

AFRICAN STUDENTS AND THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS OF ROMANIAN EDUCATION. FROM THE POLITICAL ISSUE OF INTERNATIONALISM TO THE ROMANIAN EDUCATIONAL OFFER BETWEEN 1970 AND 1990

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Abstract

Starting with the early 1970s, following several visits of Nicolae Ceausescu in African countries and the signing of trade, economic and cultural aid agreements with these countries, the presence of African students has become increasingly visible in Romania. For almost twenty years, until the end of the regime in December 1989, their number, countries of origin and the choice of subjects studied have varied significantly for political or cultural reasons, but also due to the transformations of the international market of higher education. Following a work of documentation and statistical analysis in this article presents the development of relations between Romania and African countries since their beginning of these relations and particularly between 1970 and 1990. The increasing number of African students confirmed the internationalization of higher education in communist countries and yet a more significant presence of Romania in African states.

Keywords: African students, internationalisation of studies, higher education

Résumé

A partir du début des années 1970, à la suite de plusieurs visites de Nicolae Ceausescu dans des pays africains et la signature d'accords d'échanges et d'aides économiques et culturels avec ces pays, les étudiants africains sont devenus une présence de plus en plus visible en Roumanie. Pendant près de vingt ans, jusqu'à la fin du régime en décembre 1989, leurs effectifs, les pays de provenance et les choix des disciplines étudiées ont connu des variations sensibles pour des raisons politiques ou culturelles, mais aussi suite aux transformations intervenues sur le marché international de l'enseignement universitaire. Suite à un travail de documentation et d'analyse statistique, nous présentons dans cet article l'évolution des relations entre la Roumanie et les pays africains depuis le début de ces relations et plus particulièrement entre les années 1970 et 1990. Le nombre croissant des étudiants africains avait confirmé l'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur dans les pays communistes et en même temps une présence plus marquante de la Roumanie en Afrique.

Mots-clés: Étudiants africains , internationalisation des études, enseignement supérieur

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Rezumat

De la începutul anilor 1970, după mai multe vizite ale lui Nicolae Ceaușescu în țările africane și semnarea acordurilor de comerț, ajutor economic și cultural cu aceste țări, studenții africani au devenit o prezență din ce în ce mai vizibilă în România. Pe o perioadă de aproape douăzeci de ani, până la sfârșitul regimului din decembrie 1989, numărul acestor studenți, țările de origine și alegerea specializărilor studiate au variat semnificativ din motive politice sau culturale și de asemenea, ca urmare a transformărilor pe piața internațională de studii universitare. În urma unei cercetări de documentare și de analiză statistică vom prezenta în acest articol dezvoltarea relațiilor dintre România și țările africane de la începutul acestora și în special între anii 1970 și 1990. Creșterea numărului de studenți africani a confirmat internaționalizarea învățământului superior în țările comuniste și o prezență semnificativă a României în Africa.

Cuvinte cheie: Studenți africani, internaționalizarea studiilor, învățământ superior

1. Introduction

In an international climate characterised by anti-colonial revolutions and internal divisions taking place in the old socialist camp, particularly with the conflicts between the USSR and People's Republic of China, socialist Romania had come closer to 'non-aligned' and 'third-world' countries, claiming a separate political status ('developing socialist country'). The question we are trying to answer has to do with the impact of these distinctive political features of Romania and of its particular internationalism on the selection of students and on the orientation of their studies. In this article we intend to present the evolution of the relations between Romania and African countries focused on higher education exchanges.

The methodology used in this article was based on a documentary and statistical analysis based on diverse sources from this period: newspapers, political reviews, official documents, official statistics and some specific archival sources.

2. From internationalism to internationalisation of studies

The authors who have studied the internationalisation process of higher education (Knight, 2003; Bode, 2009), drew the attention to its multiple dimensions: connected to globalisation, intercultural in its objectives and functions, internationalisation means a growing mobility of students and teachers, but also an internationalisation of the curricula, the imposing of English as *lingua franca*, the export of educational models to developing or emerging countries, partnerships and network growth, multiplication of super-regional forms of coordination etc.

Unlike internationalisation, *internationalism* speaks of 'close relationships', of solidarity and friendship, that supposedly exist between parties, states or movements attached to an ideology stemming from the international labour movement of the XIXth century (Marxism, socialism, the Socialist and Communist International, etc.). Initially opposed to the varied nationalist demonstrations,

internationalism was able to conceal hegemonic domination forms since the Cold War, such as the imposing of the soviet model in several countries and rivalries within what was, until the end of the XXth century, the ‘world socialist system’ (which disappeared after the fall of the Berlin Wall), the collapse of the USSR and the loss of power of Central and Eastern Europe’s communist parties. The issue of the connection between internationalism and internationalisation of studies lies in the crossing between several fields: that of international relationships which were transformed during the considered period due to revolutionary and anti-colonial liberalisation movements; the field of economic development policies, which progressively lead to the intensification of international circulation of specialists and experts; the implementation of development aid programs. An international market of symbolic goods, if already existing, reconfigured during this period, and university exchange made up a distinct category of this market (for a history of the international university exchange market, see Karady 1998 and 2002). It allowed the promotion of national cultural heritage within the frame of international university exchange. In the case of Romania, for instance, Francophony and the long-established connections with the French culture were suitable to facilitate exchanges with the francophone African countries.

In this context, it is meaningful to speak of an *educational* or *educative internationalism*: the international exchanges between socialist countries and African post-colonial countries aimed at economical development objectives, mostly in a political sense (reinforcement of the political regimes mostly stemming from independence wars and constitution of political and military alliances), but also in a cultural and professional sense. ‘Socialist’ education, while containing an emancipating dimension when compared to other forms of domination (colonial), did not exclude some more direct types of indoctrination, which justified even the expression ‘*Erziehungsdiktatur*’ that historically refers to Leninism and to the ways the regimes of the soviet type seized and preserved power. The term is mostly known in German literature as referring to the GDR. *Educational* or *educative internationalism* (or the allotment of educative aid) did not necessarily lead to the *Erziehungsdiktatur*. For Romania at that time, supporting the emancipation of certain African states constituted a demonstration of its own capacity to emancipate, the probation of the change of its international status, in a way comparable to that of the African states which had just recently gained their independence (see Gheorghiu *et al.* 2014).

3. Romania and the African world under the communist regime (the Ceausescu period)

Starting 1965, the communist party of the Romanian Socialist state detached, in its international relations, from the soviet orientation it had followed until then. The election of N. Ceausescu first as head of the party in 1965 and then at the head of

state in 1970, was preceded by political distancing which was made possible by the retreat of the soviet army from Romania in 1958. Romania's 'equidistant' position in the Sino-Soviet conflict, considered at that time as a genuine 'proclamation of independence' (April 1964), the continuation of diplomatic relations with Israel after the 'six-day war' (1966) contrary to the other socialist countries, the reconciliation with Tito's Yugoslavia and with Dubcek's Czechoslovakia, and most of all the condemnation of the latter's being invaded by the armies of the Warsaw Pact members (except Romania) in 1968 insured a certain international recognition to Romania and to its leaders. It is in these circumstances that the exchange programmes with African countries were set up and significantly intensified during the 1970s and 1980s.

Internationalism is a major theme in the foreign policy of Romania at the time, as numerous documents of the party confirm. During one of the party's conferences (1967), Ceausescu emphasised that the world's 14 socialist countries represented 40% of the global industrial production. As main social strength of socialist countries, the emancipated working class was meant to represent a model for the other countries. The fight against colonial domination, against colonialism and neo-colonialism, the increasingly important role of small and medium-sized countries were also part of his discourse. For the Romanian government and its communist party's foreign policy, the main objective was the development of connections with countries of the world's socialist system and with developing countries. Against this background, the increase of connections with the African states was considered an imperative.

Throughout the years, Romania had developed good relations with the group of 77 non-aligned countries, of which most African states were members. At first, Romania participated as an observer or as a guest in this organisation's meetings, and later, in 1967, it finally joined the group (Anton 2009).

Ceausescu's first official visit in an African country, Morocco, took place in 1970 (he had since recently been holding two functions: General Secretary of the Communist Party and President of the State Council). This first visit was followed in 1972 by a great African tour which we will further present in this report. Until 1988, Ceausescu made over 50 official visits to African states. All these visits were preceded or followed by the visits of these countries' heads of state to Romania, as well as diplomatic exchanges on other levels like in bilateral commissions. The main goals of these mixed joint commissions were different forms of economic, scientific and technical cooperation. These commissions decided on the concrete measures which were to be taken in order to ensure the progress of this cooperation. From 1965 to 1989, several mixed Romanian-African commissions held joint meetings. For instance, the Romanian-Moroccan mixed commission was created in 1978 and has had 9 meetings so far (2013; the diplomatic relations between the two countries date back to 1962). *Table 1* showing the different forms of exchange between Romania and African states, although incomplete, must take into account the following items:

Table 1. Official Romanian relations with some African countries

Country	Year of independence	Year of establishment of diplomatic relations with Romania	Visit to Bucharest by the African heads of state	Visits to Africa by N. Ceausescu	First meeting of the mixed collaboration commissions between Romania and the African countries
Morocco	1956	1962		1970, 1973	1971
Algeria	1962	1962		1972, 1973	1972
Central Africa Republic	1960	1969	1970, 1973	1972	1970
Republic of Congo	1960	1966	1968, 1973, 1985	1972, 1987, 1988	1970
Zaire (now D.R. of the Congo)	1960	1966	1970, 1980	1972, 1987, 1988	1971
Tanzania	1964	1964	1975	1972	
Egypt	1952	1969	1978, 1982, 1983, 1985	1972, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1988	1966
Liberia			1974	1974	1972
Tunisia	1956	1963	1968	1975	1968
Zambia	1964	1968	1970, 1974, 1980	1979, 1983	1972

Source: data collected by the authors from the *Lumea* magazines collection, 1970-1990

The Romanian leaders' visits to Africa were widely covered by Romanian media and by various types of publications. Thus, *Lumea* magazine published numerous reports and travelogues on the African continent, in a series of journalistic works then considered as pioneering. These visits also followed a stereotypical and ritualised schedule, including moments of relaxation.

A typical example of itinerary is that of the Somali president in Bucharest in April 1968 (*Lumea* 1968, 17): beside the official negotiations, there was a visit to the capital city of Bucharest, a stop to the Museum of the Village (*Muzeul satului*), where the President was welcomed by folk ensembles, as well as visits to other important economic sites. On the occasion of this State visit, the Somali president was awarded the highest decoration of the Socialist Republic of Romania (the Star of the S.R.R., first class).

The same year (1968), Bucharest had welcomed two other delegations of the highest level: that of the People's Republic of Congo and that of Tunisia. Habib Bourguiba Jr., Secretary of State at that time, had accompanied the Tunisian delegation and declared during an interview to *Lumea* (1968, 37): 'We have youths

who have taken up studies on oil industry in your country, some of them are still in Romania and we hope to be able to continue this exchange and thus train our youth in the Romanian school of engineers'. In 1970, delegations of Zambia, D. R. of the Congo (known as Zaire between 1971 and 1997) and of Central African Republic came to Bucharest.

N. Ceausescu's first great tour of the African countries was presented in Romanian press as a great success, however these articles are written in hermetic language. Modern historians have tried to approach and decipher the signification of these events. Ilarion Tiu (2013a), for instance, has reconstructed N. Ceausescu's visit to Central Africa Republic of 16th-18th March 1972. The Romanian leader had been welcomed by Jean-Bedel Bokassa, the country's president since 1965, who was also Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. The historian noticed that Bokassa had granted many privileges for Romania to exploit the mineral wealth of his country (more details on the relation between the two heads of state in Titley, 1997; 55). Ceausescu seemingly showed special interest in economic exchange in the field of mining industry, but somewhat reluctant as to the allocation of financial credits by Romania.

At the beginning of the 1970s, according to data collected by this historian, an important number of African managers had been schooled in Romanian universities. During the school year 1971-1972, 181 African high-school, graduate and PHD students studied in Romania: 11 from Central Africa Republic, 20 from Algeria, 43 from Congo, 14 from Egypt, 76 from Soudan, 5 from Tanzania, 8 from Zaire, 4 from Zambia (see Tiu 2013a). Estimates show that 5 to 10% of foreign students in Romania at that time were of African origin.

Another example of bilateral relations is that between Romania and the People's Republic of Congo (or Congo-Brazzaville). In 1968, a delegation lead by Marxist leader Alphonse Mas Samba-Débat was in Romania and visited several industrial sites in the counties of Prahova and Brasov. They were impressed by Romania's industrial development. But when N. Ceausescu visited the African country, Congo-Brazzaville's head of state was the socialist Marien N'Gouabi. Ilarion Tiu mentions the promise to allocate 30 scholarships to Congolese students on the occasion of the visit. Training managers was an emergency for the composition of mixed Romanian - Congolese companies in the mining, oil and forestry sectors, companies financed by Romania through a \$25 million loan. President N'Gourbi had come to Romania in 1973, during the fourth meeting of the mixed commission of economic and technical cooperation. The investments in Congo proved to be unsafe, as president N'Gouabi was assassinated in 1977. The relations between Romania and the P R of Congo seemed to have been the subject of a discussion between N. Ceausescu and L. Brejnev, when the Romanian leader wanted to express his knowledge of the African issues. (see Conversation note between N. Ceausescu and L. Brejnev. August 3rd 1976 in Anton, M. 2009).

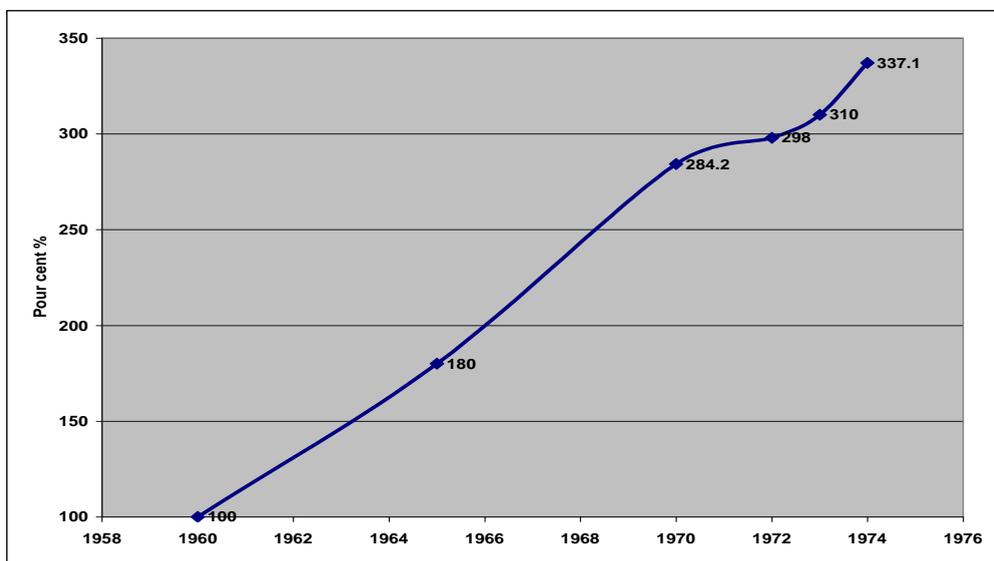
The African tour of 1972 had included Zaire (now D. R. of Congo) as a response to President Mobutu Sésé Séko's visit to Romania in August 1970.

Romania was always interested in the exploitation of natural resources and the development of the mining industry. N. Ceausescu again promised to help by training specialists and also by assisting the country technically and economically (Tiu 2013b).

In conclusion: a constant in the visits and negotiations between Romanian and African heads of state was *education*, as both the training of managers in Romania and the sending of qualified Romanian specialists abroad in areas of mutual interest.

4. The presence of foreign and African students in Romania during the communist era

After 1960, the number of graduate students in Romania starts to rise, as do the expenses for higher education, which are shown in *Figure 1*.



Source: Ministry of Education, *Teaching in the Socialist Republic of Romania*, Bucharest, 1975

Figure 1. Education expenses starting with the year 1960 (in percentages)

Foreign students are registered in the official statistics since the academic year 1955-1956. According to these statistics, the record number of students was registered around the year 1980. The evolution of the overall number of students and that of foreign students in Romania are presented in *Table 2* and *Figure 2*.

The proportion of foreign students in the total number of students in Romania appears relatively high even at a European level, as we can notice in *Table 3* (data from 1985).

Table 2. *Evolution of the number of faculties, students and foreign students*

Academic year	38/39	50/51	55/56	60/61	65/66	70/71	75/76	80/81	85/86	89/90
Number of faculties	33	136	127	131	183	195	137	134	132	101
Total number of students	26489	53007	77633	71989	130614	151885	164157	192546	159798	164507
Number of foreign students	--	--	877	897	503	1766	4971	15888	10774	6669

Source: ***, *Statistical directories of the SRR, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985 and Statistical directory of Romania, 1990*

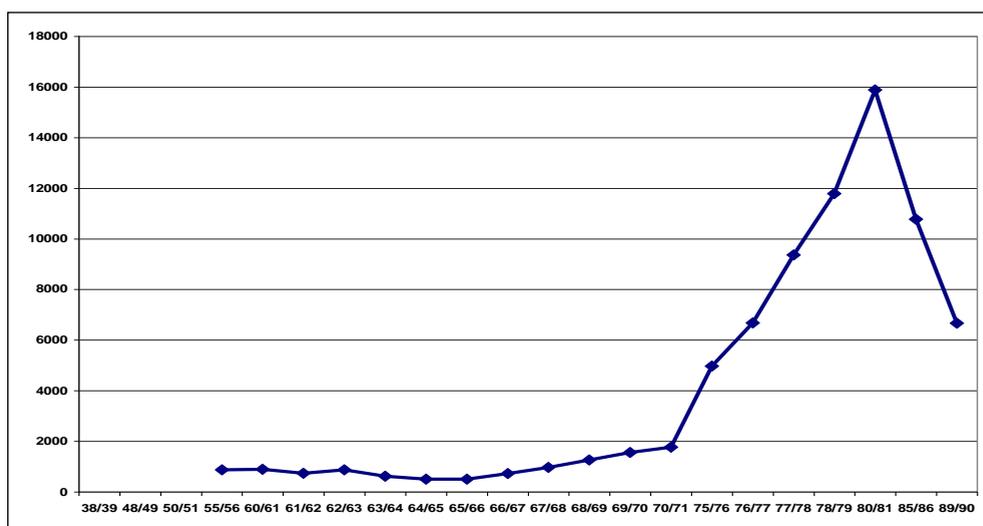


Figure 2. *Evolution of the number of foreign students in Romania*

Table 3. *The situation of foreign students in Europe (selective data)*

Country	Year	Total number of students	Number of foreign students	% of foreign students
Cyprus	1985	3134	544	17.36%
Switzerland	1985	110111	17396	15.80%
France	1985	983483	131971	13.41%
Belgium	1985	248499	24761	10%
.....
Romania	1985	159798	10774	6.74%
Bulgaria	1985	113795	7254	6.37%
German Federal Republic	1985	1550211	79354	5.12%
Greece	1985	137453	6683	4.80%

Source: Nicolae V., Smulders René H.M., Korca M. (1989)

We do not hold any data for the previous period; however we can find disparate traces such as this volume for the vulgarisation of higher education published in French in Romania in 1963, where photos of African students are shown (*Photo 1*).



Source : ***, *Foreign students in People's Republic of Romania* (1963)

Photo 1. Foreign students in Bucharest, 1963

The capacity of educational institutions to welcome African students can even be explained through statistics on the overall number of students. In *Table 4*, we can observe the differences in this matter between Romania and the African States.

We can notice that only Egypt and Libya surpassed Romania at that time in these statistics provided by the UNESCO (*Table 5*), which explains their major need for aid in training their managers. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find statistical data on the African students in Romania, compared to what we can find on other former communist states.

In *Table 5* we can see that Poland is the preferred destination for African students in 1968. Their interest for Romania quickly rises in 1979. At the same time, the proportion of students from Asia decreases radically from 1958 to 1979. On the overall, the interest of young Africans for the former socialist country has been maintained. Unfortunately, we do not have detailed two-way statistics of the 1965-1990 period: the total of students with their country of origin and the field of study they followed.

Table 4. Number of students per 100 000 inhabitants

Country \ Year	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
<i>Romania</i>	729	885	741	722	1640	2066	3424	4701
Egypt	1053	1521	1711	1331	...	...	3246	3337
Libya	508	538	886	1189	...	5671	...	...
Tunisia	256	483	546	784	1172	1935	3198	3627
Guinea	238	...	226	107	111	...	273	1024
Algeria	267	...	...	1055	1083	...	2463	3291
Morocco	206	...	...	1052	1121	980	1231	1424
Republic of Congo	201	396	521	455	...	516	...	...
Swaziland	205	325	405	387	...	459	550	...
Gabon	171	252	...	...	...	...	...	...
Zambia	179	...	...	203	...	251	...	...
Senegal	...	239	212	...	...	...	565	768
Liberia	151	...	...	...	...	1907	...	...
Sudan	135	141	162	236	...	618	...	...
Madagascar	130	277	400	343	238	217	260	372
Maurice	126	111	116	337	551	...	...	...
Ivory Coast	...	178	195	...	369	...	...	...
Togo	71	142	...	222	284	...	...	957
D R of Congo	94	103	130	191	221	...	...	...
Cameroon	86	145	176	247	...	433	590	1163

Source: UNESCO, UIS, Data Centre

Table 5. Distribution of graduate students by region of origin

Country	Africa		Asia	
	1968	1979	1968	1979
Bulgaria	9.1%	5.7% ¹	47.5%	26.2% ¹
Czechoslovakia	21.3%	33.6%	50.4%	27.4%
German D R	16.8%	18.2%	36.1%	29%
Hungary	19.9%	16.7%	42.5%	33.4%
Poland	27.2%	17.4%	37.9%	22.2%
<i>Romania</i>	13.5%	30.8% ²	70.0%	38.3% ²
Yugoslavia	15.3%	19.6% ³	58.8%	60.5% ³

Note: 1-1976, 2-1974, 3-1980

Source: P. Burloiu (1983, p. 139)

Traditionally, the dominant fields of education in Romania were engineering and medicine. However, foreign students were present in various other fields. Thus, A. Bunescu wrote in an article in 1979: 'The Stefan Gheorghiu Academy annually

houses over 500 students coming from 70 States to take up special programmes in social politics, management, journalism, or courses destined to members of labour and youth unions'. The same author added that 'starting 1974, Romania founded the N. Balcescu scholarship, offered under the aegis of the UNESCO to youth desirous of perfecting themselves in the fields in which Romanian education had been recognized on an international level: petrochemistry, mathematics, civil and industrial engineering, architecture.' The author mentioned the Demographic Centre of the UN-Romania (DCUR), opened in 1974, that had ensured the training of specialists coming from 30 developing countries such as Algeria, Benin, Burundi, Congo, Guinea, Senegal, Zaire, etc. On this occasion, the students were interviewed. Hypp Backa from Congo declared that 'the training of foreign specialists represents one of the most efficient forms of concrete aid granted by Romania to third-world countries.' In his interview, Gabriel Busokoza from Burundi stated that 'on the background of the good relations existing between Romania and Burundi, more than 200 Burundi students are studying in your country at the moment and we hope that more will arrive shortly' (Lumea 1979, 27).

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The evolutions presented here were made possible by an important legislative event: the passing of Education Law 11 on May 13th, 1968. This law consecrated the country's distancing from the soviet model of education and tried to promote a new frame of mind. The duration of mandatory studies was increased to 10 years. The law confirmed the public character of education, its being free of charge at all levels and also guaranteed education in the languages of the national minorities. The State was obliged by law to ensure jobs for all graduates at the end of their studies. Some authors, like D.C. Radulescu (2006), emphasised the benefits of this law for education at all levels, but also criticised its limits: the difficulty in generalising 10 year long studies, school drop-out risks, ideological and political control, etc. At the same time, this law created favourable conditions for the development of higher education, including the actual flow of foreign students: development of research centres, training of medium management (sub-engineers, lead architects), the organisation of post-graduate education, etc.

Very important advantages were offered to foreign students. For example, in the 70s Romania offered three types of scholarships (MEI, 1974):

- a. on the basis of agreed scholarships provided by bilateral cooperation with other countries;
- b. on the basis of unilateral scholarships awarded by Socialist Republic of Romania (RSR);
- c. Scholarships from RSR awarded by international organizations (UN, UNESCO, etc.).

A point of attraction for the Foreign students were the education fees: 125 USD per month (for technical, economic, agronomic studies), 150 USD per month (for medical studies) and 165 USD per month (for artistic studies).

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The positive evolutions were suddenly interrupted by a new Education Law issued in 1978, which confirmed the return to a political control of Education. A report on education, sent to the UNESCO by the Ministry of Education in 1985, contained an organisation chart called 'plan of the education's administration and management system', the top of which shows the main ruling entities: *The congress of science and education- The national council of science and education- 4 different commissions- the Ministry of education*. In this circumstance, political control was total and it was combined with a generalised crisis of the socio-economic system. All the indicators had dropped: the quality of teaching as well as the number of foreign students (see *Table 3*). At the same time, the *commercialisation* of graduate studies was rising, together with the expectations of those who paid for studies.

5. Conclusions

During the 1970-1990 period, Romania became an attraction for the African students and the explanations can be various: the visits of N. Ceausescu with the promises of the economic and cultural exchanges, the differentiated superior education in Romania, the costs of the studies, the facilities etc. At the same time national system of education passed an important reform in 1968. The number of African students has grown continuously but decreased at the end of the 90s. The African students are still coming to Romania after the Revolution especially in medical centres even when the Romanian presence in Africa has declined due to certain diplomatic missions coming to an end.

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