

BEYOND STATISTICS: UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE IN THE ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION DURING THE 1980S

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Abstract: *Higher education was a priority for the communist regime even from the beginning as it was one of the most necessary means to fulfil the labour force needed and „tailor” good citizens. As the Romanian foreign policy shifted starting with the mid-1960s, higher education expansion meant that it also was more accessible to international students. The Romanian Government gradually used the study places in the public universities as an instrument of soft power.*

This was done mainly through scholarships offered to different countries (especially from the Non-Aligned Movement) and communist-friendly political structures. After the economic situation deteriorated in the early 1980s, Romania used its previously established diplomatic and economic ties to attract students who paid for their study places with foreign currency, mainly USD. This shift was supported by a change in the diplomatic agenda and several changes within the admission process in the higher education institutions.

Nevertheless, international students were difficult to be handled by a remarkably conservative regime, no matter how many control measures, planning, or propaganda were involved. Many international students on the universities' campuses, full of young people vibes, implied certain risks that the regime could only marginally influence. Additionally, international students faced a significant language barrier in the universities, places where frequent clashes between different nationalities and civilizations occurred.

Our article focuses on overview statistics concerning the evolution of international students' rates in Romanian higher education, but also on presenting relevant study cases to depict some of the benefits and struggles of a global student in Romania and how these affected the planning process. We also try to depict how national authorities dealt with ludicrous situations, some of those being mishandled due to inadequate practice. Our conclusions will assess the level of preparation of the communist Romanian higher education to accommodate international students. Also, we will try to emphasise the administrative efforts that backed economic and diplomatic connections with countries that provided Romanian universities with students.

Keywords: Higher Education, 1980s Romania, international students, universities, communist regime.

During the second part of the communism in Romania, in 1970s and 1980s, an important number of international students from many countries have studied in the higher education system. The maximum number of international

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students in the Romanian higher education was registered in the beginning of the 1980s. This is interesting because although Romania was at that time a communist state, it still represented an important attraction for those wanting to become certain specialists through higher education studies. If some of the students were part of countries sharing similar political regimes, other were simply not, and they were also coming from different cultures from all over the world. No matter what was the case, and no matter if they were using a scholarship, or were self-financing (hard currency – paying with American dollars) or were using a non-convertible currency through different inter-states agreements, international students were registered in different types of higher education available in Romania, though they mostly attended medicine and pharmacy higher education¹.

In the past recent years this research topic of international students in Romania has started to be more interesting for the researchers. There are many works dedicated to the history of higher education institutions with certain chapters or aspects related to the internationalization² and especially to the international students attending these institutions. There is an article dealing, among other issues, with the political problems of the international students who were perceived as threats to the Romanian society³, or that deals with the context that made possible the students mobility in Romania and other countries, no matter the political regime they embraced⁴. Other published works investigate the agreements for development of the collaboration in the higher education system with ties to the foreign affairs and involving economic cooperation, diplomacy and politics⁵ or aspects related to the infrastructure needed by the foreign students, their free time while in Romania and other interesting aspects⁶.

¹ Valentin Maier, *Foreign Students Enrolled in the Medicine and Pharmacy Higher Education in Romania (1975–1989)*, „Cluj Medical”, vol. 89, nr. 2, 2016, p. 307.

² This is a broad research topic that could also mean the Romanian students going abroad. For instance, there is an article dealing with the Romanian scholars that received Humboldt scholarship to study in the Federal Republic of Germany (Irina Nastasă-Matei, *Academic Migration and Cultural Diplomacy During the Cold War. Humboldt Fellowships for Romania in the Context of Eastern Europe*, „History of Communism in Europe”, no. 9, 2018, p. 139–157).

³ Bogdan C. Iacob, *A Babel in Bucharest: Third World Students in Romania, 1960s–1980s*, „Cahiers du monde russe”, vol. 63, no. 3–4, 2022, p. 669–690.

⁴ Ștefan-Marius Deaconu, *Între izolaționism și cooperare: aspecte privind mobilitatea academică în învățământul superior din statele est-europene în anii '70-'80*, in vol. *O utopie devenită realitate: învățământul superior în RSS Moldovenească – de la planificare la reproducere*, coord.: Liliana Rotaru, Ion Valer Xenofontov, Chișinău, 2020, p. 71–87.

⁵ For example with Ghana or DR Congo, but also with other African countries (Bogdan-Iulian Ranteș, *Relațiile României cu state din Africa Ecuatorială și de Vest (1960–1974)*, Târgoviște, 2017, p. 98, 143).

⁶ Ioana Mihaela Bonda, Cecilia Cârja, *Studenți străini la Universitatea „Babeș-Bolyai” (1959–1989)*, Cluj-Napoca, p. 194–200, 252–260.

Another article is using statistics to tackle the research question of which was the most important type of higher education that attracted the majority of international students (at least for the period 1975–1989)⁷ and there is also a digital exhibition with documents as examples of the internationalization of the higher education in communist Romania⁸.

Explaining the conditions to admission in the Romanian higher education, sketching the institutions that were involved in the internationalization process and presenting general statistics, this article focuses on the „ground level”, on the experiences the international students had with the Romanian higher education system and society. It is also giving us the reasons and cases that explain how the statistics were registered and especially how the results obtained could in fact very easily reflect only a brief moment from what really happened in an academic year. For example, international students could have stopped attending the Romanian higher education soon after the start of the academic year, or could have studied in a different center of the higher education then at first or even the type of higher education or institution could have been changed. Also, this article aims to make us more aware that beyond statistics and quantitative analysis, each international student registered in statistics may represent an a situation involving a complex individual interacting with a complex environment with as many details as we can imagine. Our current historical sources can offer us the chance of not making biographies of different international students as study cases (which in fact would be great), but of amounting new information useful in understanding certain realities neglected or misrepresented by the propaganda of the time and later historical studies, thus enriching our perspectives (or maybe confirming or invalidating some of them presumed or reasonably expressed).

This article is based on archival documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education (Directorate of Foreign Relations), The Service of the Central National Historical Archives (different funds), The Service of the Municipality of Bucharest of the National Archives, the National Institute for Statistics, magazines („Tribuna României”, „Forum”, „Lumea”, „Higher Education in Europe”), legislation and other documents (decrees, laws, collaboration agreements). The first two archives⁹ mentioned constitute the main sources for finding out the different experiences that the international students had in

⁷ Valentin Maier, *Foreign Students Enrolled ...*, p. 307–312.

⁸ Digital Exhibition „Laboratorul de surse și idei pentru istoria universitară” (The Laboratory of Sources and Ideas for the Higher Education History) (<https://muzeu.unibuc.ro/ro/lisiiu-internationalizarea-invatamanului-superior-din-romania/>).

⁹ Other archives hold useful documents that can be accessed in the future such as those from National Council for the Study of Security Archives.

Romania¹⁰, while documents from The Service of the Central National Historical Archives mainly provided us with statistics of international students and the general understanding of the era¹¹.

Conditions to admission in the Romanian higher education¹²

The first thing that we need to present are the conditions to admission in the Romanian higher education¹³. Studying in the Romanian higher education was possible through three ways: scholarship, self-financing (hard currency – paying for tuition fees with American dollars) or using a non-convertible currency.

Scholarships in the Romanian higher education were accessed in the 1980s by candidates not older than 30 years, with baccalaureate diploma or another act equivalent to it. Until July 10 of the academic year, the candidates should have confirmed if they used the scholarships and if so, until July 15 their candidate files should have been sent to the Romanian Ministry of Education. Then, until August 15 the ministry would confirm to the correspondent ministries from different countries if the candidates meet the conditions for admission to studies or not.

A candidate file should have contained the following documents in a language with an international circulation and legalized by the consular departments of the ministries of foreign affairs of the country of residence (not original documents, because the file and its contents was not returned, no matter the final result of the application): photocopy or legalized copy of the study certificate; legalized copy of the birth certificate; the medical health certificate issued by medical units confirming the possibility of studying abroad (the result of the radiology examination and the blood analysis expressly mentioned) and of course, the appropriate health condition

¹⁰ The documents were obtained in the framework of the project „Calitate în învățământul superior: internaționalizare și baze de date pentru dezvoltarea învățământului românesc”, POCU 126766 (coordinated by Cezar Hâj, public policy expert at Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding – UEFISCDI). Many thanks to Marius Deaconu, public policy expert at UEFISCDI, in facilitating the access to these archives.

¹¹ The documentation of these archival source was done in the framework of the project „Planificare economică, învățământ superior și acumularea capitalului uman în România în timpul regimului comunist (1948–1989)”, Consiliului Național al Cercetării Științifice, CNCS-UEFISCDI, PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0476 (coordinated by prof. Bogdan Murgescu, University of Bucharest).

¹² This section of the article is mainly based on document from Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16-217/1980.

¹³ For a general look at the Romanian higher education and its specializations: Jan Sadlak, *Higher Education in Romania, 1860–1990: Between Academic Mission, Economic Demands and Political Control*, Buffalo, GSE Publications, 1990; Andrei Florin Sora, *Evoluția calificărilor din învățământul universitar românesc 1968–2011*, 2011. Available from: <http://www.invatamant-superior.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Raportistoriacalificarilor.pdf>; Valentin Maier, *Profiles of Specialization in the Romanian Higher Education during Communism. The Importance of the Mechanical Profile*, „Research and Science Today. Supplement”, no. 1/2016, p. 138–149.

for the type of higher education that the candidate wants to access; standard application with personal data and the obligations assumed by the applicant during the studies; seven photos. All these may not seem as important, not until we find this clearly mention: "files with incomplete documents will not be considered [for the application] and will not be returned".

When the confirmed candidate arrived in Romania (the deadline period was between September 15–30, otherwise the scholarship would be lost) he or she also had to bring the original study documents and birth certificate. There is also a main Romanian recommendation for foreign authorities involved in the admission process to send candidates with good and very good educational results. This is important although the admission to studies was done without an exam¹⁴, those who wish to pursue higher education in architecture, art and physical education and sports still must take aptitude tests in advance and those who did not pass these tests, were oriented towards other specialties or returned to their homeland. As we can imagine, not all the candidates respected this admission calendar or put together a complete admission file.

Candidates coming with scholarship from another state or on their own account (self-financing) bear the expenses themselves for the hotel accommodation where they stayed at the beginning of their studies, more precise in the period needed to complete the enrollment formalities. As initial expenses we can also count the transportation expenses to the educational institution where they were assigned to study (international students did not choose where to study or the actual institution of higher education, only the type and/or the specialization of higher education they wanted to attend). The value of the scholarship was fixed for students (750 lei – Romanian currency). This was not the case for the values of tuition fees. Firstly, they depended on the type of higher education: 231 USD monthly for technical, economic, agronomic, university and physical education and sports higher education; 254 USD monthly for medical and pharmaceutical higher education; 289 USD monthly for music and fine arts higher education; 416 US dollars monthly for dramatic art, theater direction and film higher education. Secondly, the fees, as seen, were in USD, not in lei¹⁵.

It is important to mention that all these conditions applied for scholarships offered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and not by the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation or offered by the Party (Foreign Relations Department)¹⁶.

¹⁴ We need to investigate further the procedures that each state had in order to select the students that will go to Romania.

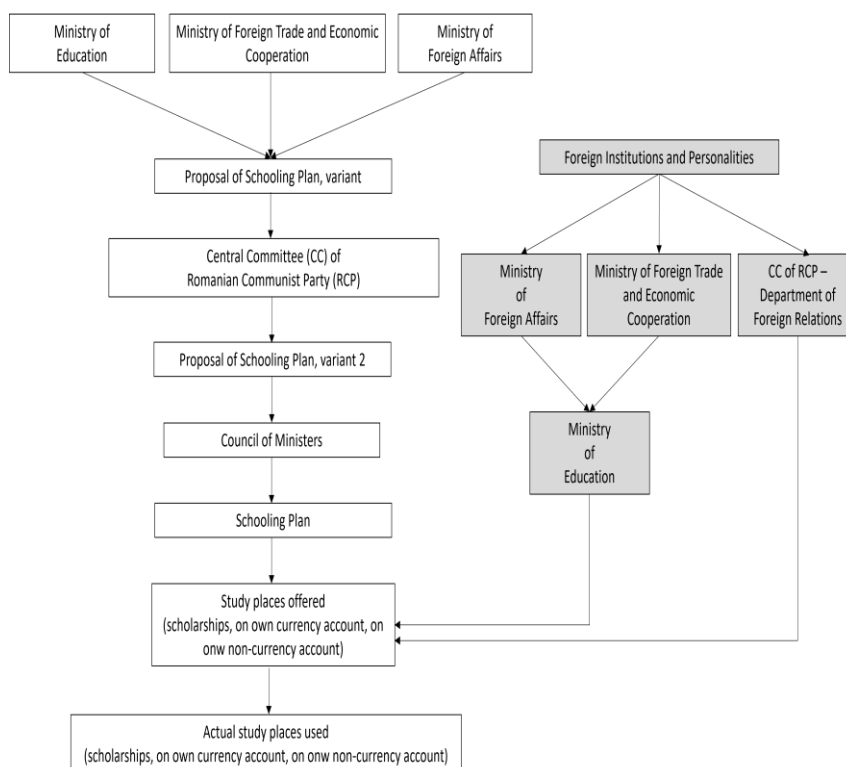
¹⁵ The levels of tuition fees did not changed significantly in the 1980s to cover inflation or to reflect other changes in the higher education system (The Service of the Central National Historical Archives, fund CC of RCP–Secția Propagandă și Agitație, 18/1989, ff. 160–162).

¹⁶ The Service of the Central National Historical Archives, fund CC of RCP–Secția Relații Externe (Foreign Relations Department) is an useful source, but still we think that many documents need to become available for a clear understanding. Another important archival fund accessible at the same institution is the Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries.

Study places for international students

International students were attending Romanian higher education institutions through one of the three ways, in terms of financing their studies: scholarships offered by different institutions¹⁷, on own currency account (basically, by paying a tuition fee in US dollars) and on non-currency account (through different documents signed between Romania and different other countries)¹⁸.

We can recreate a circuit of the elaboration of the schooling plan¹⁹ based on archival documents consulted up until now:



¹⁷ A document from 1980 mentions the following types of grants approved through decision of Council of Ministers and other documents: grants of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, of CC of RCP, for Romanian emigration, „Nicolae Bălcescu” grants, UNESCO postgraduate courses, grants offered as months-grants (probably, for specializations courses), grants in reserve (Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 7/1981).

¹⁸ For example in 1983/1984 this meant Bulgaria, China, Democratic Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of Germany, Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Mongolia and other countries (The Service of the Central National Historical Archives, fund CC of RCP–Secția Cancelarie, 21/1983).

¹⁹ A good article on this subject, but for the establishing of the national study places in Romania can be read by Matei Gheboianu, *Policy of Reduction of Study Places in Communist Romania: Case Study of the Academic Year 1982–1983*, „International Review of Social Research”, nr. 4/2014, p. 97–110.

Of course, the above diagram shows an incomplete circuit of the elaboration of study places, based on the actual documents identified and used for this article. It mainly highlights the international students attending Romanian higher education while interacting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education, and not with Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation or with the Party (Foreign Relations Department), the most important two of the other institutions involved in granting use of national higher education by foreigners in Romania. This latter mention is important to be stressed because a document from 1980 specifies the following types of scholarships approved by decision of Council of Ministers: scholarships of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, of CC of RCP, for Romanian emigration, "Nicolae Bălcescu" grants, UNESCO postgraduate courses, grants offered as months-grants (probably, for specializations courses) and others held in reserve²⁰. The Party, through Foreign Relations Department, offered grants for different other parties or other political organizations in the world, especially the "Third World" countries, that shared the same political values. The international value of a Romanian university degree was important in attracting students from different countries, but also other reasons for cooperation (economic, political) were equally important, for Romania and other countries. This is certainly on itself a different and complex topic to be researched in the future²¹.

To make a strong argument in the direction of the need to further investigate the institutions involved in the internationalization of the Romanian higher education we call for an earlier document, from 1977. It shows us the following institutions involved in the establishment process for the scholarships: Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Union of Communist Youth, Ministry for Youth Problems, National Council for Physical Education and Sport, Association „Romania” (also with a favorable opinion – *aviz favorabil* – from the Ministry of Finance)²². This also means that we need to be aware that

²⁰ Ministry of Education, 7/1980; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 3202–241/1980. Other institutions could be involved in offering scholarships, for example Asociația "Romania" which offered a grant for a PhD Student (Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 3/1981, 24/1981)

²¹ Some good examples of archival documents that convinced us of this complex situation that is international students attracted through political means and institutions are: The Service of National Historical Central Archives, fund CC of RCP, Department of "Cancelarie", 36/1983, 17/1984; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15–217/1980, 2086A–217/1980, 2254–217/1980, 2847–217/1980, 1763–212/1984; Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 40/1981. These documents also stress the role of International Center CEPECA in Romania, for training managers of industrial enterprises. Other domains targeted through scholarships offered were journalism, youth and union organizations and certain interests were placed on offering scholarships for English speaking African and Asian countries, French and Portuguese speaking African countries and Arab countries. The role of Foreign Relations Department needs to be considered also in the time perspective, as it changed in 1980s, for some years been credited in proposals for study places, other times not mentioned, but still with a role.

²² The Service of the Central National Historical Archives, fund CC of RCP–Secția Relații Externe, 214/1977, p. 35–36v. The document was first identified and published for the digital exhibition

depending on the period that we refer to, the actual institutions involved in the establishment of study places with scholarships changed, maybe even as fast, as for each academic year.

Nevertheless, the diagram shows the main circuit of establishing the schooling plan for international students, including the main institutions involved. Highlighted with gray we have also mentioned the “interventions”. They were made by foreigner entities (through official and non-official channels, through institutional and individual ways) at the Romanian institutions and personalities (during foreign political visits of Nicolae Ceaușescu²³ or other officials from different ministries, especially Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education). These interventions changed the actual study places used in the Romanian higher education, even well after the schooling plan was approved. How exactly and why it actually happened and also why statistics changed and could have changed even more than we actually can trace through archival documents, will be explained after the next section of the article comprising the registered students and graduates in Romania.

Statistics of international students and graduates in the Romanian higher education

As already written, in the 1980s the majority of the international students that arrived in Romania studied in the medical and pharmacy higher education. Other types of higher education that attracted an important number of students were polytechnics (including construction and architecture), the domains studied in Romanian universities as opposed to polytechnics (philology, mathematics, biology, physics, history, geography), physical education and sport and agronomic education.

Almost three quarters of the international students that came in Romania were self-financing their studies, followed by over 20% of scholarships holders and a very small percentage of those arriving on own non-currency account. From what the data showed us, later in the 1980s, we can see a decreasing trend of students that came with scholarships (a little over 40% as opposed to less than 7% towards the end of 1980s).

Students that came in Romania on own currency account were the preferred choice for the Romanian authorities since they were paying US dollars to study, in a time when gaining currency was the main focus, in order to make possible for paying

“The Laboratory of Sources and Ideas for University History” (<https://muzeu.unibuc.ro/ro/lsiiu-internationaliza-reainvatamantului-superior-din-romania/>). Association „Romania” had its own magazine called „Tribuna României”, in which we can find articles also about the international students from Romania.

²³ „Lumea” magazine presents many article on this subject.

the international debt of the country. International students on their own non-currency account in Romania were mostly in the same numbers throughout the period.

Number of international students and ways of financing the studies

Year	Total number of students	Total number of students with scholarships	Total number of students on own currency account	Total number of students on own non-currency account
1980/1981	19122	8030	10396	696
1981/1982	19004	6662	11690	652
1982/1983	17888	4977	12392	519
1983/1984	16157	3644	12048	465
1984/1985	14471	2539	11464	468
1985/1986	12372	1478	10454	440
1986/1987	10749	990	9262	497
1987/1988	9526	700	8271	555
1988/1989	8989	590	7864	535

Source: The Service of National Historical Central Archives, fund CC of RCP, Department of „Propagandă și Agitație”, 18/1989, f. 159.

Although we can see that the trend registered was towards a lower level of international students in Romania in the context of increased systemic difficulties, even in 1989 in Central Committee, the Romanian communist leaders, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, claimed that more international students should enter the higher education²⁴. In the proposals of study places for international students for the academic year 1989/1990, 3.000 study places were set for those coming on their own currency account, 190 own non-currency account and 150 grants²⁵. These numbers were in fact estimated to be with more than 1.000 students for those financed on their own currency account than in 1988/1989, for sure an overvalued level²⁶. It is important to note that in 1980/1981, 2.314 students came to Romania on their own currency account²⁷.

An important aspect of the statistics of international students is finding exactly from which country did they come to study in Romania. The data available to us

²⁴ The Service of National Historical Central Archives, fund CC of RCP, Department of „Cancelarie”, 31/1989, f. 6v.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 15v.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 16.

²⁷ The Service of National Historical Central Archives, fund CC of RCP, Department of „Cancelarie”, 44/1981, f. 102v.

shows the first ten countries were: Greece, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Irak, Federal Republic of Germany, Iran, Sudan, and Nigeria. The most scholarships were offered to Syrian, Jordan and Lebanon students, while many of the students on their own currency account in Romania were from Greece, Jordan and Syria. There were also countries with no students in Romania, or with as few as one (Djibouti, Denmark, Uganda, Thailand or Poland, naturally just a few examples).

In terms of graduates²⁸, Bucharest was the most important higher education center (over 8.000 graduates), followed by Cluj-Napoca, Iași and Timișoara (each with over 3.000 graduates), and a small number of graduates from Craiova, Ploiești, Brașov and Galați, while other centers accounted for less than 100 graduates (Suceava, Petroșani, Bacău and Pitești) or did not count at all (Oradea, Constanța, Hunedoara, Baia Mare, Târgu Mureș, Sibiu and Reșița).

A top 10 of institutions of higher education with the most graduates were: institutes of medicine and pharmacy from Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iași and Timișoara, Institute of Polytechnics from Iași, University of Craiova, Institute of Polytechnics in Timișoara, Institute of Constructions of Bucharest, Institute of Physical Education and Sport in Bucharest and University of Bucharest. In this top there is no surprise that the most important institutions were institutes of medicine and pharmacy and we can see three other that are part of technical higher education, while two other are universities and one is part of vocational education - physical education and sport.

Another statistical situation relevant is that from the most important higher education centre. So, in Bucharest, apart from the mentioned institutions, many other graduates of higher education came from Institute of Polytechnics, Academy of Economic Studies, Institute of Architecture, Agronomic Institute and National Institute for Chemistry, each with hundreds of graduates.

In the statistics between male and female graduates we can see a huge disproportion: almost 85% of students were male. Also, another disproportion was registered between students attending full time studies and extramural studies, the vast majority being from the first category.

Beyond Statistics

After we have seen the evolution of statistics regarding the attraction that Romanian higher education exercised on international students, it is necessary to be aware that this represents at most, only, as they say, half of the story. Attending higher education can be a big step for young adult people. They may move to a different city, country or even continent, leaving their parental home, entering a new society bound

²⁸ Information regarding graduates is based on data collected from Archive of the National Institute for Statistics, *Învățământul superior la sfârșitul anului universitar, 1980/1981–1988/1989*.

by different customs, rules and regulations. Studying abroad can also be more than just a result of the clash of cultures, it can maybe turn into a first significant life changing experience. Many of the international students were entering the Romanian higher education at the same age as other Romanians, so with the same challenges of young people, and we need to also take this simple and evident fact into consideration when studying the situation of international students in the Romanian higher education.

Although not a country to attract that many international students, they came from almost all over the world to study in the higher education system of the communist Romania, but mostly from the so called „Third World” states and communist states. Romania was not that developed itself at that time and many foreigners came from communist countries to study, but all of these didn't meant the international students adapted very fast to the Romanian everyday realities. In this main section of the article we are trying to present examples of the problems (dealt or created) that the international students faced during the process of studying in Romania.

An inventory of some facts that the international students encountered can be reconstructed by studying the archival documents from the Foreign and Education ministries in Romania, and here it is: concerns addressed about the conditions of admission in the Romanian higher education, faulty procedures during the admission process (regarding the study documents – missing documents, documents sent in a wrong state, for example not in an official translation in Romanian, documents sent at another date than the one established in procedures, date shift request, mistakes in the writing of names of students – not to be overlooked !, re-registration in the academic year), other faulty procedures during the studies (for example, new exams sustained at the same discipline without approval from the Ministry of Education, coming to study at a different time than the one mentioned in the official calendar, extension of PhD scholarships and other studies), expulsions and repetition, transfers between university centres, educational institutions and specialisations, problems in the payment of tuition fees (delays, partial or split payments by calculation elements, non-payment, bank transfers and other payment arrangements, extension of scholarships, errors in the classification of scholarships/currency/non-currency self-funding and of the transfer between them), organizing meeting of international students in Romania (from a simple rally to a congress) with or without the collaboration of the Romanian institutions, problems with settling in Romania, learning the Romanian language, lack of interest in studying, accommodation problems, financial hardships encountered by the parents of the students or by the students themselves, (serious) health problems, transportation difficulties to/from Romania, accidents (e.g. compensation in foreign currency for a fatal traffic accident instead of becoming imprisoned), fights and all kind of brawls in pubs and other places, drug trafficking, suicides, funerals as problems leading to loss of students in the academic years or social unrest, students who left their studies without returning the books they borrowed from the libraries and the linen they received from the dormitories, problems at the border – introduction of

banned written materials in the country, visa problems and other border crossing issues, problems with people coming as companions of students, who were involved in „bribery, business dealings, illicit currency transfers”, obtaining facilities not related to the study in the higher education (money for winter clothing especially for Africans, renting of studios and apartments, discounts for trips in Romania and abroad of international students from Romania), collaboration on related issues (between institutions like ministries of foreign affairs, embassies, political parties and also between political leaders).

In the following pages we will expand and exemplify these aforementioned aspects of international students interaction with the Romanian higher education system so we can rightfully assess their role in influencing the statistics of higher education and to be convinced that this topic may give us plenty different information that could be used in all kind of other studies.

Let us first deal with the problems of the adaptation to Romania and financial problems that the international students suffered at home. For example, in 1980, the director of the Cultural Directorate of the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs complains about the expulsion of 15 students for repetition and non-payment of tuition fees, writing that Sudanese authorities, families and students themselves are worried about these series of expulsions. He repeated the indiscipline argument as a cause for this situation cataloging it as the result of particular issues: „language difficulties, moving away from home, climate conditions”²⁹. Another similar adaptation problem was encountered by students from Greece, which had in their poor knowledge of Romanian language a serious barrier in passing the admission exams in Greece to study in Romania³⁰. So serious was the problem, and at the same time, so high was the need/wish to study in Romania, that a House of Culture of the Friendship between Greeks and Romanians asked for 2 or 3 months of language improvement courses in Romania. Another Greek student claimed that difficulties in the Romanian language constituted an important reason for his poor educational performance³¹. Romanian language was a barrier that the Romanian authorities were aware of, so a preparatory year for the international students was set in order for them to learn the language (nine months of studying Romanian, between September 15 to June 15) but it was not a mandatory course to attend in order to study in Romania. An international student could have easily attended right from the first year of study, with the condition of passing a language exam at the beginning of the academic year³², instead of following a preparatory year.

The health problems (because of the existent climate) was again mentioned as a cause for problems related to adaptation to Romania, a student asking in his third year of study to be transferred from Bucharest to Cluj-Napoca, stating: „I can hardly stand

²⁹ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16–217/1980, ff. 66, 67.

³⁰ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1196–217/1980, ff. 34, 35.

³¹ Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 23/1981.

³² *Ibidem*, 23/1981.

the climate and the crowding of Bucharest. I mention that I did the preparatory year in Cluj-Napoca and **was assigned, against my will, to Bucharest**³³.

„Accommodation difficulties, of a psychological kind” affected two Ghanaian students demanding a transfer, but this time to Bucharest from Timișoara (interesting, at the same type of higher education, for agriculture)³⁴. Climate conditions of Romania were a problem for some of the students, but also the food, as some Iranian students thought poorly of it („good for animals”)³⁵.

Other health problems that the international students showed had other origins. For example, a „serious nerve disease” caused an Ethiopian student to be hospitalized and then to leave the country, without suspending his studies, eventually being declared a repeater student, losing the right to the scholarship that he was entitled³⁶. Another psychiatric problem affected a student from Iași, hospitalized and resuming his studies, but when his psychiatric problems resurfaced, he was forced to abandon his studies in Romania, in order to prevent socially dangerous acts to be done³⁷. Other health problems implied myocardial infarction, which interrupted the studies of a PhD student in Romania³⁸. Of course, when the students wrote about their health issues causing difficulties in the learning process and thus asking for a freeze of academic year or for the possibility to be re-examined at a new date so that it does not lose a study year, they attached a certificate of health to attest what they were claiming, and in this way to obtain an official certification of the problem they faced.

Another aspect that we definitely need to consider was the financial issues. They were in fact serious causes for the international students to abandon the studies in Romania. This was the case of a student from Costa Rica, with good educational results (except in mathematics), regularly attending the courses and seminars and also a very good football player, but he states that because „of some family and financial problems” he has to abandon his studies³⁹. Some family problems could mean, in another case a health problem of a family member that needed the attention of that student causing him to return to the home country, but of course financial problems emerged at the same time (maybe even a shame to acknowledge this in the first place)⁴⁰. At other times the problems of the student were coupled with those of another family member forcing the student to go back home⁴¹. The Romanian state

³³ The highlight was kept from the Request of F.R. registered with no. 4778/7.09.1981, but made in 8.09.1981 (sic!), approved in 9.09.1981 and the transfer to be actually made from 15.09.1981 (Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 1/1981).

³⁴ Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 26/1981.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 38/1981.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 7/1981.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 30/1981.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 33/1981.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 5/1981.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 23/1981.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 23/1981.

was receiving other requests because of financial problems of the international students, like offering scholarships for students that entered the Romanian higher education on own currency account, but in the meantime having serious financial problems, like for some of the students coming from Sudan in 1980⁴².

Faulty procedures during the admission process were probably the most encountered reason of communication messages exchanged between Romanian institutions and foreign institutions or even people that wanted to study in Romania. This was also the reason why many of the candidates for higher education in Romania did not actually got the chance to study here⁴³. Let us take a closer look at all the faulty procedures to also find out how the Romanian institutions dealt with them, but also to know if beyond rules and regulations, some of the candidates actually did get to study here in a favoured manner, in a way or in another.

Often one of the most important concern during the admission process for the Romanian institutions involved in was the number of study places allocated by Romania to a certain country. Ministry of Foreign Affairs was sending and receiving many telegram for resolving this problem. For example, in 1980 the Romanian diplomatic officials from Kinshasa were requested by the ministry to ask the officials from Zaire (the present Democratic Republic of the Congo) if they will use all the 10 study places on own currency account⁴⁴. The request was, almost in all cases, termed as „urgent” because the ministry would reallocate the study places or supplement them depending on the answers received (and as we have seen from the archival documents, there were no little reasons to do it). When a state received a reduction of grants offered by Romania, there were definitely reactions from the foreign partners. There were questions demanding for the reasons behind this decision, like for the reduction of grants of Maroc, from 20 to 13 in 1980⁴⁵, or the diplomatic regret message expressed in a similar way, as it was the case of Republic of Congo (with capital at Brazzaville), receiving only 35 out of 65 grants established in the scientific and cultural exchanges agreement⁴⁶.

After the respective country officials were sending the number of study places that they will use from those allocated to them, the problem of sending the documents of the candidates in right time was another obstacle to study in Romania. Many times, foreign officials asked for a postponement because of their own educational system delays or calendar (for example, still at the time there were no grades for baccalaureate)⁴⁷. In most of the times all these request were favorably resolved, but

⁴² Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16–217/1980, f. 25.

⁴³ We are taking into account that as any process, it has its winners and its losers, no matter how hard you are trying to steer towards the desired result.

⁴⁴ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16–217/1980, f. 32.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 16–217/1980, ff. 18, 19.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 16–217/1980, f. 29.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 16–217/1980, f. 29.

there was a sense of „maximum urgency”, also stressed to respect the new deadline⁴⁸, especially since the request of study places was also made by other countries⁴⁹.

In order to increase the number of study places offered to a country, the local officials were also making some „interventions”. Officials from the ministry of foreign affairs from Sudan asked in 1980 the correspondent ministry from Romania for a supplementary scholarship for the son of the ambassador who specifically wanted for his son to study in Romania, due to its „prestige and seriosity of the Romanian education”⁵⁰. In fact, with other occasions in other documents, we have read similar appreciations to the Romanian higher education⁵¹. Other interventions were done for the son of the ministry of Foreign Affairs from Republic of Congo and the sister of the ambassador, though we do not know the exact result of them, only the recommendation to use tact in making this possible through an exchange with another student (successful candidate that did not already arrived in Romania from Congo to be informed that it is actually rejected)⁵². This must have happened in some cases as was the situation with the intervention (actually repeated several times) made by the ministry of Foreign Affairs from Jordan for one more grant in addition to those 20 offered in 1980, when some of the candidates did not actually came to Romania⁵³. This particular case also shows that other things could go wrong, as the candidate came in the demanded time in Romania, but due to a misunderstanding actually arrived late at the Ministry of Education to finish the needed admission bureaucracy. This demanded subsequent interventions, this time from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Education, which in the end was resolved favorably for the Jordanian student⁵⁴.

This is important, because the ministry of Foreign Affairs asked the Romanian officials from different countries not to make unsustainable offers or to maintain high hopes for an increase of study places, leaving any possible additions to be analyzed on a case by case scenario. The preferred solution was transferring the study places from countries, that have not used all their allocated places because of different reasons, to another⁵⁵. The interventions resulted in some of the cases, to a number of total scholarships more than the Romanian authorities would have wanted. In 1981 Syria got more scholarships through the intervention of the presidency, generating a ferm answer from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Romanian diplomats in Syria to stop „offering” scholarships and demanding to explain to the presidency how many exceptions were actually already made on the part of the Romanian side (also

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 16–217/1980, f. 30.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 16–217/1980, f. 34.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 16–217/1980, f. 74.

⁵¹ Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 30/1981.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 16–217/1980, f. 86.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 1344–217/1980.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 1344–217/1980.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 16–217/1980, f. 87, 87v.

regarding the delays of students arriving in Romania and other procedures) just for that current academic year (1980/1981)⁵⁶.

Once all documents were received (September 30) another deadline had to be respected. It was the one regarding the actual presence of the students in Romania, once they were receiving the confirmation of the status of successful candidates (October 15)⁵⁷. From 1979/1980, the problem in respecting this deadline was partially related to the measure of not supporting any longer the cost of international transport by the Romanian state for students coming to the Romanian higher education⁵⁸. In fact, this was problem that appeared through many of the documents from 1980 and even later (though the foreign partners were notified previously). The only exceptions done were when the transport was expressly mentioned in acts of bilateral cooperation. An example is CC al RCP – Department of Foreign Relations who offered for its fellows tickets for international flights to go to holidays (sic !)⁵⁹.

The deadline to arrive in time at studies was important, otherwise, even with interventions, it could not have been generally surpassed, except in only some of the cases. This was true in 1980 for a Sirian candidate sustained by „a highly important personality from the head of the Sirian party just instituted”⁶⁰. So again, we can see the importance of interventions, that really stretched a little bit further the limits of rules. Overlayed interventions seems that opened all the doors and pushed aside (m)any obstacles.

The facilities received by the candidates for admission in the Romanian higher education are also an important aspect. We have seen that once the international transport to Romania was not supported by the Romanian state some problems appeared, but other example can be made. For instance, students received money for buying winter clothes, 2000 lei in 1980 as a one-time payment for the whole period of studies. This was offered for South African students and was termed as „for fitting clothes”⁶¹. Other times it was just a written recommendation, for example the one for Zambian successful candidates: „We advise that the eight Zambian candidates to come prepared with winter clothes”⁶². For sure, we can understand that this recommendation was actually made because of several awkward situation that the Romanian authorities had to face (we have yet to find more such examples, but we also have to not miss the point that archival documents preserve a part of what really

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 2254–217/1980.

⁵⁷ Sometimes the indicated date for all the documents to be received by the Romanian institutions was September 30, other times this was mentioned as the date when successful candidates should have been already in the country, other times this last deadline was October 15 (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16–217/1980, f. 34; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2252–217B/1980; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2557–217/1980, f. 24).

⁵⁸ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 451A–217/1980.

⁵⁹ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2499–217/1980.

⁶⁰ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2254–217/1980.

⁶¹ Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 1/1981.

⁶² Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2869–217/1980, f. 1.

happened, so we may have to academically to fill the blanks). At other times, students got the possibility to rent studios, not as widely as we may suppose, in all the higher education centres in Romania⁶³.

International students were also involved in Romania in all kinds of troubles. Sometimes they occupied an embassy in Romania to ask for scholarships at a previous level (Gabonese students)⁶⁴, other times they provoked accidents. When they had consequences like one or more people being left dead, the situation got complicated. One such student, a Jordanian who provoked an accident killing one man, got shelter in the embassy in order to avoid expulsion. The Jordanian prim-minister showed at the same time more understanding towards delays at Zarka (Zarqa) oil refinery, where Romanians were working on its construction site, in order for the Romanian authorities to show clemency to this specific case, in fact involving his nephew, so that he can finish the studies⁶⁵. Many other similar accidents happened in Romania and the authorities had to find solutions for all the parties involved, in a way or in another.

The international students also got to in all sorts of fights, like the one in Iași where Nigerian students overturned tables and chairs and destroyed lampposts as well as road and traffic signs, breaking the windows of billboards and telephone booths, for a total damage being assessed at 15,640 lei. Another trouble was done at the Târgu Copou student complex where they broke the windows of the cafeteria and the swing doors and the stairwell from dormitories no. 3 and 4, for a total damage estimated at 56,000 lei⁶⁶.

At other times international students came to Romania and sometimes wanted to resolve national problems with their home neighbors (Iranians versus Iraqi, also we need to mention that the latter students had to go back home when the war between Iran and Iraq started in the 1980s)⁶⁷.

Another event involved two students who got into a fight at the border. Although officials from Nigeria asked for a reconsideration of the events that happened and especially their consequences, it all finished with expelling, except of one of the students⁶⁸.

A repercussion to a student involved in a fight, like that in which a victim was a didactical staff member, was translated in being downgraded, so from having a scholarship to the status of student in the Romanian higher education on his own currency account⁶⁹.

⁶³ Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 7/1981.

⁶⁴ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 994–217F/1980, ff. 8, 9.

⁶⁵ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1344–217/1980.

⁶⁶ Other examples can be read in Bogdan-Iulian Ranteș, *op. cit.*, p. 100, 101; Bogdan C. Iacob, *op. cit.*, p. 683–687; Ioana Mihaela Bonda, Cecilia Cârja, *op. cit.*, p. 195, 241.

⁶⁷ Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 38/1981.

⁶⁸ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1881–217/1980, ff. 1–12v.

⁶⁹ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2257–217/1980, ff. 1–12v.

Monetary compensation of imprisonment for a fatal traffic accident was also a solution in these kinds of problems and not only once⁷⁰, but when they were not paid imprisonment was the only option left⁷¹. Let us take the example of a Tanzanian student without driving license who made a car accident in which he killed a Romanian citizen and who was sentenced for two years of prison. Later, the sentence was transformed into a fee of 600 American dollars. The Ministry of Education expelled the student, and the police authorities expelled him from the country. The Tanzanian Embassy (situated in Koln) tried to make steps towards favorably resolve the situation for the student, but in the end his expelling could not be overturned⁷².

The illegal activity of dealing drugs involving international students was a problem that concerned the Romanian authorities. In 1980 a Costa Rican student was accused of dealing such substances⁷³. Other students and sometimes the persons who accompany the student also provoked problems to the Romanian authorities, like doing all kind of illicit business (in Romanian: „bișniță, afacerism, transferuri ilicite de valută”)⁷⁴. This may have had repercussions in a range as wide as from losing a scholarship to being expelled, but we need more documents to investigate this aspect.

Not paying the tuition fees (from unknown reasons) resulted in expulsion⁷⁵. Sometimes, the Romanian authorities carried out intense communication with correspondent authorities in order to remind the need for international students to pay their tuition fees. In fact, they should have been paid in advance for 3 months, and paid in full, not divided by calculation elements⁷⁶. This was of course, mentioned expressly, and was reminded as often as it could. Paying these fees was important since they were done in US dollars and once a student attending higher education in Romania on their own currency account, they could not transfer to a studying place with scholarship⁷⁷. However, some postponement of fee payment could have been granted⁷⁸.

⁷⁰ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2254–217/1980.

⁷¹ Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 23/1981.

⁷² Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2538–217/1980.

⁷³ Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 5/1981.

⁷⁴ Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 5/1981. Profiteering involved Kent cigarettes or radios with cassettes (Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 23/1981).

⁷⁵ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16–217/1980; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2086A–217/1980.

⁷⁶ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16–217/1980; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 994–217F/1980.

⁷⁷ Many archival files attest that Romanian authorities had to remind this to foreign institutions; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16–217/1980.

⁷⁸ Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 23/1981.

Repeated unexcused absences were again a reason for expulsion, like was copying during an exam.

Being away from home as an international student does not mean that personal problems remained at home. An international student following medicine higher education in Romania in contradiction to what she actually did want to do, resulted in a suicide. This was done by getting herself throwed out of the window from the dormitory in which she stayed. A description of her, recorded in the archival documents sounds like this: „retired by nature, she liked literature that posed deep psychological problems, sometimes, jokingly, she made an apology for suicide, she considered that her vocation was not medicine, but her parents did not let her become a flight attendant, forcing her to come to our country in order to study medicine, she was friends, in turn, with a Greek student, another from the FRG, and then with a Lebanese student”⁷⁹.

Sometimes in the admission process, there were simple registration mistakes on computer or mistakes made because of misspelling the names of the candidates and these created additional problems⁸⁰. Other times, the information regarding the Romanian system of higher education did not reached the international partners as students asked to be enrolled in certain specialization that in fact was non-existent in Romania (for example, „medical assistant”)⁸¹.

Conclusions

In the 1980s international students were coming to Romania to study mainly because of the scholarships granted by the Romanian state through different agreements between states, and because of the prestige of the higher education. Beyond the actual statistics of the students and graduates, we too often miss to point out other important aspects related to the student life and to the international student life of those coming to Romania. Using many archival documents from

⁷⁹ Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 23/1981. Another case of suicide, with many other complications that we will not expand here, involved a student from Chad (Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 5/1981).

⁸⁰ Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 23/1981; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2252–217B/1980.

⁸¹ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1196–217/1980. At the same time, in problems involving a PhD in different specialities, some solutions were more easily achieved so that the PhD Students could receive a title of use when they will be back in the origin country (Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 1/1981). Coming into Romania as PhD Student involved other problems because of the nature of this type of original research. For example, it could involve the procurement of specific chemical substances and so on, but the responsibility was on the student's account in this case, not of a particular institution of higher education (Archive of Ministry of Education, Directorate of Foreign Relations, 7/1981).

different important and relevant sources we have created an inventory of the problems the international students faced in Romania during 1980s. We have also exemplified these aspects and pointed out other ways that this research can be enriched, once with more of the same sources (from the same archival sources, but with files from different years), and from different archival sources, like for instance, those of the Romanian Communist Party or from the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation. Of course, archival documents are one of the historical sources on which we can base our research, but for sure and newspapers and magazines or interviews as well as other sources need to be considered. Also, a comparative approach with similar countries like Hungary or Poland should be researched in the future to understand better the status and problems of an international student in Romania and in general, in a communist country. In this article we have used previously not researched documents to present aspects of the life of the international students in Romania in 1980s, getting a little bit further in the analysis of the Romanian higher education and its internationalization.