

THE INFLUENCE OF THE 2000 ELECTORAL COMMUNICATION OVER THE VOTING BEHAVIOUR

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The present study presents the results of a qualitative research concerning the influence of the electoral discourse on the voters who, at the last presidential campaign in year 2000 voted for the first time with the nationalist candidate Corneliu Vadim Tudor. We will analyze the influencing potential of a specific discourse strategy which is the enunciation of reasonability. On this basis we question a hypothesis formulated within the framework of an experimental model of research which regards the influence of the electoral discourse on the voting behavior (the model of political identification, Anderson: 1996, 1998). According to this hypothesis the voters who do not have a stabile political attachment - the volatile electors - use the "reasonable" statements of the candidates as a criterion of identification with them.

In this study we seek to approach some discourse strategies which allow the construction of reasonability (some stating strategies and socio-cognitive construction of the discourse); we will compare the "reasonable statements" in Vadim Tudor's electoral discourses with the same type of statements identified in the voters' discourse; thus we evaluate the 'socio-cognitive distance' between the candidate and the electors who voted for him for the first time.

Having analyzed this we put forward the following interpretation hypotheses: the voters have attributed to the electoral discourse advanced by Vadim Tudor a reasonable dimension^{}; the stating of reasonability as electoral discourse strategy can influence not only the undecided voters, but also the voters who have a certain political attachment; this influencing process must be correlated with the specific conditions of the electoral circumstances (the influencing process is the more powerful and unpredictable the more the electoral circumstances are atypical); as discourse strategy the reasonability enunciation can be exploited at the level*

* The reasonability statement constitutes only one of the variables considered in the evaluation of the electoral communication influence on the voting behavior. This study represents a chapter of a research project regarding (1) the evolution of electoral communication presented in the mass-media during the year 2000 the presidential campaign (devices, regimes and practices of presentation in the media) and (2) and the influence of the electoral circumstances (including the electoral campaign and its presentation in the media) on the voting behavior.

Research premises

Usually the post-electoral analyses indicate the elements which distinguish the last electoral campaign from the preceding ones. The commentators identify the 'historical' dimension of an electoral campaign by referring to the 'lessons' which should be learnt by the electorate and generally for the practice of democracy.

From this point of view the second alternative resulted after the 2000 general elections did not raise the same interest as in 1996. The specialists, the media and the public opinion have associated the 2000 electoral campaign in Romania with other phenomena such as: the leader of the 'Great Romania' (GR) party *Corneliu Vadim Tudor's electoral ascension, the exclusion from the parliament of the governing party CDR2000*, the main right-to-center structure, and last but not least, the electorate's absence (as opposed to the previous campaigns the participation of voters was reduced).

The electoral result obtained by Corneliu Vadim Tudor constituted though the most controversial phenomenon, leading to a series of contradictory reactions, including a 'vote against the nature' on behalf of some of the traditional voters of the right (theoretically in the second elections round of the presidential campaign the voters of the right were forced to vote for Ion Iliescu who suddenly became the 'symbol of democracy'). In its turn, mas-media initiated an entire campaign for promoting this vote 'against nature', the journalists appealing to several outstanding representatives of the civil society, traditional opponents of Iliescu, in order to endorse morally the vote in his favor (the media behavior generated numerous controversies, many asking themselves if by an anti-Vadim Tudor campaign the democratic electoral communication was respected and whether the anti-Vadim Tudor media discourse couldn't have generated an opposite reaction on behalf of the electorate).

Beyond this public political debate the analysis starts from some elements of dynamics of the electoral behavior during the last presidential elections: if in 1996, after the first election round, Tudor got in his quality of candidate for presidency 4.7% and his party 4.5%,

in 2000, Tudor and the Great Romania party got 28.31% and respectively, 21.01%. Also important is the fact that after the first round of the presidential elections Tudor got 28.31%, although at the beginning of the campaign his rating was between 12% and 14%. Practically, the electoral rate of the candidate increased with approximately 14% within the six weeks along which the presidential campaign took place.

On September 24, 2000, the official start of the electoral campaign, four candidates for presidency had relatively equal chances to enter the second round and become Ion Iliescu's counter-candidates. At the beginning of the campaign, Isarescu was rated with 18%, Stolojan with 12%, Vadim with 12% and Roman with 5% (Insomar survey, October 10). Each of these candidates, except Tudor, got a lower result than the one with which they started the electoral campaign. Vadim Tudor was the only candidate who doubled his electoral capital during the electoral campaign.

Research frameworks

The experimental researches concerning the electoral behavior revealed the fact that voters no longer resort to already established criteria for evaluating the candidates. These researches confirm the sociologists and politologists' evaluations regarding the "individualization of the electoral behavior" (Dogan, 1995) and the permanent political socialization of the electorate (Mayer, Perrineau, 1992). From here we infer that the <<structural variables>> (the political and electoral system, social capital, cultural attitudes and values, voting habit) are no longer sufficient for explaining the vote and that they must be correlated with the "short term" variables (similar with the political discourse and the mediatization practices of the political).

The key theoretical discussion to which we refer in the present study starts from the so-called "resonance model" according to which the influence of the electoral discourse on the voting option is more intense the more it "reasons" with the political predispositions of the voter (Iyengar and Simon, 2000).

Recent contributions within this research model discuss the influence of the electoral discourse from the identification process perspective: under which circumstances an electoral discourse stimulates the voters' identification with certain statements of the candidate perceived as being 'acceptable' in the given situation beyond the political color of the candidate (Anderson, 2000). These hypotheses rely on the electoral context analysis of the post-communist countries where there are a lot of parties, but very few stable voters and therefore a reduced political attachment.

From here it results that, in the post-communist countries, the influence of the electoral and/or political communication cannot be exercised under the form of consolidation of the voters' political identity (as it happens, usually, in the countries where there is a large number of voters having a relatively stable political attachment – Iyengar and Simon, 2000). Therefore the question is whether in the new democracies the electoral discourse – as an element of the electoral circumstances – could be contributing in time to the forming of some political identities; if certain topics and their corresponding statements launched by the candidates and/or by political parties activate the identification of the voters with the respective statements generating in time a political identity.

From the perspective of the electoral behavior the political identification refers to the fact that a voter gets to consider his opinion regarding a certain topic as being *similar* with the opinion on the same topic formulated by a political actor: "*The political identification signifies that people attribute some points of view to politicians; secondly, people attribute their own points of view to politicians* (Anderson, 1996)".

According to Anderson (1996), the voters with a stable political attachment find their political identity in and through the discourse of a certain candidate. Precisely because these voters have a political attachment they reach to consider that their own opinions are similar to the ones formulated by a candidate (in other words, they treat the opinion of a politician as a confirmation of their own opinions). On the other hand, the volatile voters, who do not evaluate the statements of a candidate from the point of view of an attachment or political identity need other criteria to get to identify with certain

political statements. The American author considers that such a criterion could be the *reasonable character of some statements*, the fact that the volatile voters or the ones with a weak political attachment perceive a candidate's statements as being *acceptable or reasonable* in the given situation. We think that this hypothesis is extremely fertile for researching the atypical electoral behaviors on the one hand, the volatile electoral behavior, and on the other, for the analysis of the discourse strategies through which the political actors <<stage>> the reasonable character of their discourse.¹

The high instability of the voting intentions throughout the electoral year and around the electoral campaign, the considerable ratio of the voters who decided upon their voting option during the electoral campaign or during the voting day (37% according to the exit-polls, Metro Media Transilvania, No. 27), the confuse electoral identities of the candidates, the reduced political attachment of the electorate, the negative perception of power – all these are just a few of the short term variables' which made that political loyalty would not intervene between the electorate and candidates. These variables are typical for an electorate sensitive to the electoral circumstances (Gerstle, 1996) – an electorate inclined towards electoral behaviors which could appear as atypical.

Besides the above mentioned elements the electorate's sensitivity to the electoral circumstances, including the electoral campaign was activated by the TV popularization, by the opinion poll

¹ During an electoral campaign certain volatile voters can identify with some statements of a candidate by considering them reasonable; this does not mean though that these voters have necessarily become "partisans" (at the next campaign they can still be among the volatile voters). Also we cannot exclude the emergence in time of a political identity. On the other hand, let us take the case of some voters with a weak political attachment: these can evaluate the declarations of a candidate as being reasonable in the given situation even if the political identity of the candidate is opposed to the political attachment of the respective voters; this identification appears apparently "against their own political sensibility" could generate "atypical" electoral behaviors: for instance, a sanction vote, the person voting for a candidate belonging to a political family "close" to the family of the sanctioned candidate; in other cases we could face an absenteeism, the voter not being willing to vote "against nature".

inflation and by the controversies around them, as well as by the electoral discourses.

Starting from this analytical framework our research hypotheses were the following:

- a) The candidate Corneliu Vadim Tudor accumulated electoral capital throughout the campaign by appealing to various sources, firstly rhetorical and media, resources which could have been thoroughly exploited in a specific electoral circumstance;
- b) part of the volatile electors or with a weak political attachment have attributed the candidate's electoral discourse a 'reasonable' dimension in the given circumstances;
- c) As opposed to other types of political statements, the statements bearing an identity value are more accessible for an evaluation in terms of 'reasonability'.

Operationalization

The discourse analysis was discussed along two theoretical axes: the integrated pragmatics (discourse enunciation strategies – Vion, 1992, 1999; Charaudeau, 1998) and the socio-political cognition (Van Dijk, 1996, 1997). The enunciation axis allowed us to evaluate the way in which the candidate and voters have built – thorough discourse – their relationship with the interlocutor, with the reference universe as well as with the previous discourses referring to the same universe, discourses belonging to the speakers or other social actors; at the level of the socio-cognitive axis we revealed the social representations which fed the candidate's and voters' discourses.

Both analysis registers reveal a certain conceptual framework of the discourse - the discourse as strategic activity through which a social actor is positioned towards the events and themes that have been under discussion, by building a certain relationship with the interlocutor, and implicitly with a whole communicational situation.

At the discourses level (candidate and voters) we have identified the consensual statements or with an identity value, respectively, statements based on opinions and arguments specific for the public space, in the social imaginary and, last but not least, in the electoral circumstance². We have started from the premise according to which these discourses considerably diminish the 'socio-cognitive' distance between the candidate and electorate, being able to stimulate the electorate to attribute a reasonable character to the electoral discourse. The consensual statements make up a common symbolic space populated by collective opinions, narration, political mythology shared by the electorate at

² For the analysis we have selected Vadim Tudor's discourses during the electoral shows on the public television (TVR1) and the private channels (PRO-TV and Antena 1). We have selected a total number of nine electoral discourses, each of them occupying an emission space whose duration lasted between one and two hours. Between October 1, 2000 and December 1, 2000, we have organized five focus-group sessions. The professional background and education level were the criteria used to select the subjects. Each group contained 9 subjects and the sessions lasted one hour and a half. The sessions took place along the presidential electoral campaign and the first week after the first round results were published. We have organized two focus-group type sessions with persons who work in the public administration system (city-council, the art and culture department of the city council), most of the participants having pre-university studies and aged between 27-40 years old; two other groups have been formed by persons working in the private sector, having university studies and an average age of 30; after the first election round we have talked to a group made up of persons who have voted with Corneliu Vadim Tudor, having pre-university or university studies and aged between 20 and 35 years.

The questions guide we used focused around the following topics: the TV consumption during the electoral campaign (how much the subjects have watched the electoral shows); the subjects' opinion about the ideal qualities of a politician and state's person; their opinion about the criteria according to which "Romanians" and/or the persons around the subjects judge the presidency candidates; the subjects' opinion regarding Vadim Tudor's rise in the opinion polls and in the voters' voting option; to what extent the subjects have identified certain priorities which were not considered during the presidency candidates' electoral discourses; their opinion regarding the political people's priorities at the moment of the electoral campaign; to what extent the subjects intend to emigrate.

a given moment in time. Moreover, the symbolic space is legitimated through the opinions and arguments displayed in the political arena by the 'media-class' (political persons, media in general, personalities of 'the moment').

The consensual statements result from the exploitation of a discursive strategy, from a certain 'setting up' of some categories of the natural language and feed some set-discourse such as "the collective identity discourse" (discourses attributed to the collectivity or a majority); the "authorized discourse" (statements attributed to some authorized sources); the "narrative discourse" (discourses which mobilize a series of narrative acts - myths, personal experiences, political, etc.); "the popular discourse" (statements which activate the so-called 'communal places')³.

³ From the point of view of the enunciation, the 'collective identity discourse' comprises statements formulated in the 1st person plural. This enunciation indicator ('we') allows the speaker to attribute the statement to an entire collectivity; thus, the speaker builds himself an image of a collective enunciator ("I'm not the only one to state this, but a whole collectivity which includes you, my recipients, as well"); consequently, to the respective statements an 'objective' character is conferred. Because of this, the enunciation indicator ('we') is frequently exploited in the public communication by journalists and political persons who need to credit certain statements as 'obvious' or 'true'.

'The authorized discourse' is generated by: a) impersonal discourse, b) statements which refer to unidentified and indirect sources which are mentioned. Thus, through enunciation speakers build their own image as enunciators which invokes various 'authority sources'; the speakers' statements become thus 'authorized' and, therefore legitimate.

At the enunciation level the 'narrative discourse' is built through: verbal constructions which signals the 'evoking' process; narrative cues which mark the standard structure of a narrative situation; the speakers build themselves an image of enunciators - 'witnesses' who discuss events that they deeply know, either through personal experiences, or because, one way or another, they have acquired the necessary knowledge.

The 'popular discourse' is constructed through: conversational statements (statements which lead to an obvious proximity or complicity relationship with the interlocutor); statements which send to the 'today's' collective imaginary (slang language, parodies, personages, scenes and in fashion media events; through a popular discourse the speaker can attribute himself the image of an enunciator who knows and controls so well the reference universe that he can distance himself from

Secondly, from the consensual statements we have selected those which had a certain frequency in Vadim Tudor's discourse; thus, we identified the political and social representations invoked by the candidate throughout the electoral campaign. Thirdly, we have compared these consensual statements - irrespective of their typology - with the consensual statements belonging to the voters who participated at the research carried out throughout the electoral campaign; the comparison was made according to the socio-political cognition (social representations, collective opinions, common places, collective narrations).

In what follows we will discuss the strategic construction of reasonability starting from the last level of analysis, respectively from the <<socio-cognitive distance>> between the candidate and the voter; we reveal in this way the socio-political cognition of the consensual statements formulated by the candidate Vadim Tudor and some of his electors.

The results of the research. <<Why Vadim Tudor?>> The discourse of the voting option

The most relevant answers to this question belong to a large extent to the voters who at the last presidential campaign in 2000 have voted with Vadim Tudor for the first time, when some of them had voted in 1996 with the CDR representatives.

The absence of an alternative: the same "players"

The voters who have voted with Vadim Tudor for the first time have been disappointed by the fact that, starting with 1990, the political scene is dominated by the same political persons. For these voters, all the political leaders had failed so that Vadim Tudor would have been the 'only' politician who could have still been 'tested' at the moment of the electoral campaign. In their opinion, the option in favor of Ion Iliescu was excluded given the candidate's age and

it, mocking at it, through humor and complicity with the interlocutor; since the speaker assumes this 'setting up', it offers truth value to some facts which otherwise could not be easily accepted by the interlocutors.

especially because he had had the power long enough to be able to bring anything new to the political arena. The same argument was forwarded regarding Petre Roman and Teodor Melescanu. The voters have admitted Mugur Isaescu and Theodor Stolojan's competence, but they could not get over the fact that the two personalities had been involved, in one way or another, in the previous governing elite, from which a certain suspicion regarding their morality arises.

For these voters, the personality or the leader's electoral program did not constitute the main reason evaluation criteria; what did matter though was the association of the leaders with a long period of corruption, demagoguery, sterile political disputes and, above all, poverty. Under these circumstances Vadim Tudor was considered as the only candidate who could not have been placed under the same 'category' with the other candidates since he had not previously been in 'power' and since he had not 'changed' from the point of view of his options and the political behavior.

We must underline the fact that the voters have repeatedly proven to be conscious that their option was risky, and that under 'different circumstances' maybe their decision would have been different. In fact, they did not hide a certain state of 'confusion' which they had regarding their voting option. At the same time, they showed that it was impossible to credit leaders who had generated the present state of 'poverty' and 'abnormality' any longer; the vote granted to Vadim Tudor meant therefore a symbolic gesture, a 'break-up' with a long period of waiting, frustrations and disappointments.

The argument of Vadim Tudor's non-involvement in the previous governments was brought up quite often in the electoral debate before and during the electoral campaign. The media and some other candidates have tried to reduce from the argument's importance by showing that PRM was for quite long allied with the governing party PDSR before 1996.

In so far as Vadim Tudor is concerned, he himself exploited intensively the fact that neither him, nor the party that he was leading had not been part of the power structure which considerably differentiated him from other candidates.

The candidate's discourse

"We haven't led anything so far, so we have the moral right to call to account for the country's disaster" (Presidential Elections, TVR, No. 21, 2000); "...another trump card is the fight against the Mafia which I was mentioning, and the fact that we have led nothing so far and people say, rightly: let's see Vadim work, for we got the idea with the others" ("I want to be president", PROTV, No. 14, 2000); "I never governed. If you can tell me now what Corneliu Vadim Tudor or the Great Romania Party governed, I get out of the presidential run". ("The Way to Cotroceni", Antena1, No.1, 2000)

The voters' discourse

"I wouldn't vote for Iliescu even if I were dead for he is the granny...Isarescu made too many concessions, at the beginning, when he was governor at the Bank (National Bank - translator's note), Stolojan has a very troubled past, as economist as well as person, and this type that goes from one den to another does not tell me much ... and then I thought ...Vadim! He looks crazy, his discourse, honestly, seems too theatrical to me, but at least he did not lose any suit, for sure he's got a lot of information and ... at least he did not change. He attacked left and right alike" (CDR voter in 1996, PRM voter in 2000).

The need for authority in politics

The voters insisted on the necessity to elect a president whose authority would be recognized both by his collaborators, as well as by his electorate. In the voters' opinion "the president with authority" would require firmness, even 'toughness', the capacity to 'impose himself' while exercising the power. The voters proved to be convinced that Romania needs an 'iron hand' who would establish 'discipline', 'order' and 'correctness' even with the risk of breaking some of the democratic procedures. Syntagms such as 'efficient leading' or 'natural born leader' oftentimes reoccurred in the voters' interventions (they also appreciated Vadim Tudor's intention to introduce the death penalty for some cases).

In this sense, the voters with whom I talked wanted to stress the fact that although democracy as a system cannot be questioned, one should take into account the fact that Romania is a country in which no institution 'functions'; consequently, Romania's evolution cannot be exclusively built on democratic structures and behaviors. The voters mentioned the 'laissez-faire' style practiced by CDR and the president Emil Constantinescu - a style which proved to be a total failure. On the

other hand, the communist period was mentioned as an argument in favor of the fact that in Romania the 'order' and 'discipline' are possible however, but only under 'certain circumstances'.

For these voters, Vadim Tudor would have the necessary authority bearing in mind that his team and entourage are formed by persons who collaborated or work in the structures of the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI), the only institution which, in their opinion, had proven its efficiency. Generally, the subjects positively evaluated Vadim Tudor's so-called 'secret' connections and networks - proof of his capacity to exercise his authority.

The candidate's discourse

"We asked for the declaration of necessity state in at least two fields under extraordinary difficulty: the financial and banking system, from where I got confirmations from the specialists around me that in 10 years were stolen more than 8 billion dollars, if the time allows I will exemplify as well... also, in agriculture to ensure the food security of the country" ("Presidential Elections 2000, TVR1, No. 14, 2000). "So, if I competed then for presidency, to be sure I would trigger the party after me like a locomotive, now I am entitled to say that I will compete in order to save the country" ("I want to be president", PROTV, No. 14, 2000). "When I come to power I will nationalize all property made by fraud" ("The Way to Cotroceni", Antena1, No.1, 2000), "an austerity regime from top to bottom to which we obey, the exorbitant luxury given up (...) Although I detest dictatorship and nobody wants dictatorship, we all want democracy, in order to save the population and diminish the population's suffering exceptional measures ought to be taken" ("The Way to Cotroceni", Antena 1, No. 22, 2000); "I will change the whole political regime from its foundations, regime which at the present moment is in metastasis" (Presidential Elections 2000", TVR 1, No. 14, 2000).

The voters' discourse

"Vadim's program...I say...A lot of firmness and stability. That's my opinion! ...Romania is not the country which can be led in a democratic manner ... no way by the laissez-faire style as it was so far. Unfortunately this is the reality in our case. For this is the mentality. Everybody cries that we don't have Ceausescu anymore, and the old ones weep for Antonescu. The truth is that I feel confused now ...by all that's happening. We need authority, by someone who says : if you don't come tomorrow at 3 you are out of the project" (CDR voter in 1996, PRM voter in 2000). "Very well, that's fine!...They should have given for free. You know how it should have been? After the revolution? 'People! Who wants them? For free, we give the factories in Romania! Take them!'" (CDR voter in 1996 and PRM in 2000)

Our attention was caught by the fact that these voters did not consider an authoritarian political regime as being incompatible with the respecting of the fundamental individual rights. Asked to talk from this point of view individual's freedom they proved to be rejecting to the infringement of individual rights. (That is why we can suppose that either the 'authority' and 'order' are perceived rather as abstractions, the voters not realizing the contradiction between the authoritarian action and individual rights; or because the voters, being aware of the fact that they do not represent the majority's point of view have tried to avoid their labeling as extremists by acting in like manner. In fact, repeatedly they appeared to be ready to 'prove' that their option for Vadim Tudor should not be equaled with an 'irrational' choice.

In their turn, the subjects who did not vote for Vadim Tudor and who manifested a liberal orientation have used the same premise - the lack of authority is chronic in the case of Romania - to prove the necessity of a permissive and receptive politics towards the international economic institutions as well as towards the foreign investors.

The declaration of necessity state in some fields as well as the adopting of some <<exceptional>> political and economic measures constituted constant elements of Vadim Tudor's rhetoric. Generally, from the point of view of the action program the candidate's electoral discourse was based on the idea that the country cannot be 'saved' but by an 'iron-hand' who would apply the 'dictatorship of the law'. Anticipating the possible critical reactions the candidate insisted upon the fact that only by exceptional measures can the constitutional order be respected (from where the phrase 'dictatorship of the law'). Based on this discourse strategy the candidate built up the image of an authoritarian leader who does not make concessions.

Authority, firmness and political efficiency have become the themes of the media agenda as long as the CDR government and Emil Constantinescu's presidency were coming to the end of the mandate and their lack of popularity was increasing. (Close to the electoral campaign the mass-media constantly denounced the

weaknesses and chaos in the presidency apparatus. Also the opinion polls indicated the electorate's preference for a leader with 'authority' and 'firmness').

Maybe in a different context the same rhetoric of the candidate would have been considered not authoritarian, but extremist. But in the electoral year 2000 the public attention was concentrated on the lack of authority and the corruption of the political class. Although these topics were dominant during the previous electoral campaigns as well, in 2000 the public's sensibility was considerably more powerful than before. On the one hand, the media was much more systematic in so far as the making public of the corruption and other dysfunctions are concerned, while on the other, the political scene was shaken by a series of scandals and political 'files'.

To some voters terms such as 'exceptional' measure, 'necessity state' or 'liquidation' were no longer perceived as anti-democratic, but on the contrary, as 'reasonable'.

The need for 'charisma' in politics

In their argumentation the voters have constantly come back to the image of a president with 'charisma', attribute which they translated by a certain 'magic', 'attraction' and 'natural born authority'. Referring to the presidency candidates, the voters expressed that Vadim Tudor would be the only one capable to 'mobilize' and 'coordinate' a team in an efficient way.

The candidate's discourse

"I recommend you, I think, three dimensions: the Christian belief, which is authentic and exactly because I want the best for those lost sheep, I tell them by their name, to recuperate them; my patriotism recommends me, which is generic, it is like a thread which comes from my family's past and I would like to think that it will continue in the future; my moral integrity recommends me" ("I want to be president", PROTV, No. 14, 2000); "I think that the Romanian people has a

The voters' discourse

<<Vadim has a speech of a leader, of president. His judgments are verdicts, he gives verdicts, he has a certain charisma as opposed to the others who don't have it. He is a certain type of leader (...) I, myself, still believe that Vadim is a leader. Hitler was charismatic as well ... whether we like it or not and now we curse him ... He also made extraordinary good things for Germany. Musollini was charismatic too, Vadim the same (...) Charisma? I don't know exactly...a certain magic power...a

huge capacity of regeneration. I am addressing now all Romanians, including those of other ethnic origins. My dear sisters and brothers, come with me, for I have the remedy for all your pains and misery. I never lied or betrayed you. I ruined my health, I neglected my family and literary work for the salvation of the country. Do not be afraid of the truth, you will know the truth, and the truth will free you. We should start the 21st century not kneeling, not in rags, but free people. And this book is a book of pamphlets, I cut many stanzas so that I can read the end, it's a paraphrase of a famous poem by George Lesnea - "The party is in everything", I said "Mafia is in everything" ... each comes with his profession, other came with black little sleeves of accountants, I am a writer, I come with what I have produced" ("I want to be president", PROTV, No. 14, 2000).

certain magic which irradiates the others, which determines 'x' to listen to him. An element not necessarily religious ... (...) Vadim is the type of person who like to be listened to, who would be noticed many times and would have a conversation with this poor people ... What can I say? We are not mobilized for action. Why? For nobody comes in the front to say: 'let's do a common thing, let's do something nice'" (PRM voter in 1996 and 2000). 'Do you think Vadim Tudor plans legislative changes? / Yes, I am sure about it. He would try...He has the tone of voice so firm and determined when he talks about stopping the corruption ... At least he has some clear ideas ... (...) A country needs leadership in the extended sense, a managerial type. To be like in a company which competes and the country to compete. Managers are charismatic persons who know how to coordinate...the must know generally, but never the particular" (CDR voter in 1996, PRM voter in 2000).

The Christian-popular discourse of which Vadim Tudor made use offered the voters a series of identification criteria. The voters have used the Christian symbolism used by the candidate in order to attribute himself a charismatic image. The candidate transformed into rhetoric the Christian-Orthodox language and rituals, by selecting the statements, scenes and elementary Orthodox rituals. Thus, the electoral 'message' - to which the candidate was entitled at the end of each debate - was invariably formulated as a Messianic incantation for the well-being of the 'lost sheep' asked to follow the elected one, to 'sacrifice' and 'heal' all the 'pains' of the 'brothers' and 'sisters'.

"The popular discourse" refers firstly to situations, events, scenes, objects and characters which acquired a *public dimension* (situations which, one way or another, have penetrated into the public space where they enjoy a constant visibility). Secondly, when articulating the 'popular discourse' the conversational language surely helps, and sometimes is doubled by a specific vocabulary relevant for the linguistic fashion of the

moment. As one communication effect, the 'popular' discourse stimulates the interlocutor's attention, by constituting a useful strategy when we touch upon less familiar topics or about which we expect the interlocutor to react negatively. The 'popular discourse' also represents a strategy of ridiculing, minimizing or rejecting some topics.

"Ideas" vs. political programs

Voters have rejected the extremely elaborated programs of some presidency candidates. They asked to be shown not 'percentages' and 'specialists', but some 'general clear and simple ideas' which would constitute a proof of the candidates' credibility and especially of their firmness. The voters referred to Vadim Tudor's 'very clear' discourse considering that he "has such a firm and determined tone of voice when talking" and that "he has at least some clear ideas".

Thus, the voters could attribute the candidate certain points of view; Vadim Tudor's discourse was "localized" easily within the electoral communication space. In our opinion, the fact that Vadim Tudor organized his electoral discourse as a set of narrations facilitated the electoral communication, diminishing the "social distance" between the political actor and electorate. At the same time, the narrations allowed Vadim to continuously defalcate the topic of the questions which he was supposed to answer.

In Vadim Tudor's electoral discourse the historical, biographical and political narrations were centered around the candidate's person (read: qualities). The biographical narrations stressed his positive personality, the historical narrations revealed his culture while the politically oriented narrations either drew the audience's attention upon political actions presented as exceptional, or constituted an attack strategy against some of the other candidates, especially against the former power represented by CDR 2000 and president Emil Constantinescu.

"The communication contract" which the narration is based on presupposes the use of the conversational language, thus the interlocutor being placed within a familiar environment (even when he does not know the topic).

The experimental researches on information processing have

shown that the "common language" and "familiar" at the same time reduces the number of inferences used by the interlocutor to construct the "message" of a discourse (as opposed to the elaborated language which increases their number). Anderson's analyses (1997) on this topic prove that *"the uttering of the political messages in a common language encourages democratic participation allowing the citizens to perceive the differences between the candidates, differences which otherwise are blurred by the distance language; citizens are thus stimulated to share the same identity with the one of the candidate, fact which motivates them to vote"*. In a recent study the same author reiterates the theme launched by Laswell in 1947 according to which the non-democratic elites address the public by using a language of the social "distance"; however, in a democratic public space the political communication would take place in an as familiar register as possible for the electorate. Anderson develops this thesis analyzing the Soviet rhetoric (2000).

The analysis of the nationalist discourse proves though that the thesis concerning the democratic dimension of the common language is not operational for any type of discourse. In our opinion, the element which indeed cannot be contested is the social 'closeness' effect which the common language generates from which its strategic utility for the politician. However this effect can be exploited no matter the contexts and political regimes. The nationalist discourse is predominantly identity-oriented which favors the common language use; on the other hand the nationalist discourse is performed at the limit of the democratic practices.

In this context the various narrations referred to by the candidate contributed, on the one, hand, to the 'rehabilitation' of his public image (the narrations have considerably humanized Vadim Tudor's forever rebel image) and on the other have offered the attack statements a reasonable and at the same time inoffensively attractive dimension (the narrative style considerably dissimulated the seriousness of the candidate's statements and distracted the public's attention from the fact that the respective statements were not backed up by proofs; the public became careful firstly to the story and its end and so the attack against another candidate seemed if not believable, at least plausible).

False electoral priorities

Some basic topics on the electoral agenda of the year 2000 presidential campaign were evaluated by the voters as false priorities. For example, the topic of the European Integration was appreciated as being important, but only in the long run. In the voters' opinion Romania was not ready for the European integration process and for the moment, the integration would only serve the Western countries' interests. Nevertheless, topics such as the defense of the national identity, legislative changes indispensable for the economic development, the streets safety or the education system were recognized as being electoral priorities.

In their tentative to justify their priorities the subjects have re-valued the communist period. Obviously, the more the time distance is longer and the economic crisis more acute the more the probability to positively evaluate the global aspects of the communist period by creating a mythical image of Romania which 'meant something' from the economic, military or international point of view.

The candidate's discourse

"Let's see...what would bring income in Romania before December 1989. We had a relatively powerful agriculture, a similar economy, good tourism, an armament industry and so on" ("The Way to Cotroceni", Antena 1, No. 22, 2000) "A study carried out by FAO...shows that Romania, with its rich soil, we have an extraordinary good soil, Baragan, Oltenia Plane, Transylvania Plateau, with the hydrographic regime that we have, big rivers, so big and with such an impetuous flow that sometimes we cannot keep a tight hand over them ..." ("I want to be president", PROTV, No. 14, 2000)

The voters discourse

"Romania's priorities? Economy! Why? On the one hand because we have resources, then we have the tourism which is not at all exploited with which we could make a lot of money, including the agro- tourism. We also have resources...Even the Jiu Valley ... there is a great potential out there...it should not be closed down as they started to." (CDR voter in 1996, PRM voter in 2000) "They don't take coal out anymore from there (Jiu Valley - translator's note). It's earth brought to the surface" (CDR voter in 1996 and 2000). "It's such an easy thing, community programs, cleaning the parks as they did while Ceausescu was alive ...the Moghioros Park ...when Ceausescu was alive it was much cleaner. Why? There was a community program, perfectly fine, in which children gathered from... let's say...Each had a lot...I would go there and have fun. Cleaning and having fun". "I remember when I was at my grandparents that they had to clean the snow, clean in front of the house otherwise the city hall would fine them" (PRM voter in 1996 and 2000).

The de-ideologizing procedure of the communist period was used by the subjects to criticize certain negative aspects of the present time. In this sense, Vadim Tudor exploited - under the form of some electoral narrations - two mythical images of Romania: communist Romania and the medieval Romanian folklore.

The first image gradually became inscribed in the collective imaginary after the fall of the communist regime in 1989. The difficulties of the economic reform were intensively speculated by the so-called 'nostalgic' people (political persons, opinion leaders and a certain part of the electorate) who fed thus the rhetoric of the communist period rehabilitation (a specifically post-communist transition rhetoric).

The rhetoric of the communist period rehabilitation includes specific discourse strategies. One of these was used by the candidate when he referred to the positive aspects of the communist period. Thus, the adepts of this rhetoric reveal the strictly technical, quantitative or statistical, aspects of the communist system by eluding the individual, social and democratic dimension. The communist period is presented as a functional "mechanism" or like an abstract space defined through orders and predictable evolutions (as opposed to the democratic period during which the 'things get out of control').

In the electoral discourses Vadim Tudor mentioned the communist period as a 'system' while during the after 1989 period it was characterized from the public opinion's perspective; the candidate compared therefore the 'efficient' communist 'system' (but from which social actors are missing) with the negative social reality corresponding to the democratic system (in which social actors act or take stands).

The second exploited mythical image is based on the Romanian medieval folklore (the medieval history scenes have fed the public space during the communist period. A folklore, an aesthetics and propaganda was constituted around these scenes). The exploitation of medieval history by Vadim Tudor generated an accessible electoral communication code. The candidate attributed himself a king figure by describing the president's role in folk tale

terms (for instance, the candidate exploited the image of the medieval wise king who listens to his subjects' 'complaints').

The electoral agenda of the subjects revealed profound social frustrations. The subject who took part in the research come from intellectual families, young persons who invested a lot in their own education and who wish to work in a competitive, efficient and transparent system.

These voters' discourse sends to persons who consider themselves socially wronged or discriminated by various 'laws' and 'systems', resenting as a trauma what they called the corrupted world with which they should get accustomed. The subjects accused the fact that although they had a competitive professional background they could not find an adequate work place because of corruption or incoherent laws.

Especially the younger voters have denounced the present organization of the education system which attributes all license diplomas no matter the institution and type of study the same professional recognition. Under these circumstances the ones who had to pass a whole system of examinations have the same rights with the ones who enjoyed a much more permissive system organized according to market criteria.

For these voters the Vadim Tudor was a last 'try' to denounce corruption - with authoritarian means, if the 'legal' ones do not function; for them the candidate's authoritarian discourse constituted the only opening offered by the political market at the moment of the electoral campaign.

Victims of the political society, victims of the 'history'

The acute perception of discrimination was felt by these voters not only at the level of their personal history, but also at the level of the national one. For these voters 'history' and 'politics' belong to the 'great powers' (just as in the Romanian society the positions and social relations would be a tribute of 'clients'). From this point of view Romania's evolution is already 'established' by the 'great powers' interest, any political or economic change being in fact a paid cost of the 'small country' statute.

The candidate's discourse

"Romania's drama starts from the fact that it is stopped to produce, to export what it produces and to manage itself (...) Romania should have been allowed to produce its every day food" ("I want to be president", PROTV, No. 14, 2000) "Maybe some occult forces did not want here, at the Danube's mouth, to be a powerful state. Maybe it was not wanted to exist a Great Romania, that is why instead of uniting sooner with Basarabia and Bucovina this phenomenon, this ideal seems further and further." ("The Way to Cotroceni, Antena 1, 2000) "I'll tell you what happens the moment the robbery taps are turned off. The moment Romania is allowed to produce, to export what it produces and manage itself, the minute when all national capacities would be liberalized and when the riches of this country would be used exclusively by the Romanian people and the gold stops going to Australia as those poor people who exploited gold in Maramures and took tones of gold out of the country. That minute you'll see how everything would turn in Romania's favor." ("The way to Cotroceni", Antena 1, No. 1, 2000) "Romania was stopped to produce since ...the beginning of 1990 until now" ("The way to Cotroceni", Antena, No. 22, 2000).

The voters' discourse

"EU needs us for we have resources. There are other interests at stake. If we enter the EU I'm sure we'll pay for it dearly" (PRM voter in 2000). "Bulgaria's economic growth is completely different than Romania's. There are different interests here" (CDR voter in 1996, PRM voter in 2000). "There is the difference between a small and a big country. Obviously! It is legitimate to break the law, the human rights if we are called America. We can intervene in Kosovo, make Milosevic a war criminal although he had not been accused and judged by any international tribunal. We can do whatever, absolutely whatever we want if we are a big country or if we have a powerful economy. As long as we are Romania, a small country with a bad economy we have no word in this" (PRM voter in 1996 and 2000).

We stress that these opinions have been put forward by persons informed about the internal and international events, persons generally preoccupied by history, politics and media information. These voters were part of the category of the electorate 'careful' to the electoral evolutions, systematic consumers of political information. In fact, they often used their information to prove the existence of occult 'scenarios' and, implicitly, the discrimination practiced by the United States and by the Western countries towards the Eastern Europe and not only.

As an argument for the 'scenarios' politics the Romanians' perception about Westerners was brought into discussion - this was one of the most powerful frustrations assumed by these voters. They

mentioned a series of personal experiences during which they witnessed what it means to be "Romanian in the West".

Nevertheless the voters admitted the necessity that Romania, before aspiring to integration, should firstly become 'capable' to enter 'Europe'; the eligibility should be however made by Romania's 'own forces' taking into account that any external aid expresses the 'interests' and 'plans' of the European institutions.

These are contradictions which signal the dilemmas, confusions and especially the frustrations of some voters who, on the one hand do not reject the European idea, but who, at the same time, are skeptical regarding what some call Romania's 'historical chance' (see in this sense Vadim Tudor's argumentation concerning the European integration: *"I respect Western European high officials , I collaborate with them, I communicated very well with Mr. Romano Prodi, Gunter Verheugen, Lord Russel Johnstone, I am in favor of Romania' integration in the Wester Europe's structures for if we look from the Atlantic wall, from Estoril, Portugal and up to Ural mountains Romania is right in the geographical center of Europe, but for God's sake, they should let us manage our country as we know it and shouldn't stop us, make the governments and alliances in the name of the Romanian people"* - TVR1 "Presidential elections", No. 11, 2000)

During the 2000 presidential campaign Vadim Tudor's electoral speeches contained numerous 'authorized' statements - statements attributed to a certain source. By doing so the candidate put forward various points of view as if these would have had a previous recognition from a social, historic or moral point of view. By using 'authorized' statements the candidate attributed himself the position of a leader who communicates 'evidences'.

The "Mafia", "occult" forces or impersonal expressions of the type "Romania was not allowed" constituted key-terms in the formulation of the thesis according to which the Romanian state and people are the victims of some scenarios and manipulations. In other words, the dramatic situation which the country experiences is artificial and under "normal" conditions Romania would have had a totally different recent history. The candidate is though extremely

convinced that, once these forces are stopped the country's situation would 'instantly' improve.

These statements are typical for the coherence of the nationalist discourse in which, on the one hand the leaders are associated with a series of miraculous actions and on the other, the evolutions take place between two extremes: one 'obviously' negative (considered as a "disaster", "danger", etc.) and another potentially positive (as "rebirth", "glory" etc.), the latter depending on the miraculous and saving action of the leaders.

Discussion and interpretation hypotheses

The voting option and the influence of electoral communication. *The partisan voters* identified with Vadim Tudor's rhetoric by continuing and developing the candidate's argumentation. *The last minute voters*, the ones who voted for the first time with Vadim Tudor (leaving behind the 1996 vote in favor of CDR) applied a *preferential reading* to the electoral discourse: they eluded from the candidate's discourse the aspects considered as inadmissible, by selecting the statements consensual or acceptable for any type of voter; in other cases, the same voters proved to be conscious of the excesses from the candidate's intervention, but they considered that they are justifiable and can be neglected as long as the candidate expresses 'truths' which everybody is aware of, feels and wants to hear.

Some of the voters who chose Vadim Tudor for the first time have attributed his discourse a reasonable dimension. They used the vote in Vadim Tudor's favor, on the one hand to express their protest and disappointment towards the CDR governing and, on the other, to vote for that candidate who was the most distanced one from the liberal right political family. Therefore, these voters did not vote with Vadim Tudor only as a sign of protest; they were torn between a *protesting vote* and a *reasonable* one, respectively the vote which was not supposed to be wasted in a gratuitous gesture.

We can suppose that the last minute voters got to vote for

Vadim Tudor because in 1996 they did not go towards CDR as partisan voters; then, just as in the case of 2000 elections they expressed their option after a time interval during which they had accumulated frustrations and revolt towards the political class. The difference from 1996 consists of that fact that in 2000 some of the voters felt 'betrayed' exactly by the political family towards whom they felt closer as ideology and political action.

During the 2000 presidential campaign Vadim Tudor was the only candidate who practiced a *consensual discourse* - a discourse based on collective narrations and opinions, on statements recognized in the public space and the collective imaginary. The electorate had thus the possibility to attribute the candidate already accepted points of view, recognized and constantly stated by the media and public opinion leaders.

The candidate's discourse did not touch political topics. Vadim Tudor did not take into account the electoral agenda but as a pretext for a 'course' of Romanian history and civilization.

This type of discourse considered during other electoral periods as being lacked of credibility became 'acceptable' under the 2000 electoral circumstances for a large part of the electorate (much higher than the electorate loyal to the candidate) and allowed the PRM leader to accumulate electoral capital *during* the campaign.

Vadim's discourse acquired resonance among the voters also due to the way in which the TV electoral communication was organized.

The devices and TV popularization regimes did not make possible the debate between the candidates on the one hand, and candidates and journalists on the other. The candidates had between 30 seconds and two minutes time to answer a series of specialized topics. The TV popularization was centered on an extremely vast and analytic thematic repertoire which could not however make the object of a debate. The candidates and journalists alike were reduced to the condition of stating a much too specialized series of topics so that the public had to make abstraction of the topics, unable to associate the themes with the candidates. Vadim Tudor broke this "televisual communication contract" by organizing his electoral appearances as

consensual discourses based on the conventional thinking of the society (myths, history, Orthodoxy, culture, collective opinions, popular scenes, rituals, etc.). Thus, the candidate's discourse supplied the electorate *identification criteria* by *stimulating the re-orienting and vote participation* of some categories of voters who did not traditionally belong to Vadim Tudor's electorate.

From the point of view of communication the excessive rationalization of electoral shows established a social 'distance' between the candidates and the public increased by the predominant technocrat rhetoric of the other candidates as well. On the other hand, we can also suppose that this rationalist media presentation - exclusively centered around knowledge testing - was not appealing to the electorate's political sensitivity in search of 'political persons' and not technicians. Paradoxically, during the 2000 presidential campaign (a), the televised electoral communication lacked by any deliberative dimension stimulated the candidates to adopt a much too specialized discourse, fact which proved counterproductive, including for the technocrat candidates; this communication contract practiced by the TV stations generated a perverse effect - the manifesting of the nationalist discourse without the possibility of a counter-argumentation. On the other hand, the electoral popularization through the media must be correlated with (b) the *indecision climate* as well as with (c) the *electorate's sensitivity* towards political leaders. In this context (d) Vadim Tudor's consensual discourse found an important opening of visibility and audience catching.

We stress the fact that the analysis which we made does not allow us to formulate any generalities, but only interpretation hypotheses. We mention in what follows the hypotheses which we think are the most important from a representative future research perspective.

The first hypothesis refers to the existence of a vulnerable *public opinion climate* in which on the one hand the *political information* of the electorate is significant (the voters with whom we talked had a considerable amount of knowledge about the political class and the government policies) and on the other, the democratic attitude did not become a practical value (for instance during the

discussions the voters oftentimes manifested civic reflexes, but at the same time the proved ready to 'give up' the institutions and democratic norms in exchange for the political authoritarianism; not least, the 'scenarios' and occult interpretations were used by the voters as explaining schemes of the political events fact which indicates the acute lack of trust in the political institutions, generally, in the juridical principle of the political publicity and in democracy as such).

The second hypothesis, the weak televised political journalism. Starting with 1990 the popularizing media devices of the electoral campaigns have restricted the political communication: on the one hand the journalists did not get involved in a debate with the candidates while on the other the candidates themselves did not have the chance to counter-argue ones against the others. During all these years the TV devices have generated an obedience relationship between the journalists and the candidates (a relationship which during the last electoral campaign in 2000 was completed by a political dimension specific to the political entertainment). The democratization of the TV political communication was understood and practiced only as an equality of access, the deliberative popularization being eluded.

The next hypothesis refers to a certain evolution of the electoral discourse during the ten transition years. Starting with 1990 the electoral campaigns were based on a populist-paternalist rhetoric manifested under more and more elaborated commercial forms. During all these years the electoral rhetoric cultivated a certain social representation of the ideal president: the president, a 'simple person', 'common', far from any privileges, but who by his morality (or, according to case, wisdom, belief, etc.) will succeed to save the country from the 'generalized crisis' and put the 'evil' aside. The electoral agenda was considerably reduced to the ethical attributes of the future president so that elements considered as being understood from the very beginning in a democracy (such as certain qualities of the president or the existence of a social climate without major conflict) have been transformed into exceptional performances relative to the political leaders' will.

The populist rhetoric reached its climax during the year 2000

presidential campaign, campaign which revealed the crisis of the Romania's political specter. The populism accumulated during the ten transition years did not remain lacked of consequences: during the last presidential elections the electoral discourse covered either the nationalist populist or the technocrat register; moreover, the 'legitimate' representatives of the nationalist-populist (such as Corneliu Vadim Tudor) succeeded in acquiring an electoral capital way over the traditional level; last but not least, the number of voters who decided their voting option during the last weeks of the presidential campaign considerably increased as compared to other presidential campaigns.

The last hypothesis concerns the low ratio of the electorate who votes according to a political attachment. The evolutions during the last presidential campaign prove that the Romanian electorate votes according to the circumstances, eventually against the power or in favor of the ones who have not been governing yet. Finally, the technocrat model could not be imposed exactly because the political specter continues to be unbalanced and lacked of social basis. The electorate's high volatility, the low vote participation and the progress of the nationalist-populist rhetoric are the first consequences of this unbalance.

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