

ȘCOALA NAȚIONALĂ DE STUDII POLITICE ȘI ADMINISTRATIVE

DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

**INSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION, RENT-SEEKING AND TOTALITARIANISM
IN SOCIALIST ROMANIA**

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SUMMARY

„In many cases, we have to choose between the correct informing of the state institutions or the pecuniary interests of the Party” – this brief quote selected from a party document of the late 40s (Arhivele Naționale ale României, Fondul C. C. al P. C. R., Secția Gospodăria de Partid, dosar nr. 1/1948, p. 3), at a time when the Communist Party had only just begun its long „stay” at Romania’s helm, perfectly encapsulates not only the nature of this party, but can also be a good description of over forty years of „socialism” in Romania. A quote as representative as this can be understood in many ways by researchers of different theoretical traditions. For the current dominant theory in the study of the pre-1989 regime, the Theory of Totalitarianism, this quote can be used to more easily defend its assumption that the party had a „totalitarian vocation” and that it was in its phase of resource appropriation and about to become what is called a „party-state” or the „total state”. From another perspective, this quote might be of little interest for a researcher of the Totalitarian Theory tradition, considering that the approach is less interested in the economic aspects or in aspects relating to the relationship between the state and the party. From a more ideological perspective, the quote may be used to defend the „anti-national” nature of the party, which essentially displays characteristics of an organization that acts against the country and its population. If we were to consider an economic approach, this quote would paint us the picture of a party that works as a self-interested economic actor that pursues the maximization of its own profit and achieving a generalized monopoly. Likewise, if we were to use an institutional approach, we would be more interested in how the party evades certain unenforced institutions to reach its goal. By interpreting this quote from the standpoint of an institutionalist, we could say that the „correct informing of State institutions” to be a rule, possibly formal or even written, that the party knowingly chooses to ignore. From here on, a fundamental question is „Why does the party choose to ignore this rule or institution”? In order to answer it, we need theoretical tools that are different from those employed by the Theory of Totalitarianism, tools that I believe could offer us important answers for a better understanding of this era of Romanian history. Naturally, some questions may remain without answers, perhaps the Theory of Totalitarianism is better suited to give answers to other such questions. For other questions there may be other approaches that are better suited than

either the institutional or the totalitarian approach. Nevertheless, it is important, I believe, to see things from the perspective of different approaches in order to find those that are more capable of giving us a good understanding of the phenomena that defined this era.

New Institutional Economics has been seldom used as an approach by Romanian researchers that concerned themselves with aspects of the Romanian society, be them historical phenomena or current events. I believe this approach presents a great potential for research, not only for Romania's individual case, but also in the larger context of Eastern Europe. The persistent economic gap between the two halves of Europe has been, for a long time, a research theme for institutional and economic approaches to political science and it is also an important theme for Romania. Especially if we consider that there is a gap not only between East and West, but also between Eastern European countries themselves. Even more so, in the world of today we still have to face the institutional legacy of the dictatorship, which has left profound marks on the Romanian society. As such, I believe there is great importance in reinterpreting Romanian socialism from a more modern approach than the Theory of Totalitarianism.

The goal of this paper is not only to „break” the „theoretical monopoly” that the Theory of Totalitarianism still has in regards to Romanian research of the pre-1989 dictatorship, but also to consider other approaches. In this regard, I will attempt to defend an institutional approach of Romanian socialism and to this end I will be, in the latter part of the paper, building an institutional theoretical framework of Romanian socialism. Up until now, very few Romanian researchers have attempted to use an approach other than that of Totalitarianism for the study of the pre-1989 dictatorship. Outside Romania, a number of institutional analyses of pre-1989 regimes have produced a plethora of interesting conclusions – I will mention the works of Antoni (1992) and Bartłomiej Kaminski (1991) (*An Institutional Theory of Communist Regimes sau The Collapse of State Socialism – The case of Poland*) which study the cases of Poland and other former socialist countries, including the Soviet Union. I must also mention the mercantilist approach to the Soviet State, by Boettke and Anderson. What I believe to be the novelty of this doctoral thesis, is not only the use of an approach that is seldom used in the research of the socialist regimes, but also the study of documents that have been previously ignored or little studied – for example, documents regarding party budgets and the financing of its operations that show the explicitly economic nature

of the party, as well as its social functions inside a society that was being institutionally reconstructed to serve the party's interests.

As such, the doctoral thesis can be broken down in four consistent chapters, each of them having relevant sub-chapters

In Chapter I, I shall explore the Theory of Totalitarianism with a larger focus on Hannah Arendt's model (1979) and I shall also lay out some criticism of its main assumptions. I will also refer, briefly to the model of Totalitarianism as laid out by Friedrich and Brzezinski (1967). These two I consider to be essential for the larger approach of Totalitarianism. Finally, I will analyze the Tismăneanu report and I shall briefly lay out my criticism of it. I believe this document to be an important summary of the main arguments and assumptions of the Theory of Totalitarianism in regards to Romanian socialism.

In Chapter II, I shall explore one another approach that is influential in the research of the former communist regimes – Janos Kornai's (1992) approach – which distinguishes between two categories of socialist regimes – (1) the classical system, in which repression and the brutality of state are commonplace but the regime is coherent and stable, and (2) the reformed socialist system, in which the regime relaxes its use of repression but falls prey to its own incoherence and contradictions. I consider Janos Kornai's approach to be a „middle theory” between Totalitarianism and Institutionalism.

In Chapter III, I explore the main theoretical assumptions and concepts of Institutionalism (North, 1990; (Caballero și Soto-Oñate, 2015), referring to a number of different institutional approaches, including New Institutional Economics (North și Thomas, 1973) and, more briefly, the historical institutionalism and the rational-choice institutionalism. I shall also briefly lay out the main assumptions of the theories of institutions as equilibria and of institutions as rules. In the second half of the chapter I will be building a theoretical framework of Romanian socialism using assumptions of New Institutional Economics and also borrowing concepts from the theory of rent-seeking (Krueger, 1974; Tullock, 2005)

In the fourth chapter, I analyze, using the theoretical framework constructed in the third chapter, a series of documents of the Romanian Communist Party. For this final part of my research, the data comes from the Romanian National Archives – I have consulted and analyzed

documents from the economic wing of the party, the so-called „party household” (*Gospodăria de Partid*). Through this final analysis I derive the main conclusions of my thesis. As I have previously mentioned, very few other research papers and works have attempted to study the party and the regime through the lens of institutional economics or by taking into accounts party financing methods. I conclude, thus, that the party worked largely as an economic actor that sought to maximize profits, to perpetuate its economic domination of society and to maintain an all-encompassing monopoly of economic and political power.

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