 1923 specifically awarded full citizenship also to the members of non-Christian communities, the schoolbook authors avoided discussing this diversity, and insisted only on the exclusive features of being Romanian. In the case of Lupaş, when discussing the factors he had enumerated, he speaks about the race and qualities of the Romanians, but does not mention the other nationalities; he also insists on the fact that the Romanians have stubbornly defended their Orthodoxy against Calvinism during the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries without even mentioning the Union with Rome and the resulting Greek-Catholic confession.<sup>11</sup> The case of Lupaş is typical for the way the schoolbook authors of the interwar period avoided to discuss frankly the diversity of Greater Romania, and preferred to praise an ideal Romanian nationhood.

During the communist period, the Stalinist definition of the nation prevailed. This definition diminished the importance of language and race in favor of territory, economic cohesion, and class character. The nation was no longer eternal, but a historical entity, specific for the modern and contemporary history. There was made a clear distinction between the more traditionally defined people, and the strict concept of nation. There was also made an effort to include the members of the various national minorities as full members of the socialist nation. During the first decades of the socialist rule, the trend was to focus more on the affiliation towards the socialist fatherland, and to put less stress on the nation; this tendency was consistent with the insistence on proletarian internationalism. Beginning with the 1960s, the Romanian nation returned in force, while internationalism was

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 7-10.

downplayed. Yet, the textbook authors generally avoided the outspoken exclusiveness of the interwar period. The Romanian-ness became one of the main educational elements, the main purpose of the teaching of Romanian history being “the patriotic education of young pupils” in order to “educate strong feelings” towards the “fatherland” and “people”. According to a didactical guide of the 1980s, history “should not be taught only to be known, but to be... /emotionally/ lived by children”.<sup>12</sup> For example, in the textbook for 8<sup>th</sup> grade used in the 1980s the Romanian nation was considered the result of a long-time process: “The forming of the Romanian people and of the Romanian language is the fundamental element of the process of constitution of the Romanian nation”. According to the textbook authors, other factors were the creation of the Romanian medieval states (“giving to the new state the name *Țara Românească* its makers have underlined the Romanian character of the state and its unifying quintessence”), the struggle against the assault of the big neighboring feudal states and Michael the Brave’s Union.<sup>13</sup>

After the demise of the communist rule, the schoolbook authors were faced with two opposite trends. First, the blame put on the communist period meant also a certain return to the interwar references, whose nationalist pattern fueled the rise of post-communist nationalism. On the opposite, the Western models and the need to adjust the education according to European patterns lead towards a more cautious and balanced approach of the concepts of nation and fatherland.

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<sup>12</sup> *Metodica predării istoriei patriei*. Manual pentru clasa a XI-a, licee pedagogice, București, 1988, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Hadrian Daicoviciu, Pompiliu Teodor, Ioan Cîmpeanu, *Istoria antică și medie a României*. Manual pentru clasa a VIII-a, București, 1988, p. 230.

Yet, more balanced and cautious concepts are also more difficult to teach. For school children, concepts like nation or people might seem abstract, and it is not easy to integrate them functionally into an educational framework. Another problem is to make a clear difference between these two notions, when sometimes even the schoolbook authors are not quite clear about them.

The textbooks for 4<sup>th</sup> grade for civic education contain, according to the curriculum, lessons devoted to the concepts of people, nation, and international community. It is obvious that for most of the authors the relationship between nationality and citizenship is not very clear. The homogenous nation-state seems to be the normal form of social organization. So we can find definitions explaining the notion of people as “all the inhabitants of a country; all the citizens of a country”,<sup>14</sup> and, adding under the title “to keep in mind”, that

in the space between the Carpathians, the Danube and the Black Sea lives the Romanian people /.../ Our people has a Latin origin, being related with the Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese peoples. The Romanian people are proud of his valiant ancestors: the Dacians and the Romans. We, the Romanians, are a peaceful people, loving the country, welcoming, hard working, and we want to live in good neighborhood and peace with all other peoples.<sup>15</sup>

Taking into account that the Romanians form the majority of the population, the authors treating subjects as *nation*, *people*, and *national community* put the accent especially or even entirely on the problems of the ethnic Romanians. So, the next

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<sup>14</sup> Marcela Peneș, Vasile Molan, *Educație civică*. Manual pentru clasa a IV-a, București, 1997, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

lesson is devoted to the “heroes of the Romanian folk” (*neam*), the children being invited to conduct a conversation on the theme: “Heroes never die”. Among the examples suggested by the textbook we find one technical scientist (Aurel Vlaicu), one painter (Ștefan Luchian) and political/military heroes: Decebal, Stephan the Great, Michael the Great, Pinteș, Nicolae Bălcescu and the “child-hero” Măriuca Zaharia.<sup>16</sup>

When defining the nation, the civics textbooks used in elementary schools provide us information as:

The nation is a group of persons, bigger than the local community: it is a community whose members have a territory, a language, a common history and a common culture, are linked by the same life customs and by the same way of thinking (!); they feel to be part of a community which is different from others.<sup>17</sup>

Or, in a more simple way, another textbook points out that

we are a nation because we speak the same language, we are offspring of the same ancient earth, we work for the prosperity of our people, we cherish the same customs and traditions, we know our ancestors, brothers and folk (*neam*).

Briefly,

the nation is a community of people who feel united through the same customs or through a certain way of thinking and who have the sentiment that they form a group different to others<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 50-51.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> Eugenia Lascu, Iuliana Lascu, Maria Henciu, *Educație civică*. Manual pentru clasa a IV-a, Zalău: Gil, 1998, p. 46.

We may see that at least part of the Stalinist definition of the nation is left aside. Yet, the assimilation of new definitions is only partial, because the authors use also the notion of people (*popor*), and consider in a very Stalinist way that the people is older than the nation, and the nation is the organic prolongation of the people.

A civics textbook for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade introduced also the concept of “ethnies” (*etnii*). These are formed by “people who have lived together, have developed the same language, traditions, culture, becoming different from the others”.<sup>19</sup> Although the authors try to insist also on the importance of the ethnic self-conscience, and on the fact that without such a conscience an ethnic risks to disappear from history, it is obvious that the organic vision on ethnicity and nationhood prevails. The fatherland is the result of the way an ethny has conceived its relationship with a territory, so that “fatherland means at the same time: a space (a certain geography), time (a certain history) and a common culture (the national specificity)”.<sup>20</sup>

The inconsequence in treating the concepts of people, nation and state generates confusing statements like: “People belong to a specific nation. The Earth is divided between 191 countries. Every country, every nation has its flag, its traditional customs and a maternal language specific to each people.”<sup>21</sup> Also, the territory is organically linked to the idea of people: “Every people lives a specific territory, a country.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Maria-Liana Lăcătuș, Mihaela Penu-Pușcaș, *Cultură civică*. Manual pentru clasa a VIII-a, București, 2000, p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 97.

<sup>21</sup> Eugenia Lascu, Iuliana Lascu, Maria Henciu, *Educație civică*. Manual pentru clasa a IV-a, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 44.

In this respect, the issue of minorities becomes just one among the other general problems of civics. It gives even the impression of being an external and neutral subject, treated in a schematic and boring manner. In the lesson about *Local and national communities* the only information about minorities takes the form of a terse and vague definition.

Nationalities, national minorities are the groups of people from the territory of a state, who live together with those forming the majority of the population. These minorities are characterized by language community, a specific culture and self-conscience.<sup>23</sup>

Other definitions are even more vague and confusing:

The people with common features, different from the dominant group, form a minority group.<sup>24</sup>

And when it comes to explain what national minorities really are about, the same author states that:

Many members of the national minority groups continue to use their maternal language and prefer to remain loyal to their own culture. They want to stay as they are.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Elena Nedelcu, Ecaterina Morar, *Cultură civică*. Manual pentru clasa a VII, București, 1999, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Maria-Liana Lăcătuș, *Educație civică*. Manual pentru clasa a VII-a, București, 1999, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*. Such statements are not neutral: without providing any discussion or explanation, the passage continues with the blunt question: “How do you think it is better: the national minorities should be assimilated, or should the national differences be preserved? Argue”.

No question of history or other specific information about the citizens belonging to the national minorities. We have only short fragments stating that

on the territory of our country together with the Romanians are living *other* nationalities: Hungarians, Germans, Serbs, etc.,

strengthened by a quotation from the Romanian Constitution about the fact that the state recognizes and guarantees all the rights of the national minorities.<sup>26</sup> After formal enumerations of the “ethnic minorities living in Romania”, some authors state that:

the harmonious living together between the ethnic minorities and the majority population is an important principle of democracy, practiced in many European countries.<sup>27</sup>

In the framework of such a world-vision, what could a child from a national minority group answer when asked bluntly “what duties have people towards the nation they belong to?”<sup>28</sup>

It is obvious that the concept of nation became only a pretext to educate the children in the values of the Romanian-ness. The Romanian nation is an undisputed and unconflictual center.

The information is enriched in time by the knowledge supplied by the Romanian history textbooks. Here not the definitions are essential, but the whole narrative of the textbooks becomes an instrument for transmitting and educating mainly the idea of nationhood.

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<sup>26</sup> M. Peneș, V. Molan, *Educație civică.*, p. 53.

<sup>27</sup> Dakmara Georgescu, Olga-Doina Ștefănescu, *Cultură civică.* Manual pentru clasa a VII-a, București: Humanitas, 1999, p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem.*

Three aspects are crucial for the concept of nationhood in history textbooks:

- The problem of the title of the discipline: history of Romanians or history of Romania;
- The relation between the Romanians and the geographical environment;
- The presence/absence of minorities.

It is obvious to what extent these elements are embodying the spiritual boundaries of the nationhood. And they are destined to design a mental map of the Fatherland.

In this respect, the title of the discipline receives a heavy ideological implication. The question was whether its title should have been “The History of Romania” (*Istoria României*), a title used during the communist rule, or “The History of the Romanians” (*Istoria românilor*), how it had been before World War II and how it had been used also by the major Romanian historians of the 19th century and of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the teachers preferred “The History of the Romanians” and a large and politically varied political lobby determined an official choice in this respect, a choice that was also included in the education law of 1995. In a schoolbook published in 1992, one of its authors being at the same time the responsible inspector for history in the Ministry of Education, we can find the following argument:

The needed transition to a new schoolbook of national history determines us to ask ourselves how it should be entitled: “The History of Romania” or “The History of the Romanians”? For the first choice, argue several examples from other European countries or from the broader world. The authors of this schoolbook prefer the second alternative, taking thus into consideration that the Romanians live in two distinct

states, Romania and the Republic of Moldavia, and also outside the borders of these two states.<sup>29</sup>

But they feel it necessary to acknowledge that

the evolution of the Romanian people is narrated in close connection with the lives of the inhabitants of Hungarian, German, Serb, Bulgarian, Turkish and Tartarian, Ukrainian, Jewish, Armenian and other nationalities, with the due respect for all of them.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, the option for “the history of the Romanians” didn’t mean a major change in structuring the national history taught in schools. Yet, it was a way to stress that Romanian national history belonged more to the ethnic Romanians than to the other nationalities. The schoolbook was thus considered the preserver of the collective memory of the Romanians as a national identity group.

We can easily see that the relationship with the geographical background is still considered to be essential. The alternative schoolbooks for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade include special lessons about “man and environment throughout history” and “the forest in the life of the Romanian people”. In one of these schoolbooks there is included even a lesson entitled “A rich country with hardworking people” (*O țară bogată cu oameni harnici*). The pupils are taught that the land of the fatherland is “picturesque and rich”,<sup>31</sup> and “it must be protected, respected and defended.

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<sup>29</sup> Mihai Manea, Adrian Pascu, Bogdan Teodorescu, *Istoria românilor din cele mai vechi timpuri până la revoluția din 1821*. Manual pentru clasa a XI-a, București, 1992, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> Maria Ochescu, Sorin Oane, *Istoria românilor*. Manual pentru clasa a IV-a, București, 1998, p. 7.

It is the most valuable heritage left by the ancestors.”<sup>32</sup>

In 1999, the new curriculum for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade demanded as an introduction to the history of the Romanians a Braudel-inspired chapter about the relationship between people, geographical environment, and time. The authors of the curriculum didn’t supply any explanation about their way of understanding this topic, in order to avoid restraining the liberty of the authors. The intention was noble, but turned bad, because most of the schoolbook authors hadn’t assimilated Braudel, and delivered an organicist vision of the past, based mainly on interwar Romanian historians and geographers. So, about the geographical environment and historical time, a very young researcher, now textbook author, states that:

The geographical unity of the Carpathian-Danubian area is based on three important elements: the Danube, the Carpathians and the Black Sea. The harmonious proportionality of the geographical elements, the temperate climate, the richness of vegetation and fauna supplied optimal living conditions to the inhabitants of this geographical area. So is to be explained the living continuity from the oldest times till today, despite the many migrations which affected the territory of our country up to the Middle Ages and which determined demographical fluctuations. The plains and the river valleys allowed practicing agriculture, in the hills there were raised animals, and from the mountains there were extracted the riches of the underground. Romania’s hydrographical system, coming from the Carpathians, is another unity element, the rivers being important communication routes between the different provinces. The Danube has always been a contact way with Central Europe, favoring the circulation of people, ideas, and cultural and

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<sup>32</sup> Simona Grigore, Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu, Niculae Cristea, *Istoria Românilor*. Manual pentru clasa a IV-a, București, p. 9.

material goods. People always felt connected with the environment, with which they often identified themselves.<sup>33</sup>

The way the minorities are mirrored in the history textbooks could be seen as an indicator for the “temperature” of the Romanian-ness. While Romanian nationhood and Orthodox faith are the basic historical values encountered in many of the textbooks, the national minorities do not exist independently. The older generation of schoolbooks mentioned them almost only in connection with the Romanians. There could be found almost nothing about their customs, traditions, and ways of life and/or specific cultures.

The curricula for the 12<sup>th</sup> grade specifically requested some lessons about the minorities, for example a lesson about the Jewish problem in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, or a chapter on unity and diversity in Greater Romania (interwar period), with a case study on the ethnical parties in the Romanian Parliament. But stating only in a general way the necessity of coping with the problems of minorities, and explicitly mentioning only the Hungarians, Saxons and Jews, the intention of the curricula authors to instil some multi-perspectivity into the teaching of history proved to be uncomfortable for the schoolbook authors, who either tried to avoid such themes, or supplied biased and/or irrelevant lessons to these topics. The lessons or paragraphs devoted to the minorities generate the impression that the history of minorities is a social requirement, or a necessary appendix used for the completion of the history of Romanians. Most of the authors are simply not interested in such issues, write about them only because it is requested explicitly by the curriculum, and the focus on the history of Romanians makes

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<sup>33</sup> Alexandru Vulpe, Radu G. Păun, Radu Băjenaru, Ioan Grosu, *Istoria românilor*. Manual pentru clasa a VIII-a, București, 2000, p. 8.

the passages about the minorities look rather artificial. And there is again almost nothing about the customs, traditions, and specificities of the minorities sharing for years and years not only the same space, but in fact the same flow of history. The lack of interest is shown by the brief and desolate way of presenting the information about minorities. Feeling that they have to cope with a delicate subject, some of the textbook authors prefer the concise style of a report. And often they mention the minorities just for making a point with respect to the majority. For example, when treating the ethnic structures in medieval Transylvania, the authors of a textbook stress in a more than neutral and aseptic manner, that in the moment when the present minorities settled in Transylvania the ethnic structure was represented by Romanians, “the majority of population and the ancient inhabitants of Transylvania”; the Magyars “established in Transylvania in the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries”, the Szeklers (“colonized in the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Bihor, then in the Târnave area, and then on the line of the oriental Carpathians”) and the Saxons, “colonized during the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries in Orăștie, Sibiu, Târnave, Țara Bârsei”.<sup>34</sup> And the conclusion is even more antagonistic: Transylvania “had a complex ethnical structure (Hungarians, Saxons, Szeklers); the Romanians were excluded from the political and religious life of the Principality”.<sup>35</sup> It is clear, the aim of this wishy-washy enumeration is not to discuss the problems of minorities, but to reinforce by comparison the idea that the Romanians are more ancient in living on this territory than all others.

It is obvious that the textbook authors feel uncomfortable with the compulsory request of the curriculum to discuss a

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<sup>34</sup> Ion Scurtu, Marian Curculescu, Constantin Dincă, Aurel Constantin Soare, *Istoria Românilor*. Manual pentru clasa a XII-a, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, București, , 2000, p. 28.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28.

topic as “unity and diversity in Greater Romania”. Some of the authors prefer to avoid a real discussion and remain at the level of general statements, presenting only selected quotations from laws and regulations of the interwar period.

A good example is the schoolbook coordinated by Ioan Scurtu, who gives plenty quotations from laws and political declarations, but avoids commenting and/or analyzing them. The authors try thus to create the impression that, in spite of some minor disagreements, all was almost perfect in the relationship between the minorities and the Romanian nation-state. A perfect illustration of the perverse way of trying to direct the understanding of the pupils by using dubious historical evidence is the table on page 104: the table contains a statistics of the ownership of economic enterprises in interwar Romania, without explaining whether it relates to the capital or to the number of enterprises, or how were found out the figures for the joint stock companies; then, after providing the pupils with data which suggest that the Romanians owned only about 20% of the total, while the Jews owned 27.8%, the Germans 13%, and so on, the authors just ask without any other comment: “What conclusions do you draw?”<sup>36</sup>

Another example is even worse, because it is provided by a researcher of the younger generation. The author describes in a biased and stereotypical manner the situation of the main minorities, insisting only on the relations between the minorities and the Romanian state, without discussing any other aspects of minority life. The contrast between the Germans and the Hungarians is again present. While “altogether, till the end of the 1930s, the German minority wasn’t a threat for the unity of the Romanian state”, the Hungarians “accepted only with difficulty the new realities”, and on the whole were ungrateful

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<sup>36</sup> I. Scurtu, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 104.

in spite of the generous policy of the Romanian state.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the author concludes:

During the interwar period Romania was a democratic state, where there were secured the basic rights of its citizen, including the minorities. These [the minorities] provided new contents to the Romanian civilization. The acculturation processes didn't function efficiently, leading representatives of the minorities often under-evaluating the Romanian civilization. The sentiment of national solidarity of the minority with the majority [!] was reduced; there didn't exist a common national project, which would have brought together the Romanians and the minorities. [...] Loyalty did not mean identifying the own (minority) effort with the general, national, one. In other words, Greater Romania was not loved by all its sons.<sup>38</sup>

This conclusion is followed by “memorable” requests:

Compare the attitude of the minorities towards the Romanian state. If you had been member of a minority in interwar Romania, would you have felt oppressed? Do you think that there exists a Romanian national specific? If yes, how would you define it?<sup>39</sup>

Besides the wooden language and the sinuous logic, it is obvious the unilateral accent. We face the same old story about “us” against “them”, we, the “good guys”, and they, the unfaithful and ungrateful.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Florin Müller, in Mihai Retegan and Carol Căpiță (coords), *Istoria României*. Manual pentru clasa a XII-a, pp. 147-149.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> See Mirela-Luminița Murgescu, *The History of the Minorities in the Romanian School System. Curricula and Textbooks in the Late 1990s*, in “Internationale Schulbuchforschung”, 23, 2001, nr. 2 (in print).

A conformist and well-stated conception asked that the history textbooks present the historical evolution of the Romanian nation pointing out the “reality” of the main historical moments or heroes. Generally, the textbooks emphasize the idea that the nation it is a concept linked to the modern world, but the main features of the Romanian nation go in time to the ancient world. The authors of a textbook for 12<sup>th</sup> grade claim proudly and underline with bold characters that “by their ancestors, the Geto-Dacians, the Romanians are one of the most ancient peoples in Europe”, “the Romanians ‘are born Christians’”, and they have defended “Christianity against the invasion of the Islamised ‘pagans’”.<sup>41</sup>

When some authors have tried in 1999 to introduce the idea that the nation is an invented community, the public reaction, shared by journalists, politicians and a large number of history teachers, was more than angry and virulent. The social pressure for keeping an old-styled, outdated and exclusivist narrative was obvious, and the efforts of several professional historians to persuade the public that a rethinking of history would not harm any national interests were in vane. For most of the public, as well as for some old-style historians who try to eliminate the more modern historical approaches not only from textbooks, but also from the academic sphere, the nation should be presented as an unquestionable reality based on the so called four pillars of the Romanian identity: ancienty, continuity, unity and independence. The tragic aspect is that the irrelevance of these so-called pillars for wide periods of Romanian history is not taken into consideration, and that the rhetoric of such national-communist historians is perceived by large segments of the public as the standard of scientific national history. Yet,

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<sup>41</sup> Ioan Scurtu. *op. cit.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 5.

the public mood is just one part of the sad story of the last months. What is even more threatening is the fact that the political influence of such nationalist historians as Ioan Scurtu, nowadays advisor of the President of Romania, and their lack of scruples in using political influence for obtaining academic positions and for discrediting their opponents (for example by comparing their innovative efforts with the anti-national history patronized by Roller in the 1950s) will discourage for a longer span of time the reconsideration of Romanian history and nationhood. And also, we have to be aware that the eternal return to the so-called “pillars” of the national identity is in fact the incapacity and unwillingness to accept and sometimes even to understand the democratic values and the democratic game. And more, it is a fear that the young generation could be educated in other values.

Finally, the discussion about nationhood in education leads us to the same and eternal Cartagina: the goal and the finalities of history teaching; the most comfortable way is to link the national identity to history teaching, but we can ask if in the long-run this ethnocentric vision is beneficial not only for the society, but also for the perception of history.