

5.9. Romania

From Traditional to European

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5.9.1. Characteristics of the country

Romania is situated in South-Eastern Europe. Its total area of 238,391 km² ranks 9th in the European Union, and its population of 20,121,641 (Census 2011) makes it the 7th largest country of the European Union. Romania gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1877 as the United Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, and expanded its territory in 1918 after the integration of Transylvania. The country joined the European Union as recently as 2007, and is not yet a member of the Eurozone.

Until 1989, Romania was a Socialist republic, under the rule of the Romanian Communist Party which enforced a totalitarian regime. After the Romanian Revolution in December 1989, Romania expressed its willingness to introduce liberal democracy again. Its fundamental law now defines the country as a 'state of law, democratic and social' (*Constitution of Romania*, 2003, Art. 3). Modern Romania can be categorised as a semi-presidential republic, in which both the president and the government (directed by a prime minister) hold executive power. Each legislature brings several political parties to the parliament, with the government being appointed by the president from the parliamentary majority.

According to the 2011 census, Romania is mostly inhabited by Romanians (88.9%), with significant minorities of Hungarians (6.5%) and Roma (3.3%). The vast majority of citizens are Christian Orthodox (81%), other denominations being Roman Catholic (4.3%) and the Reformed (3%). Besides Christians, other religious groups include 64,000 Muslims (0.31%) and 3,519 Jewish (0.017%). Romania is perhaps one of the most religious countries of the European Union, with a striking 99% of the population declaring themselves as believers, as opposed to only 39,660 atheists (0.19%).

5.9.2. Education system and policy

The education system of Romania follows the 2011 *National Education Law*. Pre-university education consists of 10 years of compulsory education and 2 years of non-compulsory education (which adds up to 12 years), plus a preparatory year before entering the 1st year. It is divided into primary education (prep year and years 1 to 4, ages 6-10), lower secondary education (years 5 to 8, ages 10-14) and upper secondary education (years 9 and 10 compulsory and years 11 and 12 non-compulsory, ages 14-18). The system is centralised with a curriculum for compulsory disciplines approved by the Ministry of Education. However, schools have the liberty to choose optional disciplines, either from a list proposed by the Ministry, or from disciplines proposed by teachers which have to be approved by the Ministry. The Ministry monitors activities in schools through a network of county inspectorates. 99% of the students attend public schools (OECD, 2014), although there is an increase in private education over the last years. Private schools have to follow the Ministry curricula as well, since they must be accredited by it in order to function. Public schools are financed by the local council from the state budget. The percentage of students who skip classes or days of school in Romania is one of the highest amongst the countries participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA): 58%, rank 5/64 (OECD, 2014).

The education ideal in Romania consists in 'developing a free, integral and harmonious human individuality, forming an autonomous personality and assuming a system of values that are necessary for personal fulfilment and development, for the development of an entrepreneurial spirit, for active citizenship participation in the society, for social inclusion and for being integrated into the labour market' (*National Education Law, 2011, Art. 2 (3)*). Despite this ideal, Romania showed poor results in the PISA evaluation of 2012 (OECD, 2014): in mathematics an average of 445 points (rank 45/65), in science an average of 439 points (rank 49/65), and in reading an average of 438 points (rank 50/65). The Ministry of Education intended to remediate this status by introducing PISA-type evaluation in general education (primary and secondary level, in the 2nd, 4th and 6th years) since 2014. Romania is not part of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS).

5.9.3. Policy of Teaching Common Values/Citizenship Education

The current Romanian education system gives rather consistent attention to TCV. For instance, the *Framework Structure for lower secondary education* that has been adopted in 2016 and which will be enforced beginning 2017, increases the number of hours dedicated to the curricular area *Human and Society* from 3-7 hours a week up to 5-8 hours a week. The area includes history (1-2 hours/week), geography (1-2 hours/week), religion (1 hour/week), social education (1 hour/week) and optional disciplines, most of them TCV-related (0-2 hours/week). This curricular area still has less hours dedicated to it than areas such as language and communication (8-10 hours/week) or mathematics and natural sciences (5-11 hours/week), but more hours than certain other areas such as arts, physical and health education, technologies, counselling and orientation (2-4 hours/week each).

The Romanian education system contains a number of compulsory disciplines directly related to TCV: civic education (2 years in primary education, ages 8-10, 1 hour/week) and civic culture (2 years in lower secondary education, ages 12-14, 1 hour/week). There is no compulsory discipline on social education at upper secondary level (ages 14-18), as common values are supposed to be taught in disciplines such as sociology, philosophy and social studies (1 year each in upper secondary education). The Framework Structure for lower secondary education (ages 10-14) contains one compulsory social education discipline (1 hour/week) for each year: critical thinking and children's rights, intercultural education, education for democratic citizenship, and economic and financial education. Each discipline comes with approved multiple-choice textbooks.

TCV can also be found in contents of other compulsory disciplines, such as history, Romanian language and literature and foreign languages. The Ministry also proposes a number of optional disciplines related to TCV in upper secondary education, such as civic education, mass-media competences, human rights, intercultural education, education for democracy, institutions of the European Union, and international humanitarian law. Most of these optional disciplines also have textbooks. Some of these disciplines were introduced at the initiative of NGOs, which also supply materials and trainings for teachers.

The Ministry also encourages schools to develop extracurricular activities in partnership with state institutions (e.g. *Project citizen*) and NGOs (e.g. debates on topics like: *Is civicism optional?* developed by the Association for the Promotion of Culture and Civic Responsibility). NGOs are incidentally also consulted by the Ministry of Education in relation to developments in TCV policy and practice.

One of the most impactful public debates concerning the role of TCV in Romanian school curricula is also the most recent one (2016) on the change of the Framework Structure for education at the lower secondary level. Some experts proposed a larger discipline titled

Education for Society that includes elements of history, citizenship education, financial education, and education about the European Union. This proposal was met with considerable opposition from a large part of society, which was intensely dissatisfied with the categorical disappearance of the discipline history and the incoherence of this new discipline. In the end, the Framework approved by the Ministry kept both history and social education as distinct compulsory disciplines for each of the four years of study.

Another recent debate concerned the optional status of the discipline religion. Since the decision of the Constitutional Court in 2015, the study of religion can only be facilitated following a request from the students' parents (or the students themselves if they are 18 years or older). After the centralisation of such requests, over 90% of the parents and students chose to continue the study of religion in schools.

Yet another prevalent debate concerns the study of diversity in sexual orientation, advocated by the LGBT community. However, there is no official response from the Ministry of Education on this subject yet. Recently (2016), a petition supported by most religious communities of Romania to change Art. 48 of the Constitution in order to define 'family' as 'being based on the freely consented matrimony between a man and a woman' (as opposed to 'spouses') gathered 3 million signatures.

5.9.4. Practice of Teaching Common Values

In order to understand the relationship between policy and practice, interviews were held with several actors who are part of the process of TCV. This section outlines their contributions to this discussion.

Table 5.9: Study participants Romania

OCCUPATION	SUBJECT OF EXPERTISE/SUBJECT TAUGHT	CITY SIZE DESCRIPTION
Policymaker	Director, Ministry of Education	Large
NGO expert	Expert in Education at the Policy Centre for Roma and Minorities	Large
Teacher 1	Geography and Civic Culture teacher, Public and Private School	Large
Teacher 2	History and Civic Culture teacher, Public and Private School	Large
Teacher 3	History and Civic Culture teacher, Public School	Large
Teacher 4	History and Civic Culture teacher, Public School	Small

Until recently, civic culture has been considered a secondary discipline in teaching practice (Colceru, 2014), since it is not part of the national assessment. This aspect was observed by a civic culture teacher:

Civic culture and civic education should be introduced in all classes, at all levels because, somehow, civic culture is still viewed as a Cinderella of the school and lessons are still perceived as a time for entertainment. [Teacher 1]

Nevertheless, other disciplines that touch on TCV issues, such as history, geography or philosophy, are given larger importance, as they are subjects that are part of the national exams (Baccalaureate) at the end of the 12th year.

Within TCV contents, democracy-related issues are more visible than tolerance-related ones. A representative of the Policy Centre for Roma and Minorities, an NGO focusing on anti-discrimination, remarked the following on this situation:

Regarding tolerance towards different cultural groups, I know that, last time I checked, there was a page in the history textbook that presented all of it, an extremely concise discussion about every ethnicity in Romania. [NGO expert]

Romania has adopted the European frame of reference, as expressed in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, which recommends eight key competences, including social and civic competences (Bercea, 2010). The current curriculum includes a series of methodological suggestions that point out the necessity of active participatory learning. The methods used to develop competence-based education are diverse, including debates, brainstorming, learning through discovery, team projects, portfolios, etc. Teaching practice does show an increase in the use of these methods, despite the fact that a large part of the classwork remains dedicated to classical methods such as presentation, description, and demonstration.

Being challenged by the school curriculum, teachers use all kinds of innovative methods in order to make the subjects more accessible to students. One example of good practice came from a history teacher who created an optional discipline called The History of Romanian Theatre and obtained some good feedback from her students:

This course could underline personal development of the individual, as well as prove that for Romanians it didn't matter that plays were written by the French, English, Germans or any others as long as they appealed to the greater public. Through dramatisation, it creates life situations for students to get acquainted to. [Teacher 3]

Another example of good practice came from extracurricular activities developed by teachers in order to increase tolerance for and information about diverse cultural groups, such as guided tours of city sights relevant to ethnic and religious minorities:

I emphasise role play, the way you can feel discriminated. In situations I encounter tolerance I try to use empathy in the approach of history, the way students would feel not as oppressors but as the oppressed. [Teacher 2]

Although the issue of school culture is not much endorsed in the curriculum, it is encouraged at the practice level (Student's Status, 2016). At the level of secondary education, student representatives participate in some of the issues debated in the school government bodies, playing a consultative role in issues such as rules, extracurricular activities, the school action plan, optional lessons, acquisition of educational materials, expulsions, or teaching content, and an informative role in issues such as budget and assessment criteria (Eurydice, 2012).

The issue of discrimination against national minorities is still on the public agenda, and the Ministry has expressed its willingness to curtail it. A part of the society criticised the positive discrimination policy which allows Roma students to be integrated into classes despite their lower average in national exams. This issue was also brought up by the interviewed NGO representative:

Special places for Roma people are a good thing, but they don't give them enough chances to recover the gap. On the other hand, positive discrimination only targets Roma people; it would be more useful to target poor people. If you belong to the Roma community and you have money you have the resources to get into a good high school; but if you are poor, you have a problem getting there. [NGO expert]

5.9.5. Support by government policy, constraints and possibilities

Most teachers acknowledge the contribution of the Ministry of Education, but mention that there is still room for improvement. As one teacher puts it:

Although there have been some activities, I consider that this is not enough, there should be a much greater involvement of the government, at the level of the Ministry of Education in this area. [Teacher 2]

The problem increases as we step outside Bucharest, into rural areas:

Although we are nearby Bucharest, because of the isolation of these rural or even urban places, we cannot develop projects related to TCV. [Teacher 4]

All the aforementioned policies are already present in the education system and are accompanied by the existence of official documents (laws, methodologies, curricula). The challenge is to enforce these new rules in teaching practice. Further, the common values should also be assumed by members of the school community (teachers, students and parents) and this is a process that will take a considerable amount of time, according to the Ministry officials:

It is not enough only to create the curriculum. What is important is that these values are assumed and shared as to become standards for the whole community. It is true that we have examples of good practice in these matters, but there are also situations in which things are not as they are supposed to be. [Policymaker]

On the other hand, there are sometimes problems concerning the financing of projects and policies: financing for better conditions in schools (e.g. facilities for disabled students) which is a task for the local council; financing for programmes on curricular and extracurricular activities (e.g. field trips to institutions) which is a task for the Ministry of Education and for local communities; the appropriate absorption of European Union funds delineated to the education system which is a task for the Romanian Government.

5.9.6. Conclusion, discussion and recommendations

Teaching European common values is a priority of education policies in Romania, as shown by the number of official documents that refer to it. However, the task proves to be particularly difficult, for a number of reasons. One of these reasons is the lack of coherence of education policies due to the numerous education reforms.

Another reason is the historical evolution of the country. In recent history, Romania has been more or less isolated from other spaces of culture, including Western Europe. A large number of the student population reveals nostalgia for the ancient regime. In a 2010 survey, an average of 38% upper secondary level students considered the Communist period to be better than the present (Fundatia Soros România, 2010).

Certain communities that define themselves as 'defenders of traditions' feel that these common values are imposed by the European Union on Romania, and show an attitude of dismissal, mostly towards subjects relating to tolerance and European integration. For instance, three quarters (75%) of high-school students reported that they would not accept homosexuals as neighbours, two-thirds (66%) reported they would not be neighbours with Roma people or people suffering from AIDS, 44% with Muslims, 35% with Hungarians and 34% with Jews (Fundatia Soros România, 2010).

The Ministry of Education intends to continue enforcing the changes that have already been initiated with regard to the introduction of TCV policies in the pre-university system of education. Till recently, TCV policies have mainly focused on the domain of democracy. The changes began when the Ministry started working additionally on topics relating to

tolerance (i.e. an inclusive society) and international orientation (i.e. European and global issues). On the curricular level, the adoption of the new Framework Structure for education at the lower secondary level has to be accompanied by new curricula for all the disciplines as well as new textbooks. The Ministry also intends to change the Framework Structure for education at the upper secondary level, which could mean a better enforcement of TCV in the curriculum.

Taking into account the aforementioned issues, given below are some recommendations to optimise the practice of TCV in Romania:

- Continuity at the level of implementing TCV-related policies. This need for continuity is shared by officials in the Ministry as well as the beneficiaries of the education process (i.e. students, parents, and teachers).
- An increase in the number of hours dedicated to TCV (perhaps even as far as making civic education compulsory in upper secondary education) relative to other disciplines, would improve the degree of assimilation of these values by the student population.
- A better collaboration between the Ministry of Education and NGOs will optimise the process of teaching common values. This collaboration should extend, besides selective projects, to creating platforms for teacher education.
- Learning from examples of good practice offered by other national systems of education from countries in the European Union. The continuation of European mobility programmes such as Erasmus, Comenius, and Leonardo could contribute to this sharing of experiences that could help Romanian teachers and students to acquire common values.
- Financing of programmes and projects dedicated to TCV by the Romanian Government and by the European Union will contribute to their success.
- Reduction in the amount of paperwork that has to be completed in order to access European funding and support will increase the number of programmes and projects implemented in the Romanian education system and their rate of success.

5.9.7. References

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