

## COMMUNISM IN POST-COMMUNIST HISTORY TEXTBOOKS. WHAT TO BE REMEMBERED\*

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### 1. Reasons and questions

Communism is finally dead, since people begin to ask loudly what *really* was it, and why do we have so different memories about it. It is still about our past but not as an easy time to accept. One of the simplest ways of solving a time problem is to translate it in a space itinerary, to reduce a historical inquiry to one of its favorite origin – travelling in Other's geography. This *other* must be somehow already met so to be recognized, but different, so to enrich the visitor. Like most of the journeys it will have plenty of space for rumors, cliché, fictions and ignorance. It will be a good opportunity to recollect times and souvenirs.

The main question is simple: was the communism good or bad? As naive and rhetoric as it could be, it is the main clue of looking back in the former socialist space. It is a personal affair as it is a powerful political argument. But it is no doubt easier for the teenagers to ask than for adults to answer. As usually, a question remembers another one. In the '80s, most of the people around me were convinced that our country was the worse living place in the socialist space. This conviction was always confirmed by good informed opinions or just simple sayings about the socialist *brothers*, and always inflicted by the slightest sign of Western life. So it could be indeed a dilemma to understand nowadays random praising of the good living times in the former regime. There are already answers to that and the quest should be adjust by them: what other former socialist people think about their socialist past, as *we* know it was surely better than ours?

### 2. Why textbooks, what textbooks

Textbooks don't need to have the best answers for everything but we still pretend them to do it; in a generational dispute it is an easy proof – to use it like the Bible. The problems appear when the schoolbook contradicts even its defenders. Adult readers, that are not meant to be the target public for it, can hardly recognize their lives in recent history lessons. It is a normal situation, not because the necessary private/public

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distinctions, but because the whole mission of the schooling system that is to discipline those who cannot be convinced and to convince those who cannot defend themselves.

For pedagogical reasons, textbooks had to select, to simplify and to offer moral judgements, altering the historiographical writing and making it much closer to the memory working. It is of course a question of dosage. The message should be clearest for the youngest and more scientific, e.g. burden with historical data, for the upper grades. The normal pattern for a future normal citizen is to be found by the end of the compulsory secondary school that is usually between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. The public addressed is still more opened for convictions than for instruction.

In former socialist countries, textbooks had definitely more importance than in the rest of the Europe. After the end of the communist regime, the once official truths endured dramatic changes. First was just twisting the previous statements and fulfilling the blank spaces with informal but already accepted information. It was considered a primary and no less rigid duty to *save* the truth so long persecuted by former rulers. By the middle of the '90s, there was a second process of re-establishing the truths, at least in textbooks, that was guided by the European Council recommendations, in order to develop a more tolerant perspective. There were also suggestions for other historical domains, previously ignored or ridiculed. By 2000, the textbooks – like the societies that use them – seemed to be more stable and consistent, suggesting more coagulated new historical narratives.

Considering textbook narratives as memorial options, instead of their apparent prescriptive task, I do not intend to make a repertoire of volumes, editions and news about, taking every piece as representative for one possible story. The form adds to the interest. The initial question (and curiosity) about the others countries responded to a long trained modern habit of representing the otherness most in its state and national structured units. The power of the borders is especially visible in educational stories, so the textbooks are the best to choose to display it. This national criterion is a reason both to prefer and to avoid stories. The national implosion in Soviet Union, Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia made a different world from them, not to cope with by the same way as for the surviving national entities. States like Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary or Germany remain/became again and consider itself as one nation-state, with one dominant national history to be taught. For some others, like Albania and Moldavia, the end of the communism meant a dramatic claiming of ethnic national identity. And, as one can easily find, national pride is closely related with the perception of good living for present times and also for the historical past.

### **3. Romania first**

Being Romanian could be enough reason to consider Romania first place in the world. It is the national identity definition. It is also a methodological caution, of first introducing the observer's profile that will tacitly remain the primary pattern of understanding the others.

The Romanian chosen textbook<sup>1</sup> is even more familiar for me because I had worked on it as teacher, for two years, with different kind of children. They made me rediscover the communism lessons, especially when we tried to both satisfy our curiosity and to learn for the 8<sup>th</sup> graduating exam.

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<sup>1</sup> Sorin Oane, Maria Ochescu, *Istorie: Manual pentru clasa a VIII a*, București, Humanitas, 2001, 176 p.

The chapter about communism is neutral entitled *Romania after the Second World War*. It starts with the *Beginning of the communist regime*, clearly deposited between 1944-1947 and unequivocal judged as a *transition to totalitarianism*. After that, the criterion is not stable. First it was the person that made a regime, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, but after that an impersonal *national-communism*, mainly covering the Nicolae Ceaușescu's period. For the symmetry of the story, there should be an *end* but, instead, there is just a date, *December 1989* with its impersonal *Context and consequences*. This was probably the end, as long as it was followed by *The Return to democracy*. The narrative grows around the totalitarian state building, with little supplements of foreign policy and constant attention for economical evolutions. The Romanian state itself is a stable reality, with little territorial problems in the beginning, when the peace treaty from 1947 *recognizes the rights of the country on northern Transylvania, but legalizes the rapture of Bessarabia by the Soviets in 1940 and the presence of the Soviet army in Romania*.

The opposition toward communism is mainly reduced to the monarchy, and the remove of King Michael I is considered the real empowerment of the communism. After the King departure, there was a violent repression. The story, the map of the political prisons and the Sighet walls picture are strongly stressing this idea. All the measures of the regime were put together under the *Stalinism* bad name. The only spot of light is *the progressive detachment of Romania from the Soviet Union* in foreign policy domain.<sup>2</sup> The communist agrarian reform is hardly mentioned and considered unnecessary, by comparison with the *real* one, from 1921. The economical policy is firstly reduced to few notions, very praised in the age: *nationalization, collectivization, economical planning*, but is getting more detailed for the next period.

If the first twenty years are easily to blame, the next ones are more ambiguous. The main lines stressed *detente, desalinization and desovietization*. But when one has to come to *December 1989* and to find the *motives of the revolt*, the same period is exclusively condemned. Textual, the *ambitions of the Party* were considered mistaken and soon reduced to Ceaușescu's desires. But the pictures of the lesson presents as *achievements of the regime* the Bucharest's underground system, the Danube – Black Sea channel and the most difficult mountain crossing roads. Still the pupils are to answer the rhetoric question: *what were the efforts and the privations that people had to endure to accomplish these objectives?* The symbol of the age, the giant construction of People's House is characterized as being *eccentric and Pharaonic*.

Ceaușescu is blamed for the great national debt making, but also for its paying by extorting the people. The text is not clear about that, incoherently mentioning the strikes of 1977 and 1987, the *dissidence* occurring and the diplomatic isolation of the country.<sup>3</sup> The privations are more explicit resumed in the following lesson, to justify the violent outburst from 1989.

The main cause of the revolt that caused the communism ending is told to be the economic failure. The heavy industry was *over dimensioned and ineffective*. The urbanization was *uncontrolled* and gave birth to a *semi-proletarian* population. All the rest is enlisted together, with no priorities: food shortages, interdiction to contact foreigners, cult of personality for Ceaușescu's couple, *suppressing the liberty of thinking*, demolition of churches. It is interesting to note that even for condemning the

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 158.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 163.

regime, the text uses the regime's language. For example, food shortages are placed under the *rational alimentation* old motto, without other explanation. One that lived those times could surely remember it much lively. The textbook abuses by abstract notions and definitions, emphasizing the traditional structuralist and political view. Only the government's leaders had short biographies and the picture of the embracing *two famous dissidents, Doina Cornea and Mircea Dinescu in December 1989* has no further comment.

To conclude, Romania was alone – and so were all the Romanians, although they are mentioned only as groups, under different labels as: *resistance, peasants, communists, party's members*, or just *population*. Other countries are fugitive named, especially to prove and to praise the Romanian *independence*. Only in the end it is suggested a possible connection with other peoples from the socialist camp that overthrew their communist governments before Romania.<sup>4</sup> It seems that the Ceaușescu's equivalence of sovereignty with autarchy is still present. The question about other's socialist life is useless here. As about *ours*, the dominant image is negative. How negative, it is hard to see because of the inconsistency of the description and the totally ignoring of the comparison with other periods or other peoples. Sometimes the story is so disorganized, that some persons or things are mentioned only by the occasion of their destruction or disappearance, like the churches or the *patriot* communist leader condemned in 1948 and later killed, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. It is no wonder that most of the narrative continues the old silences of the regime.

#### 4. Just crossing Danube: Bulgaria

In the '80s, Bulgaria was for us a good living and friendly country, at least according to the socialist criteria: Bulgarian TV shows, pleasure travelling on their Black Sea shore, fine Bulgarian tobacco and vegetables; all were much more attractive than ours. The official discourse used to praise the happy common history of Romanian and Bulgarians stressing *our* help for the Bulgarian national movement developing and *our* natural rights on Dobrudja territory. All the conflicts were solved and we thought this was mutual.<sup>5</sup>

The Bulgarian textbook chosen here is addressed to younger readers, from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and is much more detailed than the Romanian one.<sup>6</sup> The communism day entering in Bulgaria is precisely 9 September 1944, and all the national history is divided by it. The ending date is not so firmly proclaimed. It could be 10 November 1989, when Teodor Jivkov was *liberated from office* after 3 decades of ruling, the day of adopting a new Constitution (12 July 1991) or the years 1996-1997 when the elections finally marked *the abandoning of the post-communist values and meeting of the European*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 164-165.

<sup>5</sup> But it wasn't so. The historiographical debates about Dobrudja were less visible for us because Romanians ignored the Bulgarian version, while, for our neighbors, it was a constant preoccupation. See Blagovest Njagulov, *Les débats historiographiques dans les rapports bulgaro-romains (1944-1989)*, in *Études balcaniques*, Sofia, 2002, no. 2, p. 64-86.

That was a convincing plead, with long term results, since a recent inquiry about the image of others in the Balkan space showed that for the young Bulgarians the second negative historical identity is, after Turkey, Romania, because "it have always pretended that Dobrudja belongs to it". See Tzvetan Tzvetanski, *The Macedonian Romanticism against Realism. According to a Recent Sociological Survey*, in Christina Kouluri (ed.), *Clio in the Balkans, the Politics of History Education*, Thessaloniki, 2002, p. 282.

<sup>6</sup> Djoro Tzvetkov, *Istoria na Bulgaria (1878-1998) za 6 klas*, Sofia, Tilia, 1999, 135 p.

ones.<sup>7</sup> One aspect is clear: if the beginning is a brutal, military act, equivalent for loosing the state independence and submitting to the Soviet Union, the end, whatever it would be, was a form of negotiation between political leaders.

Internal delimitations of the communist period are for Bulgarian case too, not really constant. First was a Stalinist decade and the 80's crisis came in the end. Between them it was T. Jivkov. After the predictable *nationalization, collectivization and industrialization*, followed some remarkable achievements, as the textbook presents. The words are familiar, of socialist sounding: *high results of quantity and quality* in great state's farms and *new branches of industry* developing. The text openly praised social protection granted by the socialist state, *that assured jobs for everybody, free education and medical services, cheap transport and energy and all the condition for rest, sport and free time spending*; no statistics, no remarks about quality and distribution in space or social groups. But the textbook also remembers one of the most unpleasant characteristics of the regime: the existing of the privileged and corrupted party elite, living an exclusive and copious life by abusing its powers.<sup>8</sup> As for the cultural achievements, there were the best, at least judging by the old pattern of *education, culture and science* as institutional and quantitative items. What was considered to be worthy about education were free access to mass schooling, complete alphabetization and the large number of the technical schools. There is no reproach at all, as one could read in a recent rapport to the educational committee of the European Council. Here one can find more about the excessive presence of the Party in the school life, the over centralized and bureaucratic administration, the low social status of teachers, the elite schools for *nomenclature* and the false ideals of the whole education system.<sup>9</sup>

For the cultural life, there are no persons to be named but institutions like the Academy, the research centers, the Universities and, for whole, *the science and the technique* of the age. This world nourished intellectuals that didn't believe anymore in the system and started to search democratic alternatives. The 80' *intelligentsia* gave new spiritual leaders for the nation, *who liberated the people's thinking and activity from the Party's cliché and thoughts*.<sup>10</sup>

The main theme of the communism story grows page after page. It is a strong feeling of lost, of loosing the half of a century of history and damaging the very core of the nation: independence, territory and prestige. This overall shadow is so full of regrets that could hardly be reduced only to a nationalist symptom. Territorial lost is fugitive noted in the Second World War turmoil, not very clear pointed. Anyway, the neighbors got profits from Bulgarians,<sup>11</sup> and this could be a reason for ignoring the following common fate in the socialist age. Bulgaria was forced by the Soviet Union to intensify the relations with it and this was not considered a real foreign policy, as long as it was not involving the democratic and prosperous Occidental countries. It was the wrong location, and Bulgaria just felt *isolated together with* other socialist countries in this unfortunate part of the world,<sup>12</sup> not similar to them.

What Bulgaria wanted most, was the recognition of its values by the West. It received it for the best of its intellectual representatives and so they deserved more of

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12, 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> See Antoaneta Damianova-Ivanova, *L'enseignement secondaire en Bulgarie*, Éditions du Conseil de l'Europe, 1995, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Djoro Tzvetkov, *op. cit.* p. 10

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

the people's trust. But it was definitely impossible to obtain it for the poor economical and daily life standards. Still, it was not poverty as such to be blamed for the socialist period but the humiliation of not being comparable to the most desirable part of the world, the Occident.<sup>13</sup> The real signs of poverty and exasperation are more visible in the '90s, a period haunted by repeated and incredible food crises.

Other problems are not to be met here. Turk minority violent disturbances, ecological issues, unorthodox churches – all having an important role to play for denouncing the communist system, especially for international public opinion, are all missing. The major accusation against the regime is explained by the *totalitarian* abstract and neutral label, making a great contrast to the pathetic final call for democracy that one must *love*, be *devoted* to and *protect* it.<sup>14</sup> The regime is mostly narrated in its own words, with no supplementary explanations. The author only felt a need to do it for the new language, still unfamiliar. The key words are not to be understood, but to be used. *Democracy* is not presented as a working system, like the totalitarian regime, but rather as a reality that proceeds and follows it, a lost and regained possession. So, the comparison between the two terms is difficult to manage. To find if communism was good or bad was not the storyteller constant idea. Only some feelings about it are openly named. First there were *fear* and *distrust* and after that *negation* and *disbelief*.<sup>15</sup> What was between them was omitted.

### 5. Not just a neighbor: Hungary

Romania has its own Hungarians, with their ethnic history and heritage, closely linked with their own national state. It also has a very disputed large territory, Transylvania, and a long history of interfering between the two nations.

In the '80s, Romanians were more interested about the Hungarian way of life than the historiographical dispute about the national rights over Transylvania, despite the official propaganda that became very aggressive about it. But we saw the Hungarians as being somehow privileged from the rest of us, as they managed to easily get things from the better living socialist Hungary.

An 8<sup>th</sup> grade Hungarian history textbook from 1991<sup>16</sup> presents a massive story of the communist age. The chronological line is following, as usually, the '40 to the '80s, but the internal sequences are different distributed. The first interval after war is considered a normalization period and only after 1947 the communist growing power is saw as been significant. Inside the whole age, there is one major distinction to be made: before and after 1956. The end of the regime is not on a certain day, but it is placed in 1989, according to the general European perception. The idea of the imminent crushing of the system is the main narrative line, encouraging the anticipation of the events and the retrospective collecting of decaying symptoms. As an interesting chose,

<sup>13</sup> After praising the developments of industry and agriculture, the author sadly recognized that "it was far behind the world level". The text has the same conclusion also about the social protection of the state and the creating of all the condition "for rest an spending free time" - that "comparing with the social level of the developed industrial states, the Bulgarian level of life overpasses just a little the poverty limit". Then again, after mentioning the great success of the Bulgarian cultural life, it is invoked "the remaining behind of the world results in science and technique". See *Ibidem*, p. 8, 9, 11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Fekete Pál, *Torenélem 8* (az általános iskola 8. osztálya számára), Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, 1991, 191 p.

immediately after exposing the 1956 revolution, the author introduced a large chapter about the international events until 1990, including the *disintegration of the socialist camp*.<sup>17</sup> After that, he came back to the Hungarian space and continued the chronological evolutions since 1956.

The author's very interest is not the Hungarian daily life, excepting the time of the greatest hardship, after the war. In that context, the agrarian reform was a good thing, even it was promoted by political reasons, including the communist ones. The story stresses the violent, corrupted and repressive side of the system. There is almost no mention about the reasons why Hungary was called in '70s the most *cheery barrack in the socialist camp*. There is no remembering of the *goulash communism* that once seemed to be a plausible model for improving the system. One could only meet some short remarks like *from the second half of the '60s we can count the ten golden years of the Kadar's government in Hungary*, or the mention of Kadar's tolerant motto: *who is not against us, is with us*. But the positive tone doesn't last, as long as *in change for personal well living people had to give up political opposition*.<sup>18</sup> And when this well living was not satisfactory anymore, the crisis was proclaimed, simply by talking about it. Such debates occurred in newspapers and the people were attracted into. After long term efforts of the *intelligentsia*, those debates became more political. The main blaming of the regime, as it appears in the textbook, is national and managerial. The Party was a too narrow frame for public decisions and the regime is at best captured in observations such as *to occupy the important functions it was needed to have the permission of the Party*.<sup>19</sup>

Hungarian view pays much attention to the neighboring states. First it is because of the lost territories and people, by 1947 treaty of peace. The caring for Hungarian minority is a matter of honor and national pride. That treaty *offended the nation* by not providing any protection for the Hungarian ethnic in other countries. After 1956 and the repressive campaign that followed, a greater number of Hungarians left the country, enlarging the exile, and one of the Kadar's government guilt was that *there was no interest for the Hungarians who lived abroad, they were like enemies of the nation*.<sup>20</sup>

Another source of interest for the others is the solidarity against the communist system; e.g. in 1956 students intended to demonstrate solidarity with Polish workers from Poznan and their courageous strike, and that was one of the starting spark for the revolt. In 1989, Hungary directly contributed to the German uprising by opening the border with Austria and letting East German citizen to go west. The textbook also reminds that a Hungarian ethnic, the priest Lazlo Tokes played an important role in starting the revolution in Romania and also stresses *the help gave in 1989 with the occasion of the victory of Revolution in Romania by offering financial support, food and medicines*.<sup>21</sup> The author blames Hungarian armed participation against Czechoslovakia in 1968, but in all, Hungary looks like an anticommunist champion in East Europe. There are regrets of course, like for the previous cases, but also a more militant attitude and more confidence in the national destiny. The historical narrative is more coherent, proving a long exercised alternative discourse and making minimal use of former socialist vocabulary. Still, the perspective is highly politicized. Although the role of

<sup>17</sup> See Miklós Molnár, *A Concise history of Hungary*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 331.

<sup>18</sup> Fekete Pál, *op. cit.*, p. 165, 167.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 150.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 169.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 163, 170-171.

intelligentsia was mentioned in the last decade public debates there is no special accent upon cultural life, only a short line about the schooling extension.

### 6. Good old Poland

Poland is an old respectable neighbor for Romanians, that didn't really disturb us since the middle age times and even then it was very attractive as cultural habits, especially for the eastern part of the country.

In the '80s, despite both countries declared isolationist policy, tourists continued to travel between them. It was common to meet Polish on the main roads to Black Sea shore. There was no perception of crises, of inflation or political conflicts, no Solidarity for the Romanian citizens.

It was surely different from the lived communism in Poland, as one high-school textbook from 1998 suggests it.<sup>22</sup> The story is based upon the long series of protests against the unfairness of the regime, finally ended by free elections in June 1989. Still, the great Polish trauma of the XX<sup>th</sup> century remained the Second World War, not the communist period. The country itself was practically *moved* from East to West, by loosing the eastern part in the favor of the Soviet Union and getting western territories from Germany. So almost one third of the land was switched, accompanied by huge transferring of population, involving different minorities and answering to very different reasons for moving. The textbook doesn't speak clearly about the state territory, but insists upon the people's exchanges. The neighbors and their minorities are not well remembered. The story details the Ukrainian aggression in the '40s and about the German minority expelling it is explained that *at that time one could not see a way of coexistence with the German minority inside the same state.*<sup>23</sup> The result of all these changes is not clearly stated. It is just take for granted that Poland is to be a uniform national state.<sup>24</sup>

Inside the new state, the first years after war were devoted to reconstruction, as in Hungary, but the communists were guilty of distorting them by their violence. This caused economical trauma and the first protests against the communist decisions. The strikes in 1956 were provoked by daily shortages. In the following decades, this will remain a permanent motivation for protest. Only in 1968, the events were originated in the ideological dispute upon the national culture and got birth to political organized opposition. In 1970, 1976, 1980 and 1988, the worker's strikes were usually related to government decisions to heighten the prices. There were violent enough to provoke changes of the political leaders and to remind the permanent threat of the soviet army intervention. From 1976, *intelligentsia* built a real alternative culture, by *samizdat* distributing and organizing civil society groups. The huge crowd that saluted the Pope John Paul II in 1979 was also registered as a sign of protest against the communist government. In 1980, the anticommunist movement became aware of its history as the workers strike committee requested for rising a monument to celebrate the memory of their predecessors from 1970 and 1976.

<sup>22</sup> Tadeusz Glubinski, *Historia 8. Trudnywiek XX*, Warsaw, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1998, 366 p.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 341-342.

<sup>24</sup> "For the first time in its history, the Polish state, always weakened by its inability to integrate the different nationalities that composed it, became ethnic and cultural almost homogenous... Almost 98% of its population were Polish and almost 94% were recognized as being catholic". See Pierre Buhler, *Histoire de la Pologne communiste. Autopsie d'une imposture*, Paris, Ed. Karthola, 1997, p. 160.



For this Polish textbook, the '80s decade was the long winter of the communist regime, the age of the military law, and of a high repression. It asked for the ultimate proof of people's heroism and resistance.

But it was not always like this. In the '70s, the better living standards really grew up Eduard Gierak's popularity. The bad investments of the external credits and the price rising destroyed it. Excepting his decade, communist Poland life does not worth to be detailed.

Poland was not involved in socialist international life but formally, suggests the omissions of the text. But, it was the pioneer, the first country that restored democracy and gave the sign for 1989 chain of changing in East. This was the prize for its struggle and also the victory of the national ideal.

### 7. Albania: a story, not a country

Some people hardly remember its existence and others make jokes about it. In Romania, one should make serious efforts to remember an Albanian movie and, probably, no other products. Except Skanderberg's name and few pre-modern historical facts, it is difficult to say something more about Albanian culture in Romania. After 1989, Ismail Kadare had more books translated in Romania and occasionally one can find that Mother Teresa was born in Albania.

In the '80s, Albania was surely the worse place in the socialist camp, at least in a Romanian view. There were specific jokes about the military ambitions of this small country. What Romanians didn't know – and if they would, they would be probably displeased and surprised – was that abroad the two countries were seen much alike. The poverty, the hardship of daily life, the isolation and the incredible show of an absurd dictatorship were enough reasons for it. Both were considered the exception of the East, especially in the late '80s and in 1989.

In pages of the Albanian textbook for national history teaching in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade<sup>25</sup>, the communist regime appears to be less significant than the Second World War or the fate of the Albanians living in the neighboring countries. Inside the communist chapter, the most extensive description is about the '80s crisis and the final crushing of the system, confirmed by the political pluralism proclaiming. As usually, the chronological frame starts with the installing of the communist power (1944-1949). But it is not, as usually, ending in 1989, instead of the same general accused crisis of the '80s. The line of the regime's history is divided by the foreign policy switch from 1960-1961, when Albania suddenly broke the close relation with the Soviets and chose China instead.

During the war, Albania had not been invading by the Red Army and this encouraged the legend of the own installing of the Albanian communists on power. There is no *sovietization* or *stalinization* period in the Albanian textbook and so no *destalinization* nor *detente* either. Instead, the text registered the remarkable achievements of the regime, firstly about education and cultural institution development. Again, the alphabetization and the overall heightening of the instruction's level are only slightly touched by the regrets for the '60s reforming that *overloaded the school with political and ideological requirements*. But the author concludes that *even under strong political pressure, the Albanian science had continued to deepen its progress*.<sup>26</sup> It is an optimistic

<sup>25</sup> Myzafer Korkuti, Petrika Thëngjilli, Gazmed Shpuza, Fatmira Rama, Xhelal Gjeçovi, Ajet Shahu, Ana Lalaj, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, Tirana, Shëpia Botuese e Librit Shkollor, 2001, 240 p.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 195, 205, 210.

view, if to compare with recent documents about the school reforms needed, that describe the heritage of this age as a disastrous one.<sup>27</sup>

The early nationalization of enterprises and banks and the agriculture's collectivization are barely mentioned. In a country with no large properties and no major capitalists, there was no great impact about destroying them. Instead, it is stressed the visible development of the socialist economy. Practically, the industry was the communist's invention in that country. Together with electrification – one of the earlier myth of the Stalinism – are repeatedly invoked.<sup>28</sup>

The author openly affirms its right to *select* the truths, by so putting the textbook in a memory working frame, not in a historical researching one: *no matter the methods used, the rhythm of economical rise was the most higher those years.*<sup>29</sup> The voluntarism of the time is so seen as being worthy, building new realities: railways, roads, telephone nets. Even the agriculture was certainly developing and modernizing in those years.

The defects of the regime were lately and predictable: exaggerated heavy industry projects, growing bureaucracy, bad management. A special case, largely exposed, was the restrictions upon small private production for peasants, causing a great lost of cattle and food resources.<sup>30</sup> Moral rewards instead of payment were not satisfactory anymore. Shortages became chronic and poverty so deep that in a way even stealing from public propriety was understandable. People started to disbelieve the Party and expressed discontents firstly by jokes, ironies and suggestive posters.

The man who ruled almost all the communism times, Enver Hoxa, is shortly and aggressive portrayed and his dead is looked as being more significant than his life. His dead made indeed the Party's leaders very confused, especially because of the higher external pressure upon them: on one side it was Perestroika, on the other one, Western countries capable of offering financial support that missed so much.

The communist Albanian perception of others was strange, especially after '60s, when the country was imbued by the *besieged fortress* malady and *bunkers* were planted everywhere. The textbook still doesn't recognize the whole absurdity of it and considered that the militarization of the country *had grew the safety of the citizen's life and reduced the criminal incidents.*<sup>31</sup> Until that tight isolation, Albanian foreign policy was very active. First rank was accorded to the Soviet Union, of course, but it was not for free, because *it contributed with 30% of the Albanian budget.*<sup>32</sup> It is a rare case when a former socialist country openly recognized the economical importance of the Soviet partnership. Yugoslavia and Greece, that included significant territories inhabited by Albanian population, are described as being violent and unfair. Italy is not easily forgotten for its guilt to occupy Albania. The tension was appeased by a morbid trade: *only in 1957, according to the Act from Roma, Italy paid to Albania 2,6 million dollars and in exchange Albania allowed the Italian government to take home the bones of the Italian solders died in Albania.*<sup>33</sup> Shortly after that, this little but ambitious country had denounced the Soviet leaders false way of communism and proclaimed itself the *true*

<sup>27</sup> See Ylli Pango, *L'enseignement secondaire en Albanie*, Editions du Conseil de l'Europe, 1996, 33 p.

<sup>28</sup> Myzafer Korkuti, *op. cit.*, p. 205, 209, 210.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 205.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 214.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 209.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 203.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 204. This subject made the theme of Ismail Kadare's first famous novel, *The General of the Dead Army*, published in 1963.

depository of Stalinism and Marxism values. The Albanian conception of foreign policy was far from the real life: *all the democratic states and international organisms were declared enemies of the socialism*,<sup>34</sup> not to count the socialist states themselves, excepting the new protector, China. But its financial aiding was not so consistent as it was expected and this contributed to the economical crush of '80s. The crisis made people more curious about the life abroad, defying the isolation rigors, and so, *with all the political and ideological obstacles, they got all the information about the good life of the Occidental civilization*. The interdictions only grew up the admiration and the faith in Western power. The people believed that a sign from it could change the fate of the country. The fabulous rumors appeared, like that in 1987: visiting Tirana, the foreign ministry of Germany offered especial guarantees that the Occident will help Albania if it will be the first to leave the communism.<sup>35</sup> And so the country lost its only mentioned chance to be *the first*. It is a deep regret in this story, a great frustration and an equal fascination for the Western life.<sup>36</sup>

### 8. Bessarabia, now Moldavia

On the eastern Romanian borders the map had the name of the Soviet Union for almost 70 years and that is difficult to forget. Still, for the last half of century, everybody knew it was a former Romanian land, called Bessarabia. Like in Poland, it was our Katyn truth that was not to be told loudly and it was especially vivid for the direct neighborhood, in the Moldavian historical space. After decades of interdiction, something changed in '80s, when personal contacts between relatives from the two parts of Moldavia were aloud and suddenly *their* TV shows became more interesting than were ours. It was the first viewing of Perestroika.

For identity reasons, Romanian history became more relevant in Bessarabia than in Romania, especially in late '80s and after the proclaiming of the independent Republic of Moldavia, and so the communist period is more detailed described in their textbooks than in *ours*, both for the Romania and for Moldavia history. This is surely obvious for the chose 12<sup>th</sup> grade volume.<sup>37</sup>

Like for the others, the Moldavian story starts with the Second World War trauma that was far more complex than in Romania. Bessarabia had been firstly grabbed by the Soviets in June 1940. One year after, Romanians allied with Germans freed it. In 1944, it was again occupied by the Soviet Union and severely punished. Territorial lost was important, almost 1/3 of its surface being granted to Ukraine. There is no word about the gained territory, Transnistria, although the disputed nature of it caused a civil war in '90s. Instead, the textbook constantly mentions it as being a Romanian/Moldavian territory.

All the territories across the new border were brutally cut up from Romania, the refugees were haunted for years and sent back in the Soviet world. The newly established Soviet Republic, Moldavia, became a huge concentration camp. The major drama of the next years were the deportations to Siberia and the great famine of '46-'47,

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 208.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 218

<sup>36</sup> All these, "guilty of inculcating in students complexes of inferiority deeply related to one's very Albanian being" are extensively described in Erind Pajo, *Albanian Schoolbooks in the Context of Societal Transformation: Review Notes* in Christina Koulouri, *op. cit.*, p. 445-461.

<sup>37</sup> Nicolae Enciu, *Istoria românilor. Epoca contemporană. Manual pentru clasa a XII a*, Chişinău Editura Civitas, 2001, 183 p.

comparable to what happened in Ukraine in the '30. The authorities were not helping people, on the contrary, they asked for greater quantities of supplies *from* Moldavia. All the time, the textbook talks about these dues like about a tribute to pay to the unmerciful empire. No matter if it were the *stalinism* or the *Perestroika* times, this tribute remained. That was not the only evil. The text accuses forced and intense Rusification policy, the bringing of Russian language talking people in Moldavia and by so, the reducing of the Romanians number. The colonists got the best jobs and locations, and made Romanians second-degree citizens in their own fatherland. Even more, the regime that was totally submitted to Moscow started to build a new historical theory, named by the textbook *a fantasy*. The Romanian cultural heritage was denied, the Romanian state and history denigrated, the Latin alphabet was changed for the Slavic one and it was pretended that Moldavian language is a different language from Romanian, and that the Moldavians are different from Romanians.

The textbook stresses the *resistance* against all of these aggressions, first of all the preserving of the Romanian identity. The intellectuals are the favorite heroes and the textbook states that the Writer's Union was the first organized and legal group of the civil society opposing to the *fake* theory of Moldavian identity and defending the Romanian culture. Despite the anti-Romanian aspect present in most of the cultural achievements, there are seen as the best thing of the regime, especially the education and the academic life. Like in the Albanian case, the narrator deliberately avoids contradictory aspects and admits that *no matter the goals of the regime, these realizations were rising the level of the instruction and the culture of the people*.<sup>38</sup> The worse thing was the permanent economically extortion of the country, forced to be the *garden of the Soviet Union*. Detailed description, lots of tables and statistics are to prove it. It also denounces the industrial dependency of the Republic to the Russian space or to the difficult territory of Transnistria. Far from the lyric reportage of the Moldavian TV in the '80s about the nice villages of the republic, the textbook accuses serious destruction of the land, little profits for the peasants and limited choices of life. The small periphery of the Empire did envy not only the Center, where the life was cheaper, wealthier and more dynamic, but also other privileged parts of the Union, like the Baltic countries.

The narrative permanently reminds the importance of the *state* structure. The soviet regime had no respect for local decisions. There was no autonomy, not to speak about sovereignty, the most important fact of the recent times history. Still, the Soviets and the *Center* gave a solution: Perestroika, the chance for changing. It didn't change the economic system, as it was intended to, but it encouraged an identity revival. First of all the language, the very essence of national remembrance, became an open subject. Consequently, the end of the communist regime took in Moldavia a specific path. A conference of the Romanists from all over the Union, held on 31 October 1988 in Kishinev, established as a scientific truth that Moldavian is not different from the Romanian language. The political authorities finally accepted it and for the textbook, *this was the culminating point of the national movement: decreeing the national language [Romanian] as state language*. And so the anticommunist victory was equivalent with the Romanian identity imposing and *with the proclaiming of the Independence for the Moldavian Republic*.<sup>39</sup> These were, in fact, two different and

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 124.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131.

somehow contradictory acts, showing an evolution from 1989 to 1991, from Romanian to Moldavian identity.

Opposite to the German way, *Wir sind ein Volk* became *Wir sind das Volk*.

Despite of its massive descriptions, the text misses lots of people and facts. There is no story about those who are not Romanians, orthodox, or even Moldavians. The tragedy of so many boys fighting in Afghanistan, and generally in the Soviet Army, is not even reminded. There is no clear idea about how the people *lived*, but only how they survived.

There is only a remaining, at least as a personal and uncomfortable memory, from the late '80s conviction, that Moldavians across the border were definitely *better living* than were the Romanians. Even this is slightly fading away in front of the present terrible crisis in the Moldavian Republic.

### 9. The first West for the Easterners: Germany

In the '80s, East Germany was seen, surely not only by Romanians, as the most *Western* and *civilized* members of the socialist camp. There were many witnesses for that, especially *our* Germans that managed to have contacts with their relatives or the most fortunate Romanians who traveled there as tourists, students or, simply, as Party members. No one could doubt about German prosperity; at least looking from East.

One recent history German textbook<sup>40</sup> suggests other plausible views. The textbook followed the history of both German states, from the separation till after the unification. This double looking made the narrative more complex than simple stressing of the similarities between them. The resemblance is better visible until the '60s: efforts for reconstruction, increasing level of daily life, lots of hopes and rather easy contacts between the two states. The Soviet presence was not the only difference as long as socialism might be seen as an option. The story points the *economically systems in conflict* and the brutal military solution to it, the building of the Berlin Wall. That was a strange and painful experience, as was the whole Cold War for the world. The textbook pays much attention to daily living information: prices, products, social advantages. It's clearly trying to make a credible comparison and not to give verdicts. The second rank of Democratic Germany in the socialist world<sup>41</sup> is reminded without naming the first, as it was obvious to be the Soviet Union. Talking about the economical effectiveness hierarchy, it must be said that the positions were differently viewed in other Eastern countries. It was commonly said that Democratic Germany was *the shop window of the socialist camp*, no matter how rich was the Soviet Union.

Looking from West, the life took different colors and the socialist system was not something to be very enthusiastic about.<sup>42</sup> Adding the national identity conscience and the failure of a socialist German identity building, the comparison became useless. After unification, tensions of equalizing the level of life in the two parts of the country got birth to new interests and motivations for remembering the socialist past. The textbook openly accepts that new perspectives are to be found. For identity reasons it became necessary to recollect the good things to preserve<sup>43</sup> about the socialist past, in

<sup>40</sup> *Ausgabe Thüringen. Klasse 10. Deutschland nach 1945 / Strukturen der Antike*, Braunschweig, Westermann Schulbuchverlag GmbH, 2000, 190 p.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

<sup>42</sup> See John Ardagh, *Germany and the Germans. An Anatomy of Society Today*, New York, Harper&Row Publishers, 1987, *Daily life under German-style communism*, p. 319-388.

<sup>43</sup> *Ausgabe Thüringen*, p. 106.

order not to humiliate and mistreat the new citizens. The Federal Republic is the winner, but the competition is over and a new national profile must be constructed, after decades of double language communication.

There are no frequent connections with the world events, less with the socialist camp. The history of the world last half of a century is put in the German example: *in Federal Republic of Germany existed a free social and democratic market place economy. In Democratic Republic of Germany it was installed the Party's dictatorship and the SED [The Communist Party] imposed the socialist order.*<sup>44</sup> The main problem of the socialist system is not considered to be the strictly economical one, but the failure of the legitimacy discourse. Without free options for the people, the system was not to be effective.

The East is symbolized by the Soviet Union, which is pictured as a great power and an immediate presence in the German territory. Other *brothers* in the socialist camp are not mentioned. Only after unification, Germany reconsiders the neighboring context, as long as it is seeing itself as a Central European new power. But the final word is *Europe*.

#### 10. Western mirrors: France, United Kingdom

Moving further toward West, we will meet the concrete Occidental life, including its view on eastern one, back to '80s and after the falling of the socialist system.

The communism was for western history textbooks a chapter of international relations, not a certain way of living. Everything after war period was seen as a competition between two giants, as a French volume of 1980 put it: *The free world and the communist bloc.*<sup>45</sup> The short story of the Cold War origin sounds very familiar today, with the little difference of interpreting the role of the Occidental powers. It seems to make a perfect opposition to some of the post-communist versions, like the Romanian one, that claims *our* abandoning and sacrifice. From West, it appeared that *the Occidentals vainly invoked the need to observe the Yalta's agreements and urged for free elections under the control of foreign observers. They just took under their protection Greece and Turkey.*<sup>46</sup> The story continued by proclaiming the *impossible peace* between the two parts of the world and the *American crusade* against the new Evil – the communism. The textbook carefully registered the dimension of this threat: the atomic bomb possession, one from 2,5 billion of planet's inhabitants obeying the Soviets and the greatest army of all, the Red Army. The concise picture of what *stalinization* was is also easy to be recognized in nowadays post-communist textbooks. Few names of eastern political leaders were mentioned only to represent internal fights under the Soviet obedience. The Khrushchev *relaxing* impulse went together with rebellions and national ways to be invoked as a dilution of the socialist rigor. In this context, Ceaușescu's claiming for independence was considered comparable to Dubček's reforming attempt!

The eastern small countries are mostly pictured for their signs of disobedience, but the Soviet Union is carefully analyzed as the *real* partner of the Occident, especially in the economy chapters. The negative but fascinating elements were not the only ones

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>45</sup> *Espaces and Civilisations. 3<sup>e</sup>. Histoire, Géographie, Economie, Education Civique*, Paris, Belin, 1980, 255 p.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 86.

to be described. The rapid industrialization is respectfully regarded and statistics are abounding.<sup>47</sup> There were of course inconveniences of economical organization, a surely weak productivity and lots of daily problems about market shortages, poor lodging and alcoholism. The education system is not included on these. On the contrary, it is highly appreciated, ignoring the political stakes.

Finally, the story contradicts its initial terms, because the peace was tacitly accepted and the Soviets were partially entered *inside* the civilized world. In the '80s, the Soviet Union was recognized, by an unspecified criterion, to be the second economically power of the world. Despite the ideological violence, the two camps were having multiple exchanges and the Occidental ideas found ways to penetrate the Soviet space although its peoples did not have the right to travel abroad or to freely emigrate.

But a close look to it could show the fragile support of this world. The external payments balance was considered to be about 97% in deficit for the Soviets. The Achile's heel common to all the socialist countries and put on the origins of the '80s crisis was already visible, even it was not expected to produce the final damages of the system. That was *the great financial dept to the capitalist countries*.<sup>48</sup>

After the collapse of the system it seems that once the danger has being removed, it doesn't worth much attention anymore. The retrospective view is more appeased, as a 1999 French textbook suggests it.<sup>49</sup> From the start, the *Cold War* didn't exclude *pacifist coexistence* and the *end of the communism* is celebrated so rapidly that it missed the communism portrait at all!<sup>50</sup> The economical hierarchy of the world is also changed: Japan takes the second place and Russia is not mentioned at even mentioned. Instead, the European Union is put on the third level. There are no words about the military potential of the Russians. The end of the communism is only linked with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The story about the communist system became a short prologue of its disappearing. Somehow, after 1985, *the situation became catastrophic: increasing shortages, alcoholism, pollution, grate dept of the states*.<sup>51</sup> The situation is similar for the whole east. The crushing of the system is a random enlisting of events, putting together the ends and the beginnings of 1989-1991. The Romania is only mentioned because of the unique case of not just removing but killing the old ruler, Nicolae Ceaușescu.

A British volume, *Case studies in twentieth-century history*, from 1988<sup>52</sup> included in the chapter about *communism, fascism and democracy* only the Soviet Union under the Stalin rule. The episode of the 1956 rebellion in Hungary is put under the *nationalism* title, together with India, Nigeria and Caribbean struggles for independence. Talking about the Hungarian struggle against the Soviet domination, the author just reminds that *during the 1940's, the Communist parties, with the support of the Soviet Union, took control of most of the countries of Eastern Europe*.<sup>53</sup> That is all

<sup>47</sup> See Jacques Dupâquier, *La "déstalinisation" des manuels de géographie*, in "Commentaire", no. 100 / Hiver 2002-2003, p. 972-976, showing the long term and uncritical use of Soviet sources, by ignoring the programmed false of them.

<sup>48</sup> *Espaces and Civilisations*, p. 205.

<sup>49</sup> M. Brogini, J.-P. Coevoet, J. Creillery, G. Lancelot, A. Prost, J.-B. Somarandy, M. Tavan, *Histoire-Géographie-Éducation civique. 3<sup>e</sup>*, Paris, Hachette, 1999, 144 p.

<sup>50</sup> See *Table de matières*, in *Ibidem*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 79.

<sup>52</sup> Derek Benjamin Heater, *Case studies in twentieth-century history*, London and New York, Longman Group UK, 1988, 154 p.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101.

about. These countries were not even named, being just Moscow's satellites, enduring the same (Soviet) fate in the same way.

A book from 1991 is more precise,<sup>54</sup> but communism is still mostly defined in its interwar context and detached from the *Cold War* problem. The last one is presented as a supremacy dispute, in terms of territorial advantages. In this respect, communism is the second name of the Russian power and the socialist countries alliance is resumed as *Russia put troops into of them*. A pragmatic option is best defined in Truman's saying that *poor countries were more likely to turn communist*.<sup>55</sup> Communism became again a subject by its suddenly 1989 *retreat*. The facts are enlisted under Gorbachev's name and distributed in Russia and *elsewhere in Eastern Europe*. The images are rolling, with the news flash spots about Solidarity, Iron Curtain and Berlin Wall disappearing, and of course, the final shot, Ceaușescu's execution. Communism finally vanished because the Cold War didn't mean anything anymore and that happened because *Russian and American leaders agreed that the Cold War ended!*<sup>56</sup>

Western mirrors were too far away.

### 11. Back to class: textbook language

The eastern schoolbooks are very devoted to the *text*, to the narrative, keeping a close resemblance with the classic history *book*. Even when the pages are sometime accepting images, documents, tables and different assessments, the main reason of the book is to *write down a story*. Without the explicit story, all the *secondary* elements have no independent meanings. Images are perceived as luxury or as supplements of the text, to confirm it or to offer little breaks inside the whole reading effort.

The pre-eminence of the text was also clear for the western schoolbooks of the '80s, but after two decades, the situation is different. One could say that the energy invested in East to change the *truths* of history teaching was invested in West to change the *means* of presenting the truths and this distance between the goals is difficult to cover up. For the most influential educational trends, the present schoolbook is not a book anymore, becoming a relative of its most challenging partners, the new *media*. The knowledge exposure becomes more visual, information is distributed in small dosage, design is complex, and the author is not mainly a good history writer but a leader of an effective editorial team.<sup>57</sup> Textbooks became *magazines* for the young customers.

Different structures of the schoolbooks are not exclusively related with the amount of technical experience, the free market economy conditions or the financial costs. It also embodied different pedagogical concepts. The former socialist countries are still linked with the previous regime's pedagogical model that stressed discipline, effort making, authoritarian relations and intellectualist standards. Meeting alternative, pluralist and optional views of a democratic education is not easy.

It is something more to say about history teaching in the post-communist countries, at least in the '90s. The common perception was that finally teaching the *real historical truths* and by so removing the communist lies about it, was the first duty of the free, democratic school. And the new narrative became even more inflexible and sober than the previous one.

<sup>54</sup> J. F. Aylett, *The twentieth century world*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1991, 128 p.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 95.

<sup>57</sup> See Alain Choppin, *Les manuels scolaires: histoire et actualité*, Paris, Hachette, p. 87-96, the chapter about *L'édition scolaire aujourd'hui*.



It must be reminded that school language is a very specific code of communication, because of its scientific, didactic and social equalizing goals. During the communist age, this language was even more overwhelmed by ideological and political messages. If the information could be rather easily changed, the concepts, the categories, the very structuring patterns are more difficult to be replaced, being the main vehicles of communication. The political institutional view remains dominant, all others question being clearly submitted to it. In this respect, not to include in the schoolbooks some subjects because of the not existing historiography works about them (e.g. daily life history, children history, etc.) it is not a complete explanation. It could also be a question of *worthy subject* hierarchy, doubled by an old pedagogical expectation, that a textbook must deliver/reinforce complete and already accepted truths.

In communism presenting lessons, one can identify the final commentaries and classifications as being western originated, e.g. *totalitarianism, free elections, pluripartitism, Cold War* and others. The communism is presented from outside, as if the lessons were to be addressed to western readers, even when the former communist vocabulary is used, e.g. *nationalization, collectivization, popular democracy, alphabetization*. It seems that the communism had been defined itself in western terms, both to be accepted by and to challenge the West, and did not ever have an internal and self-sufficient, credible look upon itself.<sup>58</sup>

The documents of the period are quoted without any decoding help, like the readers will surely understand it, even when it clearly contradict the main text story.<sup>59</sup> The narrator so assumes a tacit consensus about the way of proper reading, usually in a simple “yes or no” logic. Metaphors like the *Cold War* launching or the ’80s symbolical revolts are the real international language for the communist age. This is used to expose the most fragile truths about it, e.g. the beginning and the ending of the communist system, and to sustain the most unconvincing chronological departures.

The general narrative tone is a tragic one.

Western looks upon are different structured, by a good educational using of pictures, questions, or even cartoons and jokes. Especially the German one is relevant for it, managing to express difficult truths in a familiar and straight manner, e.g. about the reunification problems, offering a few brilliant political cartoons on this sensitive matters,<sup>60</sup> so to encourage less tensioned reflecting upon. It is also making an inspired displaying of direct testimonies and common people opinions, especially for controversial options, so confirming the well-known tradition of *alltagsgeschichte* and oral history working.<sup>61</sup>

For a direct witness of the socialist life style, something is surely missing from the story: a lot of smart and conclusive political jokes. These were a specific “code” of the

<sup>58</sup> See Maria Todorova, *Remembering Communism* in *Centre for Advanced Study in Sofia Newsletter*, no. 2, 2002, autumn, p. 15, that suggests the eastern giving up in front of the western concepts: “The existing image of a real socialism is still crucified between the completely delegitimised discourse of the official state socialism, and the no less inadequate but surviving cold-war models”.

<sup>59</sup> E.g. in the Bulgarian textbook, where the text clearly stated that “the Bulgarian Army, once a faithful guardian of the country was transformed in a military support for the new power” and shortly after it follows a fragment of a Council of Ministries’ decision from 12 September 1944, where it is ordered to be arrested all the “militaries that by their behavior, caused the country’s catastrophe”.

<sup>60</sup> See *Ausgabe Tübingen*, p. 58, 105.

<sup>61</sup> So, the text courageously presents uncomfortable resents and social tensions after unification. More interesting, the testimonies are collected from students having about the same age as the readers. See *Ibidem*, p.106.

time and one of the most accessible way to express critical opinions about the regime, used both inside and outside it.

Different sequences of language to describe communist regimes probably correspond to different generations and values, and are not just *reminiscences* of former socialist, former anticommunist and former post-communist times. For each one, there are social options and loyalties that translate the history lesson's key words into symbols to be revered and not judgements to be questioned.

The words did create realities, not only in the socialist camp.

## 12. What history, whose memory

Summing up all the pieces collected from the visited textbooks, one naturally can ask again: was the communism good or bad? Before reaching answers, we have to admit that it is not only a question, it is a series of questions. It implies a more detailed framework, since what is called *communism* was not a solid, indistinct block nor in timeline, neither in space. *Who asked about* also matters, to see what expectations and regrets the question may contain. Communism itself has not a clear definition even by its own favorite denomination, ideological and political. Using terms such as *communist regimes*, *communist age*, *socialist countries* are we talking about the same realities? As for *good* or *bad*, it is obvious that it already incorporated comparative judgements so it needs to rename the realities to be compared with.

Reminding the context of questioning, it must be stressed again that there were two different times of questioning and two different views. First were teenagers from 2000 asking about the reality of their parents' life and this provoked the second stage, a retrospective interrogation about the realities *lived* by former teenagers in the '80s. Both sources of what is considered the most credible information were, now and then, *the parents*, *the family*. There were then unbearable differences between what the young were informal told and what the school – the authority of knowledge – intended to impose. There are still great differences, and these provoked the questioning.

From the start, the textbook is not seen as the best or the most convincing source of knowledge. Questioning it was rather a sign of mistrust than of intellectual curiosity. It could be seen as memory's devotes disbelief in official historical narrative. But is not the only possible view. It could also be the need of being recognized by the most powerful public historical text, or the need of checking again the relevance of it.

Of course, textbook's authors usually try to avoid naive and simplistic labels like this was good, that was bad. So the question must be translated in a textbook's language. It so becomes a questionnaire around the problem of communism describing lessons, trying not to forget the first version of it. This will get to the national, social, economical, cultural items.

Usually, the lessons about communism's history insist upon the violent beginnings directly related with the Second World War aggressions, and the culminating moments of contesting the regime, that ended in 1989-1991. The first repressive decade and the last one, of the final crisis, are the main subjects. Between them, a list of political leaders and oppositions against them is laid down, with little spots of social, economical and cultural life.

In a good Marxist tradition, economy, seen as an impersonal, institutional and mechanical reality, is a major explanation of history. But the politics is the first key of reading history. Typically, the regime is reduced to some chronological marking points, to the names of some leaders and to a few general concepts. The texts openly name the

most relevant feelings that were supposed to be born by the regime's evolutions; first there were *distrust, fear, discontent* and finally *anger, courage, enthusiasm* and *hope*. Between them – a long silence? The stable period of the regime, the '60s-'70s, is usually suggested to be a relaxing one. This is the period that inspired the question, the period when the communism was, by the same time, good and bad, but surely not so bad as before and after it. This was *the apathy* (Poland), *the detente* (Romania), *the golden time* (Hungary) and *the economical development* (Bulgaria, Albania) break. It was related with external credits, urbanization, better supplying, less terror and major cultural investments. It was also the beginning of the ending, because there were many political dictators born then and great managerial mistakes. But these were to be seen later and the retrospective angry darkened much of the picture. It was also the age that grew up the future opposition leaders and they encapsulated forever these times as their primary way of seeing the world. From that time on, they considered themselves entitled to judge how *good* or how *bad* the communism could be.

In the textbooks, the communist period is not usually compared with other historical times, before or after it. Only indirectly, one can see the forced development of the age, when it is to compare it with the previous situations. Also must be remarked the relative stability of it, if one will remember the turmoil of the Second World War or of the following post-communist transitions. Some texts openly recognize the difficulty to choose between the moral/ideological evil and the at least acceptable material good living (Albania, Moldavia), or even to condemn it for its false appearance (Hungary, Poland).

As for the question of comparison between socialist countries, it seems that it didn't ever occur. On the contrary, the former socialist countries prefer to ignore the fact that there were once in very comparable and much closed relations. Or maybe it was not exactly so? Even ignoring ideological discourses and the socialist friendship propaganda, there are still acts to prove multiple and frequent exchanges between, even supervised by the Soviets. For most of the people, it was the only world allowed and there was serious encouragement to populate it, to travel in, to compare with, to *take example* of.

Only a pale memory of this remains and it is rather a competitive one, commercial (Germany) or political, but for the anticommunist merits (Hungary, Poland). The most striking description of the eastern world is the one that stated to be *forced to* have relations with the other socialist partners and by so to feel much deeply the isolation, the unreal of the system (Bulgaria). What is almost funny, is that everyone pretends to have once unique *independent* diplomatically initiatives, defying the major Soviet trends. The importance granted to this foreign policy acts is greater for the less visible anticommunist protesting countries, Romania and Albania.

This claimed *isolation together* and the unworthy of the inter-socialist relations could not be seen only as a worrying sign of nationalism but merely as an identity reshaping effort. It must remind that people in this part of the Europe used to define their historical identities in antagonistic ways and never forget to claim historical rights and territories from the others.<sup>62</sup> This is the first image to see if one intends to wash down the communist heritage from the national history, and to get back to what was before, until and during the Second World War.

Another aspect is the long trained conviction of Western superiority, exaggerated by the socialist propaganda in competing with it. What is the most visible remaining of

<sup>62</sup> See Christina Koulouri (ed.), *Teaching the history of South Eastern Europe*, Tessaloniki, 2001, p. 20.

this is not easily to answer<sup>63</sup> but the general feeling is the regret. This is the regret of loosing earlier opportunities to join or at least be much closer with the western way of life, deeply embodied in Bulgarian or Albanian texts.

Knowing this, it could be an unwanted surprise to find out how *The West* used to see the eastern countries. In western textbooks they were usually not named, at least as a foreign policy matter, being almost completely covered by the giant shadows of the Soviet Union. From the indistinct mass of Soviet obedience territory, only the most striking revolts became visible, from Hungary and Poland. Western view didn't make comparison between them, because they seemed to be all the same, smaller duplicates of the Soviet life style. As for their international relevance, despite the *independence* claiming of some ones, it was not worth to make a separate episode in a textbook story. The common mention about West-East relation from both respects is the financial support that was accorded and caused the limited prosperity of the age, or was denied and so nourished the '80s final crises. That's how the West made the difference.

The regret that underlies the post-communist texts is also having other sources. It is not only because of speaking of a bad past but of a badly non-speaking about it. The textbooks still preserve an *outside, anticommunist and highly ideological* view upon it. A new political correctness condemned the difference and made it even difficult to catch *memory that is now publicly denigrated*.<sup>64</sup> And so, once more, the history lessons could be equal relevant by their omissions as by "*what to be remembered*" prescriptions.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>64</sup> See Maria Todorova, *op. cit.*, p. 16.