

From Performance Sports to Sports for All: Romania 1945-1965. Legal Aspects

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Abstract: *The establishment of the communist regime in Romania in 1945 marked the beginning of a series of profound transformations in the Romanian political and social life. These changes also affected the field of sports activities, which were, at the time, at the initial point of their institutional organization. Our research aims at analyzing, in a critical manner, the main legislative regulations regarding sports life implemented between 1945-1965. Their main goal was to promote the benefits of practicing physical activities regularly, not only by performance sportsmen, but also by the majority of the population. This initiative matched the international tendency commonly called "sports for all", advertised by the founding-father of modern Olympic games – Pierre de Coubertin. The laws issued by the communist authorities stipulated the establishment of national institutions and organizations in charge with the situation of the Romanian sports field, with the financial aspects requested by such endeavor and with the funding provided by the government. Unfortunately, many of the objectives formulated in these laws were left only in their initial form or were completed much later than initially intended.*

Key words: *performance sports, mass sport, communist regime, Romania.*

Introduction

The present study aims to briefly present the main legal regulations directly related to physical activities and sports that were promoted in Romania by the Communist authorities between 1945 and 1965. The impact of these decisions upon the future development of the Romanian sport movement was highly important, since they provided the institutional and logistic mainframe, mandatory in order to obtain better performances abroad. At the same time, through sports practices, the Communist Party in power tried to control and to remove the ancient democratic values inherent to the Romanian people. The aggressive promotion of practicing mass sports in Romania, including by the means of the legal regulations further presented, targeted the alignment of the physical activities already popular here with the Russian norm, which needed to be obeyed by the letter. Due to a happy coincidence, in the Western Europe, at the time, was most famous the "Sports for All" slogan, notion envisioned at the end of the XIXth century by Baron Pierre de Coubertain (the forefather of the modern Olympic Games), which also consisted in constantly promoting physical exercises both within the common people, and the performance sportsmen as well (MacAloon, 1981).

General Political Framework

In the afternoon of 23 August 1944, King Mihai of Romania, with the agreement of all the political parties in the country, ordered the arrest of Marshal Ion Antonescu, Romania's exit from the Axis and the war against the United Nations, parallel to the partial reinstatement of the 1923 Constitution. Thus, 23 August became a crucial moment in Romanian national history, since it marked, on one hand, Romania's exit from the II-nd World War, and on the other hand the beginning of the establishment of the Communist regime. As a consequence of this very day, the communists already existing in the country, with the help of the Red Army based in Romania (which behaved as an occupational army), imposed their presence in all state institutions, and were co-opted to govern the country since the first two Governments after 23 August, those led by Generals Sănătescu and Rădescu. At the end of 1946, Romania was the last country in South-Eastern Europe ruled by a monarch, a symbol of the non-communist world, who was also very highly regarded by the people. On 30 September 1947, under the Soviet pressure, King Mihai was forced to step down his throne

and go into exile, while the country was proclaimed People's Republic (Hitchins, 2004). The new status quo was reaffirmed in April 1948, when was adopted the first Constitution of the now-Communist Romania. The Communist Party remained the sole leading power in the state, by annihilating political pluralism and abolishing the monarchy; the 1952 and 1965 Constitutions strengthened, legally speaking, the existence of this one-party political system (Deletant, 1997). The most important Romanian political figure from 1945 to 1965 was Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the leader of the Romanian Workers' Party (Deletant, 2001). From 1948 to 1965, the Romanian communists were completely dominated by the Soviets, who also imposed the internal structure, the political message, and also their action pattern for imposing and consolidating their power. In 1958, after the Red Army retreated, leaving behind the Romanian territory, the party self-constructed a new legitimacy, based on a gradual promotion of the national Communism, freed from the Russian influence. The independence of the Romanian Workers' Party from Moscow was underlined by the *April 1964 Declaration*, which also had the role of increasing the popular support towards the Communist regime (Niculescu-Mizil, 1997). Nevertheless, the newly-embraced political statement did not mark the renouncement from the Stalinist governing system, based on repression and the violation of the fundamental human rights.

A New Vision upon Physical Activities and Performance Sports

The profound changes brought by the implementation of the Communist regime and the abolition of all democratic elements deeply influenced the field of physical education and sports, too. Although it had no apparent connections with politics, they have been used by the Communist authorities as a propaganda device meant to advertise the benefits of Socialism, and also as an instrument for controlling the masses. Romanian Communists correctly identified the fact that sportsmen could become their best ambassadors abroad, bringing along an image capital not be neglected.

Similarly to other domains, all the advances realized during the previous regimes were ignored, and was made a clear separation from the democratic practices, doubled by a complete submission to socialist ideology. Romanian sport had to be adjusted in order to perfectly fit the Soviet pattern, impossible to be left aside.

According to official statements, the problem raised by physical culture and sports became a state issue. The Communist authorities considered physical education as an essential part of the more general program destined to educate the working people, a type of education based on the Communist principles. For the multilateral progress of the Communist people, sports and physical education were highly important. The role played by physical education within the communist education has often been underlined by the Marxist-Leninist classics: Karl Marx considered that educating the young generation meant "first of all, the education of the mind, secondly the physical education and thirdly technical training" (Marx, 1962). Mind and body had to be equally developed, in order to create a "new type of man", more robust and competitive (Boia, 2000).

The image Communists created about the sports life in Romania before 1945 was totally negative. According to them, during the previous regime, the accent fell exclusively upon performance sports, while mass sports were neglected, for the profit of the higher social classes. According to the Marxist-Leninist ideology, the access of common people to physical activities and sports was quite reduced. Moreover, the material basis requested by the practice of sports was also limited; after the end of World War II, the few existing sport halls and fields were in ruins, and needed huge investments to be put back in use. The number of professional trainers to guide the beginners and amateurs was also very low, reported to number of those who might have practiced physical activities, if conditions would improve. During the democratic regime, sport was characteristic for the bourgeoisie and the wealthy gentry. Inactive, bored, obese, their representatives practiced games of fortune, and also those sports deemed to be 'noble', like fencing, tennis, and racing. In a capitalist society, sport was considered a means to acquire wealth, a profitable business. The most expedient

sport, financially speaking were boxing and football, very popular among the people, while others were virtually unknown (Societatea pentru răspândirea științei și culturii, 1953).

These depictions of how physical education and sports were before the instauration of the Communist regime is opposed to the other, quite idyllic, where the working class can freely practice physical activities, due to the efforts of the Communist authorities. After 1945, it was widely promoted the practice of mass sports, seen as an efficient pro-communist and anti-capitalist propaganda. Living by its slogan, 'All sports for the people', the new movement advertising physical culture and sports spread throughout the country, reaching people belonging to all social classes. The practice of mass sport by the common people and not only by performance sportsmen also influenced the general health, according to the Communist authorities. Physical activities, if practiced periodically, could contribute to preserving the health of the working people, and also to preparing them for fulfilling their social functions (Fărcaș, 1984).

Nevertheless, the support given to mass sports against performance sports did not automatically lead to extraordinary results in the international competitions. Mass sports generated uniformity, mediocrity, while performance sports brought worldwide fame. Similarly to other Communist countries, in Romania too was attempted a complete fusion between performance sports and mass sports. This is why, under the cover of the sportive associations controlled by various institutions of education, state companies or production units were organized preparation centers for performance sportsmen, who were the beneficiaries of modern facilities and training conditions. Officially, these athletes were the employees of the respective factories/institutions, without really working there, since their sole role was that of preparing for various sport competitions.

In order to spread mass sports throughout the entire country in a relatively short period of time, the Communist authorities adopted a series of legislative regulations, which stipulated the foundation of specialized structures to manage sports at the national level.

Legal Regulations Regarding Sport and Sport Activities Issued from 1945 to 1965

The first legal regulation adopted by the Communist authorities in what concerns the development of physical culture and sports according to socialist principles, was Law No 135 of 9 March 1946, which stated that the only organization able to lead the mass and performance sports movement was Popular Sport Organization (PSO). This organization was founded by communists on 15 December 1944 and received the support of the various unions and youth organizations, in order to promote sports within the working masses from both rural and urban areas. Until 7 March 1946, PSO functioned simultaneously with the Union of the Sports Federations from Romania (USFR), which represented the ancient sports federations, sport associations and bourgeois clubs, unaltered by communist ideas. Since 7 March, USFR was abolished by the Communist authorities, while PSO assumed all its attributions and prerogatives.

Law No 135 of 9 March 1946 was structured in four parts. The first one, entitled "General Regulations", stipulated the foundation of the Popular Sport Organization, which "will function by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers". PSO was declared the only institution legally invested to lead and control all sports resorts and federations, both central and regional, from the sportive, educative, technical, administrative and financial point of view" ("Monitorul Oficial", 1946).

The main purpose behind founding PSO was the creation of auspicious conditions for "promoting by all means sports, physical education and tourism among the masses, by creating the most favorable conditions for it", followed by a new classification of the Romanian sports federations, which also received "functional and financial directives". Financially, the law stipulated that "the state will support PSO and all the sport manifestations organized by PSO through various subventions, tax exemption, tax waivers" ("Monitorul Oficial", 1946).

Structurally, the law postulated that PSO had to own five different central resorts, each one targeting a specific social class/group - union, university, school, army and countryside -, with its own internal regulations

and set of instructions. Moreover, specialized sports federations were to be founded (one for each sports branch), which also needed to enroll to PSO in order to function legally. This organization was led by central organs, such as: the General Assembly, the Central Committee, the Consulting Council, the Permanent Executive Office, the Central Resorts, the Committees of the various Federations; their functioning was pre-established by internal regulations ("Monitorul Oficial", 1946).

A special chapter from the third part of the law regarded the PSO budget, which could be secured by: a) subventions allocated from department budgets; b) 5% from the total gains from horse racing; c) 5% from the income resulting from all shows, excepting philanthropy galas; d) federation incomes, resulting from individual demonstrative shows; e) taxes and contributions; f) individual and random incomes. ("Monitorul Oficial", 1946)

The financial basis for founding PSO was ensured by the state. PSO was also provided, for free, with all stadiums, sport fields, swimming pools, and the respective installations. The urban communities were forced to build at least one stadium or a sport field with tribunes, while the municipalities were also requested to build a swimming pool "useable in winter, too". The expenses imposed by building these edifices were covered by contracting grants guaranteed by the state, which were then covered by allocating the corresponding amount of money to the current budgets.

According to the Communist chronology, the period between 7 March 1946 and 9 August 1949 represented a transition stage in Romanian sports, from the ancient bourgeois forms of organization to the new ones, characteristic to the "popular democracy". The first institutionalized form of mass control through sport, namely PSO, functioned until 1949, and it took various radical and unpopular decisions, meant to enlist Romanian sports within the organizational and functional norms of its Soviet counterpart. The new sports movement mobilized a very large number of young people, by organizing various sports competitions, such as: Youth Union Cup, People's Ski Championship, Working Youth Cup, "Let's Meet 1 May" cross, People's Chess Championship etc (Postolache, 1975).

In order to finance the increasing number of sport competitions throughout the country, it was adopted Decision No 640 on the constitution of the "Cultural and Sportive" fund, issued on 24 June 1949 and published in the Official Gazette No 40 on 25 June 1949. This law stipulated that "all State companies, all types of cooperative farms, the State agricultural households, and also all the private companies are compelled to monthly maintain and support the respective unions, beginning with 1 January 1949, an amount of money equal to 1% of the total net wages paid to the workers." These sums were to be deposited to the State Bank in each union's account, constituting the "Cultural and Sportive" fund, destined to ensure a better development to unions' cultural and sportive activities. ("Buletinul Oficial", 1949)

On 26 June 1949, the Political Office of the Central Committee of the Working Party issued a "Decision upon the continuous stimulation and development of physical culture and sport", leading the sportive movement in Romania on a new stage of its Socialist evolution. This document argued the necessity to replace PSO with the Committee for Physical Culture and Sport (CPCS). Moreover, attending classes of Physical Education became compulsory at all school levels, in such institutions, and it needed to be paralleled by a sustained ideological training, for both teachers and sportsmen.

Decree No 329 in 6 August 1949 stated the foundation of the Committee for Physical Culture and Sport that was supposed to function by the Council of Ministers, following a series of strict rules. Among the main responsibilities of this institution, we should mention:

- a) To decide the norms and take the necessary measures for developing physical culture and sport, (...) in order to spread them (...) among the working class, countrymen and students;
- b) To lead and control the activity of all the organizations focused on physical culture and sport;
- c) To coordinate the activity of mass organizations and public institutions related to physical culture and sport;
- d) To study, assess and apply, according to scientific research, "following into the footsteps and using the vast experience of the Soviet sport", new teaching and practicing methods for physical culture

and sport, for using the most advanced sports techniques and “realizing an advanced physical culture”;

- e) In collaboration with the Ministry of Public Education, it establishes the physical culture and sport programs and controls their implementation in all education areas, at all levels;
- f) Organizes, tutors and controls the sportive technical education at all levels, ensuring the recruitment, training and rational use of all the necessary staff to physical culture and sport, and also the ideological growth of the teaching members and top sportsmen;
- g) To stimulate and supervise the perpetual search for new sportsmen within the youth, and to carefully take care of their training, in order to successfully compete in those competitions;
- h) To help increase the number of sports fields, sports installations and set-ups, to establish the norms for their building, to control and coordinate their use;
- i) To establish the quantity and quality of all sportive equipment needed to attain the goal defined by the Committee; to present those for examination before the State Planning Commission and for abrogation to the Council of Ministers; to supervise the rational production and dissipation of all the sports materials and equipment received;
- j) To guide the sports media, to edit books, booklets, guides, bulletins and other publications regarding issues on physical culture and sports; to give its agreement upon the publications in the same field, issued by other organizations and institutions;
- k) To organize, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the medical assistance requested by the sportsmen;
- l) To confer sports medals for activities related to physical culture and sports and to establish the qualification attributed to each sportsmen and all-levels instructors;
- m) To establish and maintain sports relationships with the outside world, and to represent, through its messengers, the interests (...) in what concerns sports, in the specialized international forums and conferences. (Nicu et al., 2002)

The law also stipulated that CPCS's leading committee comprised one president and four vice-presidents, nominated by the Council of Ministers, and twelve to eighteen members, elected by the same state institution, at the proposal of the President of the Committee. By all County People's Councils functioned County CPCS Committees, and delegates for Physical Education and Sports acted by all People's Councils, too.

When carefully analyzing the main regulations implemented by this law, it is obvious that CPCS's role was to supervise the Romanian sports movement, which needed to coordinate with the politics of the Communist Party in power. In other words, sport was regarded as a means to control the masses, since all practitioners also received an ideological Socialistic indoctrination, both from the sportsmen and from those who trained them. An important role in attracting the youth - from both urban and rural environments - had the Young Workers' Union, the newest wing of the Romanian Workers' Party.

An important aspect of this law, which was also put to practice, regarded the arrangement, maintenance, repairing or construction of sport centers, stadiums, parks, sport fields etc. These were considered essential to the practice of sport activities, since, at the end of the IInd World War, Romania had only a few functioning sport bases. This type of infrastructure was not considered a priority in a country where the traces of war were still visible, and whose economy nearly collapsed. The Communist authorities spent, from 1945 to 1965, important amounts of money on constructing or on repairing modern sport bases, sometimes to the prejudice of other investments. The most impressive realization of this period is, undoubtedly, the Culture and Sport Park of Bucharest, built in 1953, which had, at its core, “23 August” Stadium, a mammoth comprising more than 60.000 places.

On 2 July 1957, the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party and the Council of Ministers of People's Republic of Romania decided to reorganize the movement for physical culture and sports, and to found a new organization for managing it – the Union for Physical Culture and Sport (UPCS).

The emergence of this new advisory and controlling organ was preceded by a thorough analysis of the CPCS activity, from 1949 to 1957. It was underlined the existence of various negative aspects, among which the more important were: the outdated system of organization, with parallel leading centers, from top to the bottom (futile bureaucracy), and the neglect towards the mass aspects of physical education, favoring an excessive concern with performing sports; all these justified somehow the dissolution of CPCS.

Beginning with 2 July 1957, it was decided to gradually cease the activity of CPCS, and to create a large popular organization, based on the principles of democratic centralism, namely the Union for Physical Culture and Sport (UPCS); it also led, advised and managed all activities related to sport and physical culture.

The main provisions of this legal regulation were the following:

- to found sport collectivities, meant to focus the organization of mass sports and mass physical culture activities at the workplace (in factories, artisanal cooperative centers, schools, Car and Tractor Stations, state farms and cultural centers). Within all these institutions were intended to function sport divisions, which would participated to local, regional and national competitions;
- to found sport clubs – functioning as judicial persons – destined to performance sports. These could be: union, student, military, rural etc. clubs, meant to serve a certain territory, or to function by big factories;
- student competitive activities developed during school, national or youth championships (“Spartachiade”); the sport activities involving children or pioneers were controlled by the young pioneer organizations already functioning within schools, pioneer palaces or clubs, based on a curricula elaborated by the Ministry of Education and Culture, UTM etc.;
- The Central Committees, one for each sport, went back to their previous name, as sport federations; moreover: “The sport federation is a judicial person, the highest technical forum of a specific sport branch”. The federations will concentrate their activity on working with a large number of volunteers, active within all colleges and committees, with only a few workers actually on their payroll;
- The Romanian Olympic Committee (ROC) was intended to function under the same conditions as CPCS; it was founded the Association for “Popular Tourism”, destined to the development of tourist activities and excursions.

Similarly to the previous laws, special attention is given to the way in which sport activities were financed. The solution at hand was a price reduction for all sport equipment; furthermore, the Ministry of Finance had to act in order to: diminish import taxes, and reduce the taxes on sport events organized by UPCS or its divisions. The amount of money spent on organizing the sport clubs and on making them functional came from the contributions of sport collectivities, from selling tickets to the important sport events etc.

Another aspect of this law worth mentioning is the decision regarding performance sport. If previously it has been chastised and considered a bourgeois heritage, this particular law can be considered its public rehabilitation. The Communist authorities realized that mass sport does not bring international acknowledgement and prestige, since remarkable results can only be the offspring of performance sport.

It would be unfair to consider these laws as bad or unfortunate only because they were introduced by the Communist authorities, so unpopular nowadays. They also had their good parts, which are constantly ignored. A positive aspect was the compelling need to develop the infrastructure, for all Romanian citizens to be able to practice sports in the best conditions possible. The building of sport fields, training camps, stadiums, parks, was a good thing, given the fact that the war had already destroyed many of the constructions destined to relaxation and sport activities. Their effort to attract children and to enlarge the selection base for performance sport made possible, during the Communist regime, for the Romanian sportsmen to have remarkable results in international competitions, accomplishment unequalled after 1989.

The Communist authorities' main mistake was their intention to use sport as a way to advertise the qualities and benefits of the socialist ideology and lifestyle.

The new law designed an institutional and administrative Romanian framework for practicing sports, by stipulating clear objectives, attributions and resources, which, in turns, led to a better sportsmen selection and training for international competitions. Nevertheless, the remarkable results obtained by the Romanian athletes will only occur after 1965, when all the regulations destined to sustain and promote sport will be fully implemented and will have the opportunity of proving their efficiency.

The best Olympic results from 1945 to 1965 can be found in the following grid (Postolache, 1979):

| Year | Location | Gold Medals | Silver Medals | Bronze Medals |
|------|-----------|---|---|---|
| 1952 | Helsinki | Sarbu Iosif - small caliber rifle 40 shots (target shooting) | Tita Vasile - middleweight, 75 kg (boxing) | Fiat Gheorghe - super featherweight, 60 kg (boxing) |
| | | | | Lichiardopol Gheorghe - speed pistol shooting male (target shooting) |
| 1956 | Melbourne | Rotman Leon - C-1 1000 m male (kayak-canoe) | Negrea Gheorghe - light heavyweight, 81 kg (boxing) | Lichiardopol Gheorghe - speed pistol shooting male (target shooting) |
| | | Rotman Leon - C-1 10.000 m male (kayak-canoe) | Dobrescu Mircea - flyweight, 51 kg (box) | Dumitrescu Constantin - light welterweight, 63,5 kg (boxing) |
| | | Linca Nicolae - light middleweight, 69 kg (boxing) | Szabo Orban Olga - foil individual female (fencing) | Horvath Francisc - greek-roman 57 kg (wrestling) |
| | | Petrescu Stefan - speed pistol shooting male (target shooting) | | Leustean Elena - floor exercise female (gymnastics) |
| | | C-2 1000 m male (kayak-canoe) Alexe Dumitru Ismailciuc Simion | | Female team (gymnastics) Leustean Elena Fodor Dobrovolschi Elena Hurmuzachi Georgeta Iovan Sonia Sacalici Elena Vatasoiu Emilia |
| 1960 | Roma | Parvulescu Dumitru - greek-roman, 52 kg (wrestling) | Cernea Ion - greek-roman, 57 kg (wrestling) | Manoliu Lia - discus throw female (athletics) |
| | | Balas Iolanda - high jump female (athletics) | | Rotman Leon - C-1 1000 m male (kayak-canoe) |
| | | Dumitrescu Ion - metal plates (target shooting) | | Taranu Ion - greek-roman, 73 kg (wrestling) |
| | | | | Vicol Maria - foil individual female (fencing) |
| | | | | Monea Ion - middleweight, 75 kg (boxing) |
| | | | | Female team (gymnastics) Leustean Elena Iovan Sonia Poreceanu Schlandt Utta Ionescu Anastasia Lita Emilia Niculescu Elena |
| 1964 | Tokyo | Balas Iolanda - high jump female (athletics) | Igorov Andrei - C-1 1000 m male (kayak-canoe) | Manoliu Lia - discus throw female (athletics) |
| | | Penes Mihaela - javelin female (athletics) | Bularca Valeriu - greek-roman, 70 kg (wrestling) | Parvulescu Dumitru - greek-roman, 52 kg (wrestling) |
| | | | Tripsa Ion - speed pistol shooting male (target shooting) | Cernea Ion - greek-roman, 57 kg (wrestling) |

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|--|--|--|--|---|
| | | | <u>Lauer Hilde</u> - K 1 - 1.000 m female (kayak- canoe) | K-4 1000 m male (kayak-canoe) <u>Vernescu Aurel</u> <u>Sciotnic Atanasie</u> <u>Turcas Mihai</u> <u>Cuciuc Simion</u> |
| | | | | K-2 500 m female (kayak-canoe) <u>Lauer Hilde</u> <u>Sideri Cornelia</u> |

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