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Spiru Haret and his concerns in setting the bases of physical and sportive education within the national education system. Legislative and organizational analysis

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Abstract

The legislative and organisational reforms implemented by Spiru Haret in substantiating the national education system and, implicitly, physical and sportive education, explicitly reflects the greatest part of the pedagogical, sociological, social and political ideas supported throughout time by means of a laborious scientific, didactic, parliamentary and ministerial activity. On this background, we started from the assumption that there is no general working perspective which follows the continual thread of the previously stated theme; thus, we purport to examine from a present-day perspective the literature review on this issue (general and specialised studies), while analysing at the same time a series of documents (in particular collections of laws) with a view to draw a study aimed at supporting this continuity. This research has the goal to highlight the legislative and organisational implications of the field of physical education and sport in the context of political, social and cultural changes characterising the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Through the contents and the distribution of materials, our aim was to assess, as realistically as possible, the outstanding contribution brought by the great minister in setting the grounds and promoting corporal education (gymnastics and sportive games), both as part of the educational curriculum (as an instructive-educational activity), and outside it (as a social activity).

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1. Introduction

The analysis of the legislative and organisational aspects of physical education and sport in our country appears as an integral part of the general modernisation process occurring in education, especially in the second part of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. Some aspects of this problem have not always been appreciated as deserved; they were either not analysed to the full extent of their complexity, or, the significance of the facts and events was not correctly interpreted, on political and ideological grounds. Major preoccupations in substantiating corporal activities (gymnastics – physical education and sportive games – sports) as an integral part of the national education system (curricular and extracurricular), were manifest in the legislative and organisational reforms made by Spiru Haret. Since the Minister Haret is considered to be “the true organiser of physical education and sport in school and extracurricular activities”, a discussion on this subject is self-evident. Therefore, we consider necessary a vision that includes several legislative and organisational “benchmarks”, specific to the field of physical education and sport, namely: a) the evolution of reforms and the organisation of physical education within the national education system, stating from the *Law of Public Instruction (1864)* to the *Law on primary and normal-primary education in 1893*, respectively *1896*; b) the time of the great reforms made by Spiru Haret (1896 - 1910); c) the consequences of the laws *promoted by Haret* in strengthening the national education system and, implicitly, physical education and sport. This study equally aims at supporting a balanced and nuanced approach, able to avoid “patterns” and “labels”, providing the true perception that modern Romanian society had on the notion of physical education. As a research method, we proposed to present the information for each “benchmark”; moreover, at the end of the intervention we will focus on the comments and conclusions that drawn on the contribution made by the Minister of Public Instruction and Cults, Spiru Haret, in substantiating the national education system, and, implicitly, physical education and sports.

2. The evolution of the reforms and organisation of physical education within the national education system, starting from the *Law of Public Instruction in 1864* and continuing with the *Law on Primary and Normal-Primary Education in 1893*, respectively *1896*.

The *Law on Instruction in 1864*, approved by Royal Decree no. 1850 of 25 November 1864 and promulgated on 5 December 1864 (Hamangiu, 1941, pp. 48-80) was initiated by the Minister of Instruction in the person of Mihail Kogălniceanu.

Structured into two parts and 418 articles, the law stipulated that “instruction be public and private” (Chapter I, *General Provisions*, article 1). Under articles 2, 3, 4 and 5 are presented the forms of education, respectively: *primary* – primary schools in rural and urban communities; *secondary* – high schools; secondary schools and seminaries; technical profile schools, beaux-arts and vocational schools; secondary schools for girls; *higher education* – faculties of letters; mathematics, physics and natural sciences; law and medical schools.

Gymnastic was also among the subjects of study provided in the curriculum for secondary education (Chapter III *On the organisation of secondary instruction*, section II). In this respect, the legislature stipulated that each boarding school should own gym equipment for keeping in good physical shape, and the physical exercises should be carried out during the break time (Article 173). According to the legal text, gymnastics (physical education) became an object of study in Romanian Schools and opened the way for this discipline to the school, providing it with a legal framework to be later applied. By adopting the law, the mission that physical education was about to have within the national schools was to develop, promote and refine the physical and moral forces and abilities, as well as the intellectual capacities of the students, depending on their age and sex particularities. However, this approach remained at the level of intention. One of the greatest problems was the absence of skilled staff, since gymnastics was taught, according to the research carried out, only in a few secondary schools and high schools in the country, and in inadequate conditions. “Instability regarding gymnastics teaching – and its status of optional subject of study – lasted until 1878, when it was introduced as compulsory subject of study in secondary schools, without being accompanied by corresponding syllabuses (C. Lascăr and I. Bibiri, D. Ionescu). In order to improve the teaching process as regards the teaching of gymnastics in schools, starting with the 17th of January 1879, the Minister of Instruction, C. Cantili introduced the new methodology regarding the temporary appointment of teachers in secondary schools, high schools and vocational schools. According to the document, the teaching positions were

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