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## **The Holocaust and International Norm Socialization: The Case of Holocaust Education in Romania**

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## ABSTRACT

The present paper first uses norm lifecycle theory to examine the appearance of the Holocaust as a symbolic event affecting the behavior of international actors in matters of human rights and even humanitarian intervention. Then the paper employs the literature on the political uses of history to highlight the mechanism of norm socialization and institutionalization in the case of Holocaust education in Romania. The paper concludes that norms are important ingredients in defining the identity of states in international arena and that because they play a role in determining membership in various organizations norms can directly affect state's domestic politics. As Romania's situation demonstrates however it takes time for a norm to become institutionalized and uncontested and therefore it is argued that Romania has not entered this last phase in the norm's lifecycle yet.

## **The Holocaust and International Norm Socialization: The Case of Holocaust Education in Romania**

The idea that norms, values and ideas have an influence on politics has returned to the social sciences since the 1990s and has seen an impetus in the 2000s. However, many of the research projects that focused on normative behavior separated clearly between domestic and international spheres<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, the interest of constructivists in the study of identities lead them in the direction of multidisciplinary studies that revealed the important part history and its political and ideological use have in shaping decision-making processes. Even if the use of history has been examined quite thoroughly at the level of domestic politics, however, the literature on the role of history in norm creation at the international level has been somewhat scarcer.

The present paper aims to bring together these two bodies of literature: international norm creation and socialization on the one hand, and use of history on the other. The perfect instance to illustrate the connection between these two intellectual paths of analysis is the Holocaust, a historical event considered by most academic and political elite members across the world as a watershed in the timeline of mankind. The Holocaust is seen as *the* trauma of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and thus has been awarded special influence among historical analogies, having direct consequences for the building of norms such as humanitarian intervention. The process of internalization of the Holocaust-inspired norm of interventionism led to its increased distribution via channels of socialization, where for example education plays a great role. A wave of norm export followed; once the norm achieved uncontested universal status, states were compelled to adopt it, despite domestic resistance or hesitation, as the process of including Holocaust education for the Romanian public school system demonstrates. Tracing this process of norm adoption confirms that norms are important determinants of state behavior and highlights the interesting dynamics between domestic and international politics.

The paper begins by discussing the idea of international norms, highlighting the lifecycle of the norm and on the effects of norms on state behavior. The essay will then look briefly at the case of the European Union as a normative power before switching focus to the Holocaust and its special position as historical analogy of choice when discussing the norm of international humanitarian intervention. Furthermore, the Holocaust education and arguments for its necessity will be introduced only to examine them more minutiously in the case of Romania, a country reluctant to engage critically with its recent past but who had to take a stand on the issue because of its desire to be accepted under a new identity, a modern European democracy. At the end, some more general conclusions will be drawn on what role history plays in legitimizing international norms and on how socialization into the norm takes place in the current international system.

## **1. International norms: definition, life cycle, and domestic – international connections**

If we accept that actors in the international system, states as well as NGOs and those networks they belong to, are moral in the sense that they are concerned with defining and practicing what is “good”, then it is easy to accept the definition of the norm as a “standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity”<sup>2</sup>. Norms dictate what “ought” to be done in a particular situation by a member of a specific group; non-compliance with the norm may lead to exclusion from the group, therefore to a loss of identity from the part of the trespasser. Norms are in this sense based on a “shared moral assessment”<sup>3</sup> or as the constructivists would put it, on an inter-subjective definition of the good.

Finnemore and Sikkink, whose work inspired many reactions in the field of international normative studies, distinguish between three major stages in the life cycle of a norm: norm emergence, norm cascade and internalization.

Norm emergence is particularly linked to the existence of norm entrepreneurs, who construct the new norm by giving it form via language and interpretation, and who then try to persuade elite leaders at the domestic and international level to adopt the new moral standard. Their motivations cover both materialistic self-interest (securing political support for their own cause and thus achieving access to power, for example) and immaterial altruistic goals (empathy, altruism, belief in certain values). Even if some rational choice theorists are critical to the possibility of altruistic goals, studies in psychology have clearly demonstrated that one of the ways to construct the identity of the self (which is part of the normative process, as norms are part of one’s identity), is to see the Other as part of the Self. As Julia Kristeva puts it, there is an abjection (a part of us that we reject but that remains within us) deep into our unconscious; we are both the part that is moral and proper, and the “abject”, the “foreigner”, who behaves improperly<sup>4</sup>. Because we can be both Self and Other, we can act on behalf of causes which do not directly benefit us but humanity as a whole. Norm entrepreneurs are constructors of new meanings, as they use language and symbols to interpret and design new forms of appropriate behavior. In their doing so, diffusion of information via such channels as the media, the popular culture and the education system plays a crucial role. In the case of the Holocaust, the film industry seems to have played an important role, as films had both the power to communicate effectively and to spread widely the moral lesson. Schindler’s List is arguable the work of art with the most considerable effect on the perception of the Holocaust. Even if based on a book, it is in its cinematographic version that Schindler became the hero and the model of those who want to protect the innocent and served as inspiration for political decisions; Hillary Clinton said, when speaking in favor of a US intervention in the Balkans: “I don’t know how many of you saw Schindler’s List or Sophie’s Choice, [but] at the end of this violent century, you’d think we’ve had learned something”<sup>5</sup>.

This is particularly relevant in the construction of the Holocaust as a symbolic historical event bearing on a moral responsibility of actors in the international system today. The Holocaust has been defined as “a warning to all people of the dangers of hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice”<sup>6</sup>. It has universal connotations, moving away from being the suffering of one people to defining human tragedy in general<sup>7</sup>. American politicians have been eager to use the Holocaust when trying to convince the general public for the necessity of international action on the part of the US. Henry Kissinger declared that the

American support for the existence of an Israeli state was based on the Holocaust as it “added moral urgency to the quest for a Jewish state” and Jimmy Carter was also inspired in his vision of the American foreign policy by “the indescribable horror of the Holocaust which at the time was accepted or ignored by many people in the earth’s civilized nations, including the United States”<sup>8</sup>. Bill Clinton used the Holocaust to mobilize the public opinion in favor of American intervention in the former Yugoslavia and George W Bush referred to it when trying to persuade the Congress to remove the Baathist party from power in Iraq<sup>9</sup>.

This universalism is exemplified even by representatives of the Jewish people, who want their experience to serve a general lesson. Talking in 1993, just as the Western world was facing the Bosnian crisis, the executive director of the American Jewish Congress Henry Siegman said that West’s total abandonment of Bosnia’s Muslims is “as complete and cynical an abandonment as that of the Jews in World War II” (1993) and Elie Wiesel supported the pro-active attitude that the Clinton administration took towards the genocide of Bosnians in the former Yugoslavia by saying that “This time the world was not silent. This time we respond. This time we intervene”<sup>10</sup>.

The key word here is “intervention”: the events of World War II have been interpreted by current political figures as giving ground for a “never again” policy of intolerance against similar crimes against humanity. As mentioned before, George W Bush and Paul Wolfowitz used it as a reason to intervene in Iraq, and before them both Al Gore and Bill Clinton used it to intervene in Bosnia and Kosovo; especially in the case of the Yugoslav conflicts the parallels with the Holocaust were too obvious to be ignored: people selected only on the basis of their faith or ethnic belonging were packed in trains and shipped to concentration camps or executed in mass graves. Without taking away from the uniqueness of the Jewish tragedy and while preserving a sense of proportion (note the difference between cleansing and extermination), Clinton urged for action by drawing a direct parallel with the Holocaust: “Though [Milosevic’s] ethnic cleansing is not the same as the ethnic extermination of the Holocaust, the two are related - both vicious, premeditated, systematic oppression fueled by religious and ethnic hatred”<sup>11</sup>. Clinton was said to be influenced by the reading of the book *Balkan Ghosts*, by Robert D Kaplan, the same author who argues in a later volume that the lesson of the Holocaust is that states should never allow for genocides to happen, and that the norm of humanitarian intervention must take precedence over the norm of state sovereignty<sup>12</sup>. The Holocaust is therefore today more than just a historical event, it is a symbol and justification for international moral behavior, urging for respect for human rights and justifying humanitarian intervention to prevent genocide.

Because of its cosmopolitan characteristic, going beyond a specific cultural historical or political context, the Holocaust and the norm of humanitarian intervention it partly generated had from the beginning high chances of being embraced by many states. Keck and Sikkink argue that norms involving the prevention of bodily harm to innocent parties, alongside norms arguing for a legal equality of opportunity, are most likely to be adopted internationally<sup>13</sup>. As the Holocaust has been increasingly portrayed as a universal and not just valid for a specific group, and as it deals precisely with avoiding the harming of innocent people, it was expected to succeed in attracting support from states others than those directly involved in the events of WWII.

The success of promoting the Holocaust as the inspiration for an international attitude of no tolerance against other attempts at genocide and ethnic cleansing was dependent also on the existence of organizational platforms<sup>14</sup> that supported the claims made by the initial norm entrepreneurs. Originally promoted by the victims themselves, the Holocaust symbol became embedded in institutions, usually representing at the initial stage Jewish organizations that drove a campaign of information about the WWII tragedy. One of the most important such organizations is the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Institution in Israel. The original specific focus on the Jewish victims of the Nazi “final solution” was later on enlarged by norm entrepreneurs who perceived the need for a wider framing of their issue. Frames are important because they “organize experience and guide action”<sup>15</sup>. Framing allows new norms to be strategically placed in relationship to already existing ones; sometimes the new norm or symbol thereof comes in competition with the existing accepted behaviors and references, sometimes the new norm can use the old one as link and support for its own propositions. Norm entrepreneurs expanded the meaning of the Holocaust without diluting it: it remained a Jewish tragedy at the same time as it could speak to all victims of genocide, beyond borders and cultures. The new frame aligned the Holocaust with the human rights discourse and thus opened up the possibility of adoption of the Jewish tragic experience as a universal symbol valid for Bosnia as much as for Rwanda as for Darfour. For example, the United Nations places its Holocaust remembrance resolution firmly within the legal framework dealing with human rights: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Charter of the United Nations, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide are all mentioned in the resolution’s preamble<sup>16</sup>.

Once the zoom of the Holocaust became wider, it could expand the type of organizational platforms that supported it: now the United Nations, as well as Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union have made official statements about the Holocaust and even based policy decisions on references to this symbol. As we shall see when discussing the Romanian situation, the international diffusion of the Holocaust as a universal symbol and moral reference point directly affected the domestic politics of the state; international organizations and their norms more or less pushed Romania to adopt the same attitude towards the Holocaust despite domestic reluctance and even opposition.

Once the Holocaust became coupled with the human rights norm and was embraced as symbolic event by powerful states like the US and international organizations like UN and the EU, it reached a tipping point in its evolution to becoming institutionalized. Entry in the second phase in the life cycle of norms and their symbols is norm cascading. After the crucial moment of going over a threshold (Finnemore and Sikkink estimate that at least one-third of the states must adopt the norm/ symbol for it to be able to cascade, and among them powerful, both in hard and in soft terms, states and organizations must be counted), norms are ready to expand. This process of diffusion of the norm/ symbol happens via an active socialization attempt by the states already adopting the norm targeting states currently outside the norm. Both media and the education system are effective channels of socialization, which lead to information distribution, continuous exposure to the moral message and the creation of habits. In recognition of the role education plays in affecting normative behavior a special Task Force has been designed to support Holocaust education and the development of teaching materials relevant for this purpose. In addition, organizations such as the OSCE, the EU, the Council of Europe and the UN have all included special encouragements in their declarations and policy suggestions for the

widespread information campaign, including via school curricula, about the history of the Holocaust.

At this stage it is the easiest to observe how normative behavior is an important determinant of state action in the international arena. Even in conditions of anarchy, where deviance from norm does not imply punishment, socialization via diplomacy (praising or chastising) or material sanctions or incentives (e.g. embargos or special trading status) remains an effective mechanism. One of the possible reasons for this is that norms determine collective identity inasmuch as they are the codes of acceptable behavior valid for members in a specific group<sup>17</sup>. If a state wants to belong, say, to the group of liberal democracies, if in other words it wants to have a liberal democratic identity, it must conform to all the norms that cluster around this type of identity.

The Holocaust became a quality mark for states that define themselves as democratic and respecting human rights. Especially since the European Union took it on as a symbolic event, it became part of a moral package of appropriate behavior that was expected from all the members of the organizations. Romania's decision to implement not only the political and economic recommendations of the EU but also to assume its normative guidelines was part of its strategy to move away from its identity as a communist state towards a "European" identity, involving a complex of multiple features that necessarily included democracy, individualism and respect for human rights.

This is an example of the particularly strong tendency of the EU to act as a normative power, in other words to "shape conceptions of the 'normal'"<sup>18</sup>. Manners argues that "EU has gone further towards making its external relations informed by, and conditioned on, a catalogue of norms which come closer to those of the European convention on human rights and fundamental freedoms and the universal declaration of human rights than most other actors in world politics"<sup>19</sup>. Because of its alignment with the human rights norm, the Holocaust is now officially part of the EU normative pack. In the European Parliament's Resolution on remembrance of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and racism, both the connection between European identity and the Holocaust and its human rights framing is explicit: "the Holocaust has been *seared* on the consciousness of Europe" but despite this hard lesson "anti-Semitism and racial and religious prejudice continue to pose a very serious threat to their victims and to the *European* and international values of democracy, *human rights* and the rule of law, and therefore to overall European and global security"<sup>20</sup>. If the symbol of the Holocaust is so tightly woven with the European identity, it was an unavoidable condition for Romania membership into the club to adopt it, at least at the level of official discourse and policies.

The last stage of a norm's life cycle is its institutionalization, or its achieving uncontested status. Norms that have been accepted are no longer questioned, and their very presence sometimes can go unnoticed, so much they become part of the world view of the actors who abide by them. Norm consolidation and spread is positively correlated with habits and repeated and repeatable behavior. The same logic as the neofunctionalist idea of spillover applies here: the more actors use the norm in their regular interactions, the more predictable it becomes that the norm is respected which results in building up trust. When actors achieve high level of mutual trust, they change their emotional relationship to each other, which in



turn affects the identity of the group and, as mentioned above, identity relies on the existence of common norms, this results in a consolidation of normative acts among the actors connected in iterated actions.

Romania has not achieved yet an internalization of the Holocaust as a symbol with normative value, as it is still perceived as a foreign import, a compromise made for the sake of international membership and corresponding benefits. Once the Holocaust stops being contested, which is the case now as we shall see, it can be said that it has become consolidated and achieved the same almost hegemonic status, to use the gramscian terminology, as other norms such as democracy or freedom.

We have gone through now the life cycle of a norm-symbol, the Holocaust, and it has become apparent that indeed this particular historical event had the elements necessary for it to be adopted as international marker for appropriate behavior: there were norm entrepreneurs supported by organizational platforms that framed their discourse within the larger context of the already established human rights perspective; we had norm diffusion and socialization, including by professional academics, which happened after a considerable number of critical actors adopted the norm; and finally we had the Holocaust as an internalized symbol especially in the case of Western Europe and the US, but not to the same extent in the former communist bloc<sup>21</sup>.

In the next section we will take a brief look at the political uses of history in the case of the Holocaust only to then concentrate on the analysis of the Romanian case, including a brief overview of the general attitude of the Romanian state towards its problematic recent past and then more concretely at how the diffusion of Holocaust education took place in Romania.

## **2. Holocaust and the use of history**

History defined as in the recorded past of mankind is a pool of resources for every kind of norm entrepreneur. In itself, the past is outside the realm of normativity, but through the processes of selection and framing, these entrepreneurs are able to use historical events as grounds, justifications and support for their cause. The history they tell, as any history ever told, is not objective but reflects the values, priorities and biases of its authors. The Swedish historian Klas-Göran Karlsson<sup>22</sup> developed a systematic typology of the uses of history according to the various user kinds and their respective interests. He distinguishes among several uses:

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<i>Use</i>	<i>User</i>	<i>Need</i>	<i>Function</i>
Existential	Everyone	Remember/ Forget	Guiding, giving roots
Moral	Highly educated people, intellectuals	Rediscover	Restoring, rehabilitating, reconciling
Scientific	Historians, history teachers	Discover, (re)construct	Verifying, interpreting
Commercial	Business people	Increase the value of history, make profit	Commercialization
Ideological	Intellectual and political elites	Find/ construct	Legitimizing, rationalizing
Non use	Intellectual and political elites	Forget, eliminate	Legitimizing, rationalizing
Political pedagogical –	Intellectual and political elites, Instructors, teachers	Illustrate, make public, submit to debate	Politicizing, instrumentalizing

The existential use of history is located at the private level and is most salient for members of those social groups that had experienced a historical trauma and who must deal with it in order to find themselves a more secure future. The moral use falls under the category “history as a lesson” – looking at the errors of the past, the present is exhorted to straighten them out. Moral users are also looking for assigning responsibility, and cleaning the slate so to speak in preparation for a better future. The scientific use, although straightforward, can also be subject to questioning, especially as it will be described further below from a postmodern perspective on the possibility of history as a true science. The commercial use of history is obvious in such enterprises as historical theme parks and even museums (but also in best-selling films based on historical events), in which history is recreated in a digested format that is palatable to a public who sees history through an existential lens. The last three uses have as main actors the intellectual and political elites who aim to legitimize the present and future by a selective pick of events from the past which are interpreted to suit their needs. The selection implies automatically exclusion of unwanted, unfitting occurrences, and thus the non use of history. These elites can also be interested in building ideologies, theoretical constructions that attempt to give universal explanations and solutions, on the grounds of the past, by downplaying errors and inconsistencies and by invoking the laws or inevitability of history.

The political – pedagogical users see history as relevant in contemporary political debates, and employ direct comparisons with past experiences in order to either show the way out of current problems or to immediately bring political winnings<sup>23</sup>. History plays the role of legitimizer: historical events are gathered and rearranged to fit into the puzzle created by the nationalist leadership; the selection and interpretation of historical facts and sources are

dedicated to the present cause: rallying the people around a flag which, they have been told, has been theirs since immemorial times. Rituals, symbols and an inflammatory rhetoric play a role in the mobilization of the people<sup>24</sup>, but their receptivity to this message cannot be explained in the absence of information about what they know about their own past and how deep this information goes.

The Holocaust can be placed in all of the above categories<sup>25</sup>: it has a clear existential use for those who were its direct victims and their descendents, and has been the object of numerous scientific investigations from various viewpoints, from historical to social anthropological, from geostrategic to philosophical. It can even be argued that it has a commercial use as museums dedicated to the Holocaust attract a large public who has to be guided but also hosted, fed, transported and even entertained. The non-use of the Holocaust is relevant especially for the former communist countries who only in recent times have begun to engage, even if reluctantly, with their recent past. The silence Romania kept on its actions during the early 1940s speaks volume on the role of organized forgetting in shaping a country's self reflection. For the purposes of this paper however, the most relevant uses are the moral, the ideological and the pedagogical ones.

The lesson of the Holocaust has led to the formulation of normative statements and even as illustrated in the previous chapter to the grounding of the norm of humanitarian intervention. The moral of the Holocaust is reflected in a "never again" attitude of the international community and of the individual states, and appears clearly in official declarations and statements. There may arguably be so that the moral and the ideological - political uses of the Holocaust are interrelated. Without driving as far as Norman Finkelkraut in his *Holocaust Industry*, it can be said that the moral lessons extracted from the Holocaust experience have been biased in favor of particular interests who interpreted the past so as to arrive at the greatest gain, either in material or immaterial terms, for their own cause.

In International Relations the prevailing use of history is in the form of analogies<sup>26</sup>. Historical events are seen as guiding posts for decisions waiting to be taken today, and the larger the international impact of such events, the more potent the role of a pedagogical and normative interpretation of the past. The logic behind the historical analogy model is that errors of the past should not be repeated; in order to do so, politicians must try and identify in the current dispositions of actors and interests parallels with situations from the past who inform the decisions taken today. Historical analogies are playing a double role: one for the politicians as logical shortcuts in the decision making process, as psychological mechanisms that simplify and make sense of a complex and sometimes hard to grasp world and the other as persuasion tools for politicians in front of their electoral mass or political institutions. History is used as a filter, as a moral guideline and as justification for specific policies; history modifies perceptions of present reality and is thus crucial in the foreign policy of states and in the creation of norms. Large scale historical events such as wars and major economic depressions are more likely to signal a time of change on the ideatic and normative plane<sup>27</sup>, and certainly the Shoah, with its unprecedented objective (the elimination of a people) and scale (about 6 million victims) qualifies as a shattering event for world consciousness.

The Holocaust became "a convenient, highly symbolic and easily recognizable event"<sup>28</sup> used normatively to support human rights and other humanitarian oriented objectives and as such was increasingly made part of a politics, or maybe even what has been called an ethics of memory<sup>29</sup>. Not only individual states, but international organizations as well introduced the

commemoration of the Holocaust on their agenda. The United Nations, via its Resolution 60/7, adopted in November 2005 the date of January 27 as the International Day of Commemoration in the memory of the victims of the Holocaust. The European Parliament, following the UN, also encourages the remembrance of the Holocaust on January 27, the day when the concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated, and makes it into the European Holocaust Memorial Day across the European Union.

Another strategy to spread the symbol and its associated norm was to employ the educational system as socialization tool. The UN Resolution states in article 2 that it “urges Member States to develop educational programmes that will inculcate future generations with the lessons of the Holocaust in order to help to prevent future acts of genocide” and requests in article 6 that the Secretary-General establishes an outreach programme on the topic of the Holocaust and “measures to mobilize civil society for Holocaust remembrance and education”<sup>30</sup>.

The same moral and pedagogical use of history is to be noted in the European Parliament’s resolution from 2005, which “reaffirms its conviction that remembrance and education are vital components of the effort of making intolerance, discrimination and racism a thing of the past” and urges for the promotion of “awareness, especially among young people, of the history and lessons of the Holocaust”. A particular policy suggestion, supported by special funds from the European Union’s budget, is that all the 25 member states of the EU adopt programs that make “Holocaust education and European citizenship standard elements in school curricula” that must “address the teaching of the Second World War with the utmost historical rigor”<sup>31</sup>.

These two resolutions are clear examples of the official and political use of history for normative purposes (against genocide, racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia and for the promotion of human rights). Both are legally binding texts and especially in the EP’s case, are now part of the European *acquis communautaire* which must be also part of national legislation for each and every member of the EU, including those who join the Union after the date of the resolution. The resolutions are also examples of the codification of international norms that have been internalized at the level of powerful actors; the texts also reveal how important education is in the socialization process.

As part of the education process, the textbook offers a direct way to communicate the state version of the past to the young, whose knowledge about the events which took place for hundreds, thousands of years ago comes in the beginning almost exclusively from the classroom. Educational activities are obviously not restricted to the readings provided in the manuals, but it has been demonstrated that textbooks play the crucial role in teaching: “Both historical reports (from the beginning of the century) and more recent research indicate that from 75% to 90% of classroom instructional time is structured by textbook programs.”<sup>32</sup>

The history textbook in particular can be an instrument for the controlled remembering and forgetting. The history textbook is a simple and efficient conservation tool, the bearer of the collective memory sanctioned by the state. If we accept that we can “remember together”, that institutions have memories just like individuals<sup>33</sup>, then the institution of the school,

partly via textbooks, suggests to each member of the society the fragments of the past worth remembering.

Focusing on history textbook analysis allows for a useful and practical thermometer of the state of the society, because they reflect the official values of the state in a simplified crystallized form. Textbooks “offer a simplified, but clear and desirable notion of one’s own nation, its ‘historical fate’, its historical place and identity”<sup>34</sup>, and, when studied over time, present the researcher with a graphic curve of the ways in which political priorities evolved, how present concerns required a reconsideration (or not) of the nation’s history, identity and relations with others.

If the state education and specifically history curriculum is partly under the influence of international or supranational organizations, then looking at the education and textbook policies will reveal the norms held by the state and its conformity or lack thereof with international moral standards.

In the remaining part of the paper, the case of Holocaust education policy in Romania will be analyzed, with the purpose of highlighting the process of norm socialization and importance of international norms and of the organizations which carry them in the domestic policy of states.

### **3. Romania and the Holocaust**

In the East European context Romania is not an exception – the reluctance to deal with a controversial recent history characterizes most of the other former members of the communist bloc, perhaps with the exception of Bulgaria, a country where anti-Semitism is the lowest in the entire Eastern Europe or Hungary who, according to Braham, has made most progress in examining its actions during World War II. As early as 1989-1990 Hungarian politicians paid tribute to the Jewish victims of deportation and denounced anti-Semitism, even if at the time no concrete apologies were made<sup>35</sup>. Romania, Slovakia, Croatia and Poland on the other hand give raise to worries that “failure to confront the Holocaust honestly may once again encourage the spread of anti-Semitism with all its horrible social consequences in the post-communist era”<sup>36</sup>. Just like many of its neighbors in the region, Romania preferred even during its transition to democracy an identity of victimhood to an ethics of responsibility; continuing the tradition launched during communism, it preferred to play down the events of WWII involving the destruction of the Jewish population, which was attributed elsewhere (Germany, Hungary) and to play up its own innocence, by portraying itself as a victim at the hands of dominant powers, first Nazi Germany, then the Soviet Union. This is again not unique; the most famous parallel is probably Poland, a country where victimization myths have dominated WWII narratives and where the writings of the Polish-American historian Jan Gross describing the active anti-Semitic actions of ethnic Poles during the war including the mass murder of several hundred Jews, provoked an earthquake among both academics and regular people<sup>37</sup>.

Nothing of the kind happened in Romania however. The Romanian society is slow in acknowledging the need to come to terms with the past, and to see the link between democracy and memory. On the contrary, both in respect to the Holocaust and to the communist crimes, Romanians have demonstrated a sense of collective amnesia, a “flagrant absence of expiation, penance or regret”. As Tismaneanu puts it when discussing the relationship with the communist experience, Romania slowly realizes now that “an authentic

democratic community cannot be built on the denial of past crimes, abuses and atrocities. The past is not another country. It cannot be wished away – the more that is attempted, the more we witness the return of repressed memories<sup>38</sup>.

This realization does not seem to reflect the state of mind of the society at large, which still seems to be leaning towards a more nationalist or anti-Semitic attitude. This is almost a tradition by now in modern Romanian politics, with the interwar period being characterized both by the popular presence of a homegrown fascist movement, the Iron Guard, and by the tight alliance of the Antonescu government (a dictatorship) with Nazi Germany<sup>39</sup>.

A history of the Holocaust at the hands of the Romanians is outside the realms of this paper<sup>40</sup>. Let it be noted here briefly that the deportation and killings of the Jewish people took place under the rule of Marshall Ion Antonescu, Hitler's ally, and that they focused in the province of Moldova, even if a pogrom took place also in the capital city, Bucharest. Jews and Roma from different parts of Moldova were deported and killed in concentration camps located in the territory of Transnistria, then occupied by the Romanian army, currently split between Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, the Jews living in Northern Transylvania were also deported but under the authority of the occupying Hungarian forces who took over the region in 1941<sup>41</sup>. It is not clear exactly how many people perished, but the estimates vary between 270 000 and 380 000 Jews<sup>42</sup>.

The anti-Semitism of the interwar period only continued during the communist regime, which never attempted a divorce with the past but practiced a “grammar of exculpation” where “historiography was used to illustrate Romania's self-victimization and serve the political enterprises of different communist regimes in an attempt to deny Romanian participation in the Holocaust”<sup>43</sup>. History teaching in the communist era was ideologically controlled by the Romanian Communist party and served the purpose of legitimizing the regime. In his analysis, Cioflanca identifies several features of the Romanian history writings about the Holocaust published before 1989:

- a) Fascism was an imported product, Romanians never accepted it and even increasingly rejected it.
- b) Romania was a victim of the West, which “pushed Romania into the arms of Germany” to use a quotation from the wooden language of the times. It was Germany who eventually decided that Romania must enter the war and perform “terrorist policies”, the Romanians carry no responsibility in these matters
- c) The Romanian people themselves never have supported these policies and even outright rejected them. If occasional atrocities were performed by some Romanians, they were extreme elements, unrepresentative for the rest of the people
- d) Increasingly after the 1960s, there is a revalorization of the figure of Marshall Antonescu, a more positive father-like figure, in contrast with the Iron Guard, radical bloodthirsty elements
- e) Anti-Semitism is not explained, rarely present as one among a list of features of interwar politics and almost never described in its relationship with fascism

- f) Jewish suffering is reduced to a minimum; often instead of Jews historians prefer some generalizing terms like “citizens”, “civilians” or “persons”.
- g) Romania was an exceptional case in dealing with its Jewish population in that it did not have on its territory any concentration camps, it did not send any Jews to Auschwitz and on the contrary it offered safe haven to Jews from other countries. As a result, 350 000 Jews were saved. This argument could be made because at the time of writing, Bessarabia and Transnistria were both territories outside the Romanian state, now belonging to the Soviet Union. This was the positive self-valorization that defined the perception of the Holocaust in Romania.
- h) The terms Holocaust, Final Solution, Genocide are never associated with Romanian policies but always with other’s treatment of their Jews, in particular with Hungary.

These characteristics are valid or become more radicalized during the Ceausescu regime, which sought to use anti-Semitism and nationalism as legitimacy tools to compensate for its failing economic policies and the extensive use of the security police against its own people. The two dominant themes of the latest Ceausescu years were the reinterpretation of the role of Marshall Antonescu in a positive light and the clear anti-Hungarian stance that placed the blame of Jewish extermination only on the forces of Horthy regime stationed in Northern Transylvania<sup>44</sup>. The propaganda machine of the regime, including the education system and the history writing, exerted a long lasting effect over the public historical consciousness.

It is not surprising then that these features of the Romanian interpretation of the Holocaust permeated also the early post-communist period. It is also a sign of continuity that the most acerbic anti-Semites today are former nomenklatura members of the communist party, former Securitate agents, or sycophants of the former regime. Their themes are largely a repetition of the communist anti-Semitic position, but with an exacerbation of the virulence in the language.

That there are anti-Semitic politicians and publications is not surprising; what does surprise however is the presence of anti-Semitic declarations in the official discourse. The democratic regime in Romania has been dancing a curious form of tango, with one step forward and two steps back: measures in line with the European norm were initiated only to be contradicted by acts or statements made by public representatives. In a sense, this contradiction or duality reflects well the dilemma of the post-communist leadership: to want to change into a new and more acceptable identity while hesitating to actively break with the former identity and its features. If possible, Romania would like to preserve the national, self-focused, self-complacent attitude of the past, while being accepted as an equal partner at the European table. Of course, this is not an option, but trading old for new has not been an easy process and one can argue that we are still in the middle of the negotiation of a new identity, and under the internalization phase of the new norm. To use Felicia Waldman’s terms, we are now in a phase of “relevant silence” (as the non-use of history is just as significant as the ways in which historical events are approached), which comes after a long period of “relative silence” (during the communist era, there were occasional historical accounts being published about the Holocaust, even with errors and omissions)<sup>45</sup>.

To support this claim, I will present briefly the steps taken by the state to conform to the European and international Holocaust treatment, while at the same time contrasting them with the texts written about the Holocaust in schools.

The first steps taken in the direction of adaptation to the international norm took place in 1996, under the first truly democratic government after 1989. Significantly, during the previous six years the regime of Ion Iliescu, a former second tier cadre of the communist party, refused to engage with the past and even made controversial statements questioning the Jewish tragedy in Romania<sup>46</sup>. The communist continuation thesis is thus supported by the ideological affiliation of the political actors involved: the more nostalgic the politicians, the less prone to critically engage with the past.

The pro-reform, pro-European politicians on the other hand tried their hand at using the normative language of the UN and EU. During the Stockholm International Forum of 2000, Andrei Marga, then Minister of Education of Romania, employed the same constellation of ideas as those reflected later in the UN and EP resolutions. He talked about Holocaust as the “epitome of barbarity in modern Europe”, as a “culminating tragedy of history”, which must be remembered in order not to be repeated. He also places the Holocaust as a symbol or shortcut for democracy and human rights, the defining norms of the European identity Romania aspires to, by counting the ways in which Romania fits with the international trends in the matter: Romania has anti-discrimination, anti-Semitic legislation, and obeys the equality in front of the law of all citizens. More concretely, in terms of promoting Holocaust education, which is meant for “consolidating the democratic awareness of the younger generation and for developing better understanding between people”, Romania has introduced in January 1999 the mandatory study of the Holocaust in secondary and tertiary education, which is now part of the history textbooks for grades 7 to 12. Moreover, there are now three research institutes dedicated to the study of the Hebrew language and the Jewish history, in Cluj, Craiova and Bucharest, with Iasi as the potential fourth<sup>47</sup>. Collaboration with the state of Israel in the training of teachers is also under way, fact confirmed by the presence of 20 history teachers and five students as attendants to a course about the Holocaust at the Yad Vashem Institution in 2000, trend continued yearly ever since<sup>48</sup>. Several university courses on Jewish history were introduced at the university level since 2004.

Romanian legislation meant to harmonize with the West includes since 2002 the punishment of Holocaust denial with six months to five years in prison but in all its good intentions forgets to define what exactly constitutes the Holocaust, thus rendering the whole measure inapplicable<sup>49</sup>. Moreover, the Romanian government of a left-wing non-reformist coloration breached its own laws in 2003 when it claimed at the end of a weekly meeting in October that a Holocaust never took place in Romania. As the international reactions to this statement were very strongly critical, besides an official recognition of the role played by Marshall Antonescu in the deportation and killing of the Jews, president Iliescu established the International Commission for the Study of the Romanian Holocaust, led by the Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel.

The Wiesel Commission and later the Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania (opened in October 2005) are the most important objective sources of information regarding the fate of the Jewish and other minorities during the WWII and its



aftermath. The Wiesel Commission issued a complex report which made several recommendations in terms of the remembrance and study of the Holocaust: it asked for the creation of a Holocaust Memorial and Museum in Bucharest, the establishment of a Holocaust Remembrance Day, and the spread of Holocaust education at all levels, including the review and preparation of textbooks and other teaching materials based on the Commission's conclusions, and the drafting of courses on the history of the Holocaust<sup>50</sup>. In practice the optional high school course on the history of the Holocaust got its first textbook, "Jewish History. The Holocaust" in October 2005; a year later the Romanian president officially inaugurated the space dedicated to the Holocaust Memorial. The academic community saluted the introduction of this course but it was not equally welcomed by the civil society at large. Surprisingly, even minority rights activists like Gabriel Andreescu were against the textbook since it may "trouble teenagers' conscience with such shocking information as the gas chambers"<sup>51</sup>. The public debate around the existence of the tailor-made course on the Holocaust unveiled the existence of those who doubt the Romanian Holocaust even among the respectable intellectual class. The member of the Romanian Academy and liberal politician Alexander Paleologu, otherwise a very well-educated pro-European figure, declared that "There is no point to talk about the Holocaust. [...] I do not want to use the term Holocaust. The term is a totally radical integral, it is excessive. [...] The course is not opportune. I believe the attitude towards the Jewish people, if we push things, may change for the worse and not for the better. Everything that is imposed via the education system, falsifying the natural order of things, leads to negative exaggeration. This course may create anti-Semitic sentiments there where they currently they do not exist". Professor Ioan Scurtu, one of the members of the Wiesel Commission and holder of the Modern History chair at the University of Bucharest judges the Holocaust textbook as a good initiative but at the same time excuses the Antonescu regime and beautifies the treatment of the Jews in the Romanian society: "The Antonescu period is an accident in Romania's history. Until then the relationship between Romanians and Jews were peaceful, good. What happened in Romania took place in the entire space dominated by Germany. The initiative of the extermination of the Jews did not reside with the Romanian but with the German government"<sup>52</sup>. Scurtu and Paleologu are representative for a general trend among the Romanian intellectuals, who do not deny the existence of Holocaust per se, only that it took place in Romania, thus being prone to what Shafir calls "selective negationism"<sup>53,54</sup>.

The example of the Holocaust textbook is a good illustration of the general attitude dominating in Romania: the government tries to comply with international requirements and obtains support and praise for its actions (e.g. after the textbook discussed above was introduced in high schools Romania succeeded in becoming a member of the Taskforce for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research), the local public, both specialized (historians, journalists, civic activists) and at large, are not on the same wavelength and criticize the state for giving in to outside pressure.

When confronted with the push of the international community and the pull of the domestic public opinion, it is not surprising that the government is split or takes ambiguous decisions. Again, in the case of Holocaust education, besides the existence of the special optional course, every textbook for grades 7 to 12 must discuss the Jewish tragedy as part of the description of WWII events. Here are some examples of history textbooks and their take on the Holocaust.

Textbooks dating before 2000, when due to a major education reform the textbook market became liberalized, are largely inspired if not direct copies of their communist predecessors. In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Romanians' History: The Modern and Contemporary Age<sup>55</sup>, pupils can read that "Although measures against the Jews were indeed undertaken, they were *not exterminated*, as Berlin had stipulated. The pogrom of June 1941 in Iasi [...] was organized *without the knowledge* of the Romanian government by the Legionnaires [Romanian fascists] and the Nazis. Many Jews were *rescued* from north-western Transylvania, which was occupied by the Horthysts [...]"<sup>56</sup>. Exactly the same main themes as during the Ceausescu era are found here: the lack of responsibility of the Romanians, the placing of guilt elsewhere<sup>57</sup> and the congratulatory attitude based on the rescue of Jews, implying a subtle condemnation of Hungary.

Ioan Scurtu, whose declaration regarding the Holocaust textbook we have read above, is also among the authors of a textbook for the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, where we can read that "the Antonescu regime promoted an anti-Semitic policy, taking measures particularly against the Jews of Bessarabia, whom he accused of communism. Pogroms were recorded (Iasi and Odessa), the number of dead or missing Jews amounting to about 250,000 people. Still, *Antonescu did not accept the "final solution"* (the extermination of the Jews) demanded by Hitler<sup>58</sup>. One can wonder if not the death of 250 000 Jews qualifies as extermination, what does? The same attempt to rehabilitate the figure of the authoritarian Ion Antonescu that defines Romanian nationalists both during and after the communist era is to be noted here.

But there are exceptions to this biased description of the Romanian Holocaust. In a textbook for 12<sup>th</sup> grade published in 2005, the paragraphs describing the events taking place in Romania during 1941 are based on the findings of the Wiesel Commission, which demonstrates that even if it was instituted at the demands of the international organizations, the Commission became a relevant actor on the domestic scene. In this textbook the question "Was there a Holocaust in Romania?" is explicitly asked and the answer is yes. "The orders for the civic degradation and the killing of the Jewish people had been given by the Romanian civilian and military authorities."<sup>59</sup> The rest of the paragraph is also historically accurate, in concordance with the Wiesel Commission's data, and informative. Even when mentioning the survival of some of the Jews, the words used are not intending to promote the positive valorization of the Romanian side (like previously with the word "rescue") but describe in objective tones the events: "About 340,000 Romanian Jews survived because of the suspension by the Romanian government of deportations beginning with the year 1943, 16 months before Romania's exit from the alliance with Germany [...]"<sup>60</sup>. Finally, there is a moral lesson explicitly made at the end of the text. The study of the Holocaust today is meant to help understand the recent history, to attenuate and eliminate interethnic conflicts and to develop tolerance<sup>61</sup>. The general European discourse is clearly reproduced here, almost ad litteram, with the same references to tolerance and eradication of conflicts, and this has been recognized by the EU itself when via its Council of Ministers which issued a statement supporting the Romanian textbook policy regarding the history of the Holocaust<sup>62</sup>. The trend in Holocaust education has been clearly towards the adoption of international framing and conformity with the international norm.

#### 4. Conclusions

The Holocaust, a symbol tightly coupled with the international norms of human rights, democracy and even humanitarian intervention has become internalized at the level of powerful states (US) and international organizations (UN, EU, OSCE). Since norms are defining state identity as they concern the rules of accepted behavior within a given group, they exert a significant influence over states that have an interest to acquire membership in such groups and therefore to update their identity to one that awards them both material benefits and nonmaterial perks, such as acceptance, self-esteem or prestige.

Romania during its post-communist period has attempted precisely this type of identity change: from a poor, marginalized, communist dictatorship to a democratic, liberal and above all European modern state. In order to achieve such a new identity, Romania was obliged to adopt not only a mandatory law system but acted according to a logic of appropriateness<sup>63</sup>.

Its attempts to adapt to international norms regarding Holocaust education, taken here as example of one of the moral and political uses of history, have been more or less successful. As the brief description outlined above hoped to illustrate, Romania hesitated to make a radical break with its past identity and tried to find a middle ground where conformity with both old and new norms was desired. As increasingly the new standard of behavior took ground, Romania followed the norm cascade in the issue of Holocaust and introduced measures in the same spirit as the ones in the rest of the EU. However, it is still too early to perceive that the internalization phase has begun, since the domestic public debate, the official *pas double* and the various presentations in history textbooks clearly mark the Holocaust as a very debatable issue, quite far away from the unquestionable status that an internalized norm requires.

The tracing of the norm socialization process in Romania helps to prove again the power of norms in the international system. Once they are embraced by a critical mass of actors, norms do affect the internal policies of states not only because of economical or political conditionality but also because they affect identity. Even if in the case of the Holocaust the Romanian government's actions have been judged as being bows to outside pressure, once the norm has been offered legal status it can take a life of its own, and can continue on the path towards internalization. Until then however the potential remains for a reverse trend, where the new norm fails to persuade the domestic public opinion and thus cannot gain wide support.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper has been presented at the WISC Global International Studies Conference, Ljubljana, 23-26 July 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Finnemore, Martha and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", in *International Organization*, vol. 52, no. 4: 891

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<sup>4</sup> Kristeva, Julia (1982) *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press: 4; Kristeva, Julia (1991) *Strangers to Ourselves*. New York: Columbia University Press: 192

<sup>5</sup> quoted in Desch, Michael C. (2006) "The Myth of Abandonment: The Use and Abuse of the Holocaust Analogy", in *Security Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1: 118

<sup>6</sup> United Nations General Assembly (2005) *Resolution 60/7 on Holocaust Remembrance*. 60<sup>th</sup> Session, 2005-11-21

<sup>7</sup> Of course, this internationalization of the Holocaust has been criticized by some scholars who would still prefer it to be associated exclusively with the Jewish experience. For example Gavriel Rosenfeld considers "dejudaizing" one of the five strategies of exploiting the Holocaust for partisan interests (Rosenfeld, Gavriel D. (1999) "The Politics of Uniqueness: Reflections on the Recent Polemical Turn in Holocaust and Genocide Scholarship", in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1)

<sup>8</sup> quoted in Desch, Michael C. (2006) "The Myth of Abandonment: The Use and Abuse of the Holocaust Analogy", in *Security Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1: 112

<sup>9</sup> For more on the Holocaust as a reference in American politics and society see for example Novick, Peter (1999) *The Holocaust in American Life*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

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- <sup>39</sup> The Romanian fascists have been studied successfully by Leon Volovici (1991); for a history of Romania under Antonescu, see Deletant, Dennis (2006) *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940–1944*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.



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- <sup>40</sup> For a more complete overview of the history of the Holocaust in Romania see for example Ioanid, Radu (2000) *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of the Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime. 1940-1944*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Ancel, Jean (2001) *Contributii la istoria Romaniei: Problema Evreiasca, 1933-1944*. Bucharest: Hasefer, Ancel, Jean (2003) *Transnistria, 1941-1942: The Romanian Mass Murder Campaigns*, 3 volumes. Tel Aviv: The Goldstein Goren Diaspora Research Center).
- <sup>41</sup> The memory of an incident where several Jews were murdered in a North Transylvanian village and how it was preserved at the level of the individual despite communist regime's attempt to shut it out was dealt with in Bucur, Maria (2002) "Treznea: Trauma, Nationalism and the Memory of World War II in Romania", in *Rethinking History*, vol. 6, no. 1.
- <sup>42</sup> Ioanid, Radu (1997) *Evreii sub Regimul Antonescu*. Bucharest: Hasefer; Ancel, Jean (2001) *Contributii la istoria Romaniei: Problema Evreiasca, 1933-1944*. Bucharest: Hasefer
- <sup>43</sup> Cioflanca, Adrian (2004) "A 'Grammar of Exculpation' in Communist Historiography: Distortion of the History of the Holocaust under Ceausescu", in *Romanian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 2, pp. 35-43
- <sup>44</sup> The anti-Hungarian nationalist stance of the Ceausescu regime was manifested in other policies as well, for example the forced Romanianization of Hungarian names, the elimination of education in Hungarian language etc.
- <sup>45</sup> Waldman, Felicia (2004) "Holocaust Education in Post-Communist Romania", in *Studia Hebraica*, vol. 4: 88)
- <sup>46</sup> Shafir, Michael (2003) "Ex Occidente Obscuritas: The Diffusion of Holocaust Denial from West to East", in *Studia Hebraica*, vol. 3
- <sup>47</sup> Marga, Andrei (2000) "Remembrance of Tragedy. Written message by the Republic of Romania". Stockholm International Forum
- <sup>48</sup> Waldman, Felicia (2004) "Holocaust Education in Post-Communist Romania", in *Studia Hebraica*, vol. 4: 90; Ionescu, Mihail E. (2007) "Romania: A New Trend in the Holocaust Education", paper presented at the OSCE Conference on Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding, Bucharest, 2007-06-06
- <sup>49</sup> Oisteanu, Andrei (2005) "The Holocaust Remembrance Day in Romania", in *Studia Hebraica*, vol. 5: 147
- <sup>50</sup> Comisia internationala pentru studierea Holocaustului in Romania (2005) *Raport Final*, Iasi: Polirom
- <sup>51</sup> (quoted in Florian, Alexandru (2004) "The Holocaust Textbook in Romania – Between Contestation and Support", in *Studia Hebraica* vol. 4: 166
- <sup>52</sup> quoted in Florian, Alexandru (2004) "The Holocaust Textbook in Romania – Between Contestation and Support", in *Studia Hebraica* vol. 4: 166-67
- <sup>53</sup> Shafir, Michael (2002) *Intre Negare si Trivializare prin Comparatie: Negarea Holocaustului in tarile postcomuniste din Europa Centrala si de Est*. Iasi: Polirom, Shafir, Michael (2003) "Ex Occidente Obscuritas: The Diffusion of Holocaust Denial from West to East", in *Studia Hebraica*, vol. 3
- <sup>54</sup> The reluctance of some Romanian intellectuals to accept the Holocaust in Romania as a historical event was also illustrated by the heated public debate provoked by the publication of a critical article by the historian Tony Judt. The article and the collected responses from the Romanian side are published in Judt, Tony (2002) *Romania: La Fundul Gramezii. Polemici, Controverse, Pamflete*. Iasi: Polirom.
- <sup>55</sup> Cristescu, Octavian (1999) *Istoria Romanilor: Epoca Moderna si Contemporana*. Bucharest: Editura Didactica si Pedagogica
- <sup>56</sup> Cristescu, Octavian (1999) *Istoria Romanilor: Epoca Moderna si Contemporana*. Bucharest: Editura Didactica si Pedagogica: 171, my italics
- <sup>57</sup> There is even a debate between the Romanian and the Moldovan historians of the Holocaust, who assign guilt to each other (Dumitru, Diana (2008) "The Use and Abuse of the Holocaust: Historiography and Politics in Moldova", in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1
- <sup>58</sup> Scurtu, Ioan et al (2001) *Istoria Romanilor*. Bucharest: Petraion: 188, my italics
- <sup>59</sup> Selevet, Mihaela et al. (2005) *Istorie - 10<sup>th</sup> grade*. Bucharest: Corint,: 98
- <sup>60</sup> idem
- <sup>61</sup> idem
- <sup>62</sup> Council of Ministers of the European Union (2004) *Document CM/AS*, quest 435finalE/, January 23

<sup>63</sup> March, James G. and Johan P. Olsen (2004) "The logic of appropriateness", in *ARENA working paper*, No. 9