

‘Civilising’ the Transitional Generation: The Politics of Civic Education in Post-Communist Romania

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the introduction of civic education in post-communist Romania as an educational means of civilising in a democratic ethos the children of the transition. Particularly close analytical attention is paid to a) the political context that shaped the decision to introduce civic education, b) the radical changes in both content and end purpose of civics brought about by educational policies adopted for accelerating the country's efforts of integrating into the Euro-Atlantic structures (NATO and the European Union), and c) the actual consequences that these educational policies betting on civics have had on the civic values expressed by Romanian teenagers. The analysis rests on an extensive sample of schoolbooks and curricula of civic education, civic culture, and national history used in primary and secondary education between 1992 (when civics was first introduced) and 2007 (when Romania joined the EU). Drawing on critical discourse analysis, the paper argues that a major discursive shift had taken place between 1999 and 2006, propelled by Romania's accelerated efforts to join the EU. Set in motion by the new National Curriculum of 1998, the content of civics textbooks went through a dramatic change from a nationalist ethos towards a Europeanist orientation. The paper identifies and explores the consequences of a substantial shift from a heroic paradigm of celebrating the nation's identity and monumentalised past towards a reflexive post-heroic model of celebrating the country's European vocation.

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Introduction: civics and democracy

Starting with Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s passionate plea for educating republican virtues, through John Stuart Mills’ liberal urge for education through political participation, to John Dewey’s view of democracy as an educated way of life, a solid tradition of philosophical and political thought continued to highlight the intimate connection between civic culture, citizenship education, and political democracy. With the seminal publication of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba’s (1963) classical work, the role of civic education in substantiating political participation and of civic culture in reinforcing democracy has been established through solid empirical research. The civics–democracy link was also highlighted in the context of the post-socialist transformations in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries.

Comparative research in the CEE region has shown that civic education does ‘play an important role in preparing students for citizenship’. Scholarship done on this topic has also found a positive relationship between students’ civic culture (their knowledge of democratic processes) and political engagement (likelihood of voting when becoming adults) (Torney-Purta et al 2001: 180). More pessimistic conclusions were drawn by Gabriel Bădescu, Paul Sum, and Eric M. Uslaner (2004), whose research focused on Romania and Moldova has cast doubt on the taken for granted presumption that ‘participation is the foundation of democratic attitudes’ (p. 316). Other studies have pinpointed specific factors on which the success of civic education hinges. In this regard, Florin Feșnic (2015) has accounted for the success of civic education in Poland and its failure in Hungary in terms of who is doing the teaching: whereas in the former the teachers of civic education have a background in social sciences, in the latter they tend to be educated in the more conservative field of historiography.

Adopting a different take on the subject than the quantitative approached embraced in the literature mentioned above, this paper sets out to explore several inter-related aspects regarding the politics of democratisation in post-authoritarian, ‘transitional’ societies. First, the paper

aims at examining the politics of education in post-communist Romania, paying particular attention to how civics were introduced in the school curriculum with the purpose of ‘civilising’ the transitional generation in a democratic ethos centred on the concepts of citizenship, democracy, and human rights. A cautionary note is in place regarding the terminology employed in this study: both ‘transitional’ and ‘civilising’ deserve inverted commas since they are terms loaded with teleological assumptions (transition) and moral superiority (civilisation). However, they are employed as such in this paper simply because civic education was deemed to have a civilising mission upon the cohort of Romanian pupils considered to make up the transitional generation whose educational period spanned the movement from communism and totalitarianism to market liberalism and democracy.

Second, moving beyond the socio-political context, the study proceeds by analysing the (geo)politics of civic education in post-communist Romanian society. This is accomplished by looking at how civics have been put in the service of Romania’s efforts to join the Euro-Atlantic structures (NATO and the European Union) once the country’s political elite had become committed to this pathway of Europeanisation.

Third, using critical discourse analysis (CDA), the ideological and value-related (axiological) contents of civic and history textbooks are assessed in an effort to understand how this political decision has impacted upon civic education (Rogers 2004; Wodak and Meyer 2016). Finally, drawing on survey data from a representative sample of Romanian teenagers, the paper’s concluding section takes stock of the possible effects brought about by civic education in youths’ political belief- and value-system.

Civics and the post-communist politics of education

The crumbling of the communist regime in the winter of 1989 had thrown Romanian society into the deep uncertainties entailed by post-socialist transformations. The democratic enthusiasm that captured the popular imagination in the aftermath of the violent revolutionary

events soon appeared as the realization set in that the transition period was to be mastered by the second echelon communists revamped into social democrats (Siani-Davies 2005; Roper 2000). With the heirs of the former Romanian Communist Party (RCP) in charge of the political power, it did not take long until ordinary people became acutely aware that the construction of the democratic regime was to be built ‘not on the ruins, but with the ruins of communism’, as a sociologist famously put it (Stark 1996: 995).

This had become abundantly clear after the governmental crackdown of the anti-communist protesters organised in June 1990 by the miners called by president Ion Iliescu to ‘restore order’ in Bucharest’s University Square (Nistor 2016; Croitoru 2011). Under Iliescu’s presidential terms (1990–1996), who pleaded for an ‘original democracy’ (Verdery 1996: 112; Literat 2012) further based on a humanised socialism, the political elite was keen to conserve as much of the status quo as possible while struggling to convert their relational capital into economic assets. They also proved highly reluctant in confronting the past, choosing instead for implementing a ‘politics of amnesia’ deemed to bury the past in collective oblivion (Rusu 2017). Instead of coming to terms with the past by enacting measures pertaining to transitional justice which would include prosecution of perpetrators, lustration policies, establishing ‘truth commission’ and revising the politics of remembrance, the political elite employed a ‘forget-and-forgive policy’ and strove to draw a thick line between the present and the past (Stan 2013a; Stan 2013b).

It was during these first years of the transition controlled by the inheritors of the former communist party that a vibrant civil society took shape (Kligman 1990; Beck 1991). Joining hands with the democratic parties reborn from the interwar period, this anti-communist civic-political opposition relentlessly urged for accelerating the process of democratisation. Their continuous calls to put communism on trial (*Procesul Comunismului*) remained unanswered

until 2006, when the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (PCSCDR, colloquially known as the ‘Tismăneanu Commission’) appointed by the democratic president Traian Băsescu declared the communist regime as ‘illegitimate and criminal’ (PCSCDR 2006; for a critique, see Rusu 2015a).

The educational system followed a similar path. Just as in the political realm post-communist elites dragged on in breaking away with the recent past, educational policies were oriented to keep to a minimum the changes inflicted on the traditional paradigm of monumentalising the past and celebrating Romanian identity. Following the political construction of the Romanian nation-state in the second part of ‘the long 19th century’ (Hobsbawm 1962), nationalism has been both the driving force and the ordering principle that structured the meta-narrative of Romanian history (Rusu 2015b). By the turn of the 20th century, the national identity underpinned by heroic historical narratives and mythical tropes of noble origins, temporal continuity, ethnic unity, and a collective striving for independence was articulated.

During the 19th century process of state-building, a public, free-of-charge, and mandatory mass schooling system was politically constructed whose aim was that of nationalising the people (Ramirez and Boli 1987; Rusu 2014). In Étienne Balibar’s provocative words, national states have resorted to educational systems for instituting the individual as ‘*homo nationalis* from cradle to grave’ (Balibar 1996: 137). At the outbreak of the Second World War, this heroic paradigm of emplotting a monumentalised past that celebrated the Romanian historical destiny and became institutionalized in the educational media and as pedagogical discourse was fully established.

The socialist regime established in the aftermath of the Second World War was driven by a radical agenda inspired by the Soviet concept of ‘international proletarianism’ that dismantled the entire nationalist ethos of the heroic paradigm celebrating a monumental

past. However, this anti-nationalist thrust had soon blown itself out as the regime took a dramatic ideological turn in the late 1960s that recovered and intensified to paroxysmic heights the nationalist legacy it so vigorously denounced (Boia 2001; Petrescu 2009). In the brink of the 1989 Revolution, the Romanian history as laid out in schoolbooks but also in academic treatises espoused a curious mixture of nationalism and communism, whose inherent doctrinal tensions were all reconciled in the heroic destiny of a ‘working nation’.

This damage-minimising approach employed by the post-communist authorities with regard to the legacy of the former regime was most clear in the pages of history schoolbooks. As pedagogical tools codifying the collective ‘autobiography of the nation’ (Jacobmeyer 1998), schoolbooks were and remained the most ideologically sensitive educational media before and after 1989. For several years after the regime change of 1989, the old communist history schoolbooks were still in use, but trimmed up to remove the most politically salient contents. Just as the Romanian revolutionary flag featured a whole after the communist coat of arms was cut out, the portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu, which figured on the first page of each and every schoolbook, was clipped out. References to the Communist Party as well as to dialectical materialism that were scattered throughout the text were also removed.

This policy of purging all the communist references but leaving intact the nationalist meta-narrative had produced the curious effect that the history of Romanians stopped abruptly amid the Second World War. This was nowhere more visible than in educational authorities’ decision to re-issue a history textbook from 1942 for the school year 1990–1991 (Panaiteescu 1990) [1942]. A brief historical contextualisation is deemed necessary here: the communist regime in Romania has its origins on March 6, 1945, when the first government led by communists was installed. It was on December 30, 1947, that king Mihai I abdicated, the kingdom was abolished, and the Romanian People’s Republic

(RPR) was proclaimed (Deletant 2018). Newer textbooks, commissioned and published during the early 1990s, continued to halt history in 1945. A full half a century of Romanian history was thus left outside of the didactic narrative. These surgical interventions were able to salvage the heroic paradigm of the Romanian past with as little ideological costs as possible, all related to the now-defunct Communist Party and its central figures, such as Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife, Elena.

Civic education was reluctantly introduced in primary and secondary schools in 1992 at the pressure exerted by the rabidly anti-communist civil society organised around *The Group for Social Dialogue* (Grupul pentru Dialog Social, GDS) and its influent weekly magazine *Revista 22* (GDS 1990). Civil society groups have urged for the need to educate pupils in the spirit of democracy, hoping to create a new generation of citizens that would eventually break away with the legacy of the communist past that was still looming over the present. Driven by the faith in the transformational potential of civic education, they hoped to replace the ‘human ruins’ that communism had produced with responsible citizens nurtured in a democratic political culture.

However, the start turned out to be far from auspicious. Although a class of civic education was now being taught every week, schoolbooks were lacking. With no dedicated didactic materials to support their learning, students had to buy on a weekly basis the pedagogical magazine in which a civic schoolbook was being published as a feuilleton. These feuilletons introduced the discipline of civic culture as a ‘handbook [*îndreptar*] for the “use of the good citizen”’. Its introduction was justified by an ‘acute absence of civic consciousness, of the sense of collectivity, of the respect for the law, and of a common discipline recognised as necessary’ (*Cultura civică* 1993: 4). Other dangers to society that the civic culture was meant to fight against were represented by ‘individualism’ (denounced for its

corrosive effects to social harmony) and ‘the “protesting-profiting” mentality’ (this was a clear reference to the June 1990 protests from Bucharest’s University Square that were shed in blood by the miners called in the capital by president Ion Iliescu). Against these threats to social order, civic culture was deemed to ‘cultivate the sentiment of collectivity’, to teach pupils the values of cohesion, and to impart them the pedagogy of ‘belonging to the nation[-as-kinship]’ (*apartenența la neam*’ – in Romanian, ‘*neam*’ designates the nation understood in a genealogical manner, as a ‘kind’ defined by lineal ancestry) (*Cultura civică* 1993: 4).

When the first editions were finally issued in 1994, their content was still tributary to the old nationalist conception and identity tropes of what it means to be Romanian. For instance, in the unique textbook of *Civic Culture* for the 8th grade, the authors continue to convey the self-appraising nationalist clichés propagated in the golden age of Romanian Protochronism. Protochronism was a state-sponsored cultural movement, originated during the 1970s in the literary field but then spread out to cover the entire cultural spectrum. Endorsed as an official cultural ideology by the regime in the 1980s, protochronism was driven by the strive to discover all kinds of Romanian ‘firsts’ in various fields ranging from historical achievements to scientific discoveries (Verdery 1991). Some of the claims went so far as to assert that the 19th century raconteur-writer Ion Creangă (1837–1889) was the first psychoanalyst and the national poet Mihai Eminescu (1866–1888) adumbrated in his lyrics Einstein’s theory of relativity (Tomiță 2007). Resorting to a classic nationalist topos, the *Civic Culture* for the 8th grade textbook describes the organic harmony of the Romanian territory and presents the country’s geography as a terrestrial symphony made up of landforms that mutually balance themselves (Lăcătuș, Chirițescu, and Zăinescu 1994: 104). Such descriptions resonate with the interwar nationalist morphological theories of culture such as Lucian Blaga’s ‘stylistic matrix’ and ‘mioritic space’ (Blaga 1936).

Other passages echo closely the old monumentalising paradigm of the Romanian past, its national culture, as well as its pantheon of heroic figures. During the socialist period, the personalistic conception of history partially subsided as collective entities such as the people and especially its working-class took centre stage. However, going against these doctrinal precepts that invested collective actors with agentic powers in making history, communist educationalist themselves have personified history in the great leaders and heroes of the party and the working class (e.g., Lenin, Stakhanov, Ceaușescu, etc.). After 1989, this hesitation disappeared entirely as the national saga was re-embedded in the flesh and bones of a selected pantheon of human heroes (Rusu 2019).

‘The poets, the heroes, and the apostles’ of the nation were all hailed as national saints, and even the land where their statues have been placed was deemed as ‘sacred ground’. Children continued to be taught the pedagogy of national pride, as they were learning that ‘Romanians have been a stable and brave people, with great nation leaders: Burebista, Decebal, Mircea, Ștefan, Iancu, Mihai, and many others’ (p. 105 – the names in the quotation represent military rulers from the time of the Dacians to the 19th century). Depriving ordinary people of any agentic power, the civic culture textbook promotes a personalistic understanding of history, in which History (always written with capital H) is not only made exclusively by Great Men (and not women), but it is also embodied in the personalities and history-making feats of these glorious heroes (Carlyle 1841).

Breaking the spell of nationalism

Despite the material setbacks and ideological residues, a rhetoric of political empowerment and democratic renewal through civics education was already articulated in the pedagogical discourse. However, it was only after the heirs of the former communist party

stepped down from power and a coalition of liberal democratic parties supported by the anti-communist civic society formed the government that things started to change. In 1996, the Romanian Democratic Convention (*Convenția Democrată Română*, CDR) was elected to form the government and replaced Ion Iliescu’s Social Democratic Party (*Partidul Democrației Sociale din România*, PDSR). Two years later, in 1998, a comprehensive educational reform was made that, besides restructuring the curricula, liberalised the schoolbook market by introducing alternative schoolbooks (Ministerul Educației Naționale 1998).

Until then, only a single schoolbook, provided by the state-run publishing house *Editura Didactică și Pedagogică* (Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House), was available for each discipline. From now on, students and teachers could choose from among the several approved schoolbooks that complied with the directives set out by the Ministry of Education. Backed by the World Bank’s ‘General Education Reform Project’, which invested between 1994 and 2002 around \$50 million US dollars (OECD 2000: 143), the Ministry used the mandatory guidelines included in the new curricula to which all publishers had to adhere in order to receive the institutional approval for imposing its Westernising views in the resulting schoolbooks. Textbook proposals that did not comply with the normative guidelines and continued to promote a self-centred, autochthonous view of Romanian identity, would not receive the ministerial approval for publication.

In this way, an ideological agenda of Europeanisation made its way into schoolbooks via the crafty manipulation of market forces and institutional constraints. Market forces, since the production of textbooks was now regulated through the medium of the market and employed free initiative, entrepreneurship, auctions, and economic competition. Institutional constraints, since the ministry imposed the guidelines underpinned by a Westernising agenda as a normative framework for producing the schoolbooks’ content. The new

generation of schoolbooks that came out of this comprehensive reform brought about a major shift, indeed a discursive rupture, in the content of history and civics schoolbooks.

The historiographical discourse laid out in history schoolbooks underwent a fundamental change from promoting a martial triumphalist heroism to a new paradigm of critical post-heroism. Similar to what other states have done, beginning with the mid-19th century, the newly established Romanian nation-state started to legitimise itself by constructing a monumental history. This was a history of noble origins (Romanians as descendants of the great Romans) and glorious military victories (Romanians as protectors of Christianity against the ‘barbaric’ Turks). It was also a history of collective suffering (Romanians as oppressed on their own land by Ottomans, Hungarians, and Russians) but also of national redemption (Romanians as accomplishing their dream of creating the Greater Romania in the aftermath of the First World War). With the liberalisation of the didactic market, the new generation of history schoolbooks started to deconstruct the master story of Romania’s national memory underpinned by the narrative essentials of Latin origin, ethnic continuity, unity of historical destiny, national will of political freedom, and Eastern Orthodox faith as ingrained into Romanians’ spirituality (Rusu 2011).

However, this swift change did not occur without struggle and contestation. A textbook of Romanians’ history for the 12th grade in particular triggered a political and cultural backlash among the conservative nationalists (Pavel 2000; Pârâianu 2001; Culic 2005). The textbook published by a group of historians (Mitu et al 1999) provided a radically deconstructive account of Romanians’ history that undermined the basic foundations upholding the mythicised master narrative of the nation articulated by previous generations of historians. What infuriated its critics to the extreme were the fact that the textbook questioned methodically the myths underpinning

Romanians’ official history; that the national heroes such as Michael the Brave and Stephen the Great were dismissed in a couple of lines as opposed to being celebrated as great heroes on countless pages; and that more attention and textual space were given to contemporary showbiz celebrities, sports stars, and mass media personalities. In this regards, educational researchers have pointed out a remaking of the category of ‘national heroes’ that underwent ‘from Michael the Brave to Gheorghe Hagi’ and Nadia Comăneci (Romania’s most renown footballer and gymnast) (Szakács 2018: 155). After a flurry of passionate debates in the mass media, accusations of national treason, and urges to burn the book in the public square made by members of the Parliament, the Ministry of Education decided to ban the textbook (Pârâianu 2005).

Whereas history schoolbooks redefined Romanians’ relation with their past along post-nationalist lines, civic education had also reworked its approach to the question of national identity. A survey of the first generation of alternative schoolbooks of ‘civic education’ (written for the 3rd and 4th grades of primary education) and ‘civic culture’ (for the 7th and 8th grades of secondary education) reveals sharp redefinitions of the educational discourse. These discursive shifts can be mapped along the lines presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. *Discursive shifts in civic education in post-communist Romania*

Discursive dimension	Pre-1998 discourse	Post-1998 discourse
<i>Value-orientation</i>	Ethnic collectivism	Liberal individualism
<i>Social commitment</i>	National loyalism	Humanitarianism
<i>Social attachment</i>	Ethno-national patriotism	Civic patriotism
<i>Nature of attachment</i>	Sacrificial patriotism	Critical patriotism
<i>Structure of identity</i>	Closed monic identity	Opened plural identities
<i>Anthropolitical project</i>	Homo nationalis	Postnational citizen

Source: *Author’s elaboration*

A thematic content analysis performed on national curricula, school syllabi, and textbooks of civic culture and education revealed a surprising ‘convergence with the world trends’ (Szakács 2013, see also Szakács 2015, 2014). In this aligning of pedagogical discourse in Romania with the ‘world culture’ (Meyer et al 1997), a major shift occurred in the value-orientation system from ethnic collectivism specific to national-communism towards a liberal individualism characteristic of democratic regimes. In our analysis, we also found that the discourse preaching the values of collectivity, unity, and solidarity previously inscribed in didactic materials has given way to the axiological notions of personal dignity, rational autonomy, and self-achievement.

A second change shifted the nature of the social commitment required of future citizens. The former generation of schoolbooks was promoting the nation as the supreme value, requiring of the students the exclusive solidarity with the national community defined in ethnic terms, as a community of the same origin, common blood, and shared historical fate. With the new discourse, the scope of loyalty, moral responsibility, and social solidarity is extended so as coincide with the entire humanity.

The semantics of patriotism have also undergone significant remaking. Previously, the ideology of political nationalism was accompanied by an ethnic understanding of patriotism, rendered as the supreme love of the nation. When translated into inter-personal terms, ethnic patriotism was predicated as the exclusivist love of the national fellowmen. The New Curriculum came with a new definition of patriotism, re-conceived along civic lines (on civic versus ethnic conceptions of national identity, see Coakley 2018; Kuzio 2002). As the fundamental category of the nation was subjected to a semantic revision, which transformed it from a biological community of destiny into an affective community of political will, the true marker of

patriotism has now become the commitment to fulfil one’s duty towards the workplace, to contribute to social welfare, to bear respect for otherness, and to have, in general, a morally responsible behaviour (Lăcătuș and Pușcaș 2008: 98).

The nature of this social attachment has also changed accordingly. A critical and reflexive patriotism – ‘Patriotism means the capacity to relate critically to your fellow countryman, to the social realities’ (Lăcătuș and Pușcaș 2008: 98) – superseded the previous rendition of patriotism along self-sacrificial lines. Other authors retain the conventional idea that ‘to be a patriot means to love your country and fight for its happiness’. However, they immediately add that ‘this does not only involve fighting in wars, but also consists of remarkable activities in literature, music, painting, [and] sports’ (Pițilă and Mihăilescu 2006: 4).

In contrast, within the nationalist paradigm of Romanian education, patriotism had long been defined by the willingness to die for the country. This self-sacrificial love of the nation reached its climax in form of ‘thanatic patriotism’, that is to say, the doctrine of social attachment that claims from the part of individuals to willingly embrace death as a form of patriotic martyrdom seen as the ultimate proof of his/her political commitment (Rusu 2016a, Rusu 2016b).

Civic patriotism, instead, is less spectacular in requiring exceptional feats of martial heroism. In contrast to the thanatic type, the former demands everyday forms of civic allegiance to the political community, expressed through obeying the law and fulfilling one’s civic duties (Viroli 1995). If prior to the education reform, some schoolbooks included exhortations to patriotic virtue understood as an unbounded love of the nation, post-1998 civics schoolbooks denounced the ‘alterations of patriotism’ under the guise of nationalism, xenophobia, and chauvinism.

All these shifts converged with the redefinition of the structure of identity which implied the opening of the previously monic identity

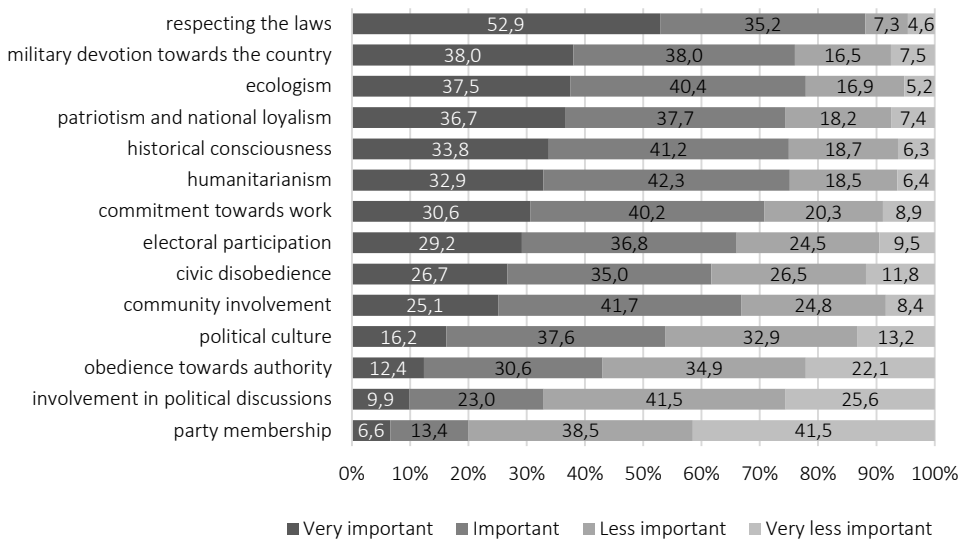
towards plural forms of belonging. A renegotiation of Romanian identity has taken place. The conflict between national specificity on the one hand and the strive towards European integration led to a stratified concept of identity to emerge. Similarly to our observations, in a monographic study of civic education in post-socialist Romania, Simona Szakács (2018) has pointed out what she calls a ‘multi-scalar approach’ to social identity: the community to which the pupil is taught that s/he belongs is ‘no longer exclusively defined as a territorially bound nation but simultaneously expanded to the global and shrunk to the local, and concerned with issues of global relevance’ (pp. 194, 27).

‘Expanded to the global and shrunk to the local’, the former monolithic Romanian identity has now become stratified by subordinating national identity to European identity and humanitarian solidarity while super-ordinating it to a lower level represented by local and regional identities. In advocating this multi-dimensional conception of identity, civic literature attempted to dislocate children out of the national exclusivism into which the previous schoolbooks had enclosed earlier generations of pupils. This was pursued by teaching them that they belong to various forms of solidarity among which the national community is only a part. Above all, despite insisting on the need to embrace their local and regional identities, civics schoolbooks were trying to convince pupils of their European vocation and to fashion their post-national selves.

The shifts in the educational discourse of civics and history schoolbooks did not remain on paper only, suspended in a textual realm thoroughly disconnected from pupils’ minds and souls. The influence of post-socialist education (civics included) on pupils’ political attitudes could be assessed through sociological surveys and opinion polls. Such a survey conducted on a nationally representative sample of high school students set out to tap into the value-orientations and political belief-systems of youth in the contemporary Romanian society. The questionnaire-based study ‘Civic and Political Implication

of the Youth’ was carried out in 2010 and collected data from 5,861 students (8th to 12th grades) from 86 schools (Bădescu et al 2010). Among the topics that were explored, one question asked students what they consider to be the qualities of a ‘good citizen’. The distribution of their answers is detailed in the figure below.

Figure 1. *The qualities of the ‘good citizen’ according to students, N=5,861*



Source: ‘Civic and political involvement of youth’ database. Students were asked to respond in what degree do they agree with the following statements (the response choices were ranked in decreasing order in accordance with the students’ answers): ‘A good citizen....’

1. Respects the laws.
2. Is willing to fight to protect the country.
3. Participates in activities meant to protect the environment.
4. Is a patriot and loyal to his or her country.
5. Knows the history of his or her country.
6. Participates in activities that promote human rights.
7. Is hard-working.
8. Votes at every election.

9. Would participate in a peaceful protest against a law that he or she considers being unjust.
10. Participates in voluntary activities designed to help certain people in society.
11. Is well informed on political issues (newspapers, radio, TV).
12. Respects the government’s representatives.
13. Discusses political issues.
14. Is a member of a political party.

What these data show is that ‘respecting the laws’ (1), which stands at the very core of the civic conception of patriotism, is valued before other traditional forms of ethnic patriotism, expressed by ‘national loyalism’ (4) or ‘military devotion towards the country’ (2). Nevertheless, the good citizen is not a blind obeyer either to authority or to any law, since ‘civil disobedience’ (9), an indicator of a radical understanding of civic patriotism along the lines of Henry David Thoreau (1849), is valued before the more conventional ‘obedience towards authority’ (12). Moreover, ‘humanitarianism’ (6) – a post-nationalist value occupying a central place within the new cosmopolitan global ethics – is valued almost in the same measure as ‘national loyalism’ (4), another conventional measure of the traditional conception of patriotism.

Similarly, ‘commitment towards work’ (7) – a clear indicator of civic patriotism – is valued almost equally with ‘historical consciousness’ (5), the latter considered one of the cornerstones of the traditional paradigm of national identity. It is also worth noting that the constituents of ‘formal’ democracy – ‘electoral participation’ (8) and ‘party membership’ (14) – but also some aspects of ‘informal’ democracy – ‘political culture’ (11) and ‘involvement in political discussion’ (13) – are among the least important features of what students conceived of as ‘good citizen’.

To be sure, these empirical results are not to be taken as proofs of a direct link between civic education and youth’s political attitudes.

The same survey revealed that more than a third of the respondents (38%) consider that the communist regime was ‘far better’ and ‘better’ than the current political system (Gheorghiuță 2010: 65). Nevertheless, even acknowledging the intricate complexities and paradoxical contradictions underpinning the process of post-socialist transformations in general and that of shaping collective worldviews in particular, there are empirical reasons to believe that the civics education programme was largely successful in infusing a post-nationalist civic ethos.

As such, the qualitative findings derived from the content analysis of civics textbooks, coupled with the results of the sociological survey conducted on teenagers, challenge some of the pessimistic views entrenched in the academic literature. In particular, the results documented in this paper diverge significantly from the ‘organised hypocrisy’ thesis of civic education, according to which ‘there is a huge gap between policy statements and the school practice’ (Rus 2008). In contrast, corroborating with the conclusions reached by other researchers based on visual and conversational analysis of real-time classroom interactions (Szakács 2018), our findings pinpoint towards a closing gap between the official pedagogical discourse on identity and citizenship, as inscribed in educational policies and schoolbooks, and the political and value-orientation of schoolers, as revealed by opinion polls and attitudinal surveys.

Conclusions

This paper has documented the changing facets of civic education in relation to the fluctuating political context and the changing contents of civics schoolbooks. It has highlighted how the change of government of 1996 was followed by a comprehensive educational reform which included the introduction of a new national curriculum. Civics was instrumental in this educational renewal. Propelled by the triple ideals

of liberal democracy, market economy, and civil society, the courses of civic education and civic culture were invested with the hopes of creating a democratic post-nationalist ethos and shaping a civic selfhood that would eventually break with the legacy of the former regime. Civic schoolbooks were the educational media carrying this ideological programme of ‘civilising’ Romania’s transitional generation in the European ethos.

Education policy is often entangled with contentious politics. The state-led programme of restructuring Romanians’ identity along Europeanist lines through civic education did not go uncontested. As the banning of the history textbook forcefully shows, the revision of the Romanian identity structures triggered reactions and activated resistances among the nationalist conservative factions who decried the undermining of the national consciousness. The shift from the nationalist paradigm of Romanian identity and memory towards a Europeanist post-national framework was countered in the civic education literature in several ways: (1) a *discursive resistance* consisted in the perpetuation of the traditional heroic paradigm of the Romanian past in some history and civic education schoolbooks; (2) when a radical, deconstructive discourse that threatened to undermine the sacred pillars on which the national identity was built could not be contained, the conservative resistance took the form of *censorship* (e.g., the Mitu textbook scandal); (3) a third mode of contesting the postmodern identity narrative was through *subversive resistance*. This consisted of some schoolbooks conforming to the new curriculum guidelines that emphasised the importance of the European identity but asserted the importance of Romanians in shaping Europe instead of highlighting the European character of Romanians.

What this paper has attempted to show is that education is always entangled in the politics of identity (Szakács-Behling and Rusu 2019). In post-communist Romania, just as during the communist times and before, education was part and parcel of political programmes of

identity construction. But they were also the subject of political calculations in the process of joining the European Union. After the demise of the communist regime, education in general and civics in particular have been used as political vehicles in a state-run project meant to smoothen the way for Romania’s accession to the EU. Besides its manifest function of shaping a civic culture designed to strengthen the country’s emerging democratic value-system, civic education has also served a secondary, political latent function, that of proving to the European Union’s officials the democratic commitments Romanian authorities have undertaken by fashioning a postnational selfhood through civics.

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