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Ideological indoctrination through propaganda in educational institutions in Romania

Ana-Daniela Farcaș

Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania
 farcasd@ssuta.utcluj.ro

La propagande politique a souvent été introduite dans les institutions éducatives afin d'inculquer un ensemble de valeurs et une manière de penser spécifique chez les jeunes esprits. Au cours de l'histoire, ce phénomène a été plus facile à observer dans les régimes autoritaires, mais il a également existé dans les régimes démocratiques. La période communiste en Roumanie est un exemple révélateur du processus d'endoctrinement dans les écoles publiques et des mécanismes qui l'ont rendu possible. Aujourd'hui, certains règlements internes des établissements et des actes normatifs interdisent la propagande, mais sont-ils réellement respectés? Dans une société en constante évolution, les valeurs changent ou sont remplacées. Certaines finissent par être reflétées par les idéologies des partis. D'un autre côté, si l'on prend en compte le fait que nous vivons depuis que nous sommes nés dans une société idéologisée, peut-on se débarrasser de la propagande dans le processus éducatif?

Mots-clés : éducation, politique, valeurs, propagande, communication, Roumanie.

Political propaganda has often been introduced into educational institutions with the aim of instilling a set of values and a specific mindset in the minds of pupils or students. This phenomenon has been easier to observe in authoritarian political regimes, but it has also existed in democratic regimes. The communist period in Romania is a revealing example for the process of political indoctrination in state schools and the mechanisms that made this possible. Nowadays, internal regulations of schools and universities, but also normative acts, prohibit political propaganda in educational institutions. But are they really respected? In a constantly changing society, values also change or are replaced. Some values end up being reflected by party ideologies. On the other hand, considering the fact that we live and function, since birth, in an ideological society, is it possible for us to get out of this paradigm and get rid of political propaganda in the educational process?

Keywords: education, politics, values, propaganda, communication, Roumania.

La propaganda política se ha introducido a menudo en las instituciones educativas con el fin de inculcar un conjunto de valores y una forma de pensar específica en las mentes jóvenes. A lo largo de la historia, este fenómeno ha sido más fácil de observar en los regímenes autoritarios, pero también ha existido en los regímenes democráticos. El período comunista en Rumania es un ejemplo revelador del proceso de adoctrinamiento en las escuelas públicas y los mecanismos que lo hicieron posible. Hoy en día, algunos reglamentos internos de los establecimientos y actos normativos prohíben la propaganda, pero ¿se respetan realmente? En una sociedad que cambia constantemente, los valores cambian o son reemplazados. Algunas terminan reflejadas en las ideologías de los partidos. Por otro lado, teniendo en cuenta que vivimos desde que nacimos en una sociedad ideologizada, ¿podemos deshacernos de la propaganda en el proceso educativo?

Palabras clave : educación, política, valores, propaganda, comunicación, Rumania.

Introduction

All systems of government, regardless of their type, have included, in one form or another, propaganda in their education system. Indoctrination with certain ideologies is done all over the world. The values of a society and the principles by which society is governed are also reflected in the educational system, just as they are found in the family, which offers another type of education, different in part from the institutionalized one. In the material of school textbooks, in the media, in the family or friendship circle, children encounter multiple ideologies, sets of values, and, gradually, come to internalize some of them. Political parties, whether they are right-wing or left-wing, pursue a series of objectives included in their platform programs and are guided by a set of rules or values. When a democratic government is at the helm of the country, the values respected by this type of regime based on ideas such as freedom, equality, respect for human rights, active participation of citizens in political life through representation, etc. will penetrate society and will be found in all its layers, in all sectors of activity.

The same thing happens in totalitarian governments, but here we observe an exponential increase in the use of propaganda to disseminate ideas specific to the regime. Totalitarian systems have made use of propaganda in the most visible way to indoctrinate the masses, this being done from preschool age, with the enrollment of children in kindergartens. Their great contribution to the indoctrination process is made by people in positions of authority. Two authoritative figures are especially active: the teacher and the president of the country. The instructor, teacher, or educator must be listened to and respected by the children or students. His words cannot be overridden, following the model of political organization. The president, the dictator at the helm of the country, who is often considered the “father” of the people, is the main authoritative figure in the totalitarian state, followed by the party, the two having complete authority.

In the democratic regime, *didactic authority* refers to the *authority of the school*, ‘by transmitting culture to the younger generations’ (Momanu, 2005, p. 44), society and educational institutions are investing the teacher with authority. There is also *epistemic authority*, which belongs to the one who holds the knowledge. In the totalitarian regime, the two types of authority mentioned above are found, but they are reinforced by the authority given by the party, because the teachers who are party members are also the ones who coordinate the activities of the youth organizations where the process of ideologization with totalitarian values takes place. Here, the authority of the political regime ‘is stronger than that of knowledge’ (Momanu, 2005, p. 45). A method of indoctrination often used in totalitarian countries consists of rewriting the country’s history so that it aligns with the doctrine and ideology that the state wishes to propagate even when it departs from proven historical truths.

The importance of youth organizations in the process of political indoctrination in totalitarian regimes can be proven historically. It is enough to see the example of Nazi Germany, where the main youth organizations were German Youngsters (for boys 10 to 14 years old), Young Girls’ League (for girls 10 to 14 years old), The League of German Girls (for girls 14 to 18 years old) and Hitler Youth (for boys 14 to 18 years old) and another, created later, based on volunteerism, called Faith and Beauty (for young women 17 to 21 years old), a branch of The League of German Girls. Although in the period preceding the 1930s there were other youth organizations, they were gradually abolished or absorbed into the organizations managed by the Fascist Party. In 1936 a law was passed that made membership of children and young people in the aforementioned organizations mentioned compulsory (Rempel, 1989, p. 10). Regarding the process of education

in schools, education reform was introduced, in which textbooks were modified to align with Nazi ideology. German teachers were forced to become members of the Fascist Party, and those of Jewish ethnicity or with different political orientations were fired.

The process of political ideologization of educational institutions in communist Romania

Among the characteristics of totalitarian regimes, such as Romania's regime from 1945 to 1989, is the constant concern it places on introducing its specific ideology into the education of young people and children. Communism took power in Romania through a Soviet intervention between 1944 and 1947. Among the methods used by this regime, continuous propaganda and the attempt to gain absolute control (through censorship), and the indoctrination of the population with Marxist-Leninist values and dogmas stand out.

Communist doctrine was based on a series of ideas taken from the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, which were promoted by this regime and elevated to the rank of absolute values: the equality of all, which could be obtained through an attack on private property and through forced agrarian collectivization, the inclusion of all means of production under the control of the state, the manufacture of the "new man" according to these new absolute values, which were to be implemented at the social level. The class of proletarians, of workers, was the one that gained overwhelming importance, while the owners of land or of the means of production, the peasants and the capitalists, as well as members of the old parties, intellectuals or priests were persecuted, perceived as enemies of the party and the country. According to Marx and Engels ideology is one of the methods by which the existing social order is propagated and maintained, based on the historical development of society, that is, on the concepts regarding property and production that belong to the bourgeoisie, the oppressive, dominant class. History demonstrates that human society was based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of one part of society by the other, more dominant part.

Starting from this premise, we can say that in the theory of Marx and Engels, education and ideology are linked. Marx and Engels dismantle concepts such as the eternal laws of nature and reason' (Marx & Engels, 2014, p. 107). The concepts existing in society include, in addition to those related to production and property, the worldview, with historical relations and values, some of which have changed with the development of society. Most people adhere to a series of moral, religious, political, philosophical, legal ideas, some being considered eternal, such as the ideas of justice and freedom. Communism aims to abolish these truths (like religion or morality) because it views them as having had an important role in the historical development that propagated the conception of the necessity of the two antagonistic classes. The conception regarding the laws or truths and the social order was also specific to the dominant classes that disappeared in history. 'The dominant ideas of an era have always been only the ideas of the ruling class' (Marx & Engels, 2014, p. 106).

Marx and Engels recall that those who are against them accuse communists of wanting to abolish the ties between children and parents in education, replacing the education given by the family with social education. Their response to this accusation is that education is determined by society, by social relations anyway. This is because society intervenes in the educational process directly or indirectly through school. The communists do not, therefore, want to invent something

new, because the influence of society on education has always existed. Their goal is to change the character of education, tearing it away from the influence of the bourgeoisie, the ruling class. The communist ideal, the revolution, in which the proletariat, conscious of its own power, will overthrow the current social order, will produce the most radical rupture with traditional ideas. The communists are realists; they realize that such a rupture cannot occur peacefully. Marx and Engels propose a series of measures that can be followed so that, finally, the long-awaited revolution can take place. The importance of education in the process leading up to the revolution can be observed by including it in the ten proposed steps. Here it is specified that education must be free for all children and that education must be combined with material production (Marx & Engels, 2014, p. 110).

The soviet model

As in many other sectors, the education system was affected by communist propaganda following the Soviet model. In 1918, the Communist Youth Union (Komsomol) was established in Russia, after the Bolsheviks came to power; the union was designed to have a triple functionality: ideological, economic and military. Young people, both under Lenin's leadership and later under Stalin's, had the duty to learn communist ideology, to combine theory with practical activities and to be patriots, that is, to defend the country from internal and external dangers if necessary (Tismăneanu, Dobrinu & Vasile, 2007, p. 178). In 1922, the Pioneer Organization was founded, which included children between the ages of 9 and 14. The 'Octobrist' Organization, which was established in the same period, took care of younger children, up to 8 years of age. Both the Pioneers and the Octobrists were under the control of Komsomol (Tismăneanu, Dobrinu & Vasile, 2007, p.179).

In Romania this process took place by including children and young people in communist youth organizations, which were organized to carry out their activity within kindergartens, schools and universities, under the guidance and supervision of educators or teachers who were members of the Communist Party. The main communist youth organization had a turbulent history, which means that the date of its founding is not exactly known. The Communist Youth Union was founded in 1922, organization going through a series of dissolutions and re-establishments under the same or another name. The year 1948 marks the founding of the Romanian Workers' Party through the merger of the Romanian Communist Party with part of the Social Democratic Party, which brings with it the emergence of another youth organization: the Workers' Youth Union. This coincides with the beginning of the purge of youth organizations of all young people who previously participated in protests against the Communist Party, but also of all young people included in youth organizations of other competing political parties: the Peasant Party, the Liberals or the Legionaries. All existing youth organizations were united under the umbrella of the Workers' Youth Union in 1949 (Tismăneanu, Dobrinu & Vasile, 2007, p. 181-182), whose activity would be profoundly influenced by contacts with the corresponding organization in the Soviet Union, the Komsomol. The Worker's Youth Union's name was changed again in 1965 taking the form of the Communist Youth Union, a name it would keep until the fall of the regime in 1989. If at first the inclusion of members in this organization was done on exclusive criteria, based on party membership, starting in the 1960s the rules became increasingly permissive, so that in 1988 over 4 million young people were included as members. Their recruitment began in the eighth grade (from the age of 14) in 1983 and gradually it came to the point that all students were members of the organization from the tenth grade onwards. With the passage of time, the

organization became increasingly inclusive: if in 1956 the age range of members was between 14-26 years old, from 1985, the age limits will be 14-30 years old.

Younger children were also included in youth organizations that became satellites of the Communist Youth Union, also mandatory (Tismăneanu, Dobrinu & Vasile, 2007, p. 195-196).

The year 1947 marks the founding of the organization for children between the ages of 7 and 15, called the 'Pioneers of Romania'. The organization of the first detachments of pioneers was established in 1949, at a party meeting and included children aged between 7 and 15 years old. All the children from the education system who passed to the second grade (approx. 8 years of age) participated in a ceremony in which they were made pioneers, where they took an oath and were given a red tie with a tricolor. Within this organization, there was a well-established order, in which the students, depending on their discipline and academic results, were ranked. The pioneers participated in activities such as raising animals, but also in special events or competitions, in which the most meritorious were awarded with various badges or distinctions. Students were taught to respect communist values: patriotism, love for the country, people, and party; knowledge of the glorious history of Romania and Romanian traditions; admiration and devotion for the working people and for socialist and communist goals. The activities of the pioneers were coordinated by the teachers from the schools where they studied, who were part of the councils of the Organization of Pioneers (Jbanca, 2017). All pioneers knew the organization's anthem, titled 'I have my tie' (in reference to the red tie received upon entering the ranks of pioneers). The song praised the pioneer status and had the role of making the members of the organization proud. The anthem also tried to establish some standards regarding the most desired and praised jobs in the regime: those of workers, in the case of this anthem - the construction workers. The organization was dissolved in 1989, after the fall of communism (Bouleanu, 2024). Younger children were also included in youth organizations that became satellites of the Communist Youth Union, also mandatory (Tismăneanu, Dobrinu & Vasile, 2007, p. 195-196).

In 1976, the Romanian Communist Party founded the organization 'Falcons of the Motherland' which was to include children between the ages of 4 and 7. The name was probably based on the metaphor of 'flight to communism' (Zafiu, 2022), which was used in the era, but it is more likely that it arrived in Romania on the Soviet line, from the name of the Soviet Air Forces from the Stalinist period (1930s), who were nicknamed 'Falcons of the Motherland' or 'Stalin's Falcons' (Etty, 2010). The children learned here to recognize the faces of President Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena Ceaușescu, to understand what their functions were and their role in the development of the country, to know the country's flag, to internalize that they were expected to follow the party and its leadership. The indoctrination of young children was also ensured by the magazine that bore the same name as that of the organization. By introducing young children and students into the party's organizations, the desire was to decrease the family's influence on the children and to weaken the family bonds. Thus, young minds would be easier to shape according to the new values. In the era, there were children's books, translated from Russian, that encouraged young people to denounce their friends or relatives who did not share the party's ideology, encouraging militancy.

Restructuration in the spirit of the 'new man'

In the Romanian education system, with the communists coming to power, a big change took place in 1948, when the new Constitution stipulated the nationalization of all private schools, including

the confessional ones. At the declarative level, the decree sought to abolish illiteracy throughout the country, but the provisions included would have much more serious consequences. Decree 175 of August 3, 1948, stipulated that all educational institutions, even confessional or private ones, would come under the management of the Ministry of Public Education, which would be responsible for their administration, organization, and financing, except for technical and vocational schools, which would be under the supervision of the corresponding ministries. The curriculum and the educational methods used in secondary education would also be coordinated by the Ministry of Public Education. The situation would become increasingly difficult for faculties and higher education schools, because they were restructured, which led to the abolition of some chairs and the establishment of new ones, where they were considered necessary. Some of the teachers in these institutions lost their jobs, and the propaganda rhetoric of the era encouraged this with the argument that they had contributed to the spread of anti-democratic and anti-scientific ideas (Tismăneanu, Dobrinu & Vasile, 2007, p. 293). The changes that were to affect education would be made in accordance with Article 2 of the decree, according to which public education aims to train 'the middle and higher cadres of specialists, *on a scientific basis*, which correspond to the needs of the consolidation of popular democracy and the construction of the socialist society'.

The communists realized the potential that educational institutions had for educating children and young people in the spirit of the 'new man'. By taking over all educational institutions under the leadership of the State, but also by establishing control bodies, they ensured that young people would be trained in accordance with communist values. University autonomy was suppressed, and, through Article 32 the aim was to 'clean' or 'purify' Romanian education of inconvenient people, unwanted by the regime, who were considered inappropriate, because they could have influenced students with dangerous ideas. This process of purification took place at all institutional levels, not only in education, and it consisted of the elimination of all people whose attitude or ideas could have influenced the masses with different values than Marxist doctrine or could have brought criticism to the way in which the changes desired by the regime were implemented. The purge of teaching staff not only led to the removal from office of some important intellectuals and personalities, but also brought job insecurity in this profession, lowering, at the same time, the professional status of teachers. The neutrality of the didactic act was replaced with politically and ideologically influenced education. The model followed by the Romanian Workers' Party (the communist party from 1948-1965) was the one that the Soviets applied in 1918-1921. They facilitated access to studies for students considered to be part of 'healthy' families (who adhered to communist ideology). The education reform led to the replacement of university senates by scientific councils, which had an administrative function and ensured that the orders from the party were respected.

The principles followed by communist propaganda that were also found in educational institutions were: a) the importance of work and the worker: individuals were encouraged to work as much as possible, to exceed the established quotas, according to the Stahanovist model¹, to increase productivity and for the good of all (even intellectuals and teachers had to contribute to the increase of work productivity); b) a negative attitude towards private property and capitalism was encouraged, this being replaced by admiration for collective property.

1. Andrei Grigorievich Stahanov (Алексей Григорьевич Стаханов) was a Soviet Ukrainian miner which exceeded seven times (102 tons) the quota of mined coal per shift (14 tons) in 1935. See also: <https://spartacus-educational.com/RUSstahanovism.htm>, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/stakhanovism>.

Case study – The ABECEDAR: the transfer of terminology from the economy to the education

'ABECEDAR' is the name of the manual² used in Romania for learning to write and read in primary grades. It was also used in the communist period, benefiting from several updates over the years, both to improve the teaching material and to introduce elements of ideology in accordance with the political orientation of the country at the time. In 1975, a series of changes were with the aim of obtaining better results in educating students, but also as a necessity from two perspectives: the lowering of legal schooling age for children to 6 years old and, as the author claims, 'topics of discussion were chosen that represent the natural and social reality of our country' (Georgescu-Boștină, 1976, p. 13). This reissued manual continued to be used in Romania until the revolution against the communist regime in 1989 and even a few years after that.

Therefore, the images in the textbook were also correlated with the lesson titles, and the texts concentrated the ideas presented, so that students could draw from them a single 'certain conclusion for the lives and behavior of students' (Georgescu-Boștină, 1976, p. 13). After publishing the new manual, the following year one of its authors, Maria Georgescu-Boștină, published a guide for using the 'Abecedar', intended for teachers, so that they could have better results. This guide included techniques for working with the manual, the objectives pursued, the classification of lesson types, their development, lesson planning, exercises to consolidate and fix knowledge and helpful teaching materials. In fact, Communist ideology emphasized several elements that are found both in this guide for using the 'Abecedar', as well as inside the manual used by children. Among these, there are elements that concern economic and social aspects, such as *increasing efficiency*, through organization and effectiveness in the national economy, which led in real life to annual reports of production in various sectors of economic activity and 'fabulous' statistical figures. Another specific element is the *call to action*: it is known that the working man is an energetic, hardworking man, who does not waste time, but acts. The importance of the worker in communist propaganda, which has its roots in the works of Marx and Engels, is also present in the textbook. It was necessary, therefore, for children to learn these values, this life ethic, from an early age. In the guide addressed to teachers, it is specified that it will be necessary to insist only on those tools that give great efficiency in action, effectiveness in work, with rigorously organized tasks and precise tools. One can observe the transfer of terminology from the economic environment to the educational one, these expressions being widely used in communist propaganda. Along with other terms, such as *people of work* or *comrades*, these words borrowed from the economic sector were part of the wooden language specific to the period.

The meaning of hard work

Other values were also emphasized, otherwise appreciated and recognized in all types of societies, but which, in combination with those actively used by the communist party propaganda, give a different image of Romanian society from that period. For example, in the lesson that addresses diligence, entitled 'A Hardworking Girl' (Georgescu-Boștină & Giurgea, 1987, p. 98), the main goal is to make students value diligence and internalize the desire to be diligent and hardworking. The 'Guide for using the Abecedar' specifies as an objective 'to develop a love for beauty and for work' (Georgescu-Boștină, 1976, p. 181). If we take into account the recommendations

2. The textbook used for this article was issued in 1987, in accordance with the school curriculum, being almost identical to the revised version in 1975. The author of this article learned from a previous, but identical version.

for the previous lessons, we can see that it is not enough to be diligent and hardworking. Work must be organized in such a way as to obtain maximum efficiency, and the fruits of diligence are intended for the development of the country, which is possible only through the involvement of the Communist Party and the beloved leader (the president of the country).

A new aspect that can give food for thought (although it can be viewed from the innocent perspective of children) is found in the lesson 'The Chicks', which consists of transposing the meaning of the concept of being hardworking to the effort of having a large number of offsprings through the example of a hen: 'The hardworking hen now has nine chicks.' (Georgescu-Boștină & Giurgea, 1987, p. 71). We believe that this perspective is not accidental, due to the demographic policy implemented by the Ceaușescu regime through Decree 770 of October 1, 1966. Implemented with the aim of demographic growth, this decree criminalized abortions, which increased the number of deaths among children and women who did not have the possibility to terminate their pregnancies legally, resorting to methods that put their lives at risk. In the following period, a series of measures were taken to increase the number of children per family: strengthening support for families with many children, building new homes and educational institutions, improving medical care for both mothers and children, and requiring all people over the age of 25 who did not have children to pay a monthly tax to the state (Tismăneanu, Dobrințu & Vasile, 2007, p. 421, 422). Since 1951, Romania has followed the Soviet model by establishing the honorary title Heroine Mother, the Heroine Mother Order, the Mother Glory Order, and the Maternity Medal for women with multiple children. The title of Heroine Mother was awarded to women who had at least ten children, but mothers with fewer children could also benefit from orders or medals. A 1985 decree changed the legislation so that only women with at least five children could be honored with the Maternity Medal (Pena, 2020).

More values disseminated in the lessons in the textbook are courage, patriotism, and cleanliness (important for the idea of order). From the perspective of party ideology, these are linked to the following narratives: we must be united and help each other when needed; from a young age we must be ready to protect the country, the party, the leader from enemies; we must contribute together with others to the development of the country. Socialist ideology comes into play from the very first pages of the textbook, which include the country's national anthem (which children must learn by heart and sing at the beginning of the school day), and a photograph of President Nicolae Ceaușescu, present in all textbooks as well as in the classrooms and the teacher's room in schools. Children, from the youngest ages, were required to recognize the anthem, the president's image and the national flag. A characteristic of totalitarian systems, as Hannah Arendt also specifies, is the appeal to a form of nationalism, both in the case of the Nazis, as well as the communists - based on socialist ideology (Arendt, 1958, p. 3-4, 357).

The objective of developing love for the homeland and for Romanians in children is reserved for the lesson entitled 'My country', on page 101 in 'Abecedar'. The lesson includes both text and a short poem and brings elements related to the knowledge of the country, such as its full name during the communist period, as well as the specification of the capital, Bucharest. In addition to these, we can observe statements with an emotional charge, which induce feelings of admiration for Romania: 'We have a large, beautiful and rich country. Its inhabitants are hardworking and skilled' or 'You are so beautiful, /My country!' and last but not least, the call to action: 'For you I will work, /Year after year, so that you may flourish, /My country!'. The lesson ends with the words or the sentence that the students must write by hand at home in their notebooks, which, in this case, is: 'Long live the Socialist Republic of Romania!'

The only concern of Romanians of any age must be, according to the ideology of the communist party, the development and well-being of the country and its inhabitants. The principle is not bad, but the way it was implemented in Romanian society and the prevalence of propaganda that repeatedly used the same themes and terms led to a trivialization of these values. This is because it is normal to want a beautiful and developed country, but not at the expense of its own citizens.

The process of indoctrination

From the first lesson the process of indoctrination can be seen, even if this is not immediately noticeable from the images and text. The lesson's theme is 'The Classroom and Classroom Furniture'. The image related to this respective lesson in the textbook shows a classroom with students in uniform sitting on benches, on which books and flowers can be seen. (Georgescu-Boștină & Giurgea, 1987, p. 7). Georgescu-Boștină reminds us that the illustration must be accompanied by the teacher's explanation that 'children in our homeland receive textbooks for free and that in other countries, books are bought by parents and that school fees are paid. Therefore, only children whose parents can pay these fees, which are very high, study there. In our country and in other socialist countries, education is free' (Georgescu-Boștină, 1976, p. 69). The use of the comparison is observed, which serves to illustrate the dichotomy between the two systems: the socialist, good one, which is concerned with the well-being of its citizens and the capitalist, bad one, which only considers profit.

Another recommended question (in the guide) for discussions is: 'Who made sure that all schoolchildren in our country receive free books?' Although the answer is not stated clearly in 'The Guide for Using the Abecedar', the correct answer could only be: *the Romanian Communist Party or The President of the Socialist Republic of Romania or Nicolae Ceaușescu* (shown as a father figure).

Several lessons address favorite themes for the communist regime, such as important holidays (for example, May 1, dedicated to working people) on which there are usually events celebrating the party and the president including parades in which everyone is obliged to participate from primary school students to working people. For the lesson in the 'Abecedar' dedicated to the May 1st holiday, Workers' Day, Georgescu-Boștină (1976, p. 174) notes in the guide to the lesson objectives that aims to "develop feelings of love and admiration for working people, who fought to create the ideals embodied by the great May 1st holiday." In the 1975 edition of 'Abecedar', on page 37 there was a lesson to consolidate knowledge about the letter U, which had as its theme a demonstration. In the image of the lesson there were workers in festive clothes, and in front of them were pioneers dressed in uniforms, with the country's tricolor flags and flowers in their hands. The guide for using the textbook recommends that during the lesson, the pioneers in the picture, the working people dressed in festive clothes, and the children who went to the demonstration with their parents be discussed, emphasizing the fact that everyone is happy and shouts 'Hurray!'.

The 1987 edition has the same theme, with the difference that the picture only shows the Falcons of the Motherland in uniform at a parade holding flowers in their hands, and a little girl dressed in casual clothes waving a tricolor flag. In the text section, under the picture appears the exclamation 'Hurray! Hurray!'. In addition to the content related to learning the letter U in texts, the original lesson aims to familiarize children with the uniforms of the Pioneer organization and with the idea that they will be part of it starting with the second grade, but also with the idea of a demonstration in which everyone participates 'with joy' (in the 1975 textbook). The

1987 textbook preserved the idea of a demonstration seen as a happy event, in which the entire community takes part with flags and flowers. The lesson entitled 'Falcons of the Motherland', brings back to the attention of children this organization for youth up to 7 years old and makes the connection between children and the party, to which they must be grateful: 'We owed it to you, party/A free, happy life/Achievements and the future/Under the tricolor flag'. (Georgescu-Boștină & Giurgea, 1987, p. 107) The lesson insists on the usefulness of the children for the future of the country: they must be diligent, obedient, they have to love the school and work, to learn and prepare to be useful to the country. The image related to this lesson shows children in the uniforms of the Falcons of the Motherland dancing in a circle, after the model of the Romanian peasants whose traditional dance is the hora.

One of the pillars of propaganda during the communist era centered on praising the Party and President Nicolae Ceaușescu, along with the so-called achievements they brought to the country. This could not be missing from a textbook dedicated to training children, future party members. Therefore, the lesson entitled 'The Party' reflects this pattern. The objective of the lesson, in addition to consolidating reading skills and introducing hyphenation in words, is 'developing love for the Romanian Communist Party'. (Georgescu-Boștină, 1976, p. 183) The lesson consists of a laudatory poem dedicated to the Party, which is to be read by the students and analyzed, then learned by heart. In the discussion preceding the lesson, the more difficult terms are explained, including 'Party', 'hydroelectric power plants' ('hidrocentralele') and the expression 'Long live the Romanian Communist Party!', a greeting that was chanted at demonstrations during the regime and which serves as a writing exercise. The poem suggests that the Party is part of the children's being at all times of life. It supports them, it offers them education (the new school, the beautiful book), food (the bread they have on the table), the environment in which they live (the green field, the sunny day) and contributes to the development of the country (the hydroelectric power plant that gives light) (Georgescu-Boștină & Giurgea, 1987, p. 101).

The relevance of the ordinary worker in the process of building the republic is highlighted throughout the manual, with several lessons referring to workers from various fields of activity: builder, miner, sailor, aviator, printer, spinner, crane operator, teacher, weaver, tailor, puppeteer (lessons with the titles 'In Port', 'I Want to Have a Job', 'To the Bakery' etc.). These lessons provide children with knowledge about the work of factory workers, but also workers from other fields. The glorification of the worker also occurs at the end of the manual, between the review lessons, through the poem 'My Father'. Each stanza in the poem describes the activity of a father, who is also a working man, with flattering terms referring to his occupation: the builder reaches with his forehead up to the stars, the miner pulls out the iron and looks at the sky in the evening, the farmer has armies of grain spread out as wide as the country, the steelworker melts metal in furnaces with the sun's rays, the doctor makes you well, and the teacher teaches you arithmetic and the alphabet. The ending is apothecic, with the child wishing to learn well so that his parents can be proud of him. The positive influence of the working father with whom the child grows up is therefore also suggested.

Cosmina Cristescu did a detailed analysis of children's poetry in school textbooks from the communist period in Romania, focusing on Romanian language textbooks as propaganda tools. In it she notes that they address themes promoted by the party ideology: the new history of the homeland, national pride, elements of national identity, the glorification of the party and the leader, the praise of the heroes of the nation and of the scientific revolution brought about by communism, the promotion of the 'new man', the communist holidays, the struggle for peace

and the work that elevates the spirit. There are also symbols which are found in all communist regimes: the hammer and sickle, the star, the flag, the sun, the spark, etc., 'manipulated for propaganda purposes'. She also addresses the originality of the poets, who were free to use their imagination, but only in accordance with socialist theses: 'Freedom of creation does not in any way mean freedom for ideologies foreign to our socialist order. Romanian literature must be socialist, militant literature' (Nicolae Ceaușescu, August 4th, 1971)³. The authors of poems for children, published in school textbooks, were forced to limit themselves only to the themes imposed by the party, themes considered superior to those in classical poetry for children (Cristescu, 2017, p. 120, 179, 254-255).

We note that the textbook from which Romanian students learned to read and write was used by the totalitarian regime to propagate the ideology of the Communist Party, both through the topics addressed (national pride, agreed holidays, parades, youth organizations present in the images, the importance of working people and the party), and through the terminology used (words such as 'comrade', expressions related to the party and the country 'Long live the Socialist Republic of Romania/Romanian Communist Party!', the call to action through expressions such as 'For you I will work' or 'We learn, we prepare/To be useful to the country'). Socialist values and ideals are found in the pages of the book but only as devotion to the country and the party: efficiency, work, order, courage, diligence.

The legislative context of propaganda in education from the communist era to today

Although the communist regime used propaganda widely to indoctrinate the masses, in the legislation of the time, propaganda was prohibited. The duplicitous nature of the regime can also be observed from this. In 1965 Nicolae Ceaușescu became the leader of Romania, as the first secretary of The Communist Party and, starting with 1967, as the country's president. The Constitution of 1965, after his accession to power, mentions propaganda twice; in Article 17 and Article 29. Article 17 specifies that all citizens enjoy equal rights in the Socialist Republic of Romania in all areas: economic, political, social, legal and cultural life; these rights cannot be limited on grounds of nationality, race, sex or religion. But it is stipulated that 'Any demonstration aimed at establishing such limits, nationalist-chauvinistic propaganda, inciting racial or national hatred, are punishable by law'. Article 29 addresses freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to assembly. Unlike the American Constitution, the Romanian one from 1965 approaches these freedoms from a different angle, rather as an interdiction: they cannot be used for purposes contrary to the socialist order and the interests of the working people. Any association with a fascist or anti-democratic character is prohibited and propaganda with a fascist or anti-democratic character are punishable by law (Romanian Chamber of Deputies, 1965). Of course, people knew that this law was about the prohibition of critical thinking, of ideas different from those of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine. It could be interpreted according to the wishes of those in power, because the content of what constitutes an anti-democratic character is not defined. So, all the 'enemies of the people' were included here.

The Penal Code (Criminal Law) from 1968 provides, among other things, the punishments for those who are responsible for spreading propaganda directed against the regime. Propaganda

3. Nicolae Ceaușescu's speech, during the visit to the Writer's House in Neptun, Romania, August 4th 1971 apud Cristescu 2017, p. 179

is included in the special part, which includes *crimes against state security*, in Article 166. This article discusses fascist propaganda and propaganda or the undertaking of any action to change the socialist order, or which would result in a danger to the security of the state. Both acts were punished by imprisonment for 5 to 15 years and the prohibition of certain rights. Chapter IV also discusses additional crimes that affect other relationships regarding social coexistence. Article 317 for example states that nationalist-chauvinistic propaganda inciting racial or national hatred is punishable by imprisonment from 6 months to 5 years. The last type of propaganda, war propaganda, consisting in 'the spreading of tendentious or invented news, likely to serve to incite war, or any other manifestations in favor of the outbreak of war', is mentioned in Article 356 (Marea Adunare Națională, 1968). The way laws were implemented and the perception of propaganda in the communist era represent a model of doublethink or double standards. The regime used propaganda to promote communism on a large scale. On the other hand, all ideas different from communist ideology were forbidden and those who expressed them were deprived of their freedom, by being accused of nationalist-chauvinist propaganda. The people knew the truth, but for fear of the Securitate (Security) the information service dedicated to the state and the single party), no one dared to speak.

Propaganda is still included in the current legislation of Romania. The main difference consists in the fact that now reference is made to *propaganda in the educational process*. It is also specified what type of propaganda is prohibited in schools. If the Constitution from the Communist regime did not specify the setting/place where propaganda was prohibited, this time, the Pre-University Education Law no. 198/2023, Article 11 clearly specifies that 'In pre-university education units and in all spaces intended for professional education and training, as well as in the activities carried out in the online environment by pre-university education units (...) Demonstrations and propaganda of a political nature and religious proselytism are prohibited.' The punishments for teaching staff who violate the law differ, starting with a written warning, continuing with the reduction of the basic salary, and ending with the termination of the employment contract (Parliament of Romania, 2023, law 198).

The current legislation regarding higher education does not clearly discuss the topic of propaganda. Probably also due to the fact that higher education institutions are autonomous. The autonomy of universities is guaranteed by law, but the Ministry of Education is the one that monitors and controls the way in which higher education institutions exercise their university autonomy and how they are accountable and responsible to the public (Parliament of Romania, 2023, law 199)⁴. Although the term propaganda does not appear clearly here, there is another expression that leads us to think of propaganda. In Chapter 1, Article 4 of this law, it is specified that the national higher education system is based on the principle of freedom of thought and independence from political and religious ideologies and doctrines. The same idea is repeated in Chapter 3, Article 11: 'higher education institutions are organized and function independently of any ideological, political, or religious interference'. This also applies to the ARACIS⁵ council (Article 252, Paragraph 5) associated with the Ministry of Education, which deals with the external evaluation of the quality of higher education. Chapter III, Article 11, Paragraph 5 of the law mentions that the aspects of university autonomy that are expressed in the university charter are approved by the University Senate and signed by the Ministry of Education, in order to comply with the legislation in force. Therefore, the principle of independence from ideologies, religions,

4. Article 6.

5. ou Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

and political doctrines is included in the university charters, but also in other internal regulations, such as The Code of Student Rights and Obligations or the student status. For example, in the Student Statute of Babes-Bolyai University, Article 4 stipulates that political propaganda is prohibited within the university, and The University Code of Student Rights and Obligations of the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca states that political propaganda, as well as any form of individual or group discrimination, is prohibited within the university.

What exactly is considered political propaganda

Considering the legislation around the educational process, the question arises whether there have been cases of political propaganda in schools and colleges in Romania in recent years. The answer is yes, there have been several cases of this kind, both at the secondary and higher education levels. The subject was also debated in the press and mass media institutions. But, in this democratic period in which Romania now finds itself, cases of political propaganda in educational institutions appear in election years, as happened this year. The cases that have come to light raise an important question regarding what exactly is considered political propaganda. This comes after a teacher was accused of making political propaganda in class after encouraging students to vote and allowing a civically engaged student to talk about the importance of voting and why it is better to be informed before voting (Stan, 2025 and Mihai, 2025). The teacher accused the college where she teaches of censorship, specifying that the principal also warned another colleague who spoke to the students about the emergence of fascism. She launched a direct appeal to the Minister of Education, Daniel David, through a social network. The minister responded, stating that politics stops at the school gate, but that everyone has the right to express themselves politically in public space. The statement recalls that politics is prohibited in schools by law, especially during electoral periods, but also specifies that political science is studied in schools, without engaging in politics (Lefter, 2025). It should be noted that in the spring of this year, presidential elections took place in Romania, in which the two main candidates had different political orientations, one basing his campaign on democratic and European values, the other showing a propensity towards nationalism and legionary doctrine. The second candidate gained a large number of followers by promoting himself on social media.

The ministry's response can be interpreted as a ban on schools addressing political topics in the electoral campaign. However, the minister seems to have contradicted himself. In April 2025, Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, whose rector was Daniel David before being appointed minister, organized a controversial debate with one of the presidential candidates. During the debate, the candidate answered questions asked by the students. Although five candidates were initially invited to the debate, only one responded to the invitation of the educational institution (Fernoagă, 2025). Because several professors at the university did not approve of the event, the minister addressed the issue in a press conference, stating that such debates are normal within the university, part of good practice at European and American universities, and that 'The reactions are political, in this context, because anything you do in this context generates political reactions.' (Farcaş, 2025).

There have been other teachers or politicians accused of political propaganda or religious proselytism in educational institutions in Romania, but these accusations took place under local or presidential elections. Sometimes their actions had more or less visible consequences, from the revolt of parents or other teachers on social networks, to spontaneous protests by students in the schoolyard. The ways of carrying out political and religious indoctrination through

propaganda were also different: praising the legionary movement, presenting fragments of television propaganda shows during classes, showing support for a certain candidate (Grigore, 2025), replacing the course subject with references to passages from the Bible (Opriș, 2025), messages sent to the email addresses of students' parents recommending who to vote for (Farcaș, 2025), visits of political candidates in schools or their meetings with teachers for the purpose of promotion in election campaigns (Farcaș, 2024) (Ionescu, May 28th 2024) or even taking students to the restaurant to meet with representatives of political parties (Ionescu, May 31th 2024). Why would politicians and members of educational institutions risk breaking the law, and how was this possible? The answer is simple: in pre-university educational institutions, an important part of the appointments of school directors were made on political grounds. Edupedu, the main news platform in the field of education drew attention to this several times, as recently as in April 2024, in an article where it was specified that more than 1700 school principals were put in position for political reasons, and that the positions within the school inspectorates affiliated to each county are also filled on the bases of political orientation (Stănescu, 2024).

So, can we talk about the possibility that the educational process is free/will be free from any propaganda or political ideology? Regardless of the answer, what can be done in this regard? What can we do to reduce its influence? Taking into account the aforementioned aspects, we believe that a more detailed approach is necessary regarding the use of propaganda for the purpose of spreading political or religious ideologies. Not every discussion about politics, elections, or votes can be considered indoctrination. Institutionalized education should develop a series of skills that will serve students well in their lives, among which critical thinking plays a significant role. If schoolteachers cannot objectively discuss the importance of information during election campaigns and participation in voting, then how can students be taught to think critically in the political field? Even if they choose not to freely express their vote, the choice is theirs, but this must be the result of a process of analysis, based on reason and information. Objective discussions about the electoral process in the classroom should not include recommendations about the people or parties that should be voted for, because, as Noam Chomsky emphasizes, 'any attempt to impose a point of view on someone or to make them think in a certain way constitutes a violation of freedom' (Farcaș, 2023). On the other hand, the way in which the information is delivered by the teacher can be seen as indoctrination or persuasion, because, as social beings, we influence each other, even when we do not realize it, through attitudes, manner of speech, or personality. Indeed, as a result of this reality another problem arises, namely that of neutral objectivity, in which the American thinker does not believe (Olson, Faigley, Chomsky, 1991). Propaganda in democratic systems is harder to observe because, unlike totalitarian ones, the principles or propaganda intentions are not announced, therefore it requires a more consistent effort (Chomsky, 2013).

When analyzing indoctrination through propaganda, it is appropriate to identify the intention and the way in which the person who brings up the respective topics is acting for this purpose. In education, it happens that the act of educating students turns into one of indoctrination. In totalitarian systems, one finds a sectarian type of indoctrination, which replaces a set of values and prejudices with new ones, through psychological and even physical pressure. It is easily observed when an educational system is replaced by a new one. The second type of indoctrination, the conformist type, is based on existing prejudices and ideas, strengthening them, determining new behaviors and values. It does not oppose official education but makes use of it. Because it does not rely on violent methods, it often eludes scrutiny. Olivier Reboul has identified thirteen types of indoctrination relevant to education systems. They constitute a theoretical basis for analyzing

how ideologization occurs, which could help in the process of defining what propaganda means in relation to the educational process (Reboul, 1977, p. 14-24, 12).

Another way to reduce the occurrence of propaganda in educational institutions would be to prohibit those working in the educational system from being part of political organizations, which is impossible, because this would violate several articles of the Romanian Constitution (Article 8 on the pluralism of political parties, Article 29 on freedom of thought and conscience, Article 40 on the right of association) (Camera Deputaților, 2003).

Other states have also faced the problem of propaganda in schools. A similar situation, in which the violation of the Constitution is discussed, took place in the United States in connection with the Pledge of Allegiance. For citizens who were part of totalitarian states in the past, it is easy to perceive the oath taken by American students as a method of ideological indoctrination, because they internalized the propaganda models in childhood, when they were forced to sing the national anthem while standing up at the beginning of the school day. But a democratic society, which has not gone through the same experience, may not notice the similarities as easily. However, a 1943 Supreme Court decided that the Pledge of Allegiance violated The First Amendment Rights in the American Constitution. As a result, currently, American states do not enforce the same rules regarding the Pledge. Currently, there are several policies regarding the pledge: states that maintain the recitation of the pledge in the classroom, states that offer students the possibility of making an exception from reciting the pledge (with or without written parental consent, depending on the state), states that have requirements regarding the behavior of students in the class who do not participate in the pledge, but are present (they must either show respect for the flag or be silent while the pledge is recited), states in which it is clear what the exceptions are, and states in which the exceptions, as formulated, leave room for interpretation. American society is divided on this issue: if one side believes that the Pledge should not be recited in schools, others believe that the obligation to recite it would have positive consequences in increasing the sense of national pride among students and young people and in preserving national values (Buthch, 2024; Dress, 2022).

Indoctrination through propaganda in educational institutions takes a more serious turn in countries in conflict with each other or which are close to a conflict. Against the backdrop of the war between Ukraine and Russia, in 2024 an article appeared in the press in the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine's neighbor, about a high school teacher in Chișinău who, during the first class of the school year, made pro-Russian propaganda against the president of the state, Maia Sandu (who pursues a pro-European policy) and against Ukrainians (among the students in that class were Ukrainian refugee children). The ideological discourse used by the teacher included several elements taken from the Kremlin's propaganda regarding the war and focused mainly on several themes: fear of the adoption of a law in Moldova that would allow same-sex marriages upon entry into the European Union, insults to Ukraine and its president whom she blamed for starting the war, and a defense of Russia. The press of the Republic of Moldova denied the teacher's claims, proving the falsity of her allegations, but her actions demonstrate that Russian propaganda manages to affect the population of neighboring states, including at the school level (Farcaș, 2024). The Ministry of Education and Research condemned the behavior, considering it incitement and requested explanations from the educational institution. An investigation was opened into the teacher's behavior, with the ministry monitoring the high school's actions regarding this case. The teacher eventually resigned, and the Chisinau City Hall issued a circular demanding compliance with the Education Code and the Code of Ethics for Teachers. (Redacția Unimedia, 2024).

Conclusion

Ideological content is an integral part of the educational process, because any discourse, text or sign (from a semiotic perspective) contains ideas, meanings, values, and concepts. The ideology of an era, a country, a society or part of society, a party or the main religion in a state influences the informational content of school textbooks. It can be said that a process of indoctrination through propaganda is inherent in the didactic act. Propaganda can be used for both positive and negative purposes, therefore, when considering its elimination from education (although it cannot be eliminated completely), these purposes must be investigated, as well as the means chosen to disseminate information. Also, the process of indoctrination must be carefully studied, and where possible, it should be replaced with a teaching of the subject that encourages free, critical thinking. Although the aim of intellectuals is to deliver knowledge in the most objective manner possible, it is known that we cannot ignore our own subjectivity or the subjectivity of others, the characteristic way in which we present information and how it is received by each individual. In school textbooks, the content of subjects is reformulated to convey the desired values and narratives (Wertsch, 2002, p. 17).

The propaganda of totalitarian regimes is more aggressive, the ideological charge being easily perceptible, with clear goals and objectives, even in the educational process. The same thing is observed in the educational propaganda of countries in conflict. In comparison, the propaganda of democratic regimes does not always have specified goals and objectives, which makes it more inconspicuous. Legislation prohibiting political propaganda and religious proselytism in educational institutions exists in most states, but the phenomenon is difficult to control, especially when school principals are appointed for political reasons or when teachers themselves are members of political parties. A ban on their involvement in political institutions would raise serious problems with regard to the freedoms guaranteed by the constitution, even if certain categories of employees (especially in sectors related to national security) are prohibited from belonging to political parties.

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