

*Field* : Sport Sociology

*Type* : Review Article

*Received*: 06.04.2016 - *Accepted*: 30.05.2016

## **Sport and Politics - Unilateral or Joint Interests? Romanian Case**

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### **Abstract**

Like any field of activity, sport must face the changes on three levels: micro social - at the individual level, medium level - sports institutions, and at macro social level - at the level of society as a whole. Policies in sports, cultivation and promotion of sports talent are a long term investment for a potential benefit of a nation. Sport and politics are not separate realities and cannot be that meet by chance in life practices. Sport has become a policy area that it was exploited due to its universalization. Sports institutions were forced to politicize certain decisions to survive, but also to pursue their interests and to create a favorable image. In Romania, regardless of the political regime or color of the time, sport served as resource, if not an economic, ideological, political and symbolic stake. This area was, through the top people, the safest spokesman and image makers of Romania in relation to other states. However, as in other countries, Romanian sports performance are characterized by a sinusoidal trajectory, fluctuating constantly. Compared to the current democratic regime, communist regime (the period after World War II and until 1989) anticipated the potential of sports, used and benefited more than the results obtained by the Romanian athletes in international competitions to form their own image: the first, by identifying with the nation's athletes, on the other hand, the leading elite.

**Keywords**: Sports, politics, political relationships, Romanian political regimes

## Introduction

In the present context, worldwide occur in science and technology innovations, changes happening in the economy and political transformations taking place in demographic and social structures. These changes, which will probably accelerate in the future, will require a considerable effort in the education system, which should respond to the needs of growing and challenges that arise in a rapidly changing world.

Such challenges must come to welcome and sport, considered one of the areas for expression of human excellence. At the beginning of the third millennium, sport knows effervescence capturing the attention of a very extensive population segment, attracted by sports shows on the stadiums, courts and halls, in front of the television or radio.

On the basis of development, diversification and spread of sports were the addressability and accessibility. Sport has enabled individuals - regardless of age - to practice exercise, engaging in emotion of competition, both practitioners and audience, pursuing not only athletic performance, but also obtain the psycho-physical balance of any participant.

Over time, it has developed a conception of internationalization of sport, which has at its heart human being, beneficiary on the bio-psycho-social line of sporting activity (Rusu, Popovici, 2009).

The late of twentieth and these nearly two decades of the new millennium also marked a spectacular evolution in terms of developing the sports movement, leading governments to reconsider, to establish a new concept in terms of the usefulness of sport in modern society and postmodern . This was structured essentially the following areas:

- Sport as a social factor, the possibility of persuasion on some important socio-professional categories, in terms of educational level, age and concerns;
- Sport as a major promoter of the image of a nation;
- Sport as a possibility of political influence, even in inter-state relations;
- Sport as a result of its basic the strengths - the interaction of areas - culture, health, tourism, education;
- Sport as an area with economic potential (Rusu, Cernaianu, 2012).

Therefore, understanding wide possibilities offered by sports, every state - through governmental organizations - has awarded in its strategies an important role and the sports movement stated goals is, of course, in full compliance with the final decision, that society development .

Starting from this point of major importance, the manner of construction of sports in different countries, and particularly in Romania, was and is a first-order concern. Policies in sports, cultivation and promotion of sporting talent is a long term investment for a gain of a nation probably.

Sports and politics are not separate realities and can not be who are meeting accidentally in life practice. Sport has become an area that politics exploited, due to its universalization. Sports institutions were forced to politicize certain decisions to survive, but also to pursue their interests and to create a favorable image.

Analysis by the political exploitation of sports at international level is not subject focus of this material. Therefore, we will try to present Romanian case, analyzing sequentially and compared to the potential of sports in the communist regime (the period after the Second World War and until December 1989, when it was changing the political regime) and in a democratic society (since 1989 till present).

In Romania, regardless of the regime or the political color of the time, sports served as a resource, if not an economic, ideological, political and symbolic stake. This area was, by the top people, the safest spokesman and image creators of Romania in relation to other states. However, as in other countries, Romanian sports performances are characterized by a sinusoidal trajectory, fluctuating constantly.

### **Sport - Ace in The Sleeve of Communist Ideology in Romania**

During the communist regime in Romania, as well as in other communist countries, the sport was state policy, it has been used in the service of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) and its leaders (O Rusu, D. Rusu, 2008 Ionescu, 2009).

Associating sport with politics was done and before the communist regime in Romania. According to information on the official website of the Romanian Olympic and Sports Committee (COSR) [www.cosr.ro](http://www.cosr.ro), the lead sports institutions in Romania or representing Romania in international sports organizations were called always people in the national elite class or royal family (His Royal Highness Prince Carol of Romania, Prince George Valentin Bibescu His Majesty King Carol II of Romania) or aristocratic class people (George Alexander Plagino). With the communist regime, in the management of national sports institutions were designated party people agreed (only party members who fulfilled the conditions), who held other leading positions, including representatives of the army. Given that there were suspicions of failure of the conditions imposed by the party, those people were replaced. Also, party supporting of leader of national sports institution was performed at international sports structures (Ionescu, Terret, 2012).

Romanian Communist Party rapidly anticipated the potential of sport to make political propaganda. Values and ideals of the doctrine were promoted through the athletes, representing their success, in fact, the success of communist ideology. In this way, Romania has formed his own image: on the one hand, of the nation through identification with athletes (athletes became positive model to follow for every citizen of the country and foreigners associated the athletes success athletes with the success of the regime), and on the other part, of leading elite (political leaders were taking their athletes' success, using their image in international political meetings).

In the early days of the regime, state policy consisted in investment aimed at construction of sports facilities, establishing a national system rationalized training and competitions at all value, gender and age levels, thus creating the basis of high-performance sports (Ionescu, Terret, 2013). A secondary interest, but not unimportant, related to sports activities it was maintaining health and, thus, reduce the cost of health insurance. Were set up and funded by the state sports structures and national competitions, having the role to promote grassroots sport, the concept of today sports for all (eg Daciada, national competition, Spartakiada' sister of Soviets neighbors) and high-performance sports (national branch federations, sports clubs). Since the 60s, supporting sport (even with supplementation financial funds from other

ministries) (Ionescu, Terret, 2013) targeted those individual sports with major potential and tradition in delivering results in international sports competitions in Olympic and non-Olympic sports, which entailed obtaining international political prestige (Udişteanu, 2011).

Having control by one power (Romanian Communist Party - PCR) (Kirîtescu, 1964) of all structures in all fields in the country made it possible to achieve unrivaled performance during the democratic regime, including in sports. State massive investment in 60-70 years, especially in individual sports, resulted in obtaining exceptional sporting performance of Romanian athletes in international competitions, while in team sports remarkable results were recorded until the late 70 (the Olympics, World Championships, European Championships, European Interclubs Cups - both male and female).

Romania's political decision to participate in the Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1984, brought a number of benefits to the country. Ceausescu's decision to boycott the Olympics thus violating the directives of the regime in Moscow arises from the political decisions: getting financial support from the USA, the opportunity to make known the name of the dictator's son, Nicu Ceausescu, on the international political arena, as head of delegation of athletes to Los Angeles, and the refusal of Soviet President to discuss the restitution of the Romanian treasure (treasure that has been stored during World War I on Soviet territory). The benefits brought the country by Romanian athletes were getting: the best performance in the top nations thanks medals (ranked second place in the nations, with 53 medals including 20 gold), recognition and support to Romania by other countries (the entry stadium of our delegation all the stadium rose to his feet and applauded in recognition of participation in the competition despite the restrictions imposed by the USSR), the costs of participating Romanian delegation in worth \$ 120,000 were supported by International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Organizing Committee of Los Angeles, President Ceausescu received the Olympic Order from the President of the IOC at that time, Juan Antonio Samaranch (Ilinescu, 2008).

Potential of sport to develop the Romanian society has been used to organize large sporting events – the Universiade held in Bucharest in 1981 - that favored the development of local infrastructure (sports facilities built and upgraded specifically for the event, development of local transport, accommodation units in student campuses etc.), attracting a large number of tourists, thus leading to economic development of the capital and the country.

### **Sports - the Nation's Forgotten Treasure**

It is accepted the view that one of the factors which contributed to decreasing the level of Romanian sport performances since 1989, is the lack - at national level - a comprehensive and systematic policy and a plan for sports development. For example, the government program 2008-2012 did not include in the list of priority strategies national sport, although the sport was represented by a national governmental institution (Rusu, Popovici, 2009).

After the Revolution of 1989 and the establishment of a democratic political regime, the leadership of sport structures was provided by recognized personalities in the sportive area. According to the COSR website ([www.cosr.ro](http://www.cosr.ro)), Lia Manoliu - athletics, Ion Tiriac - tennis, Octavian Morariu and Alin Petrache -rugby succeeded in COSR leadership. At international level (member of the International Olympic Committee and its Executive Office) Romania have been represented by the same personality, Alexander Şiperco until his death (1998).

Thus, there was a gap in Romanian representation in the IOC in the 90s, 15 years, which today is provided by the former president of COSR, Octavian Morariu (since 2013). However, according to its website [www.romgym.ro](http://www.romgym.ro) since 1905, when George Gh. Bibescu was elected to IOC, and until present about 500 Romanian specialists were elected in different structures in nearly 150 international sports organizations, world and European.

In the period after 1989, sport area has undergone, like all fields and Romanian society as a whole, profound changes were:

- Organizing and structuring - there are several governmental and non-governmental organizations in sport on different levels - national, regional and local level, the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport (MECTS) subordinating private sports federations; there have been set up several private sports clubs, sports federations were established; there have been privatized a number of public clubs, finding a formula for shareholding management system;
- Professionalization of high-performance sport - athletes receive financial rewards based on several criteria (results, league where he playing etc.); have been set up professional leagues (football and boxing);
- Financial support (division of responsibility supporting high-performance sports: sports federations are state controlled by COSR as a non-governmental organization, supports high-performance sports and public authorities through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport, support sport for all). In the democratic regime, there were minimum levels of financial support from the state, identify other sources of funding and sponsorship laws constitute a real problem even today.
- Legal aspects - approved a series of laws, regulations, in accordance with EU legislation, of which Romania is part of 2007 and with international sports bodies, concerning the functioning of activity in physical education and sport;
- Socio-professional regarding activity in sport - were re-established higher education institutions specialized forming specialists; there have been adopted a series of measures of social protection of athletes after sporting career etc.

All these changes were ultimately more negative effects than positive effects on Romania's representation in major international competitions, participation and obtaining results (medals, positioning in the rankings, qualifications in major competitions). For example, statistics show that from edition Summer Olympics in Barcelona in 1992, the number of athletes who participated began to decline significantly (from 179 in 1992 to 105 athletes per edition in London, 2012, and are reserved for Olympics in Rio, 2016 - 70 athletes have qualified in 12 sports, according to the site

[https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/România\\_la\\_Jocurile\\_Olimpice\\_de\\_vară\\_din\\_2016](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/România_la_Jocurile_Olimpice_de_vară_din_2016)).

Also, since the number of medals won by athletes was considerably reduced, under 10 at each of the last two editions of the Games. After 1989, top results at the Summer Olympics it was the edition of the Sydney 2000 (26 medals) and the opposite - Beijing 2008 (8 medals). In addition, a number of athletes from traditional branches (gymnastics, rowing, athletics etc.) failed qualification Rio de Janeiro, 2016 (the men's team, especially the women's gymnastics have failed to qualify, including prequalification tournament at the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, which has not happened since 1968).

Another negative effect of changes made in sport it was the lack of conditions to support sport for all, reducing the basis of high performance sport. Were abolished several school sports competitions, we have reduced the number of hours of physical education in schools, were canceled sports facilities (not only been maintained, but were destroyed several sports facilities) and so on. Despite superficial financial support, combination of the two fields - politics and sports - has continued in this political system. Interest of politics towards sport was showed either by associating politicians, members or leaders of national political parties with different clubs, particularly football clubs with tradition in Romania - like Steaua Bucharest, Dinamo Bucharest, Rapid Bucharest, University of Craiova, Politehnica Timișoara - or using public image of athletes in establishing their own political image (appearance in the media of politicians with success athletes who tested, or using athletes image in election campaigns etc.).

Interest politicians in investment in football clubs, in particular, has been a constant since 1989, when several members of various national political parties have become owners or shareholders, thus entering the board of various clubs in the country (even shorter periods). They directed the technical staff decisions, the composition of teams after their own conceptions and interests, often without specialist knowledge in the field. Moreover, they come to represent that team in the media. This interest was actually a way to avoid paying various fees and taxes, to launder money from other businesses they owned, sometimes illegal, which attracted a number of convictions (according to website [www.mediafax.ro](http://www.mediafax.ro), in March 2014 more people involved in managements of clubs, including political functions, and players agents too, were sentenced to imprisonment for different periods of time file transfers of players).

Another aspect of interest from politics to sports, especially football, it was the use of athletes and team image in the election campaign. For example, in 2008, the Mayor of Iasi town used local soccer team Politehnica Iasi (players and coach) in the election campaign to get votes from the local electorate (Rusu, 2009).

Although the sport has not been a national priority for most government programs since 1989, nevertheless political leaders from various national parties have not hesitated associating their political image with the international success of athletes (presidents of the country, prime ministers, ministers, state secretaries, representatives local government officials, party members etc.).

Sport interest in politics was manifested in several ways. Several athletes registered with the clubs under the umbrella of ministries - the Army, the Internal Affairs etc., received awards and degrees depending on the results. At the end of sports career, many athletes have joined the management of various sports structures using thus, to the smooth functioning of, recognition and prestige sporting successes achieved. A number of former great athletes have entered the political arena as members of various national political parties have applied for, hold or have held various leadership positions in various political structures at local, regional or national level (eg. Ilie Nastase, tennis champion, a candidate for mayor of Bucharest in 1996, former athletics champion Gabriela Szabo, former rowing champion Elisabeta Lipa occupied or occupy the position of Minister of Youth and Sports).

## Conclusions

Constant investment in human talent cultivation and supporting (major national resource), in general, and in sport, in particular, can lead a nation gain certainly, direct with it. Therefore, this investment is better to be supported at all levels of decision. This lesson was quickly assimilated and put into practice the political leaders of the communist regime in Romania in the period after World War II until the late 90s.

Expectations of state involvement in supporting sports are great, even today in Romanian society. In varying degrees and in different social, political, cultural, economical contexts, this state involvement had the role to promote, regulate, provide the resources necessary to manage and exploit the potential of sport for its benefit and its citizens, too.

Failure to accept the interaction between sports and politics, separation of these fields, can be seen as a movement of resistance from those who support this idea (whether members of various sports or political structures). Politics and sport are in interdependent relationship, influencing each other. Each of these areas of a society is a product of specific contexts of action.

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