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## The distinctiveness of the institutionalization and reinforcement of the Soviet model of higher education in the interwar period

*Specificitatea instituționalizării și impunerii modelului sovietic în învățământul superior în perioada interbelică*

Nicolae TODERAȘ

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### Abstract

*This article offers an analysis of the institutional change in the Soviet higher education system during the establishment and consolidation period of the Communist regime in the USSR. The objective of the analysis focuses on the process development, mainly on the description of the constitutive actions of the Soviet higher educational system. The approach is viewed from a neo-institutional perspective and aims at offering a palette of explanations like path dependence for the rooting, establishment and marginal adapting to context of the main organization and management relations of the Soviet higher education system in the interwar period. The arguments offered shed light on and help understand better the processes related to the failure of changes aimed at modernizing the higher education system in the Republic of Moldova after the demise of Soviet Union in 1991.*

*Keywords: Higher education, path dependence, institutional change, Soviet model, Moldova*

### Introduction

After the collapse of USSR the public and administrative space of the ex-Soviet republics, including the Republic of Moldova, was dominated by arguments such as the condemnation of policies and tactics undertaken by the authoritarian regime. Among the subjects analysed were aspects related to the development of higher education and the way in which changes in the system should be made, in a way that the internal higher education be organized in a different manner, to offer a different training approach as well as another vision of society.

During the consolidation of the post-Soviet societies a totally different higher education system was projected as compared to the previous one. Thus, some state entities that emerged from the dissolution of the USSR managed to instate or reinstate new educational systems that are based on values, principles and institutional arrangements of a democratic nature. However other states have failed in this and their failure is due to a chain of causes that go back in the past starting

from the moment of the institutionalization of higher education in those territories. For example, in case of the Republic of Moldova, the institutionalization of higher education took place in two stages. The first stage is specific to the interwar period when a proto-institutionalization occurred by the foundation of higher education structures (departments and faculties, in Chişinău, Bessarabia) that were dependent upon Iaşi University. The proto-institutionalization did not start a tradition, relations, routines and artefacts that would be kept and cherished during the Soviet epoch by universities through a sort of „*institutional memory*” – a state that characterizes the Baltic States<sup>1</sup>. The institutional memory is more obvious within higher education institutions because universities are „*historic*” institutions marked by a relative continuity. Such institutional memory forms the basis of the governance and institutional autonomy model, in which interested persons, as well as their normative approaches contribute to reduce the dimension of change – thus, even the most qualitative external models are stopped by resistance and institutional inertia if they change the convictions and identities of the dominant institutions.<sup>2</sup>

The second stage is specific to the post-war period during which the institutionalization of higher education took place in an extensive and inclusive manner. Basically, it is precisely during this time that a new higher education sub-system develops through the implementation of the Soviet model. Therefore, the emergence and development of higher education institutions and the institutionalization of this field in Moldova is a relatively belated phenomenon. That is why it was impossible to create an indigenous culture of pluralist management based on the logic of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, which, during post Soviet transition could provide the landmarks and valences required for the support of change within the education system as a whole.

After two decades following the dissolution of the authoritarian regime and of the USSR arguments like the predominance of the Soviet-specific higher education relationships are still very much in use to justify the changes that should be made to modernise the higher education system. Moreover, in certain political regime contexts where Soviet-specific higher education relationships were even strengthened, such as the planning of cohorts of students, the separation of research from the higher education institutions, financing, subordination of academic leadership to political powers and so on. The range of explanations invoking the predominance of the Soviet-like relationships in a different social, political and economic context

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<sup>1</sup> For Estonian state of art see: Voldemar Tomusk, *The open world and closed societies: essays on higher education policies „in transition”*, New York, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 35-51.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Dobbins, Christoph Knill, „Higher Education Policies in Central and Eastern Europe: Convergence toward a Common Model”, in *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, Vol. 22. No. 3, 2009, p. 402.

other than the one specific to the USSR are based on the approach of *path dependence*. This recent approach offers a background for substantial empirical studies related to the implementation of policies and organizational continuity, the incremental change thereof, organization networking but also a modelling of agents' behaviour from a normative and cognitive perspective of the actors.<sup>3</sup> According to the meanings of the path dependence approach, the history of institutions archives and perpetuates in time the explanations pertaining to the causal chain of analyzed policies and provides an understanding of contemporary social events and of policy stability and change<sup>4</sup>. In other words, path dependency provides the evidence needed to assess the success or failure of policies along the temporary and procedural trajectories, showing the cause-effect relationship between these and other complementary phenomena or processes. Regarding higher education, the path dependence would mean perpetuating in time arrangements and relations specific to the Soviet model of higher education. But, as we have suggested above, in the case of the Republic of Moldova it was rather a process of implanted institutionalization through relocation of structures, mobility of teachers, etc., which involved the construction of the system from scratch. Dismantling relations and removing the *path dependence* of the Soviet model of higher education can be undertaken only if one knows the peculiarities of the Soviet model of higher education, so that interventions undertaken attack the components of the model, that remained as residues in the current arrangements specific of the organization of higher education in the Republic of Moldova. Therefore an advanced knowledge is required of the manner in which the Soviet higher education system was established and how it became a model distinct from other models of organization of higher education such as the Humboldtian, the Napoleonic and the Anglo-Saxon model. Therefore, this article presents the evolution of the formation and institutionalization of the Soviet system of higher education as a distinct model.

I seek to explain this process because the bases of the relationship specific of higher education in the Republic of Moldova lie in the performed in the first 20 years of the USSR. Thus, I seek to reveal the mechanisms that led to the institutionalization of this system, which in a relatively short period of time acquired a set of properties of successive expansion and stimulating multiplication in other countries (from the former communist bloc such as Poland, Hungary, Romania, etc.) and a capacity to maintain the methods and practices after the disappearance of the legal-administrative and ideological system and context in which they were

<sup>3</sup> Ian Greener, „The Potential of Path Dependence in Political Studies”, in *Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2005, pp. 69.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Pierson, „Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and Study of Politics”, in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 94, No. 2, 2000, pp. 263-264.

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developed and institutionalized. The approach is seen from a new institutional perspective and refers to the years 1918 to 1940, and the object of the analysis focuses on processes of development, namely on the description of the constitutive actions and tactics of the Soviet higher education system. Therefore, the objective of this article focuses on what happened in the USSR and not on the specific features of the proto-institutionalization of higher education in Bessarabia at that time.

### **Process sequencing in the institutional change**

To understand the arrangements initially established by the new political power in the Soviet Union in higher education I need to clarify first of all an aspect related to the segmentation of the period between 1917 and 1940. I think that about this period one cannot discuss in a general and unequivocal manner because, as I will argue in the following passages, the institutionalization of a new and unique model of higher education was completed based on trial and error practices in a context of autocratic consolidation of power and achievement of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Moreover, in the completion of a new higher education system and model it should be taken into account the axiological dimension of socialism, which in the context of that period was identified in the USSR context by two distinct socialism types: the revolutionary transitional type and the classical one.<sup>5</sup> If the first type is characterized by a state of idealistic awareness - institutions were designed and applied in an equally idealistic sense, then the second type is characterized by a transition from the idealistic state to the autocratic and dictatorial state where institutions became homogeneous and systems hyper-centralized. However, if with the first type the flow of events involved the initiation of dismantling the capitalist arrangements and the establishment of socialist arrangements, during which the new power applied more or less the revolutionary programmatic provisions, then in case of the second type of socialism the defining aspects are more difficult to establish because the form in which institutions are designed, tested and applied greatly vary from the ideological doctrine background set out by the revolutionary programmatic approaches. Therefore, to clarify the analysis parameters on the evolution of higher education in the USSR during the reference period I differentiate the classical interwar socialism in two subtypes: the first refers to ideational socialism and it is specific to the consolidation process of the USSR, and the second subtype focuses on totalitarian socialism and is specific to the first part of the Stalinist era. Thus, in the first subtype the consolidation process has been undertaken against the background of the struggle for supremacy of power, which has provided secto-

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<sup>5</sup> Janos Kornai, *The Socialist System. The Political Economy of Communism*, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 19-21.

rial systems with the possibility to adapt the new union regulatory arrangements<sup>6</sup>; whereas the second subtype refers to the first part of Stalinism, as manifested by the vehement intervention in the establishment of dependence in the development of higher education in the USSR<sup>7</sup>. Such a clarification was needed in order to better understand the circumstances in which actions have been taken to institutionalize the Soviet higher education system (through its phases of acquisition, disassembly, inventory and establishment of *path dependence*), as a separate system able to expand later in different contexts and areas. Given this, for the analysis undertaken in this article I will refer to three consecutive historic sequences of institutionalization and development of the Soviet system of higher education:

I) *The establishment and dismantling of the previous system* - is specific to the years 1917-1922 and involved the application of educational experimentation tactics of a progressive type specific to the classical approach of socialism. This sequence corresponds to the Civil War and the consolidation of the USSR (the establishment Treaty wasn't signed up until December 28, 1922). As a way of action, the revolutionary power partially upheld the path dependence established by the Tsarist Empire in terms of system characteristics - as I will show below, the interventions rather focused on the liberalization of access and teaching methods. With the consolidation of power, dismantling the old system involved the gradual abandonment of the path dependence<sup>8</sup> and successive attempts to invent a new path dependence.

II) *Consolidation of the system by a process of shared regulation* - covered the years 1923-1928 and was a visionary clarification on how their own model of higher

<sup>6</sup> Even if between the Russian SFSR and the Ukrainian SSR the provisions of an economic and military cooperation agreement worked and intensified (signed in December 1920), the sectorial systems of the two state entities did not manage to optimally coordinate themselves so as this could work accordingly once the USSR emerged. That is why after the Treaty establishing the USSR was signed a certain period was required to adapt and initiate the integration and homogenization processes of the management and teaching practices.

<sup>7</sup> In subchapter 3.4 I make a short analysis of the second part of the Stalinist domination when the institutions established in the 1930s were successively transposed in the new territories annexed in 1940 and after World War II.

<sup>8</sup> From an institutional perspective the dismantling and institutional reinvention lasts far more than the first sequence. As dependent upon politics and economic sectors the old institutions had been used fragmentarily up until the establishment of the Stalinist autocracy. For example, The New Economic Policy is in fact a continuity of the interventionist ideas skilfully promoted at the beginning of the 20th Century both in western states and the Russian Empire. The Soviet model, as distinct from other models of economic interventionism was not completed until the end of the '20s when the autocratic system consolidated and Stalin could impose his ideas. See also: Don K. Rowney, „Narrating the Russian Revolution: Institutionalism and Continuity across Regime Change” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 47, No. 1, Jan., 2005, pp. 97-100. As for the higher education, approaches like centralism and semi-autonomous government control of the higher education system were actually skilfully and constantly maintained since the middle of the 19th century; in the post-revolutionary context the process continued in the same direction, gradually gaining new institutional valences in relation with the adopted economic model. See also: Walter Ruegg, (Ed.) *A History of the University in Europe*, Volume III: Universities the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1800-1945), Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 10.

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education should look like and how the regulatory issues must be linked at the level of the other republics of the Union. The foundations are laid for educational terror methods and a campaign is started to purge students and teachers undesirable from the point of view of the party and power. The time sequence is consistent with the institutionalization of autocratic instances of power by processes of bureaucratization of administrative structures and organizations (forms of distinction occur between party and government powers) and the struggle for power supremacy at the central level of the party. In these circumstances the authorities have gone further on inventing a new path dependence;

*III) Industrialization and hyper centralized regulation* – specific to the years 1929-1940 and involves the establishment of the dictatorial regime and with it the socialist dimension in the USSR gains a new type, the Stalinist one that would last until 1953 and would be very different to the classic socialism. Thus, in this 11-year lapse the higher education system knows an accelerated development rhythm under the extensive industrialization surge. This time lapse is consistent with the accomplishment of the bureaucratization of central administration, as well as with a fixation of the path dependence in higher education. The sequence is characterized by the application of tough interventions related to forced collectivization and nationalization, elite and mass purges, and so on, resulting in the disappearance of the market and of all forms of private property. For higher education this change as a whole meant adapting the structural functional paradigms to the existing requests, this time not from the market but from the state. Basically, the compliance process was going to facilitate the application of tactics relative to the improvement of contingency and congruence of higher education, by elaborating and institutionalizing new norms and practices to be applied with certain incremental modifications until the end of the Soviet Union's existence – some of it would remain in place in the new systems even if corrective measures were enforced.

At this historic sequencing of the process it should be noted that until the establishment of the USSR the education systems of the states that had been part of the pre-war Soviet Union had developed independently but in close connection with what was going on within the Russian SFSR. Since the beginning of the second time sequence, a synchronized development occurred, but certain local or regional tactics are undertaken so that the systems are not identical; in the third sequence the standardization and centralization process of the whole federal system is certified.<sup>9</sup> It is precisely this model that becomes an accomplished one with its institutions and organizational forms, distinct from other systems, institutions and organizational structures that begin to multiply in the largest cities of the Soviet federal republics, and between 1940 and 1950 were exported to other Central and Eastern Europe states.

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<sup>9</sup> Here is why, for the first and second time sequences I will refer to the unfolding of events in the Russian Federation.

These three sequences specific to the interwar period prove that the Soviet higher education model has been gradually institutionalized (ex-ante and ex-post the 1930s), and each time lapse differs from the one before by means of the steps taken and the evolution of their continuity. Therefore, it may be that an own model of institutionalizing in the higher education system is rather specific to Stalinist socialism - with dictatorial educational institutions than to classical socialism - with educational institutions of the progressive experimental type.

### **From progressivism to conservatism: the trial and error path to accomplishing the model**

In view of the completion of their own higher education model, different from existing ones up to this point, the Bolshevik regime undertook various measures which have proved to be inconsistent from one year to another. The phenomenon can be explained by the fact that after taking power, the Bolsheviks did not have a clear and coherent vision on how the whole education system should be organized. Consequently, both policy makers and epistemic factors have applied as experimental measures various tactics and progressive and innovative educational strategies for the period as argued by John Dewey and Maria Montessori.<sup>10</sup> As mentioned in the preceding section, the Bolsheviks continued the efforts initiated by predecessor governments, preparing a progressive reform of the education system, reforms that were also implemented based on the Anglo-Saxon training system<sup>11</sup>. However, in the beginning, the Bolshevik power structures continued to be guided by the Russian Empire model of higher education management. Institutions and behaviour rooted during two centuries could not be removed overnight, especially since there was no clear notion of what the system should look like, even if Article 17 of the Constitution of the RSFSR stated that *in order to ensure real education means for proletariat, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic undertakes the duty to provide workers and peasants free access to complete and whole education.*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the desideratum was that by establishing such an arrangement to facilitate unlimited and unrestricted access the right and necessary conditions will be created to establish the communist order. To support this approach there was established the People's Commissariat for Education which introduced a new type of educational

<sup>10</sup> Larry E Holmes, „Bolshevik Utilitarianism and Educational Experimentalism: Party Attitudes and Soviet Educational Practice, 1917-1931”, in *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1973, p. 347.

<sup>11</sup> William K. Cummings, *The Institutions of Education: A Comparative Study of Educational Development in the Six Core Nations*, Oxford: Symposium Books, 2003, using the Romanian edition published in 2006 by Comunicare.ro, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> After the translation made by professor Ștefan Bârsănescu in: Ștefan Bârsănescu, *Politica culturii: studiu de pedagogie*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2003, p. 59.



institution called „United Working Class School”<sup>13</sup>. The purpose of this institution consisted in bridging the gap between social classes, secularization and continuous general training with granting access to higher education for all<sup>14</sup>. During the years 1921 - 1927 the institution is subject to correction and completion procedures, and at the beginning of the third time sequence it is redefined by establishing connections between education and production.

Also during this time the first steps were taken aiming at the universalisation of access to higher education<sup>15</sup>. For example, if in 1914 there were 127 thousand students, then in 1922 their number increased to 226 thousand<sup>16</sup>. As a result of this policy the Soviet higher education system expanded on an egalitarian notion applied through inequitable practices.<sup>17</sup> Initially during 1918-1920 an exacerbated egalitarianism concerning access to superior education was promoted by eliminating all payments and admission exams irrespective of the previous educational path and the financial status<sup>18</sup> (entrance exams were gradually reintroduced in between 1923-1928). However, in the context of eliminating the barriers to access the egalitarian criteria gradually restrained to certain categories of beneficiaries such as: party members, workers and their children, peasant children (for example in 1920 – 43% of the registered students in Moscow University came from these categories of beneficiaries, and in 1924 these categories of beneficiaries represented 70% of the students registered during that year at the Moscow University).<sup>19</sup> In order to increase the level of education in 1919 academic structures were established in connection with production units (*rabfaky*) that were intended to provide training to workers.<sup>20</sup> These structures remained functional throughout the period of both classical and Stalinist socialism. In 1930 a reform was undertaken for their reorganization, but in time these structures diminished in their importance and attractiveness. Only in 1969 these types of training structures were reorganized by changing their organizational forms and training methods of the future candidates

<sup>13</sup> E. Koutaisoff, „Soviet Education and the New Man”, in *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1953, pp. 111-112.

<sup>14</sup> William K. Cummings, *The Institutions of Education: A Comparative Study of Educational Development in the Six Core Nations*, Oxford: Symposium Books, 2003, p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 227-228.

<sup>16</sup> Christophe Charle „Patterns”, in Walter Rugg, (Ed.) *A History of the University in Europe. Volume III: Universities the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1800-1945)*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> Mervin Matthews, „Soviet Students: Some Sociological Perspectives”, in *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Jan., 1975, pp. 91.

<sup>18</sup> Larry E. Holmes, *Bolshevik Utilitarianism and Educational Experimentalism: Party Attitudes and Soviet Educational Practice, 1917-1931*, 1973, p. 353.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> E. Koutaisoff, „Soviet Education and the New Man”, in *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1953, pp. 111-112.

for higher level education<sup>21</sup>. With the establishment of administrative arrangements in higher education all the principles and tactics specific to academic freedom and autonomy were phased out and the principles of the „cultural revolution” were fully exploited<sup>22</sup>. The re-evaluation of the Cultural Revolution principles represents the stability and rooting phase of the constitutive relations of the Soviet model. Over the next decades the rooted relations were marginally modified in the context of adapting to circumstances, but their ideological foundation remained the same.

In the second sequence of the interwar period, significant but not definitive restrictions were introduced for certain social and professional groups to specific programs of higher education. Among these the following categories may be mentioned: young people from intellectual families, young people from wealthy families, people from politically ‘unhealthy’ families etc.<sup>23</sup> Even if untrustworthy beneficiaries were admitted in the system and – with the intention to „bring them on the right path”, they were soon expelled rather more for political reasons than on professional grounds. For example, in 1924 approximately 20 000 students, representing a share of 15% of the entire cohort of students were expelled for political reasons<sup>24</sup>. In the following years the purge of untrustworthy students and teachers was intensified. On the one hand, statistically, the implementation of the egalitarian approach caused a considerable mass expansion effect that can be illustrated as follows: from 248 institutions and 216,700 students in 1922-1923 academic year, to 701 institutions and 405,900 students in 1931-1932 academic year and 811,700 students in 1940/1941 academic year<sup>25</sup>. On the other hand, the field of higher education grew considerably, but territorially and sectorially it was unbalanced, so that in 1930 the central authorities embarked on a consistent functional structural reform.

The third sequence is preceded by the approval of the Directive „On improving the training of new professionals”, adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of the Soviet Union on July 12, 1928<sup>26</sup>. The document was considered as definitive for the completion of a Soviet higher education system. According to its provisions the system must be uniform and perfectly applied by mul-

<sup>21</sup> George Avis, „Preparatory Divisions in Soviet Higher Education Establishments 1969-79: Ten Years of Radical Experiment”, in *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 1983, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Theodore P. Gerber, Michael Hout, „Educational Stratification in Russia During the Soviet Period”, in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 101, No. 3, 1995, p. 615.

<sup>23</sup> Dmitrii Andreev, „The Soviet College Student in the First Half of the 1920s. Characteristics of Self-Presentation”, in *Russian Education and Society*, vol. 50, No. 6, 2008, p. 78.

<sup>24</sup> Larry E. Holmes, „Bolshevik Utilitarianism and Educational Experimentalism: Party Attitudes and Soviet Educational Practice, 1917-1931”, in *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1973, p. 353.

<sup>25</sup> According to S. Zinoviev et al., „Higher Education Institution”, in *The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, Third edition, the Section is available electronically at: <http://bse.sci-lib.com/article007547.html>, last time accessed on 10 January 2012.

<sup>26</sup> С. Беляков, *Лекции по экономике образования*, ГУ ВШЭ, Москва, 2002, pp. 270 – 271.

tipling across the Soviet Union so as to satisfy the requirements of the economy that was going to launch major industrialization projects. As a consequence, higher education was supposed to respond to this goal and with this in view, in the early 1930s the vocational training planning mechanism was completed, which was an essential feature of what is considered to be distinct for the Soviet model of higher education in comparison with others.

However, the reform undertaken in the years 1930 to 1931 was criticized by the central authorities who justified that the training did not provide an appropriate schooling for higher education training. Therefore, in August 1931 Central Committee decided to abandon the „United Working Class School” institution and instead institutionalized a unified system, structured on learning levels that provided the opportunity to follow each level progressively<sup>27</sup>. Such an approach is consistent with the process of the administrative-territorial hyper centralization of the USSR and completion of the ideological training projects of Soviet people by increasing literacy through a structured learning process. On the other hand, during the years 1928-1930 there was a shift from a unified management approach to one segmented by activity sectors, so that the control was done directly by the appropriate People’s Councils. The professional training planning mechanism provisioned linking the cohort of higher education graduates serving the manufacturing sectors. Targeting was carried out in strict accordance with economic development plans for medium and long periods of time. The method was maintained for six decades, and its reform was carried incrementally in several successive stages (1958, 1964, 1981 and 1985). In this way, higher education institutions complied unconditionally with plans established and strengthened by a series of specialized central authorities (GOST, Goscomtrud etc.).

Thus, for the sequence of years 1929 - 1940, the development of higher education was conditioned by economic development, but also by administrative and political consensus at the all-Union level. That is why during this sequence, with the aim to support the connection of the educational process with the provisions of the economic development planning, central and republican authorities in higher education conducted the following processes, which were undertaken at the level of each higher education institution:

- *Improving the curricula and syllabi;*
- *Introduction of the continuing professional practice in education;*
- *Improving teaching methods;*
- *Accomplishing student selection methods and supplementing cohorts;*

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<sup>27</sup> Т. Б. Земляная, Павлычева О. Н. „Правовое регулирование образовательной деятельности в период мирного строительства (20-е – 30-е годы)” in *Журнал научно-педагогической информации*, Nr. 8, 2011. An electronic version of the article can be consulted at: <http://www.paedagogia.ru/2011/69-08/153-zemlyanayapavlicheva>, last time accessed on 10 January 2012.

- *Improving teachers' training / professionalization;*
- *Improving the activity of educational institutions (perfecting governance, improving the use of resources, etc.).*<sup>28</sup>

Data contained in the previous paragraphs shows that over a decade, mainly the first two sequences described so far, the practice of organizing higher education developed by the Russian Empire during more than two centuries was subject to broad periodic changes, both structurally and in terms of value and curriculum. Thus, the changes involved going through the following states: from a self-organized pseudo-freedom and unstructured educational content – in the early 1920s, to an enrolled submission and a structured and planned learning - early 1930s<sup>29</sup>. These experiments were aimed rather at the educational contents and access to education than at the structure and governance of higher education institutions. As a result, the process of experimentation, often inconsistent, led to an obvious reduction of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, and to establishing an authoritarian tradition, hyper centralized and dependent on political power. After the 1930s towards the end of its existence (1985-1989) generic experimentation practices were no longer applied at the system level. Only in certain contexts simulation exercises and piloting of organizing tactics and training were applied. For example, in the 1960s an exercise specific for professional guidance and counselling was undertaken.

In the light of the previous paragraphs, one can speak of a genuine Soviet model of higher education management system only after the second half of the 1930s, when the rigors of „massification” were imposed on the system, on a background of extensive industrialization. By the middle of the fourth decade of the last century the Soviet model had acquired characteristics that have targeted the governance<sup>30</sup> of private institutions of higher education (internal) and the governance of the entire system.

### **Structural functional modification of higher education institutions: institutional intern governance**

Regarding internal governance of higher education institutions one can say that essential changes aimed to reduce the autonomy of institutions and academic freedom. On the one hand, institutions had been reduced to pseudo-forms of internal self-administration that *de jure* had guaranteed the rights and freedoms in managing higher education institutions and in achieving the educational, scien-

<sup>28</sup> С.А. Беляков, Куклин В.Ж. (2003), „Системные аспекты образовательной политики и управления”, in *Университетское управление: практика и анализ*, No. 3 (26), article is available electronically at <http://www.umj.ru/index.php/pub/inside/354/>, last accessed on 10 January 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Larry E. Holmes, „Bolshevik Utilitarianism and Educational Experimentalism: Party Attitudes and Soviet Educational Practice, 1917-1931”, *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1973, pp. 360-361.

<sup>30</sup> Governance in the current article carries the meaning of the totality of arrangements and institutional relations between various categories of actors that are used to administer institutions and systems.

tific and publishing process. Central authorities and party structures argued that the institutional autonomy and academic freedom were not eliminated, but only strengthened by a legal framework that was meant to ensure consistency and structural-functional homogeneity for the entire system. On the other hand and *de facto*, a framework of rigid control was established by the party organizations, and any change or structural-functional reform required approval from the party management structures and the authorities of jurisdiction. Consulting documents show that the political line of action often reflects an excess of zeal on the part of the party. Because of the instituted terror, self-organization or proactive involvement in the academic lifestyle no longer functioned in a democratic, cooperative and collegial style specific to the pre-1917 period. Taking advantage of this environment, the autocratic government imposed a state of democratic centralism concerning networking and accomplished an institutional management of a deeply controlling type, which resulted in a set of strategies and tactics.

First, a fundamental change was undertaken in terms of teacher nomination and appointment of institution management leaders by party structures, and then by the central/Republican authorities<sup>31</sup>. Prior to 1923 students participated in the teachers' selection process, as well as in the election of institution management representatives. Starting from the second sequence, teachers were selected from among the most active and resilient students on political lines<sup>32</sup> – the mechanism became effective in establishing educational terror in the circumstances of systematic exterminations and purging within the period of reference. Also in this context certain circumstances of strict controlling measures were applied that would result in the establishment of a generalized terror in terms of teaching and scientific activity, which had to correspond exactly with party ideology and dogma. Thus political police cells were instituted and massive exterminations were applied to purge the academic, scientific and administrative staff.

With the statutory clarification of HEIs (mid 1930s) teachers were employed directly by the universities according to a regulated procedure of accession and promotion in functions and academic positions. In order to ensure coherence and consistency of granting titles the Higher Attestation Commission was created and its aim was to assume a maximum dependence on the Center regarding the obtaining of higher education titles. Regarding the nomination of management representatives of the institutions it can be noted that from 1928 the nomination was made on administrative lines with the prerequisite of recommendations from appropriate party structures. From 1936, the appointment of directors (rectors) was done directly by the all-Union Council for

<sup>31</sup> Partially, the principle of institutional autonomy was re-established not sooner than 1985, when rectors were no longer appointed by the central organs of the party but by the academic bodies.

<sup>32</sup> Holmes, „Bolshevik Utilitarianism and Educational Experimentalism”, p. 348.

Higher Education within the Central Executive Committee, and they were directly accountable, both to the authorities / structures of the party which appointed them, and to the people. They were responsible for how the theoretical and practical training of students was carried out, as well as for the management of schools<sup>33</sup>. In this way responsibility and accountability ratios were mixed together so much that the direct beneficiary, i.e. the student, disappeared from their central objective dimension.

In the late 1930s the contingent of teachers had mostly become obedient to party structures and republican authorities and all-Union structures and were not generating fear of social unrest, as has been characteristic for pre-revolutionary universities.

Another fundamental change in internal governance refers to the fact that a process of distortion of the genuinely democratic mechanisms for representing the interests of students was undertaken. Thus, during the first temporal sequence, students were given the right to participate in the election of teachers and management representatives. At the beginning of the second temporal sequence such rights were withdrawn gradually so that the Party Central Committee in 1928 decided that students should not interfere with the management of higher education institutions<sup>34</sup>. Also, artificial structures were created with a role of spreading literacy and accountability in lucrative processes. These actions were taken voluntarily by the quota of students. Also, in a later stage, at the party level a political organization was founded which was intended to represent the interests of students and worker youth. Once students had disappeared from the central objective of responsibility and accountability institutions, making only their motive relevant, their control was performed by means of organizational mechanisms of a top-down hierarchical dispersion both on a political line - the representative of youth workers and students, and on a social line - student unions. Thus, the Center managed to control the political and ideological situation as well as the structural-functional situation of each institution of higher education. This institutional arrangement continued until almost the end of the dissolution of the USSR.

Another tactic taken in the direction of a change in the internal governance of higher education institutions aimed at dismantling the mechanisms of representation of the interests of those involved. Being based on a German institutional basis the old universities in the USSR had developed procedures for consultation and cooperation with the local administration in the cities they operated and for this purpose structures and functions were created to represent the interests of the leadership of universities. Between 1919 and 1925 local and regional authorities were able to participate in the decision-making or consultation process within the lead-

<sup>33</sup> Е. Щербак „Становление и развитие управления высшим профессиональным образованием в России”, in *Образование и право*, 2010, М.: Юркомпани, No. 4 (8). The article can be consulted at: <http://education.law-books.ru/shop/4-8-10/4-8-10-1.doc> last time accessed on 10 January 2012. Also, see: постановление СНК СССР и ЦК ВКП (б) „О работе высших учебных заведений и о руководстве высшей школой”.

<sup>34</sup> Holmes, „Bolshevik Utilitarianism and Educational Experimentalism”, p. 354.

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ership of higher education institutions. Gradually, with the elimination of private property and of the self-organization administrative-territorial style, these practices were eliminated. In the end of the 1930s the consultation process was already held by subordinating universities to the republican and central authorities, on the one hand, and the People's Commissariat related to industry, on the other. Thus, that link was removed between local needs and organizational-functional capabilities of universities in social and cultural development in the communities in which they operated, the stakes being only economic development. In this way, during the establishment and strengthening of autocracy, the shade of consultation was essentially changed: from coordination to subordination.

Finally, interventions aimed at eliminating all forms taken by partnership and direct collaboration with universities abroad. Like in the case of the dissolution mechanisms of representation of the interests of those involved through the nationalization process an isolation process was also carried from other systems of higher education in the West. Therefore, a mechanism of political approval was established for all collaborations and activities jointly undertaken with other universities abroad. Teachers' mobility was severely limited and the exchange of bibliographic resources as well. In the context of industrialization, forms of intelligence and counterintelligence of a technological innovation character were established, approaches that dramatically limited the university's academic and scientific creativity. Moreover, party bodies, the control and security bodies became Inquisition-like organizations, and the effects of their activities led to the use of pseudo-innovation practices in relation to allocated resources.

### **The modification of the governance system and of the higher education functions**

Regarding the change in the governance system these sets of actions primarily aimed at establishing controlling relationships that were hyper-centralized. During the years 1923-1935 several control and decision making institutions were developed thus institutionalizing a rigid dispersion of control. For example, until 1928 the Commissariat for Public Education served as foundation for regulating contents as well as general guidelines for systems development. In 1928, within the Supreme Council for Economics a General Directorate for higher and technical-professional education was created which took over from the Commissariat of Public Education the role in coordinating the training and configuration of schooling figures on fields and specializations. On the other hand, in 1932 there was established the Union Council for higher technical education within the Central Executive Committee to guide the system management for polytechnic institutions and it was reorganized in 1938, being responsible for directing the higher education system as a whole.<sup>35</sup> In this

conjuncture, specialized party structures coordinated the political activity in higher education institutions. The regulatory process acquired a formula specific to the vertical of power and at the Republican levels of administration their self-organizational ability and own *de facto* regulation was annulled by the mere fact that any autonomous approach had to be approved by the Council of People's Commissars. Arrangements in place led to a system operated by a set of *transmission belts*, which explain the whole sharing of responsibilities at the level of the entire administrative system. In fact, *transmission belts* were not a result of coordination, but rather a dictatorial framework against a generalized fear transmitted from top to bottom and horizontally. Sharing skills and tasks related rather to the contextual adoption of provisions and directives from central authorities as well as the communication on the upper-hierarchical line of records collected from the territory for monitoring/evaluation and elaboration of plans for economic planning. Therefore, the management manner of the Soviet system in the interwar period is characterized by a deep control and was manifested by undertaking changes on the structural-functional organization of the system.

First, there were a number of interventions undertaken to clarify the organizational and functional typology of higher education institutions. Towards the end of its existence, the Russian imperial system of higher education was characterized by a high degree of organizational and functional coherence (colleges, universities, academies, polytechnics). Initially the typology inherited from the imperial period functioned, but gradually, with the completion of the system and the approaches specific to planned economy the respective typology underwent some revisions and adjustments. With the increase of the industrialization process, there was a need to provide a new organizational typology, and a unified model of internal organization so that each type of institution of higher education met a specific mission of economic development. Thus, in 1930, with the adoption on 23 July of the Central Executive Committee's provision on the reorganization of higher education institutions, technical colleges and training structures in connection with production units<sup>36</sup> a first consistent reform of the structural and functional reorganization of higher education institutions was undertaken. Consequently, towards the end of the interwar period the typological clarification was completed through two thorough regulatory actions. The first regulatory action concerns the reorganization of higher education institutions through a comprehensive process of spatial, functional and sectorized systematization. For this, disaggregation and consolidation methods were applied to institutions, faculties, structures and departments, in order to achieve the following results:

<sup>35</sup> Е. Щербак, „Становление и развитие управления высшим профессиональным образованием в России”, in *Образование и право*, 2010, pp. 9-12.

<sup>36</sup> The name of the document in Russian is „О реорганизации вузов, техникумов и рабфаков”, and can be accessed online at: [http://www.intellectinvest.org.ua/content/userfiles/files/social\\_history\\_pedagogic/official\\_documents/Postanovlenie\\_CIK\\_SNK\\_O\\_reorganiz\\_VUZov\\_1930.pdf](http://www.intellectinvest.org.ua/content/userfiles/files/social_history_pedagogic/official_documents/Postanovlenie_CIK_SNK_O_reorganiz_VUZov_1930.pdf), last accessed on January 10, 2012;



- *Uniformity of spatial distribution* - in each region/economic district there was to be a balanced number of institutions of higher education, according to their economic capabilities<sup>37</sup>. Thus, new institutions were established or transferred to new regions, and where there were too many they were merged and/or dissolved;
- *Clarification of functions* – each institution of higher education should address either an economic need, or a social and cultural need. In this respect, all institutions of a specific economic sector were supposed to appear identical from the point of view of their structure and mission throughout the USSR;
- *Clarification of the sector being serviced* – each higher education institution was subordinated to a sector/area of economic activity, led at a higher level by the relevant People's Commissariat. It had the responsibility to coordinate all activities related to training within the sector, meaning: to complete economic plans; to provide appropriate financial allocation for the training of the cohorts of specialized students in related areas; to monitor and assess the employability directed/distributed to production units and/or related industrial services. Regarding the chain of command, the powers were distributed to authorities of republican and regional/district levels.
- *Clarification of competences* – each administrative-territorial level knew who, when and what to undertake so that the planning mechanism would work efficiently and effectively, so that records correspond to scheduled plans. Also, higher education institutions had to comply strictly with the provisions of hierarchically-superior authorities. Errors, inconsistencies and confusion were harshly punished.

Therefore, before the USSR entered the war, the field of higher education had become systematized, homogenous and equally spread across the country and the training programs of higher education institutions corresponded exactly with the specifics of these economic and industrial districts, regions or states<sup>38</sup>. Such a typology was maintained throughout the existence of the USSR and any vertical or horizontal expansion was framed strictly in institutional typology<sup>39</sup>. Secondly, on 5

<sup>37</sup> In this context the notion of „capability” refers not only to the initial capacity, but also to the potential for sustainable economic development.

<sup>38</sup> This explains why MASSR did not develop more higher education institutions – this territorial autonomous component did not contain an industrial infrastructure and neither of a highly accelerated economic development which in that moment was exclusively based on agriculture. Subsequently in the post war period the industrial infrastructure was developed in these districts but as part of MSSR and after a territorial administrative reorganization.

<sup>39</sup> Following the dissolution of the Union the practice instituted in the Soviet period was profoundly distorted even if the authorities from the new independent states tried to diminish the typological distortion by regulations specific to the specialized legal framework. Because of the genuine lack of quality assurance system at the system level the steps taken have failed. Maintaining accreditation mechanisms of a bureaucratic type against peer review mechanisms, resulted in duplicitous reporting and maintaining a framework of generalized corruption and political submission to organs of power.

September 1938, the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR approved a template status of higher education institutions<sup>40</sup>. Thus, each institution was required to fill in the fields demarcated by points concerning the name of the institution and its areas of specialization. In such a way, each higher education institutional field was perfectly homogenous. However, because Soviet higher education had to contribute to the exponential support of the accelerated industrialization process, the internal institutional field was gradually distorted by creating a large number of Polytechnics, a process which continued almost until the stagnation of the Soviet autocracy. Also to clarify the system, steps had been taken to divert part of these applicants towards a vocational-technical education, which, during the 1930s also experienced a process of expansion exponential to the level of industrialization.

Another structural change aimed at designing and implementing a single funding mechanism of the system<sup>41</sup>. The Soviet higher education funding model was specifically designed and consistent with the planned economy approaches: funding under state order given the application of several methods of planning, such as: derivative estimation via member payrolls or a relative indicator method. Higher education institutions were considered organizations with the purpose of providing administrative services for areas they were operating in and therefore their financing was accomplished via funding mechanisms specific to financing administrative offices, and all charges were monitored by rigorous control. In 1930 the USSR's Central Executive Committee regulated the financing of higher education institutions. Thus, the budget allocation was uniformly made - with a bottom-up planning, a classification of macro-allocations and shared budget execution. This was done simultaneously on two axes of planning and budget execution:

- *horizontally* – sectors and activity domains belonging to the respective institutions;
- *vertically* – the territorial-administrative levels institutions were subordinated to (union, republican, regional).

Global budget proposals for core funding were based on the following records: the quota of students, approved by decisions of the specialized authorities; job title list of staff members and procurement plans for logistics necessary for training activities, as approved by the authorities of jurisdiction; investments for building new real estate infrastructure they planned and executed only with the approval of People's Commissars; building and renovation works of real estate infrastructure

<sup>40</sup> The document name in Russian is „Типовой Устав высшего учебного заведения”, and an electronic version can be consulted at: [http://www.intellect-invest.org.ua/rus/social\\_history\\_pedagogical\\_official\\_documents/](http://www.intellect-invest.org.ua/rus/social_history_pedagogical_official_documents/), last accessed on 10 January 2012;

<sup>41</sup> To elaborate this regulation dimension I documented from: Сергей Беляков, *Финансирование системы образования в России*, МАКС Пресс, 2006, pp. 24-32; Chuprunov, D.; Tulchinskiy, L. (1972) „USSR: economic planning and the financing of higher education”, in Philip H. Coombs, Jacques, Hallak, *Educational cost analysis in action – Case studies for planners*, UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris, 1972, pp. 119-140.

– planned and executed with the approval of the Council of People's Commissars and combined with Gosplan provisions. The document for the budget's foundation was the estimate of planned expenditure to be integrated into a grid of expenditure categories specific to such institutions of administrative service (in the 1930s there were 16 categories, and in the 1950s they were reduced to 13).

Another important estimation document was the *uchfinplan* (учебный финансовый план) which actually was the result of corroborating training plans with expenditure estimates. The estimation of financial resources needed for basic financing like salaries and training expenses was conducted based on the ratio of the number of teachers and number of students. In addition to core funding the higher education institutions could benefit from budgetary allocations from special sources (complimentary grants), governed by specific legislation. In order to clarify the challenging aspects of developing budget estimates, in the early 1960s a methodology was designed and approved that explains in detail the terms, procedures and formulas to be followed for planning and execution of core funding and complementary funding. It should be appreciated that such an approach to financing higher education continued until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, of course with certain contextual adjustments for modernization and correction purposes (some of which are temporary, such as the introduction of a co-payment system in the period 1940 to 1956). As for the higher education system in the Republic of Moldova these methodology provisions are applied to the present, including the method of planning the contingent of students financed from the state budget and those who pay tuition.

Another set of measures taken at that time focused on clarification of access and maintenance within the system, as well as improving internal efficiency (the percentage of success and promotion, the share of graduates). If in the first temporal sequence procedures were applied to grant universally free access to higher education, then from the second temporal sequence these practices were phased out by establishing meritocratic type practices, both in terms of previous educational paths and in terms of social background. These were applied depending on the backgrounds of candidates and had a sense of enrolment and loyalty by taking into account the provisions of state order. It must be noted that practices relating to preferential access of children from cultural elites and nomenclature were not eliminated.

On the contrary, some documentation sources state that this process intensified so much that some higher education institutions simply became inaccessible to the public and urged the implementation of reforms in post-Stalinist years<sup>42</sup>. In 1940

<sup>42</sup> Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, Harper Collins Ecco, 2009, pp. 258-259; also see Jan Sadlak, „The Development of higher education in Eastern and Central Europe in the aftermath of recent changes”, in *Prospects: quarterly review of education*, Vol. XXI, No. 3, 1991, p. 404.

the training co-payment system was re-introduced, establishing a different amount based on residence and university status, which led to a decrease of approximately 50% in enrolment figures. Regarding staying within the system, the continuing and final evaluations were reinstated and on this basis career advancement occurred, both on the professional line and on party line. However, besides exams there were also institutions whose role was pursuing purges based on political-ideological criteria. Since 1932, the transfer of students from one higher education institution to another was prohibited.

The Soviet education system differs from other systems of higher education in the interwar period by the fact that it was based on a system of quality assurance. In fact, for that period one cannot speak of a 'quality assurance system' according to its meanings today. However, starting with the third temporal sequence of the interwar period a set of complex methods and tools were developed and applied for monitoring the efficiency of public resource use and proper fulfilment of the provisions of the curricula. In this respect, appropriate control structures were established, some of which had a repressive role. Wasting public funds and the inefficiency and noncompliance with the training process were severely punished (including by means of deportation). The tools were maintained with incremental adjustments throughout the existence of the USSR and they moved away from western approaches of quality assurance<sup>43</sup>.

Another element particular to the Soviet model of higher education is the homogeneity of curriculum, aspect related to the quality control of the training process. If in post-revolutionary years things were not regulated regarding the establishing of curriculum, then towards the end of the third decade it started to blend exponentially with other hyper centralization processes related to system management and teaching activities. The most significant intervention in the sense of curriculum homogenization was consumed in 1932, when, on September 19th the Central Executive Committee issued a decision on the curricula and status of technical colleges and higher education institutions<sup>44</sup>. The provision stipulated the revision of specializations' classification and their reduction and, for newly proposed specializations, the consultation with the specialist authorities of the relevant areas and cross referencing them with the technological and scientific development outlook. According to the provision, a graduate must be a specialist in a particular field and

<sup>43</sup> At an internal level the difference between the internal approach and the western one was sensed only during 1985-1990, when, under the impulse of Perestroika and the warming relations with the USA and other western states there began a collaborative exchange in the field of best practices. Until that moment the system of management and quality assurance functioned based on desk-research analyses rather than on observation and direct empirical analysis.

<sup>44</sup> The name of the document in Russian is „Об учебных программах и режиме в высшей школе и техникумах”, and an electronic copy can be consulted at: [http://www.intellect-invest.org.ua/content/userfiles/files/social\\_history\\_pedagogic/official\\_documents/postanovl\\_zik\\_ssr\\_ob\\_utchebnich\\_i\\_rezhime\\_vuzov\\_1932.djvu](http://www.intellect-invest.org.ua/content/userfiles/files/social_history_pedagogic/official_documents/postanovl_zik_ssr_ob_utchebnich_i_rezhime_vuzov_1932.djvu), last accessed on 10 January 2012.

have an overall basis of scientific and technical knowledge. Therefore, the provision stipulated appropriate plans and curriculum reviews, which had to provide a mandatory minimum share of 80-85% of compulsory and specialization courses and elective courses had to be eliminated. Thus, the revised plans were not to be overly detailed. Also, the provision indicated the introduction of optional training hours for all courses taught to more senior undergraduates. Following the indications of this provision, in the following years higher education institutions were required to apply a standard curriculum in various fields and specialties. They had to be applied exactly as such throughout the USSR, with certain exceptions related to the peculiarities of certain training areas, and were subjected to a rigid process of monitoring as well as political and sectoral-functional evaluation (in the sense of being appropriate for production, five year plans and others).

Finally, the change aimed at the alignment of the professional training process and education of the masses with contemporary ideologies. Thus, absolutely all programs of study contained subjects relating to social and political education and the contents included transversal issues with political utility (for example, about the life of V.I. Lenin, the October revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat, etc.). Students were required to participate in extracurricular activities of political education and politic advocacy for the 'glorification' of the party<sup>45</sup>, and of activities meant to 'cleanse' society of inimical social elements and unfavourable factors for the accomplishment of communist society.

For example, during the 1930s systematic political campaigns were carried out against alcoholism, unemployment, etc., which led the authorities to encourage these movements through the introduction in the educational content of messages calling for mobilization and involvement in these social campaigns.

## Conclusions

The described features show that the dismantling of the old approaches of system governance, the imperial semi-autonomous controlling type, and the institutionalization of the new model – the Soviet type involving profound control – was undertaken by way of imposing an awareness that higher education represented one of the social instances that should: a) meet the vital needs of the masses and thus provide a balanced social stratification<sup>46</sup>; and b) provide support for the establishment and development of the planned economy.

<sup>45</sup> Holmes, „Bolshevik Utilitarianism and Educational Experimentalism”, pp. 354-355.

<sup>46</sup> For example, towards the beginning of the 1980s approximately 80% of the employed population attended secondary education (with or without graduation) as well as higher education. Apud: Gheorghe Cojocaru, *Tratat de Uniune Sovietică*, Chişinău, Civitas, 2005, p. 216.

Even if in the first two time sequences there is an inconsistency and a contradiction in actions, tactics and procedures, towards the end of the '30s the system becomes homogeneous. In these circumstances, relationships developed, implemented and perfected in the third segment of the interwar period acquiring properties that demonstrate their ability: to be stable and self-strengthening; to provide consistent and timely significance to other institutions in the society; to perpetuate over time; to acquire a high mobility degree; to generate authority and so on. In the light of the described characteristics, they reflected upon the process of building a higher education subsystem in the Moldavian SSR until around the year 1991 and also carry consequences for the current higher education system in Republic of Moldova. Also, it should be pointed out that the Moldavian SSR benefited from a finished model of higher education without the need for the dismantling of the old model by corrective measures. Therefore, in the case of the Republic of Moldova higher education system, the institutional memory is limited to the refined characteristics of the Soviet model and not to the characteristics of the higher education system in Greater Romania. This particular aspect has been a touchstone for autochthonous higher education in competition with other countries in the region.

Going through this article, some of the tactics undertaken in the recent past by the Party of Communists governing in Republic of Moldova in the period 2001-2009 come to the mind of Moldovan readers or of those who are aware of the distinctiveness of the home system of higher education. It is in this sequence of time that one could notice a gradual return to the Soviet model of higher education, even if these changes were made in another political and economic regime. This demonstrates that the path dependence from the Soviet model of higher education has been maintained throughout the last two decades only, as compared to the interwar period, in the post 1991 period there are different shades, a different historic context and a different manner of intervention but essentially the same ideological basis remains.