

The Evolution of the Faculty of History at University of Bucharest (1970-1989).

Case Study: A look into the professionalization of history graduates through the analysis of study programmes

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Abstract: *The Evolution of the Faculty of History at University of Bucharest (1970-1989). Case Study: A look into the professionalization of history graduates through the analysis of study programmes.* In this article I will analyse the evolution of the Faculty of History within the University of Bucharest from 1970-1989, from the perspective of the admission process, the changes that have occurred among the study programs, the number of students and the provision of the skills necessary for graduates to become good professionals in the domain.

Keywords: history, history-philosophy, students, education, Romanian Communist Party

Abstract: *Evoluția Facultății de Istorie a Universității din București (1970-1989). Studiu de caz: O privire asupra profesionalizării absolvenților de istorie prin analiza programelor de studiu.* În acest articol voi analiza evoluția Facultății de Istorie din cadrul Universității din București între anii 1970-1989, din perspectiva procesului de admitere, modificările care au avut loc în programele de studiu, numărul de studenți și modalitatea în care au fost dezvoltate abilitățile necesare ale absolvenților pentru a deveni buni profesioniști ai domeniului.

Cuvinte cheie: istorie, istorie-filozofie, studenți, educație, Partidul Comunist Român

The instauration of the communist regime in Romania led to major transformations in society, public institutions, and collective mentalities. One of the most significant and long-term hits was that dealt with the educational system. This came once the communists had succeeded in gaining total power over the country. Thus, we can characterize the educational system during the communist period as being:

“- monopolized by the state and its use for the ideological control of education;
 - a centrally planned evolution of the system and its subservience to the options and preferences of those involved in its functioning (professors, pupils, students);
 - the emphasis of quantitative development;
 - the use of the educational system as an instrument of social engineering (a factor for the regulation of social, professional and geographical mobility of individuals; the substitution of its general formative with a political and economic one, aimed at creating a workforce, etc.)”¹.

In the following, we will analyse the evolution of the Faculty of History at the University of Bucharest between 1970 and 1989. We will look over the admission process, changes made to study programmes, the number of students, and the offering of required competences for graduates to make them good professionals in their fields. In addition, special attention will be given to the educational plans and the role seen by the party for graduates. In this endeavour we will mostly use information found in the archives of the Faculty of History, University of Bucharest, of the Ministry of National Education, and the National Institute of Statistics. From an epistemological point, we will rely on the quantitative method, analysing the number of students, as well as the educational plans by looking at the share of various types of courses.

Transformations were brought on 2 August 1948 by *Decree No.175* for the reformation of education², which meant educating the youth in the spirit of popular democracy and training media and higher staff of specialists and the creation of socialist society. Moreover, through this decree, universities and polytechnics were put on the same level, subordinated to the Ministry of Public Education, while some institutes could answer to their relevant ministries, in a case by case scenario. The imposed model was of Soviet origin, working on single manuals, most of them translated from Russian or written by the preferred academia, as was the case of Mihail Roller’s *Manual of History*. To both transform society and to create a new man, learning Russian became mandatory starting from 4th grade.

In the same period, the University of Bucharest underwent a series of changes regarding its structure, including its name, taking on the designation C.I. Parhon. This only changed when some of its faculties

¹ Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500-2010)*, (Iași: Polirom, 2010), p. 386.

² Decree No. 175 for the reformation of education as was re-edited in *Antologia legilor învățământului din România*, (București: Institutul de Științe ale Educației, 2004), pp. 342-345.

became independent³ and some of the professors were purged. As a result of the 1948 reformation of education, the history department was reorganized leading to the creation of the Faculty of History and Geography⁴. In 1950, the faculty was broken off into two independent schools⁵, and for the first time, the Faculty of History became an independent institution and will remain as such until 1977, when it will be merged with philosophy. This new change influenced specializations as well, and students could get double degrees: history-philosophy and philosophy-history⁶. The institutional development of the Faculty can be divided into several periods; in 1961-1962, it was comprised of: the Department of Romanian History, the Department of History of the USSR and Popular Democracies, the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, the Department of Medieval, Modern and Contemporary History, and the Department of Archives. After the merger, in 1979, there were both a department of Romanian History and one of Universal History, however, in 1989, due to the ongoing economic crisis, these two will be melded into one of Romanian and Universal History⁷.

For some time, admission into higher education was based on the contents of their files rather than on their knowledge. This, however, changed during the 1970s, when higher education suffered yet another change, it was politechnized. Thus, we can observe more emphasis being put on technical fields to the detriment of the university pedagogical and juridical, in accordance with the directives coming from Nicolae Ceausescu.

Table 1. The evolution of the number of students based on their field of study:

		1960/1961	1970/1971	1980/1981
Technical		30.486	53.592	124.006
	Industrial	15.552	32.594	90.675
	Transports	1.075	1.106	1.877
	Constructions and Architecture	5.563	10.818	19.163

³ See the case of the Medical School.

⁴ Ovidiu, Bozgan, *Universitatea din București. Scurt istoric*, (București: Editura Universității din București, 1994), p. 112.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

	Agricultural and Silvic	8.306	9.074	12.283
Medical-Pharmaceutical		7.625	9.898	23.381
Economics		5.085	21.016	21.919
Law		3.101	5.901	3.863
University-pedagogical		23.752	58.108	17.393
Artistic		1.230	3.370	2.207
Total		71.989	151.885	192.769

Source: *Învățământul în România - date statistice*, București, 1996, p.102-103

The available data illustrates that in just 20 years the number of technical students became four times bigger, answering the party's need for a more polytechnic-oriented society. This can be clearly observed through the nearly total transformation of theoretical high-schools into industrial ones. This type of thinking is evident from the new education law passed in 1978. Here, even in its introductory chapter, it underlines that "schools are built on the principle of politechnization, the tight combination of work, education and research - essential factors in the construction of socialism and communism in our country for the progress and civilization of humanity"⁸.

The 1980s proved to be extremely difficult for Romanian education and for society as a whole. The collective effort imposed on Romanian society, through massive reductions in all fields was also felt in higher education. In the span of just two years, the number of students plummeted by 25%.

As time passed, the role of the file during admission decreased and was eventually entirely replaced by an evaluation of the candidate's knowledge. Thus, in the second half of the 1960s "graduates of mid-technical schools, those with their baccalaureate examination or its equivalents" could enrol into higher education, while for distance learning "working people with a highschool baccalaureate diploma" could enrol⁹.

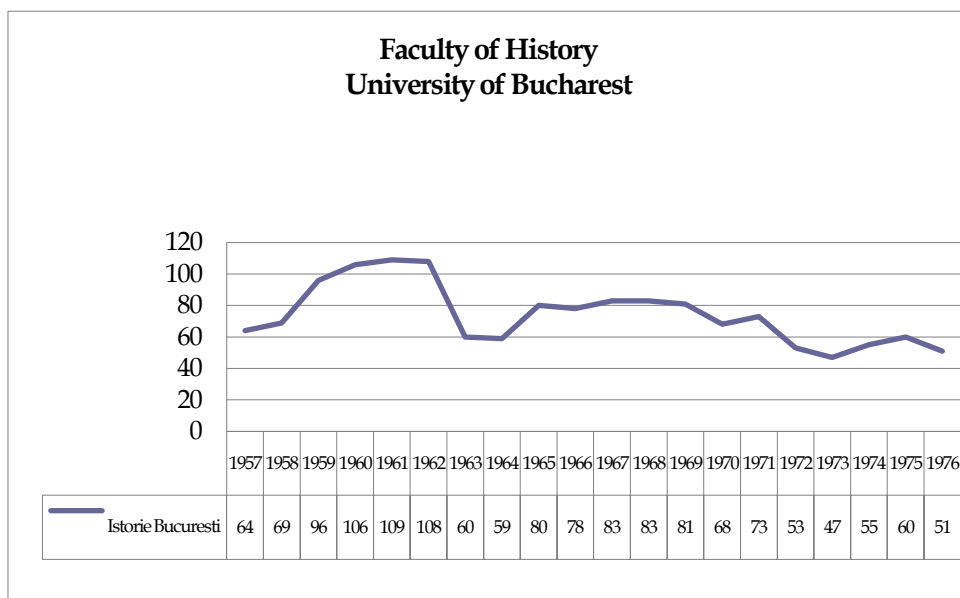
During the 1970s and 1980s, admissions for evening and distance learning courses, including for history candidates had to also provide proof that they had a job. Thus, this type of education was aimed at

⁸ Education Law No. 28 from 21 December, "Buletinul Oficial" nr. 113/26 dec. 1978.

⁹ *Admiterea în învățământul superior, 1968* edited by "Revista Învățământului superior", București, 1968, p. 61.

training people that were already working. This worked hand-in-hand with the regime’s tendency, especially during the 1980s, of lowering the number of places available in normal courses. Another condition for those that wanted to study philosophy, history, and law, either normal or evening courses, was that “they could enrol only on the basis of a recommendation from their party or youth organization”¹⁰. However, this was not the same as the previous practice of the candidate’s file during the 1950s, but rather part of a formality linked to the high level of ideologization of such subjects.

Graph 1: Tables containing students admitted in year I day courses¹¹



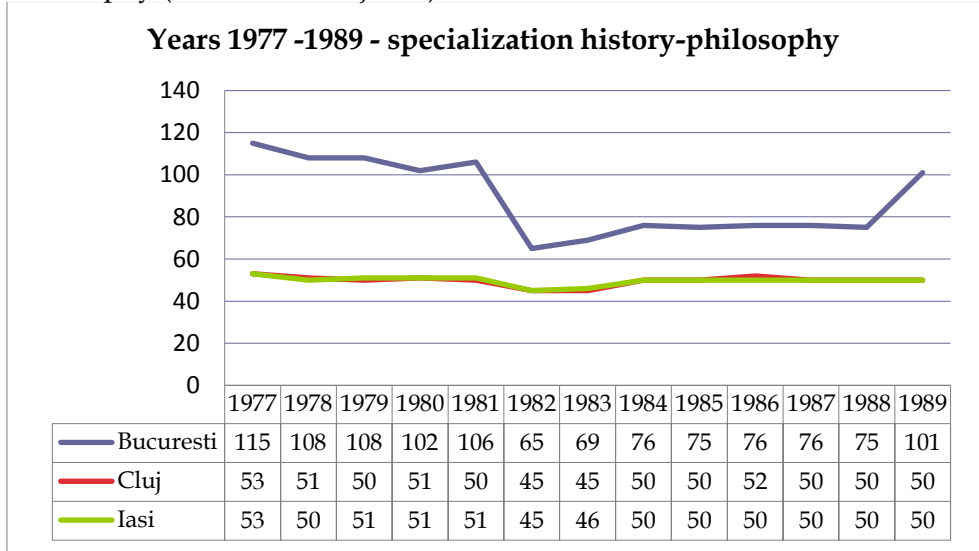
Source: Archives of the Ministry of National Education and Archives of the National Institute of Statistics

As we can see in the above graphic, the highest number of registered students in history at the University of Bucharest, enrolled in day courses, was between 1959 and 1962. Another period of growth can be noticed from 1965 to 1971, and during the eight-decade it stabilized around 50-60 students admitted in their first year.

¹⁰ *Admiterea în învățământul superior, 1980* edited by “Forum”, București, 1980, p. 50.

¹¹ This was based on information found in the yearly reports of departments of higher education institutes as discussed in the Archives of the Ministry of National Education and the Archives of the National Institute of Statistics.

Graph 2: Table of students admitted in year I, day courses, History-Philosophy (Bucharest, Cluj, Iasi):



Source: Archives of the Ministry of National Education and Archives of the Institute of National Statistics

We have made a comparative analysis of the enrolled students at Romania's three most important universities at the Faculty of History-Philosophy between 1977 and 1989. From looking at the school programmes¹², it can be observed that during the 1980s there were around 80 to 90 places available at a national level, and this level was never exceeded, the Faculty of History and Philosophy in Bucharest faced a drastic reduction of the allotted places for admission starting with 1982, without ever recovering to previous numbers.

The analysis of school enrolment figures from the presented graphics was made on several levels. Firstly, we looked at the evolution of these figures between 1956 and 1989. There was a steady decline of admitted students during the mid-50s, but this tendency changed from 1959 onwards, marking a significant increase. This was true not only for history, as it marked an increase in the entire educational system¹³. The tendency remained very much the same until the first half of the 1960s, reaching an average of 150 students enrolled in their first year. We can also notice that when compared with the Five-Year Plan approved by the Council of Ministers, there was a positive difference, which was usually signed on by the minister.

¹² The Archives of the Ministry of Education.

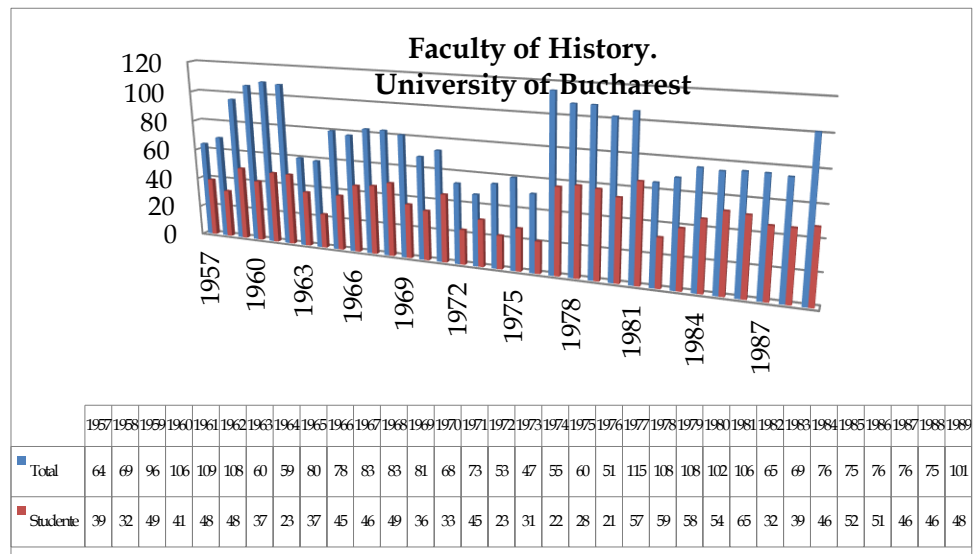
¹³ *Învățământul superior*, Archives of the Ministry of National Education, File 231.

The middle of the next decade, the 1970s, brought about another change in the school enrolment figures, namely, a decrease in the number allotted to history, an average of only 100 places on a yearly basis. The beginning of the 1980s did not only bring the creation of the history-philosophy specialization, but also a decline in the aforementioned figures. Up until that moment the minister would sign for the approval of supplementary places, yet now it seems he would rather make negative adjustments.

The second level of this analysis is comprised by the competition of the admission examination. Despite the fact that we have very little data on this, which impedes in-depth research on the topic, we can affirm that there was high competition estimated at 4-5 people for a single place.

Regarding the gender representation of those who were admitted, we can notice a bigger share was given to males during the 1950s. However, during the following decade, in the 1960s, this very much changed and there was more of a balance, over 50% of admitted students at the Faculty of History at the University of Bucharest were female, more relevant figures on this can be seen in the following graphic.

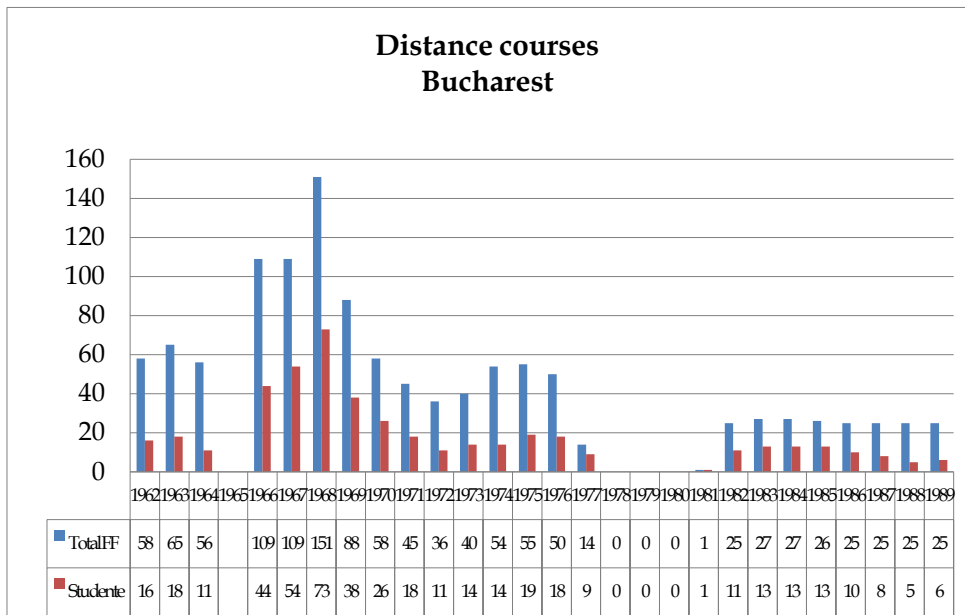
Graph 3: The number of admitted students at the Faculty of History - gender distribution



Source: Archives of the Ministry of National Education and Archives of the National Institute of Statistics

In the following graph we can see the distribution of the school enrolment figures for history (history-philosophy between 1982 and 1989), at evening courses at the University of Bucharest¹⁴. This form of education enjoyed real success during the 1960s, however, during the 1970s the number of those admitted decreased, and between 1978 and 1981 there were no more places put in competition. Evening courses were reintroduced in 1982, in the context of school enrolment figures decreasing in Romanian higher education at a constant pace. However, evening and distance courses became essential and were given much emphasis by the regime. When it comes to gender distribution of admitted students, we can again notice that males dominated. Thus, we can state that distance course was indeed more attractive for men, while normal school was preferred by females.

Graph 4: The number of enrolled students at distance courses at the Faculty of History:



Source: Archives of the Ministry of National Education and Archives of the National Institute of Statistics

¹⁴ The presented data begin from 1962. For the previous period we could not identify information. Also, for 1965 we could not find any data.

Admission requirements for history changed on a couple of occasions during the communist period, based on the transformations imposed by the regime. Given its ideological importance, history attracted a high number of people for admission, which proved it was a specialization of big interest among academic fields of study. However, its merger with philosophy would prove to be an uninspired decision, quickly abandoned after 1989.

During the period we focused, our research on, educational plans suffered constant changes, as well as mergers of various specializations, as we were the aforementioned case of history and philosophy. Thus, at the beginning of the 1970s, the history programme was five years long¹⁵, which will be later reduced to four. In 1977, the merger with philosophy and the creation of a double degree came as an answer to the regime's call for more university-pedagogical efficient study programmes. Their elaboration was supervised by the Ministry/Party and by historians to offer the graduates certain competences and abilities which would answer the call of communist society. Thus, the Faculty of History had to train specialists in fields such as education, research, politics (Party work, journalism, and cultural activists):

- "Professors for secondary education and high school for the teaching of History, Philosophy, Political Economy, Economic Education, Socio-political Education, as well as Logics and Psychology at pedagogical high schools. Moreover, for the teaching of Scientific-Materialism and Revolutionary-Humanism (at pedagogical and sanitary high schools), of production and Work Organization of Elementary Law and constitution, etc., training was ensured by the system of theoretical disciplines, pedagogical practice, social-political practice, as well as other connected activities (scientific circles, political-ideological work, and propaganda, etc.)

- Scientific researchers in history, philosophy, sociology, pedagogy, and psychology.

- Graduates can work as cultural activists and in publishing, in laboratories focusing on socio-humanities, and other similar fields"¹⁶.

Thus, graduates of the Faculty of History (history/philosophy from 1977) could become professors, researchers and could also work in the press, publishing or as party activists. To determine if these people managed to acquire the necessary skills for such occupations, we will analyse the educational plans. The evolution of the share of disciplines within educational plans can be observed in the following table:

¹⁵ It closed at the beginning of the 1970s.

¹⁶ Archives of the Faculty of History, University of Bucharest (AFIUB), Fond Secretariat, Files 1975-1980, unnumbered.

Table 3: The share of discipline in school plans, Faculty of History (UB), 1970-1989:

	General Courses (including auxiliary disciplines)	Philosophy	Specialized Courses	Ideological Courses	Party History	Pedagogy/ Pedagogical Practice
History (programme - 5 years)	54%	-	19%	11%	5%	11%
History (programme - 4 years)	50%	-	20%	10%	5%	14%
History/ Philosophy (4 years)	48%	25% (philosophy)	10%	7%	3%	8%

Source: Archives of the University of Bucharest and Archives FIUB

Thus, we can see that the base disciplines, containing general history courses, presented in a chronological manner, from prehistory and up to the contemporary period, represent on average half of the courses. This only changed slightly after the double-degree was introduced¹⁷. Moreover, this decrease can be observed more clearly by the number of special courses¹⁸, which were comprised of necessary disciplines for a student to be specialized on a certain period and / or historical topic. Once the double degree was introduced, the number of such courses decreased by 50%, which opened the possibility of real specialization. Thus, there was a place for “optional courses (third and fourth years), as well as research internships in the fields (second and third years), and scientific circles, etc”¹⁹.

¹⁷ Examples of general courses: Ancient Universal History, Ancient Romanian History, Archaeology, Medieval Romanian History, Medieval Universal History, Modern History of Romania, Modern Universal History, Contemporary History of Romania, Contemporary Universal History. AFIUB, Fond Secretariat, Files 1970-1989, unnumbered.

¹⁸ Examples of special courses: Special course in Ancient Universal and Romanian History, Special course in Medieval Romanian and Universal History, Special course in Romanian and Universal History, Special course in Contemporary Romanian and Universal History, Historic Demography, Political Parties in Modern and Contemporary Romania, etc. AFIUB, Fond Secretariat, Files 1970-1989, unnumbered.

¹⁹ AFIUB, Fond Secretariat, Files 1975-1980, unnumbered.

Ideology courses²⁰ can also be found in educational plans, having a share on average of 10 to 15%, thus in the case of a double degree they would make up around half of all special courses.

Another important area of training history students, especially in the case of those who would become professors, was that of pedagogical practice²¹. Even if the share of hours allocated to this had diminished, the total amount allotted had remained a fairly high one²². Moreover, professional practice was also given much importance when it came to preparing future graduates, such as archaeological work, practice in museums, archives, research institutes, in Party related work, pioneer and school camps, as well as communist youth organizations²³.

The introduction of a double degree meant that philosophy courses became an important component of the general courses, which made up around a quarter of their total number, with most focusing on ideological issues. In this regard, specialization training future professors which also had "in the 1987/1988 school year Philosophy as a discipline for the second year, the volume of hours of this discipline was increased by one hour of course and one hour of seminar to also encompass the issue of Scientific-Materialism and Revolutionary Humanism Education. The discipline was named Philosophy. Scientific-Materialism and Revolutionary Humanism Education"²⁴.

Another important aspect for gaining the necessary competence to become good professionals was agricultural practices, which debuted at the beginning of the university year with two to four weeks of related work, which was supposed to offer students skills in: vegetables, fruit, grapes, potatoes, sugar bee, corn harvesting, as well as sorting and siloing of potatoes, sorting and conserving vegetables, etc. This type of education can be seen as a form of improving organized and political educative work. There was a period when the Faculty of History managed to

²⁰ Disciplines such as: Scientific Materialism (scientific and revolutionary humanism materialism), Political Economy, Political Philosophy and Party History.

²¹ In the 1980s, theoretically all graduates would become professors for at least a period of three years, as a result of repartition. However, there were special cases when a certain number of students would be exempt from this phase.

²² For example, during the 1980s a high number of pedagogical practice hours – 180 hours per year – third year and fourth. AFIUB, Fond Secretariat, Files 1980-1989, unnumbered.

²³ During the 1986/1987 university year there were 504 hours of professional and social political practice planned, as opposed to the early part of the decade when there were only 300 (years I – II). AFIUB. Fond Secretariat, Files 1986, unnumbered.

²⁴ AFIUB, Fond Secretariat, Files 1975-1989, unnumbered.

change agricultural work to archaeological practice, thanks to the dean's Gheorghe Ionita political connections.

By going through the already mentioned educational plans, students were supposed to become good professionals such as professors, researchers, and political activists. For the last category, competences were to be acquired over the span of courses as follows: "students acquire fundamental knowledge in history, philosophy, sociology, and psycho-pedagogy, knowledge with an applied character and the necessary practical skills, capabilities for critical analysis and interpretation of historical and socio-political literature, a combative and militant spirit. Their entire training is organized and occurs based on the materialistic dialectic and historical conception, on the principles of scientific socialism, on the creative spirit that defines the policies of the RCP for the edification of a multilateral developed and advanced socialist society towards communism"²⁵.

The introduction of the double-degree for the more efficient running of the educational process and the use of students in multiple fields eventually proved to be a bad one. The Party's own decisions would eventually reach this conclusion themselves. Thus, in the 1989 analysis was made at the level of the Central Committee, the Agitprop Section stated:

"- the introduction of a double degree has severely diminished the training possibilities of students, both in the field of history and of philosophy;

- none of the graduates of history philosophy was assigned in these years to teach philosophy;

- the share of history within history philosophy is under the requirements for the training of graduates needed for the teaching of History of Romania and Universal History, and the share of philosophy and other social sciences disciplines is small in comparison with their share at high-school level;

- the possibilities for specialization in dialectic and historical materialism and contemporary philosophical thinking have diminished, more so, there are traditional subjects in our historiography that are insufficiently studied"²⁶.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ ANIC, Fond CC al PCR, secția Agitație și Propagandă, Dosar 131/1989, f. 10-11.

Our analysis illustrates that the decision of introducing a double degree was an erroneous one and the manner in which the educational plans were devised was not capable of covering all competences the students were required to gain. Furthermore, the measure proved itself to be inefficient, since none of the graduates of history philosophy ever ended up teaching philosophy in high schools. The proposal coming after this analysis referred to the fact that "the necessary number of cadres cannot be trained through a double degree in four years of study, in these conditions it is necessary that in the future the training of professors should be in one degree of history"²⁷.

The transformations imposed on history throughout the communist period have led to its transformation into an ideological field. From the History Handbook of Roller to the history supervised by Mircea Musat and Ion Ardeleanu and its loyalty towards Nicolae Ceausescu's cult of personality, the better part of the research methodology and knowledge gained during the communist period has been erased. This is reflected at the level of university programmes, which served towards the creation of a new generation of historians and professors, which were supposed to transmit or research history at a different level. The creation of the double degree at the University of Bucharest proves to be a totally flawed decision. Despite the presence of some highly respectable and well-trained professors, in the end they were unable to change this direction, which ultimately failed to bring the expected results, namely, the professionalization of history.

All these changes undergone by study programmes and Romanian historiography are very well synthesized by professor Mihail Berza in 1976:

"Through the historical context, which I will not analyse now, for a quarter of a century, Romanian historiography has evolved outside the University. Today, after integration, which again I will not judge, the University must once more take back its place as the motor of historiographical development and efforts in this sense are not lacking. There has been much discussion about the modernization of Romanian historical education. However, how can we have a true modernization, not in the sense of bringing each professor up to date, not even in the sense of a new perspective in existing courses, but in that of a broader opening towards new historical disciplines, towards those that today

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

renew our historical understanding, with a handful of students, divided in as many groups as there are historic periods, to make place for all and not die of inanition? Without students there is no renewal and without developing historical education in secondary education within the necessary limits, to absorb graduates, you cannot have students. The biggest loss would be to society, but the University and Romanian historical research would also lose²⁸”.

²⁸ Professor Mihai Berza. The quote is from a conference entitled The educational value of history and its place in teaching, conference held in March 1976 at the Academy of Social and Political Sciences of RSR. Andrei Pippidi, *M. Berza - Pentru o istorie a vechii culturi românești*, București, Editura Eminescu, 1985, p. XI-XII).