

Elimination of free rail transport for students: Government no. 1 priority for the "reform" of Romanian higher education

Update 10

On the 17th of February, **ANOSR representatives participated in a meeting with Government representatives:** the Prime Minister of Romania, Mr. Florin CÎȚU, the Minister of Education, Mr. Sorin CÎMPEANU and the Secretary of State responsible for higher education, Mr. Gigel PARASCHIV. During the discussions, **ANOSR supported the arguments already expressed on different channels and at various meetings in favor of maintaining the right of students to benefit from free rail transport**, starting from the needs of students and including the advantages brought to the Romanian Railway Company (CFR Călători). However, **the Prime Minister strongly opposed students' free rail transport, citing ideological considerations.**

European Students' Union - ESU, together with ANOSR, [emphasizes the imperative to maintain a free student rail transportation](#), including the need to increase equity of access to higher education, student mobility for learning and professional development, environmental benefits as well as the essential support provided to CFR Călători through this measure, and calls for the Romanian stakeholders to elaborate a strategy on accessibility in higher education through the inclusion of free access to adequate means of support in order to take up, progress through and complete the educational programs, regardless of their political, social or economic conviction.

We are deeply outraged by the fact that the Government representatives did not even accept the extension of the age limit (above 26 years old) or the provision of free railway transport for the route between student's home and the university center. **We will continue our efforts in Parliament and we hope that the parties will honor their commitments.**

Also, in the alternative, during the meeting we addressed other issues of interest, including employability, internationalisation, access to educational resources, and the necessity to be involved in shaping a realistic plan in these areas.

ANOSR este membru în:

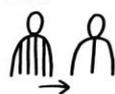
European
Student's
Union



Consiliul
Tineretului din
România



Alianța pentru o
România
Curată



 facebook.com/anosr.ro

 office@anosr.ro

 www.anosr.ro

 Calea Plevnei nr. 61,
camera 12-13, sector 1,
București, 010223

Update 9

Following ANOSR's efforts to maintain the right of students to travel by train for free, in the second class trains, this afternoon (February 12th) ANOSR President Horia ONIȚA attended a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and Co-President of USR-PLUS political alliance, Mr. Ilie-Dan BARNA. During the talks, Mr. Dan BARNA claimed that 300 million lei (approximately 61,5 million Euros) were allocated for investments in railway infrastructure, to the detriment of funds to cover the right of students to travel for free by rail. We consider that this justification is undoubtedly insufficient, as the subsidy granted to students has an identical destination: investments by railway operators.

However, we announce that the Deputy Prime Minister stated that **the Government has decided to remove the 26-year limit in its proposal, so that at the moment the proposal involves granting a 50% discount for all student travel in the second class trains.** Also, in the context in which the measure would involve exclusively a temporary decision caused by the pandemic, we conveyed to the Deputy Prime Minister that we do not understand why the Government would propose the repeal of gratuity instead of suspending the application of the provision for this budget year. The way in which the Government made the proposal shows that the governing coalition does not currently intend to take a temporary measure.

Within the proposals regarding the State Budget Law for 2021, made by ANOSR, **we requested an amount of 10.7 million lei** (approximately 2,19 million Euros) **to cover the expenses involved in the National Program "Student Camps" (PNTS).** Given the fact that the draft budget for 2021 put into public consultation yesterday does not include amounts for PNTS in the Education chapter, we asked Mr. Dan BARNA to solve this discrepancy and ensure the necessary funds for this, either for PNTS or for other activities dedicated to students, maintaining the initial destination. Thus, following the discussions, **Dan BARNA stated that he supports the allocation of 10 million lei** (approximately 2,05 million Euros) **to student and youth programs.**

As we stated, regarding the amendments for the budget allocation for this program and in the proposals for the State Budget Law for 2021, we support the organization of student camps in compliance with the related health restrictions, if the epidemiological situation allows. This program is one of the few opportunities for some students to benefit from a vacation and it is a relevant measure to stimulate students' academic performance and social inclusion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

ANOSR este membru în:

European
Student's
Union

Consiliul
Tineretului din
România

Alianța pentru o
România
Curată



 facebook.com/anosr.ro

 office@anosr.ro

 www.anosr.ro

 Calea Plevnei nr. 61,
camera 12-13, sector 1,
București, 010223

Finally, we do not consider that these situations are sufficient to meet the requests and needs of students and **we will continue efforts to maintain the right of students to travel free by rail in relation to the Government of Romania and the Parliament of Romania.**

Update 8

Discussions with government representatives at the local level continue, in parallel with the actions started, this time moving to Sibiu. ANOSR's local member unions exposed to the representatives of the Government their position regarding the action of eliminating the free of charge railway transport, but also the benefits generated by the current facility.

The prefect of Sibiu county, Mr. Mircea Dorin CREȚU, sent the position of the students to the Government.

Update 7

Student transportation is not up to the rulers' whims!

Starting at 10:00, in the 12th of February, **ANOSR and its local member unions organized various actions in several cities of the country, expressing disagreement with the proposal to limit the right of students to free rail transport and with the way the Government acted in this situation.** Although Government representatives tell us that the proposal is still being discussed, the draft State Budget Law is already being built with the facility removed. **We, students from all over the country, demand that decisions are not made without consulting the beneficiaries and that our rights be upheld!**

Update 6

Student transportation is not up to the rulers' whims!

We still disagree with the limitation of students' rights and with the way the Government has acted in this situation - the student representatives will organize protest actions in various cities of the country, starting around 10:00. We, the students from all over the country,

ANOSR este membru în:

European
Student's
Union

Consiliul
Tineretului din
România

Alianța pentru o
România
Curată



 facebook.com/anosr.ro

 office@anosr.ro

 www.anosr.ro

 Calea Plevnei nr. 61,
camera 12-13, sector 1,
București, 010223

demand that our wishes be heard, that decisions not be made without consulting the beneficiaries, and that our rights be upheld!

Combining the benefits of free railway transport for students, including increasing equity in access to higher education, student mobility for learning and professional development, environmental benefits and concluding with essential support for transport operators, especially the Romanian Railway Company (CFR Călători), **it is imperative to maintain this right and to immediately stop the efforts to limit the free transport of students by rail.** Unfortunately, we are not deputies, to have maximum benefits for rail transport and the **Government should not even consider that there is a problem!**

Update 5

Discussions with local government representatives continue (February 11th), this time moving to the south and west of the country. The dissatisfaction of ANOSR local member unions persists today. Our colleagues met with prefects in Gorj, Timiș and Bucharest counties.

The prefect of Gorj county, Mr. Cosmin Petrișor PISTOL, the prefect of Timiș county, Mrs. Liliana ONEȚ and the sub-prefect of Bucharest, Mr. Corneliu CÎRSTEA, **sent the students' position to the Government.**

Update 4

Following the requests and steps of ANOSR in order to maintain the right of students to travel free by second class trains, this afternoon (February 11th) **the president of ANOSR, Horia ONIȚA, participated in a meeting with the President of the Chamber of Deputies and The President of the National Liberal Party, Mr. Ludovic ORBAN.**

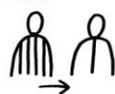
During the discussions, **we presented the arguments and the position of the federation regarding the benefits brought to the students** and the Romanian Railway Company (CFR Călători) by the current measure, but we did not reach a common denominator. In addition to the Government's option of establishing a 50% discount for rail transport, Mr. Ludovic ORBAN has taken the position of offering students unlimited free travel on rail transport from their

ANOSR este membru în:

European
Student's
Union

Consiliul
Tineretului din
România

Alianța pentru o
România
Curată



 facebook.com/anosr.ro

 office@anosr.ro

 www.anosr.ro

 Calea Plevnei nr. 61,
camera 12-13, sector 1,
București, 010223

homes to the university center and back. The President of the Chamber of Deputies also stated **that he supports the ANOSR desideratum**, included in the governing program, regarding ensuring the participation of students with the right to vote in a percentage of 25% in all relevant decision-making structures, including the election of rectors.

Although it is an improvement over the Government's proposal, we still disagree on the limitation of students' rights and on how the Government has acted in this situation, and will launch protests. Also, at the beginning of next week, ANOSR obtained a meeting with the Prime Minister of Romania, Mr. Florin CÎȚU, on this subject.

Update 2

If the **Government cannot really and openly explain why it wants to eliminate students' free rail transport**, maybe the representatives of the Government in the territory know more! The local member unions of ANOSR will discuss these days with the prefects the measure proposed in the Government. Otherwise, we will wait in front of the prefectures until they welcome us to discuss the Government's intention to eliminate free students for rail transport. Today, our colleagues met with prefects from Hunedoara County and Iași County.

The prefect of Hunedoara county, Mr. Călin-Petru MARIAN and the prefect of Iași county, Mr. Marian GRIGORAȘ, sent the students' position to the Government.

Update 1

During the press conference held by Prime Minister Florin CÎȚU on the 10th of February, 2021, he presented the Emergency Ordinance on some fiscal-budgetary measures and for amending and supplementing some normative acts. The ordinance proposes to amend Article 205 (2) from the Law of National Education:

"During the academic year, students enrolled in the form of full-time education, in accredited higher education institutions, up to 26 years of age, benefit from a 50% reduced fare on local public transport, domestic car transport, internal rail transport for all categories of trains, class II

ANOSR este membru în:

European
Student's
Union



Consiliul
Tineretului din
România



Alianța pentru o
România
Curată



 facebook.com/anosr.ro

 office@anosr.ro

 www.anosr.ro

 Calea Plevnei nr. 61,
camera 12-13, sector 1,
București, 010223

and naval transport. Orphans or children from orphanages benefit from free transportation for these categories. ”

In view of the communications, **ANOSR continues its efforts and invites students to send addresses to the governors, requesting the cessation of any actions to limit the right to free rail transport, to the following addresses:** cabinet.pm@gov.ro, pm@gov.ro, drp@gov.ro, dan.barna@cdep.ro, kelemenhunor@rmdsz.ro, petitie@mt.ro, catalin.drula@cdep.ro

Initial article

ANOSR strongly criticizes the position of Prime Minister Florin Cîțu to discuss limiting the free railway transport of students and calls on the Government to stop these steps immediately. Although the Prime Minister and his team have not found time since the Government's investment to discuss the problems and priorities of students, it continues its concerns in recent years to eliminate this facility for students.

During today, the Prime Minister of Romania, Florin Cîțu, informed as a possible measure to limit the expenditures of the state budget for 2021 the reduction of the subsidy for student transport. We find that Mr. Florin Cîțu returns repeatedly on the elimination of free students for rail transport, mentioning here the amendment tabled by Florin Cîțu together with Eugen Teodorovici in 2017. Subsequently, Senator Florin Cîțu by that time, abandoned the amendment on the grounds that the **budgetary impact is low**. We ask ourselves this: ***in the context in which the subsidy has not increased from 2017 until now, what determined the change of mind of the prime minister?*** The right to travel by train for free, in the second class trains, came into force on February 1st, 2017 and benefits all students enrolled in a form of full-time education in an accredited higher education institution, regardless of distance and number of trips.

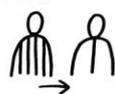
This is an important measure for increasing equity in higher education, facilitating access to and completion of studies for students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. The measure increases the mobility of students, both for participating in exchanges of experience and for participating in various artistic, cultural, sports or scientific events, organized in different university centers. At the same time, it has a positive impact on the environment, facilitating policies to promote this means of transport, and, last but not least, it

ANOSR este membru în:

European
Student's
Union

Consiliul
Tineretului din
România

Alianța pentru o
România
Curată



 facebook.com/anosr.ro

 office@anosr.ro

 www.anosr.ro

 Calea Plevnei nr. 61,
camera 12-13, sector 1,
București, 010223

has been correlated with the increase of students' participation in voting, according to a study conducted by the Romanian Academy.

Such student support measures exist at the level of other European countries, such as Luxembourg or Slovakia, which have provided students with free rail transport, a measure that has supported the increase in the quality of life of students. In addition to the low budgetary impact, the measure is also a form of support for the Romanian Railway Company (CFR Călători). As stated by the director of CFR Călători, Mr. Dan Costescu, for 2021, CFR Călători needs an investment budget of 350 million lei (approximately 71,8 million Euros) and CFR Călători has been underfunded for years, a fact also recognized by the state. **Subsidizing students' free rail transport is a measure that helps CFR and private operators to increase their investment capacity and, implicitly, to take steps to provide quality services for all users.**

We must keep in mind that students' financial problems are not negligible at all. According to the Eurostudent VI Report (3), **38% of Romanian students (EU average = 29%) have moderate financial problems**, well above the European average. In the same context, Romania has a large number of people living at risk of poverty or social exclusion - one in three Romanians is still at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

According to the data received from the Authority for Railway Reform (ARF) regarding the number of trips and the budgetary impact of this measure, we find that **the budgetary impact is low, as stated by Prime Minister Cîțu, amounting to 214,500,588 lei** (approximately 44 million Euros), **representing 0.0189% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) forecast for 2021**. Although Prime Minister Cîțu stated in 2018 that the deficit of CFR Călători would have been caused by the subsidy for students, the truth is that the subsidy not only that does not represent an expense for CFR Călători, but is a measure that reduces this deficit.

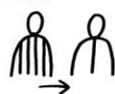
In conclusion, corroborating the benefits generated by free rail transport for students, including increasing equity of access to higher education, student mobility for academic and professional development, environmental benefits and concluding with the essential support provided to CFR Călători through this measure, **it is imperative to maintain this right and to cease all efforts to limit it. We invite, thus, the students to send the address attached to ANOSR's website to the prime minister's office, to the address cabinet.pm@gov.ro requesting the cessation of any actions to limit this right.**

ANOSR este membru în:

European
Student's
Union

Consiliul
Tineretului din
România

Alianța pentru o
România
Curată



 facebook.com/anosr.ro

 office@anosr.ro

 www.anosr.ro

 Calea Plevnei nr. 61,
camera 12-13, sector 1,
București, 010223