

PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATION. ELEMENTS FROM A PATHOLOGY OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AT THE LEVEL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE.

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Abstract: This study follows some of the essential coordinates of the public communication deontology and of the professional communication within the public space and it underlines, by contrast, the slippages from the requirements of an authentic and professional public communication, evident in instances of Romanian contemporary political discourse. All of the case studies are based on analysis from the perspective of professional standards in communication and public relations. The final accent is laid upon the necessity of professionalizing the public discourse of the politicians alongside with concrete proposals regarding such a process.

Keywords: Public Communication, Political Discourse, Professional Communication, Public Discourse.

1. Introduction

As far as our knowledge in concerned, at this moment, there are no systematic academic studies about the way in which the public communication is developed in Romania at the level of public space by the politicians and, in general, by any form of an official authority of the state. Attempts were made, but the majority of them are reduced to some media analysis or press commentaries. Our study intends to make a step further in building a conceptual analysis and elaborate general coordinates for the analysis of the contemporary Romanian public political discourse and of the concern of politicians regarding their public image.

2. Public space and public ethics. A brief anatomy of contemporary public discourse in Romanian public space.

For any Westerner who happens to be for the first time in Romania, even for two short weeks for example, it is almost from the very beginning clear that the Romanian public space in general, and the form and the content of the media, especially is the one created by the television, is significantly different from what he or she can encounter in his or her country of. In today Romania, media has a very specific mode to promote a kind of continued aggression of the public, combined with almost always a very low level educational component. Also, the so called "freedom of the press" is quite often very badly understood by the Romanian journalists, in the sense that very often media goes, through its content, far beyond moral or deontological acceptability.

Why have things degenerated in such a way? It is not difficult to pinpoint the causes, but, we must admit that in this field also significant studies are scarce. It is however certain that Romanian media has no significant democratic tradition. Even more, after 1989 Romanian media employed people which had no professional experience or background in this domain. Anyway, in order to come closer to our subject, what it is also sure is the fact that within this general frame the public discourse of the Romanian politicians found an almost a perfect ground for its sustaining and developing. Generally speaking, a political public discourse with almost no significant content or responsibility was, and still is, delivered through a media which even today is far from the professional standards of the Western media. To this we can very easy add the fact that the politicians themselves, in the greatest majority of situations, do not have any significant expertise or training in the field of public communication.

2.1. Structural flaws in the public communication of contemporary Romanian public political discourse

As far as we know, there is no systematic research of the structural flaws of Romanian contemporary political discourse disseminated by politicians, in different forms, in the Romanian public space through media. This could be even a paradox because the palpable possible examples of fundamental flaws regarding public communication style of the Romanian contemporary politicians are very numerous and very diverse. However, even given this obvious situation it seems that nobody was patient enough in order to extract some possible *structural* negative aspects which are present in the public discourse of the Romanian politicians. In some ways it is very possible that this study is maybe the first attempt to draw a systematic view upon this issue even if, we do not contest this, in Romanian media there were numerous articles and positions which tackled this topic extensively. But, maybe because of their too journalistic style, those positions could not be used for a systematic debate of this topic.

So, how can we draw a possible set of *structural* flaws in the case of public communication of Romanian contemporary politicians? It is important to mention that by "structural flaws" we understand those types of mistakes which are made during a process of public communication, regardless of the medium in which this process occurs, and which can be derived from that standards of professional public communication as defined by literature.

Now, which are these fundamental flaws, at least in our view, that Romanian politicians made so often when they promote, in a one way or in another, they so called "political discourse" into Romanian public space? In a brief and systemic order these flaws could be counted as it follows.

Firstly, in the vast majority of the situations, Romanian politicians simply do not have a spokesperson, a professional one, to talk for them in the front of the media and in the public space in general. This, of course, is not mandatory for all the possible situations, but at least when a crisis occurs, these professionals would be good assets.

Secondly, only a small fractions of politicians employ image counselors and this is obvious for anyone who has is patient enough to engage in monitoring the public appearance of some high profile contemporary Romanian politicians for several months. Even more, and it is really interesting to notice, only a small part of those who have an image counselor seems to also trust the professional advice. Maybe here we encounter something which many researchers of Romanian history meet in their academic work of disclosing the set of characteristics, historically configured, of the Romanian people: a seemingly uncontrollable appetite for importing symbols and tools from the West, but without any significant concern about the way in which this import could be put to a good work in the favor of Romanian people. Here we obviously disclose that already well known theory among Romanian researchers from the field of human and social science, a theory known under the name of “forms without substance” (Boia, 2012: 38 – 43). In this particular case, we encounter a sort of almost typical situation, a one in which something is indeed imported from the West, such is here the profession of image counselor, but without any serious concern about a serious capitalization of this asset. Of course, there some exceptions in this picture, but these exceptions are not enough to determine a significant change.

A particular case in which the poor quality of public communication regarding the political discourse of the Romanian politicians is represented by electoral campaigns. Here we observe once more the poor quality which ultimately could be translated in promoting a weak and unprofessional electoral discourse. This can be illustrated, for example, in the way in which the slogans are conceived and presented to the general public (Sergiu, 2012).

Thirdly and in addition to what has been said so far, we can mention a very particular style, so to speak, in which Romanian politicians are used to behave during talk shows on television channel, especially during electoral campaigns. In many cases the language becomes aggressive, with disrespect for the partner and the whole discourse is succumbing into a general type of popular demagoguery. There are very few cases in which, at least during the electoral periods, Romanian politicians display the capacity to build a solid, serious and constructive political dialogue in public space. Not only their very poor training in public communication is to blame for such a situation, but also, in a significant proportion of the cases, their poor professional and even human quality.

It is also worth to mention, as some extreme examples for totally disastrous public communication contexts, those extreme situations, which were not too few anyway, there were cases in which *physical aggression* was present during these televised talk shows. This was happened, usually, with no trace of hesitation on the part of the involved parts. And, as always, these scenes are happening after verbal violence. Sometimes all stops at this level but not in all the cases (Moisoiu, 2013). In most cases, to be honest, the TV moderators do not intervene properly. They just act like they want to do this, but in the vast majority of the situations this do nothing more but to further fuel the “debate” from the studio.

In the fourth place, and we have to mention this because it could be a sort of a very strange paradox, the majority of the contemporary Romanian politicians enjoy the public appearance in the media in general. And, of course, they like very much to talk. In our view, this is a very particular structural component of the poor quality of the public communication in Romania, because is encouraged by the media. Many Romanian politicians are present almost daily in the media and they like to stay in TV studios for hours, even if they practically either are saying nothing, either are saying platitudes or even foolish things. A very particular example, and here we have absolutely no doubt that this was indeed something specific only and only for Romania was a private Romanian television which usually made TV talk shows with politicians, shows which regularly lasted for hours.

How this poor situation was fueled, the one in which the public communication of Romanian politicians has so much to suffer?

2.2. What are the causes?

It would be wrong to consider that the present situation of public communication regarding the dissemination, in different forms, of the political discourse of Romanian politicians had somewhere in the near past a period of professionalism and responsibility in terms of respecting the necessities of a professional public communication. *In reality such a period never existed in Romania.* After the collapse of communism in 1989, Romania, including its politicians, had to start everything from a point zero, and this was mandatory. It would be completely wrong to think that the only difference which should be eliminated between Romanian and the West are only the economical ones. Romania has to start from zero even in the field of public communication and this is especially true for the politicians and for all which now have in Romania some public responsibilities.

Another aspect which is worth to be mentioned in this context is the fact that this general poor situation could have been improved in time, but it seems that nobody was seriously interested in this. A part of the guilt is to be found within Romanian system of higher education in the field of Communication Sciences which seems not to be capable to deliver the most needed professionals. But not all the responsibility should be put on the shoulders of this educational field. A heavy part of this responsibility belongs to the society as a whole, which even now, after so many years from the collapse of communism in Romania, seems not to be capable to adapt its structures, and especially the content of these structures, to a Western type of society. Why we prefer to merely import structural forms from the West, without any serious concern to fill them with substance and responsibility? Answers had been searched, but the facts are remaining (Boia). Romania is strong in making projects and in developing structures that are similar to ones from the West, but it seems that these structures simply fail to work properly and to deliver significant results for the society. This is true, of course, for the domain of public communication too.

3. What should be done in order to improve the situation?

We do not believe that a potential and serious answer to this question must be exclusively reduced to concepts within the general theoretical frame of Communication Sciences. In other words, we think that it would be completely unrealistic to believe them, speaking now in general terms, the entire, or at least a significant proportion of Romanian politicians' public discourse could be indeed improved by telling them or training them with the set of tools from the conceptual frame of Communication Sciences. It is needed a process deeper than this, a sort of historical structural change in the quality of those who forge politics in Romania. But this is not the subject of our study, so we will not insist further. What we really must assert is that indeed some positive changes could be obtained, on a short and medium term, and these changes could be indeed made using tools from Communication Science even if, as we mentioned above, a deeper change is need and a much deeper approach and perspective.

From the point of view of Communication Sciences we consider that the quality of Romanian political public discourse could be improved if some simply things will be seriously taken into consideration. And these are: the use of spokespersons, the use of some professional image counselors and especially the use of very well trained professionals in order to guide the Romanian politicians and to teach them how to build a solid and mutual advantageous relation with the media, especially with the internal one. It is true that in time some remarkable Romanian journalists had become themselves politicians, but these seemed to be not enough in order to change for the better the whole frame in which public communication is carried out by the Romanian politicians.

4. Conclusions

It is difficult to make a brief set of recommendations, other than the ones that we have already mentioned, designed to change for the better the actual context in which Romanian politicians, from all political ideologies, are making and develop their own particular mode of promoting at the level of public space a political discourse. From a medium and long time perspective what seems to be absolutely necessary is a the occurrence of a solid and serious filter, one which should be able, at least in theory, to make a much more rigorous selection of the individuals who want to become politicians in Romania. Of course, this is not an aspect which belongs to the general conceptual frame of Communication Sciences but, if this will ever happen in Romania, we consider, at least from a strictly sociological point of view, that the quality of public discourse and the general quality of public communication from Romania will be categorically improved. So, a sort of an irony, ultimately the real chances for the improvement of the quality of Romanian politicians' public discourse and public communication depends on these politicians! Because the political class is the only one which can change the selection mechanisms which now are used in order to enter

the political sphere. And, as we believe, a serious filter will be established than the changes for improvement will increase. But are these politicians ready to do this?

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