

Historical Development of Gender Equality During the Soviet-type Dictatorship in Romania

CSABA SZABÓ

Ph.D. student, University of Miskolc,
Central European Academy
E-mail: szabo.csaba@centraleuropeanacademy.hu

ABSTRACT

The present article focuses on legislation covering gender equality during the Soviet-type totalitarian era in Romania. The article showed that the institution of gender equality made significant progress under the dictatorship. It is worth noting that every era comes with its own set of problems: in the beginning, under the leadership of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the will of independence, then, under Nicolae Ceaușescu, the will to increase the population, and the general monitoring and propaganda spreading mechanism.

KEYWORDS

gender equality, Soviet-type totalitarian regime, working mother, women's organisation, abortion, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Dezvoltarea istorică a egalității de gen în timpul dictaturii de tip sovietic din România

Rezumat

Prezentul articol se concentrează asupra legislației privind egalitatea de gen în timpul epocii totalitare de tip sovietic din România. Articolul arată că instituția egalității de gen a făcut progrese semnificative în timpul dictaturii. Este demn de remarcat faptul că fiecare epocă vine cu propriul set de probleme: la început, sub conducerea lui Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, voința de independență, apoi, sub Nicolae Ceaușescu, voința de creștere a populației și mecanismul general de monitorizare și răspândire a propagandei.

Cuvinte cheie

egalitate de gen, regim totalitar de tip sovietic, mamă muncitoare, organizație de femei, avort, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Nicolae Ceaușescu.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a basic fundamental principle of society, not only in labour law but also on a much broader level. However, we nevertheless continue to struggle to

eliminate inequalities in the 21st century; thus we are far from having perfect regulations that ideally eliminate gender-based discrimination. For example, unequal wages between sexes or jobs associated with male workers are still prevalent.

Accordingly, it is imperative to understand the development of this institution to ensure effective regulation in this field. The present article aims to offer a broad perspective on the development of gender equality in Romania, focusing on the period of the Soviet-type dictatorship. Romania was a state heavily influenced by the USSR and which carried forward the fundamental steps of the communist ideology. Romania had two rulers during the Soviet-type totalitarian period: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu. Despite these dictators supporting communist ideologies, they had independent views on how to build a prosperous socialist society.

For reference, let us first examine the period before the installation of this type of totalitarianism. It can be stated, gender equality was an unexploited field of law, in particular, Romania being a state where women were subordinated to their husbands' or fathers' will. The subordination of women was generally an accepted state in society.

When examining labour law from the point of view of gender equality, there is hardly any concrete regulation because laws regulating this field were just emerging.

Interestingly, the first law that contained few labour law regulations was the Romanian Civil Code of 1864, which was based on the Napoleonic French *Code civil*.

Initially, the field of labour law was regulated with royal decrees. The first decree was from 1912:¹ the law for organising occupations, credit system, and worker care. Although there is no *expressis verbis* mention of equal treatment in the mentioned law, it has some interesting regulations. In this era, a woman who wanted to work needed the permission of a man (the husband). However, the law allowed women to take any legal action required in the meantime regarding the working process individually; furthermore, to be a part of litigation without a man's consent. The working hours were maximised for women at 11 hours per day with some additional benefits for female workers who were married.

Seventeen years later, in 1929, another law was implemented,² which abolished the need to acquire a man's permission for women to work or to perform actions that arise during the working process. The same law also gave women the right to use their salary as they wished.

1. Education

The first step for women to be able to compete in the labour market with men was to get good education and gain knowledge that would help them enter the various fields of the labour market.

The first law in Romania, which was a starting point for equal education, concerned secondary education in 1928,³ which stated in Article 4 that secondary education will

1 Law No. 27 from 1912.

2 Law about labour contracts from 1929, Article 40.

3 Law No. 79 from 1928, Article 4.

be provided equally to boys and girls. These laws were far from introducing equality in the educational system in Romania. If we carefully read the law, we can see that education continued to be different among boys and girls. For example, there were separate schools for boys and girls at that time, or girls had different courses than boys, like handwork or household. In this regard, girls followed an education system that already assumed that they would become housewives instead of equal members of the labour market. Women were raised to become housewives from the beginning. Therefore, after completing their studies, they did not have a chance to enter any competitive field with men in the labour market, especially those that required special, concrete, material knowledge. The importance of education was significantly proved when the following Constitution was adopted.

In 1938, the Romanian Constitution agreed to give women the right to vote. Although this right was conditioned by education, it meant that, in reality, the number of female voters was confined to wealthy urban women. Coincidentally, the next elections, in which women were allowed to participate for the first time, were organised by the Communist Party, which helped it seize power and start the era of the Soviet-type dictatorship in Romania.⁴ In reality, the regime had two advantages arising from this regulation. First, the image of a democratic and modern state because seemingly they were following states like the Netherlands (1919) or the USA (1920) in this matter. Another upside was that the Communist Party could be elected with double the votes.⁵

Before examining the period in question, it is important to mention that the two world wars had a major impact in many fields, including labour laws and gender equality. Both world wars consumed immense resources, and problems arrived not just in the economic field but in the workforce as well. After World War II, Romania, among many other states, faced huge losses. In order to offset the losses, women were gradually allowed to enter the workforce.⁶

II. GHEORGHE GHORGHIU DEJ (WOMEN AS WORKERS)

After King Michael I was forced to abdicate, the Soviet-type totalitarian regime in Romania came into force officially in December 1947, two years after the end of the second World War.

The first dictator of the period in Romania was Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. He was the head of the Romanian Communist Party that came to power in 1945. At the beginning of his leadership, he was governing Romania under the influence of the USSR.

4 Mihaela Bărbieru (2022): *Women in Romanian politics: representation and a better governance*, in Iulian Boldea, Cornel Sigmirean, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (ed.): *Reading Multiculturalism. Human and Social Perspectives*, The Alpha Institute for Multicultural Studies, Tîrgu-Mureş, p. 256.

5 Oana Lavinia Ciucă: Etapele ideologozarii conceptului de emancipare a femeii, *Antropomedia*, 2/2010, p. 76.

6 Viorica Banciu, Chișea Floare, Ionuț Bancilă (2012): The Social Status and Image of the Romanian Woman Presented in the Nationalist Discourses of the Dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, in *History and Society IPEDR vol. 34*, IACSIT Press, Singapore, p. 112.

From the 1950s, he began focusing on the partial removal of the dependence of Romania from the leadership of the USSR. In 1958, this goal could be achieved as the Soviet army withdraw from the country, so he even attempted to pursue an independent foreign and domestic policy without Moscow's influence. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej saw the success of the independence of foreign and domestic policy in industrialisation.⁷ The idea of industrialisation also accentuated the need for women to enter the already imperfect labour market.

The first and most important task of the regime was to consolidate power; so, it changed the Constitution and its provisions to match the USSR's philosophies and ideologies. The reason for the change was clear; the Constitution was at the top of the hierarchy in the given law system, which was the supreme law based on every other law.

The first Romanian Constitution of the regime was adopted on 13 April 1948, and it stated in Article 16 that all citizens of the Romanian Peoples' Republic, irrespective of sex, nationality, race, religion, or cultural grade, are equal before law. This Constitution was the first that placed women at the same level in one particular area, namely, justice. Furthermore, it offered equal rights to women and men in economic, social, cultural, political, and private fields of life. In Article 21, it stated that for equal work, women have the right to equal salary as men.

It can be noticed that immediately after the new regime came into force, gender equality became an important issue. This can be attributed to the modernisation process of the society, which was started by the regime. Gender equality served as one of the essential measures of modernisation. However, it was sustained by the regime just at an ideological level.⁸

1. 1948-education reform

At the beginning of the Soviet-type dictatorship in Romania, similar to other countries, every law and institution needed to be changed to conform to the USSR's ideologies. As with the Constitution, the education system needed to be revamped. The regime acknowledged that education was a primary tool to raise "*valuable members of the Socialist society*." Romania was directly under the control of the USSR, meaning that the USSR heavily influenced the first educational reform. The only institution that could organise education became the state, and private schools or schools operated by the church were excluded from providing education.⁹ From my point of view, what is relevant is the first article on educational reform, which stated that public education constitutes an equal right for all citizens of the Romanian People's Republic, regardless of sex, nationality, race, or religion. This was the next step, after the 1938 education law, towards

7 Stanca Iris Iacob (2018): *Worker, Mother, Socialist: The Making of the Romanian Communist Woman, 1965–1975*, Duke University – Department of History, Durham, p. 8. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/10161/16659> (accessed on 27.12.2022).

8 Ciucă (2010): p. 74.

9 Georgeta Stoian Connor (2003): *The Reform of Education in Romania and its Implications for the Teaching of Geography in Secondary Schools* (unpublished Master's thesis), University of Georgia, Athens (Georgia), p. 21. Available at: https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/connor_georgeta_s_200308_ma.pdf (accessed on 27.12.2022).

gender equality. Reading the entire law, we can state that the text remains faithful to the first article, uses gender-neutral language, and does not contain any regulation differentiating genders in education.

The result of the present reform quickly gained popularity, resulting in many women entering the education system, not only schools but also universities. The importance of gender in the education system began to wane gradually, but another issue appeared. Education was hard to reach for people living in villages. A new trend showed that, in reality, education was available in most cases only for wealthy urban families.¹⁰ Good education was considered the privilege of the upper echelon of society.

The present regulation aimed to change the whole education system. In its last article, it repealed all former laws dealing with education.

2. Labour Law Code

In 1950, Romania continued to be heavily influenced by the USSR, meaning that Romania followed other Soviet-type totalitarian regimes and finally introduced its first labour law code. In the field of gender equality, this labour law code strengthened the principle of equal pay for equal work between women and men, which was already regulated in the 1948 Constitution. It included age and nationality in this principle.¹¹

The code introduced various individual rights for pregnant workers:

1. They cannot be assigned overtime duty – Article 59
2. They cannot work in challenging or harmful conditions and cannot be delegated without their consent – Article 89
3. After the sixth month of pregnancy, they cannot be asked to work on night shifts – Article 91
4. They are exempted from the so-called temporary obligations (for example, helping authorities in a natural disaster) – Article 112

It is important to note that the labour law code from 1950 does not regulate in any sense maternity leave.

The labour code does not include any provision that promotes gender equality in particular besides the principle of equal pay for equal work, meaning that the only field that was aimed to balance the differences between genders in the labour market was the economic aspect. This can be explained by the fact that, 15 years after the end of World War II, the consequences of the loss of people continued to mark this period. The economic approach of gender equality aimed to introduce women into the labour market. We can see that this originated from the deficit of workers available at that time rather than balancing the inequalities between the sexes. Women were seen as a tool for solving the demographical problems triggered by the world wars.

This was the beginning of the use of women in the propaganda. Women were portrayed in it as professionals, hard-working members of society, and no longer

10 Cristina Petrescu: A Genderless Protest: Women Confronting Romanian Communism, *Annals of the University of Bucharest. Political science series*, 2/2014, p. 85.

11 Law No. 3 from 1950, Article 33.

remained just housewives. Posters came up showing women working in factories or driving tractors, which further appeared to encourage women to take up jobs. It can be acknowledged that women benefitted from the economic approach of achieving gender equality, with financial independence much more prevalent than before (in some cases, they were not totally dependent but partially), and with that, the roles in a family became relaxed.¹²

This seemed beneficial to the ruling government, just as in the case of giving women the right to vote. First, it solved the problem of worker deficit. With women entering the labour market, the existing workforce was doubled. Second, the emancipation of women in the working class portrayed the ruling body as a modern democratic government.

It became evident that the economic intention somewhat limited gender equality at one point and helped its evolution. Women entered the labour market and gained more or less financial independence. However, they were generally employed in positions at the bottom of the hierarchy and their salaries reflected this. Industries were somehow classified because the most critical sectors, like strategic or energy industries, continued to be occupied by men.¹³ Furthermore, even in industries dominated by women workers, the leaders were generally men.¹⁴

In 1952, a new Constitution was adopted in Romania, the second Constitution of this totalitarian era.¹⁵ The regulations of this Constitution cautiously expanded the fields where it offered equality between males and females. Here, it is important to mention that the rights offered were more at an ideological level, and were motivated by the deepening and spreading propaganda, which had an important role in creating and influencing the society in the desired direction.

First, Article 83 expands on areas of life where women of the Romanian Peoples' Republic had equal rights as men, and highlights the already existing economic area: politics, state, and culture. The intentions of this expansion makes sense when discussing the next important article.

Furthermore, the same article of the 1952 Constitution expands areas of equal rights in the labour law field, stating that women and men have equal rights to the following: work, salary, rest, social security insurance, and education. It is worth noting that the previous Constitution already mentioned work and salary, and even education was discussed earlier in the first educational reform, leaving two new aspects: the right to rest and right to social security insurance. By introducing these two concepts from the point of view of gender equality, the intention of creating attractive working conditions for women can be observed.

The last phrase of Article 83 mentions that the state protects families and the interests of women and children. Interestingly, the previous legal system did not include

12 Petrescu (2014): p. 7.

13 Petrescu (2014): p. 8.

14 Mihaela Miroiu (2004): *Drumul către autonomie. Teorii politice feministe*, Polirom, Iași, p. 203.

15 It is interesting to note that even at that time, Romania was heavily influenced by the USSR. In the preamble, it is stated that the Romanian Peoples's Republic was born due to the victory of the Soviet Union against German fascism and the liberation of Romania by the Soviet Army.

any regulation prohibiting domestic violence or consider it as a crime.¹⁶ The state's protection of children was materialised concretely by daycares (*creșă*), where parents could leave their children at a very young age. The reason once again was simple, as Mihaela Miroiu remarks in her book, the task of child-raising was taken over by the state, so that the parents could return to work much quicker, and, in that way, the adults are occupied with production, while the state in turn could control them. Furthermore, taking care of children's education at an early age meant that the state had the opportunity to control and influence their education.¹⁷

Article 96 can be seen as a sequel to Article 83, giving women the right to vote. However, importantly, it introduced the right to be elected, and this right is what expanded the area of gender equality in the fields of politics and state, which is mentioned in Article 83.

The arguments regarding the advantages of the governing body hold water, because the image of a democratic country is once again upheld, and the number of votes helps consolidate power.

The expansion of these areas had not influenced reality, as women continued to occupy the same positions and jobs at the bottom of the hierarchy. The right to be elected for women could be symbolic, but in no way influenced anything, in particular, there was a one-party system so if they wanted to be elected they had to become a member of the Communist Party, while members of the Communist Party were chosen instead based on political decisions (fidelity towards the party) than their genuine merits.¹⁸

After almost 13 years of the 1952 Constitution, provisions regarding the right for women to social security insurance came to the fore. In 1965, the decision to grant material aid within the state social insurance introduced the right to material help for women in case of maternity. A separate section, Chapter 3, regulated in particular the aid that is offered by the state in case of maternity.

The institution of maternity leave was finally regulated. The law states that female workers have a right to 112 days of maternity leave, including 52 days before the birth of the child and 60 days after. The same article stated that maternity leave ends if the child dies during its first 42 days, highlighting the dark side of the regime. Browsing the statistics, I suppose the extended period was given because the government did not want to show a high number of child deaths in their statistics.¹⁹

A vital regulation was the interdiction to terminate the employment contract of a woman on maternity leave.²⁰ The mother's workplace was somehow protected, and it offered continuity for those who desired to return to the same workplace where they worked before the child's birth.

16 Petrescu (2014): p. 85.

17 Miroiu (2004): p. 205.

18 Banciu, Chișea, Ionuț (2012): p. 114.

19 *Romania Population 1950–2023*. Available at: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/ROU/romania/population> (accessed on 27.12.2022).

20 It is important to mention that 12 years before the present law, in 1953, Decree No. 202 already introduced punishment for reducing the salary of a woman due to pregnancy or maternity or refusing to accept them for work for the same reason by imprisonment from 3 months to 1 year or by a fine.

3. Women Organisations in Romania

To comprehensively understand the intentions and aims of the dictator, we need to examine the situation of women's organisations.

Before the installation of the Soviet-type totalitarian regime, feminism in Romania evolved as a movement in similar proportion as in western countries. In 1850, the Romanian Women's Society and in 1913, the Union of all Romanian Women's Reunion were established.²¹ These organisations were not centralised. They were somewhat autonomous organisations, meaning the state did not intend to acknowledge them.

When the regime came to power in Romania, the ruling body recognised the organisations' potential. Women's groups were just some of the organisations that captured the state's attention, although it was a general observation. The state considered all types of organisations with a possibility to reorganise them in a way that helped consolidate power. For example, the heads of these organisations were chosen by political decisions²² rather than based on their objective merits. The communist ideology saw the opportunity in the organisations and tried to separate the whole population into various organisations. For example, there were organisations for youth, workers, or as we can see, women. Another advantage of these reorganisations was that the state could expand and strengthen its control over people.

The direction in which women's organisations could evolve was decided. At the beginning of 1946, all women's organisations were rethought, and the state centralised them. Unification of the mentioned organisation began and it fell under the direct subordination of the state, and the so-called Democratic Federation of Romanian Women was established within the framework of the Romanian Democratic Woman's Congress, which was held in March 1946. As Oana Lavinia Ciucă remarked, in 1964, the organisation, whose function can be described as a "lever" to influence female public opinion was established, with its principal activities aiming at political work.²³ The existence of the organisation, seemingly upheld by the government, was imitating western countries' will to emancipate women. However, it was just used as another tool to spread propaganda and control the population.²⁴

In general, the organisations were used as tools by the state for objectives other than what they were meant for. The goals of these organisations were never achieved; instead, they were limited by the state at the level of their own goals.

However, in the middle of the 1960s, a new era in the history of the dictatorship started under the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu, and as an essential part of the communist ideology, the use of women's organisations and the use of women as symbols changed. Unfortunately, as we will see in the next chapter, the change brought additional problems and extremist ideologies.

21 Krassimira Daskalova, Susan Zimmermann (2017): Women's and Gender History 1, in Irina Livezeanu, Árpád von Klimó (ed.): *The Routledge History Of East Central Europe Since 1700*, Routledge, New York, p. 306.

22 Miroiu (2004): p. 201.

23 Ciucă (2010): pp. 74–75.

24 Miroiu (2004): p. 202.

III. NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU (WOMAN IN THE MOTHER'S ROLE)

After the death of the first dictator Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, a new leader came to power in 1965. Despite also being a dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu had different ideologies and goals to attain. As a symbolic gesture, the same year, the name of the ruling Communist Party changed to the Romanian Communist Party. Furthermore, they even changed the state's name, which is what Romania came to be called: the Socialist Republic of Romania.

Ceaușescu's popularity skyrocketed, driven by his intentions to separate Romania from the foreign policy dictated by the USSR. He was not famous just in communist circles. By denouncing the occupation of Czechoslovakia as illegal in 1968, he also gained popularity in western countries. A new era started in Romanian totalitarianism, which was considered one of the harshest at that time. One of the main differences was the personality cult of the new dictator and his wife. His main goal at the beginning of his reign was to increase the population, which was around 19.1 million²⁵ when he assumed power, to 35 million. Later in the 1980s, he focused on repaying Romania's foreign debt, collapsing the national economy. The process of following these goals influenced all aspects of life, both in the private and public sphere.

Under his rule, the expected role of women underwent a massive change, as we will see. Women were often referred to as "*Héroine Mothers*" in Ceaușescu's speeches, accentuating the pressure to raise children.²⁶

1. Criminalisation of abortion

The new ruler was clear about his new goals; his approach to promote population growth was relatively simple: the population can grow if birth rates are as high as possible, and one of the easiest ways to reach this was to criminalise abortion. Within two years of him having the supreme power, he made abortion illegal by decree No. 770/1966, with effect from 1967. The pressure for women to fulfil their role as a mother was a general perception in the communist ideology. However, the criminalisation of abortion led to Romania becoming a unique regime in the Eastern Bloc. By this law, the Romanian regimes attempted to control an individual's private sphere in a manner that no other Soviet-type totalitarian state did.²⁷

The decree²⁸ had just eight articles and regulated the interdiction in a brief manner. The first article stated that termination of pregnancy was prohibited. The second enumerated six exceptions, situations in which abortions would be possible and allowed:

1. If the pregnancy endangers a woman's life that any other way than the termination of pregnancy cannot remediate;

25 *Romania Population 1950–2023*. Available at: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/ROU/romania/population> (accessed on 27.12.2022).

26 Iacob (2018): p. 95.

27 Iacob (2018): p. 119.

28 Decree No. 770/1966.

2. If one of the parents suffers from a disease, which is hereditary, or causes serious congenital malformations;
3. If the pregnant woman has severe physical, mental, or sensory disabilities;
4. If the woman is aged over 45;
5. If the woman already gave birth to four children and takes care of them;
6. If the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest.

We can state that the exceptions arose when the child's or the mother's life was threatened. Another type of exception was only the case in which a woman was already raising four children. Therefore, the goal was for every woman to give birth to at least four children. Those were the steps that Ceaușescu used to increase the population of Romania.

The intention behind the protection of children is obvious; the goal was to increase the population rate, and with that, the regime needed the next generation of parents to be as healthy as possible. A healthy population was the basis of the socialist society in Ceaușescu's perception.²⁹ The contradiction in Ceaușescu's way of thinking was obvious because while the health of the population was an essential piece of his plan to build a prosperous socialist society, the healthcare system was being neglected³⁰ by the governing body. The healthcare system in Romania started to improve only in the last 10–15 years. Therefore, the neglect of the healthcare system in the totalitarian regime had a significant impact even after the change of regime.³¹

To achieve the goal of increasing the population, Ceaușescu's regime even went further than just prohibiting abortion. In reality,³² hospitals had a plan that maximised the number of births that could occur by C-section. Unfortunately, women who needed C-sections risked their lives in the hospital where the birth took place. Women who were in one of the cases of the enumerated exceptions needed the consent of a prosecutor, who was present when the abortion took place.

The right to raise a child, becoming an aggressively pressured obligation by the state, meant that both parents' privacy was violated by the state. However, women lost more than just their privacy. It is true that the law that mentioned the interdiction to terminate the employment contract of a woman on maternity leave was in force, but for an employer it seemed more advantageous to employ men than women, which appeared to be completely legal. The simple reason that the clear intention of that state forced women to have more children, disadvantaged them because in this case, they needed maternity leave, meaning that labour and child birth would negatively influence productivity, driven by Ceaușescu's strict "five-year plans."

29 Banciu, Chipea, Ionut (2012): p. 113.

30 Lorena Anton (2011): *Socialist Mothers and their Legacies: Migration, Reproductive Health and 'Body Memory' in Post-Communist Romania*, p. 6. Available at: <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00785532> (accessed on 27.12.2022).

31 Elena Bărbulescu: Farewell to Communism but Leave the Hospitals Here, *Transylvanian Review*, Supplement 1/2016, p. 17.

32 Roxana-Elisabeta Marinescu: Representing gender in communist and postcommunist Romania, *Diversité et Identité Culturelle en Europe*, 1/2017, p. 30.

The totalitarian state was very inventive when it came to achieving goals. Acknowledging that, in reality, the prohibition of abortion will have, as one of the side effects, illegally executed abortions, authorities forced women to have medical controls to track early stages of pregnancy. These controls took place in most cases during work at their workplaces.³³ Despite these efforts, Romania continued to struggle with many illegal abortions and a high infant mortality rate.³⁴

Another disadvantage for working women was financial autonomy. The decision from 1965 remained in force, regulating, among others aspects, financial support for maternity leave. The regulation distinguished three cases. If women worked uninterruptedly for more than 12 months before maternity leave, they earned 90% of their salary; if they worked for 6–12 months, they earned 70% of salary; and if they worked for less than six months, they earned 50% of salary.³⁵ It can be stated that if women could not reach at least a year of uninterrupted work, their monthly income was significantly lower, especially when compared to the income of fathers, who were working and continued to receive their full salary.

At this point, it is essential to acknowledge that the criminalisation of abortion also abused men's rights. Child raising becoming an obligation in the Ceaușescu era was a concrete violation, not just for women, but for men's rights to private life as well. The double obligation to child raising and working strongly affected their day-to-day life. Men also were involved in parenting, maybe not at the same level as women, but the responsibility to raise children weighed on them as well.

Without differentiating between genders, we can understand that with the power of the state to decide for their citizens to have children, even defining the number of children, and then leaving the obligation of raising the children to parents was considered a severe violation of the parental dimension of individuals. This deep interference of the state that violated individual rights was one of the reasons that led to the peculiarity of the Romanian Soviet-type dictatorship.

2. The second Romanian labour law code (Women in the working mother role)

In 1972, Romania adopted a new labour law code. The new regulation was in line with the new goals of the regime. This labour code reinforced the principle of equal pay³⁶ for equal rights or the right of women to choose their profession, education, and work. The maternity leave was highlighted and accentuated by introducing it into the labour law code.³⁷

It is important to mention the additional rights offered to women by the present regulation, which were considered “*special measures*” under the new labour code. Women

33 Petrescu (2014): p. 87.

34 Anton (2011): p. 10.

35 Decision No. 880/1965 regarding the granting of material aid within the state social insurances, Chapter 3, Article 15.

36 Law No.3 from 1950, The Labour law code, Article 33.

37 Law No.3 from 1950, The Labour law code, Article 66.

were allowed to work on night shifts only in exceptional cases. Pregnant women were prohibited from working in challenging, dangerous, or harmful conditions. If they worked under these conditions, the employer was required to delegate them to another work without reducing their salary.

We can see that separate measures were primarily created to protect pregnant workers, thereby aligning the labour code with the idea of the working mother. Article 158 of the 1972 labour code makes it clear that women were not just a symbol of motherhood. It states that women who have children up to 6 years of age, whom they take care of, can cut their working hours by half if they do not benefit from nurseries or dormitories; the time they were placed under these conditions will be considered as full-time working hours.

The symbolisation of the woman as a mother, in reality, was a double expectation. It did not change from women as workers to women as mothers.³⁸ The role of the mother was added to workers' role. The state continuously needed the workforce to be able to maintain and raise the level of production. Therefore, the plan to increase the population was tantamount to exploitation of women in both "*reproductive and productive*" ways.³⁹ The best example of this double work schedule is the regulation of the above-mentioned labour code, which stated in its 156th article that women with children who are no more than nine months old can take half-an-hour breaks every three hours during their work time to feed and take care of their children.

In Ceaușescu's speech, women were characterised as heroic builders of the socialist economy who contributed to growth, both as workers and mothers. As Oana Lavinia Ciucă writes, an ideal socialist woman was an equal desexualised object in the labour market with its male counterpart, the image of the crane operated by a woman, as a tractor operator, and an object sexualised in private life (the image of the patriotic mother eager to procreate the nation).⁴⁰ The celebration of women who were both mothers and workers was disguised propaganda that pressured and obligated women to work and raise children. The two tasks were hard to separate; it was common to take the child with them to work, especially if there was no one to take care of them.⁴¹ In the wake of rapid industrialisation, people tended to move to cities to be able to work. Therefore, grandparents were not able to take care of their grandchildren.

3. Education under the Ceaușescu era

In the Ceaușescu era, two main educational reforms were promulgated: one in 1968, and another in 1978.

The 1968 reform was a manifestation of the intention, of independence, both from the USSR and the west. The leader of that time realised the importance of education to build an "*independent and great nation*." It gave some autonomy to universities but the regime nevertheless had a significant influence on them, the control was maintained

38 Ciucă (2010): p. 75.

39 Banciu, Chișea, Ionuț (2012): p. 113.

40 Ciucă (2010): p. 85.

41 Iacob (2018): p. 95.

through several solutions.⁴² From the point of view of gender equality, the reform did not bring too many new regulations. It strengthened the prohibition of gender discrimination by expanding the prohibition of discrimination on nationality, religion, or any limitation that could constitute discrimination.⁴³ The text avoids gendering the wording; education was declared unitary in the Socialist Republic of Romania. From the perspective of education, the evolution was unquestionable: obligatory classes were determined at ten instead of eight in the educational reform from 1948; it introduced the classification of students based on grades, etc.

The 1978 educational reform practically copied the same article from the previous one stating that: citizens of the Socialist Republic of Romania have the right to education without differentiating nationality, race, sex, or religion and without any other limitations that could constitute discrimination. Four new bodies were introduced to control and help the evolution of national education: the National Council for Science and Technology, Academy of Social and Political Sciences, Congress on Education and Instruction and Supreme Council for Education and Instruction.⁴⁴

The most interesting part of education from the point of view of gender equality was Elena Ceaușescu, Nicolae Ceaușescu's wife. Elena's entry into politics was made through education, with her election as General Director of the Institute of Chemical Research and as vice president of the National Council for Science and Technology.⁴⁵

4. Elena Ceaușescu, the supreme woman

The progress of building the personality cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu was followed in parallel with building his wife's personality cult. The couple was portrayed as the perfect socialist couple, the husband was the head of the state as well as the head of the family. Concurrently, Elena was the perfect woman who was not just educated. She fulfilled both the worker's and the mother's role, having and raising three children. She was the perfect example for Romanian women's society.⁴⁶ Even International Women's Day, which is held every year on 8 March, was instead a celebration of Elena Ceaușescu than a celebration and recognition of women in general.⁴⁷ The propaganda was, of course, built on lies and exaggerations. Elena was often portrayed as a scientist in chemistry. She was even handed a Ph.D. even though she had only finished primary education (until the 4th grade).

To help his wife advance in politics, Nicolae Ceaușescu, at the beginning of the 1970s, consistently built propaganda on the emancipation of women in decision-making bodies and in politics. The regime even specified minimum quotas for women's participation in politics at every level. This led to a significant increase in women's

42 Stoian Connor (2003): pp. 25–26.

43 Law No. 11 from 1968, law about the education in Romania, Article 4.

44 Stoian Connor (2003): p. 26.

45 Iacob (2018): p. 25.

46 Miroiu (2004): p. 201.

47 Banciu, Chipea, Ionut (2012): p. 114.

presence in politics. For example, in 1989, 24% of the members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Romania were women.⁴⁸

With the help of her husband, Elena reached the top level of the political sphere,⁴⁹ and in 1980, she became the first Deputy Prime Minister of Romania.

The propaganda undoubtedly built the possibility for women to participate in politics, but did not achieve the goal of fully integrating women into politics. Women were appointed to their positions by political decisions rather than based on their merits. They were seen instead as a percentage that needed to be maintained to fulfil the will of their dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu. We can remark that at the level of entering into politics, women had same rights as men, from the point of view that both could only become a member of the Communist Party. Their political will and loyalty, rather than their merits and knowledge, could propel them upward.

Many believe that the image propagated of Elena as the perfect example of a socialist society contributed to a general resentment among the population. This may have contributed even to the fall of the totalitarian regime in Romania.⁵⁰

IV. CONCLUSION

First, we can see that as time passed, the perceived importance of gender equality developed exponentially. From the time when women were highly subordinated to their husbands' will throughout the totalitarian period, they achieved relative independence in various fields such as their economic situation.

It is visible that the evolution of the present regulation was influenced by the events that occurred at that time. Gender equality was driven by the consequences of the war, more concretely by the gap in the labour market caused by the colossal loss of the working force during the war. This situation was accentuated by the first leader of the Soviet-type totalitarian regime, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, as one of his primary goals was to decouple the country from the USSR by increasing industrialisation, where women were a tool for expanding the workforce. Women's appearance as a tool can be tracked in the situation of women's organisations, where these were instead used for controlling and monitoring people or spreading propaganda than to encourage women and narrow the gap between genders. A similar situation occurred under the leadership of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the second leader, whose main goal was to almost double the population; again, women were used as a tool to fulfil this goal, as abortion was criminalised.

At the level of legislation, it can be seen that at the beginning of the totalitarian regime, the evolution of the institution of gender equality was affected by the USSR because, in the beginning, amendments to the law, in general, were made to harmonise

48 Miroiu (2004): p. 201.

49 Radu Clit (2015): Modelul femeii comuniste: Elena Ceaușescu sau Ana Pauker?, in Alina Hurubean (ed.): *Statutul femeii în România comunistă. Politici publice și viață privată*, Institutul European, Iași, p. 89.

50 Banciu, Chișea, Ionuț (2012): p. 114.

the legal system with communist ideologies and institutions. With the appearance of a personal cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the law needed to match not just the general communist ideologies but the personal ideologies of the leader itself. The peak of this phenomenon had the most significant impact on gender equality when the personal cult of the leader was extended to his family, including his wife, Elena Ceaușescu.⁵¹ It is also interesting to see the development of the personal cult of the leader and the potential to deviate from the general mechanism seen in other countries of the Eastern Bloc, which gave the possibility to Nicolae Ceaușescu to reach an outstanding level in the violation of personal rights of individuals by criminalising abortion and monitoring the status of pregnancy among women.

⁵¹ Miroiu (2004): p. 201.