ENDORSING CHANGE FROM A CONSERVATIVE PERSPECTIVE? THE CASE OF A NEW ROMANIAN RIGHT-WING PARTY

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate how the attitude towards change is expressed in the discourse of a Romanian right wing political organization, Noua Republică (The New Republic) which was legally recognized as a party in January 2013. The corpus consists of the texts of five infobulletins mailed by the organization during February and March 2013. The topics covered in the selected texts concern the party’s identity and its attitude towards the health reform and towards Romania’s foreign affairs policy. The research draws mainly on critical discourse analysis methods, employing van Leeuwen’s (e.g. 2008) theory on the representation of social actors. The results show that the party’s identity is constructed on a real but also on a symbolic level as an in-group opposed to the group represented by the government parties.

Keywords: legitimation, social actors, political discourse, Romania, right wing, identity, othering.

Introduction

Political change is a defining feature of democratic societies, where the alternation of different political parties to the government allows all political groups – and therefore all the electors – the possibility to have their interests represented by the governing structures. This study aims to investigate the case of the Romanian party Noua Republică (The New Republic- NR). This opposition party claims to represent a valid alternative to the governing parties and employs various discursive strategies in order to legitimate the necessity of such a major political change. Its discourse addressed to the possible electors focuses mainly on a marked polarized representation of the main political actors represented by the governing and the opposition parties.

There are several reasons for this investigation. At present, there are some important studies on Romanian political communication but this topic still

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deserves further analysis within the field of disciplines like pragmatics, discourse analysis or rhetoric. Another reason regards the fact that the discourse of right-wing organizations in contemporary Romania also deserves further investigation, especially from a comparative perspective. First, it should be compared to the discourse of extremist organizations in pre-communist Romania and thus be placed in a historical continuum. Second, comparisons with the discourse of other European right wing parties may also provide useful findings. One last reason for this research regards the medium used for getting the political messages to the electors. Computer-mediated communication tends today to become a significant alternative to traditional media and this is also the case for political communication. The use of direct e-mails in order to get the political messages across to the electors represents an original technique in the Romanian public sphere.

Romanian political life before and after communism

The two major political forces in 19th century Romania were the Liberals and the Conservatives. The first party represented the interests of the middle class while the second one was sustained especially by the landowners, the rich members of the upper class aiming to preserve their large estates. The Conservatives insisted on the preservation of the traditions and of the differences between social classes. In time, the Conservative Party weakened considerably so that in the interwar period the Liberal Party remained the strongest political force in Romania followed by ‘Partidul Național Țârănesc’ (The Peasants’ National Party). Extremist organizations also gained force in the first half of the 20th century. The Communist Party was founded in 1921 but it was declared as illegal soon afterwards, in 1924, and remained prohibited by law until 1944. As a reaction to the communist organization, the extreme right-wing group ‘Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail’ (‘The Legion of the Archangel Michael’) was founded in 1927. Members of this organization participated in the successive governments formed in 1940 but, in order to obtain the complete control of the state, the organization started an anarchic movement known as the ‘legionnaire rebellion’, consisting in thefts and massacres throughout the country. This rebellion was stopped in January 1941 through the intervention of the army and Ion Antonescu, the President of the Council of Ministers, took complete control of the government.

‘Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail’ sustained an ideology which was profoundly religious and based on a moral evaluation of the members of other political parties and the chosen name is suggestive for its doctrine. The word *legiune* alludes to the Roman origin of the Romanian people as the party members
viewed themselves as descendants of the legionnaires of the Roman Empire. The reference to the Archangel Michael is also connected to the idea of war and army. According to the Romanian Orthodox religious beliefs, Michael is the warrior archangel, the one leading the army of angels in the great battle against the demons. His name literally means ‘who is like God’ and it is his God-like character that enables him to bring justice everywhere in the world. In Romanian popular culture, Michael was associated with Death and represented as the Angel of Death, one of his responsibilities being to ascertain that the spirit of the dead received the deserved reward or punishment. The figure of the Archangel Michael signifies the triumph of the Good over the Evil but also the idea of final inexorable judgment both at a cosmic and a personal level.

One of the first consequences of the coming to power of the communist forces was the dissolution of all other political forces around 1950. Between 1948 and 1965, the unique political party was ‘Partidul Muncitoresc Român’ (the Romanian Labourers’ Party), which afterwards changed its name to ‘Partidul Comunist Român’ (the Romanian Communist Party). The revolution in December 1989 marked the end of the totalitarian regime and the beginning of the transition towards a capitalist society. Leftist forces have still been represented in the Parliament and formed various governements in post-communist Romania. However, one of the major goals of all post-revolutionary governements and parties was to distance themselves from the communist doctrine and to enforce their democratic orientation.

How far, how right?

According to the data available on the party’s website, NR was founded in June 2012 and entered into an alliance with other parties (‘The Electoral Center-Right Alliance’) which allowed it to run in the elections held in December 2012 and to obtain one senator position in the Romanian Parliament. The status of NR as a political party was officially acknowledged at the end of January 2013 and the party became a member of the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR) at the end of 2013.

Being a new party, one of the main challenges that NR faces involves distinguishing itself from other previous Romanian parties. It needs to construct a coherent collective identity and also to find specific discursive topics in order to legitimate its presence and actions in the public sphere and to delegitimate those of the competitors.

The party status explains NR ideology as a combination between classical liberalism, Christian democracy and modern conservatism. The mainstream parties which are closest to this positioning in the Romanian political sphere are Partidul Democrat Liberal (PDL, the Democrat Liberal Party) and Partidul National Liberal (PNL, the National Liberal Party), both positioned as moderate right parties. However, NR’s discourse in the first stage of its existence indicated support for PDL and opposition towards PNL. This choice is grounded above all in the values openly assumed by PDL, whose key topics include anti-communism and
‘realization of justice’ (*infăptuirea justiției*). NR disagrees openly with the positioning of PNL as a right wing party because of their decision to form an alliance with the Leftist force represented by Partidul Social Democrat (PSD, the Social Democrat Party) which allowed them to become members in the recent government.

NR’s economic policies support free-market economy and competition alongside with a reduced role of the State. As Green notes, the determination of the role of the State represents a major issue for conservative politics throughout the 20th century. The politics led by the British conservatives in the last decades starting with Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher show a growing orientation towards libertarian principles instead of paternalist ones. NR adopts such principles not only because of its explicit inspiration from Anglo-American conservative models but also because laissez-faire policies and anti-statism are opposed to the ideology of the former communist regime.

The asserted orientation towards conservatism and especially towards Christian democracy distinguishes NR from other contemporary Romanian parties. The ideology grounded in Christian democracy is more frequently sustained by parties in some West European states like France, Germany, Belgium or Italy and it derived from the increasing preoccupation shown by the Catholic Church for the social and political situation at the beginning of the 20th century. In pre-communist Romania, the development of a political ideology influenced by Christian values was characteristic for the National Peasants’ Party, with whom NR attempts to create a symbolic affiliation. Furthermore, this choice also links NR with other prominent Western right wing parties such as the German CDU (Christlich Demokratische Union).

By choosing this ideological position, NR also runs the risk of being associated by the voters with the former ‘Legion’ and thus be perceived as a radical instead of a moderate right wing party. The party status and the texts analyzed show that the authors of the messages are aware of such risks and state their rejection of extremism. However, the question arising at this point would be how to define precisely the ‘extreme right’ and whether NR shows signs of such a potential radicalization.

In the last two decades, a few Romanian parties have taken an explicit radical stance, with little success in the long term. One of these parties, ‘Partidul Noua Generație’ (New Generation Party), founded in 2000, appeared to have

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maintained some elements from the doctrine of the ‘legionari’. The only political party which still legally exists is ‘Partidul România Mare’ (PRM, Greater Romania Party), founded in 1991, though it has not received enough votes at the last elections in order to gain Parliamentarian representation. PRM is centered around the charismatic figure of the party founder and leader, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, who is actually the most prominent figure of the organization7. In comparison to this strategy, Mihail Neamțu, the president of NR, has chosen a more discrete approach. One of the analyzed texts shows the emphasis placed on the connection between the party founders, members, supporters and electors and on the creation of a community of views. Furthermore, the PRM leader constructs his discourse by highlighting national values and rejecting ethnic, religious and sexual minorities. Such a stance is not explicitly adopted in the NR corpus analyzed. Yet, the discourse of the infobulletins issued after the period selected for research shows recurrent topics like national identity and values and even some rigid views, as for example the rejection of same-sex marriage.

As the analysis of the selected texts shows, NR’s identity is not far from right wing populism because of its constant criticism towards the political elites. According to Jaschke8, populist right parties claim to plead for the interests of the citizens against the corrupt elites and thus address directly to ‘the people’ as a coherent community instead of targeting specific classes or groups of voters. Populism is also one of the conceptions characterizing right wing extremism in the model developed by Harrison and Bruter (2011). The model encompasses two ideological dimensions, authoritarianism and negative identity, each one with two possible ideological conceptions: a reactionary and a repressive one for the authoritarian dimension, and a xenophobic and a populist one for the negative identity dimension9. However, the authors note that populism may be a durable or a temporary characteristic of a party’s discourse10. Though populism characterizes other extreme right wing parties such as the Front National in France, there are also specific topics of such discourse that are not addressed in the NR discourse. The immigration issue, a common topic for West European parties11, does not represent a problem in present Romania. Instead, the xenophobic dimension may take the

form of a violent discourse against ethnic minorities, but no references about – either pro or against – minorities were found in the corpus. On the whole, its discourse shows that NR attempts to appear as a party composed of members with modern views, excluding extremism and, at the same time, related to former Romanian parties and politicians famous for their opposition against communism.

Corpus and characteristics

The corpus consists of the texts of five unsolicited e-mails which I have received during February and March 2013. The sender of the messages was labelled as ‘Noua Republică’. The messages were selected from a larger array of e-mails for two reasons. One reason regarded the topic discussed, which was, in all cases, clearly connected to the concept of social and political change. Another reason for the selection regarded the period when the messages had been issued. As NR’s status as a political party was acknowledged by the Romanian State at the end of January 2013, the messages issued in the following weeks appeared to be very relevant for understanding the party’s doctrine and standpoint. The research questions are: (1) how are the in-group and out-group defined in the party’s messages and (2) how does NR legitimate the need for a government change.

Each message sent has the form of a brief newspaper article, but the content differs. The texts ‘Vrem domnia legii într-o Românie bogată!’ (‘We want the law to rule in a rich Romania’ - DL) and ‘Noua Republică merge mai departe’ (‘The New Republic goes on’ - NR) focus on the presentation of the party’s identity. The other three texts present the stance taken by the party on a specific issue, as indicated by the headline: ‘Acordul transatlantic: o oportunitate pentru antreprenorii români’ (‘The transatlantic agreement: an opportunity for the Romanian entrepreneurs’ – AT), ‘Reforma Sănătății: protagoniști vechi și soluții la fel de vechi’ (‘The Health Reform: old actors and just as old solutions’ – RS), ‘O Nouă Constituție pentru o Nouă Românie’ (‘A New Constitution for a New Romania’ – NC). The text ‘Noua Republică merge mai departe’ (‘The New Republic goes on’) is the only one which does not represent an autonomous article. It contains only an excerpt from the speech held by Mihail Neamțu, the founder and the president of NR during the National Meeting of the NR party members, and a link to the party’s website for accessing the entire speech. For the purposes of the analysis, this link was accessed in order to retrieve the entire speech and to avoid drawing conclusions based on a single excerpt taken out of the context.

The choice of computer-mediated communication in order to convey messages for the electors is not uncommon for Romanian politics as, for example many politicians and parties – if not all of them - have webpages, personal blogs or social media accounts. The innovation lies in the technique used by NR, the direct e-mailing, which is usually exploited by corporate advertising. As Wodak notes, political life tends increasingly to be organized according to marketing principles. Contemporary media tend to present political activities and politicians in a ‘fictionalized’ manner and, at the same time, political communication involves a wide range of genres apart from the traditional political speeches, some of them
involving advertising techniques\textsuperscript{12}. A possible explanation for the choice of this technique is that at the beginning of 2013, NR had less access to ‘traditional’ media like the television or the print media than the leading political parties. As a consequence, they found less conventional means of communication – like the electronic and the social media – in order to get their messages across to the audience.

It is still difficult to assess whether the messages fulfilled the party’s objectives or not. They may have contributed to informing the audience about the existence of the party and its constructed identity. However, when direct mailing is used, the sender has little control upon the composition of the audience reached by the message and it is likely that the receivers of the NR mails were varied and had different political views, opinions and education. The content of the messages reveals that the text producers attempted to avoid such drawbacks by appealing to what may be called ‘standard common ground’, in other words a system of values and beliefs which had the least chances of being rejected.

**Theoretical framework**

Political communication tends currently to be equated with the use of language with persuasive or manipulative goals\textsuperscript{13}. Such a view derives from the ideas advanced by Berger and Luckmann regarding the role played by language in the construction of reality. It is not surprising, therefore, that the importance of language appears to be only tacitly acknowledged in the field of political studies\textsuperscript{14}. However, the use of language in the political domain represents a major research direction for critical discourse analysis, because of its contribution to ‘the enactment, reproduction and legitimization of power and domination’ in society\textsuperscript{15}. Power and legitimation are key concepts for understanding the structure and functions of contemporary political discourse.

A common characteristic for CDA research is the interest in the social and not the (inter)personal dimension of power which is generally defined in terms of asymmetry and dominance though with some variations. For example, the social dimension of power is highlighted by Reisigl and Wodak\textsuperscript{16}, who advance a general

view of power relationships as being ‘asymmetric’ and occurring between social actors ‘who assume different social positions or belong to different social groups’. A cognitive approach is preferred by Van Dijk\(^\text{17}\), who explains social power as the ability to exercise control over ‘the acts and minds’ of other groups or of the members of other groups.

Another recurrent point in CDA is the preoccupation for the distinction between various forms in which power may be exerted in society. Fowler\(^\text{18}\) distinguishes between two types of linguistic processes intended to the achievement of social control: directive practices and constitutive practices. According to him, social control is gained especially through constitutive practices which contribute to “the construction of institutions, roles, statuses that preserve the hierarchic structure of society”\(^\text{19}\). A similar opinion is advanced by Fairclough who observes that a mark of contemporary societies appears to be the trend to exercise power through consent instead of coercion\(^\text{20}\). This appears to be the case of the majority of political discourse, issued either by governing parties or by opposition groups. The state is traditionally viewed in CDA as the most significant among the institutions aiming to enforce their domination in the society especially because the state has the largest array of resources at its disposal in order to create social consent\(^\text{21}\). However, attention should likewise be paid to the discourses which attempt to challenge the dominant perspective and offer an alternate representation of the reality. The new representation may be different from the one preferred by the elites, nevertheless just as subjective. NR discourse illustrates this idea as the messages construct a reductive and polarized representation of the society in order to persuade their audience. Similar to all other actors on the political scene, NR attempts to project its “practices as universal and ‘common sense’”\(^\text{22}\).

The framework chosen for the data analysis is van Leeuwen’s theory of social practice\(^\text{23}\). Based on the Foucauldian view, discourse is defined as ‘a socially


constructed knowledge of some social practice. Social practices are ‘socially regulated ways’ of action that include: participants with specifically ascribed roles, a specific set of actions, performance modes, presentation styles, times, locations, resources and eligibility conditions that need to be fulfilled. The analysis focuses on the representation of the social actors in the given discourse and on the legitimation of the social action, aiming to identify some of the most frequent strategies employed.

Discussion of the results

The main aim of the study is to investigate the manner in which a new and small right wing party as NR attempts to construe its identity discursively in the communication with the mass of electors. The selection of the texts forming the corpus does not, however, imply that all messages issued by NR since its foundation belong only to the infobulletin/news article genre. During 2013, NR has become more visible in the print and visual media, for example through the interviews given by the party president. In addition, its relationship to the supporters and voters is not limited to the use of the media, but also consists in direct meetings. Thus, the communicative strategies at the disposal of the party are broader than those representing the focus of this analysis. A larger corpus would have been more difficult to investigate, first, because of reasons of space. Second, it is important to remember that political parties also undergo a process of development and adjust their programmes and communicational strategies in response to the evolution of the national and international context. Last, but not least, it is also possible that the party’s messages to its electors vary according to the targeted number of voters. At the beginning of its existence, a political party is more likely to choose ‘safe topics’ in order to attract as many supporters as possible and radicalize its programme only in the maturity phase. The following analysis of the five texts issued by NR does not claim to be representative for the entire political communication of the party throughout its existence so far, but for the views expressed in the first stage, after its foundation. In order to answer the two research questions, the analysis will first focus on the means of construing the speaker’s identity and the ‘othering’ strategies related to it. In the second section, the four legitimation categories identified by van Leeuwen will be introduced in order to assess the signification ascribed by NR to political and social change in the Romanian society. Besides, both sections will try to examine the NR messages taking into account the populist dimension pervading the ideology of contemporary right wing parties (though not exclusively right wing) as discussed above.

Social actors as culprits and rescuers

The main social actors represented in the examined corpus are: the party NR, the opposing political groups and the Romanian citizens. The aims of the messages are to differentiate NR from the other political parties and to create a relation of solidarity with the citizens who form the audience of the messages. The differentiation from the other parties is realized through a marked relation of antagonism, leading to the construction of an in-group identity positioned versus an out-group.

The most common strategies used in the NR discourse are differentiation and appraisement. While the first strategy constructs the differences between the in- and the out-group, the second one implies the use of evaluative lexis, labelling social actors as good or bad. Through the use of these strategies, NR constructs its identity at two levels. At the concrete level, it states its political views as a new actor on the political stage. At a deeper level, it also constructs a symbolic identity, by depicting the opposition between NR and the other parties as a struggle between good and evil.

This is a recurrent feature in the discursive creation of in- and out-groups, which necessitates the use of strategies of positive self-presentation and the negative presentation of others. The opposition between identity and alterity in the political domain is extensively discussed by Connolly, who pays attention to the philosophical dimension of this relationship. He identifies two ‘problems of evil’ on the political level, concerning the attempt to create and preserve a hegemonic identity, which can only be done by defining what is different as evil. In order to maintain the created identity, it is necessary also to define an ‘other’, opposed to it. It should be noted that Connolly’s observations apply both to the sphere of international and national politics. In the last case, the enemy is not represented by another state, but by a political organization whose views and courses of action are perceived as different and menacing to the identity of the organization or political actor in question. Here, Connolly points out an interesting paradox: it is necessary to live in a democracy in order for difference to ‘establish space for itself as alter-identity’. At the same time, the democratic society allows the legitimation of a dogmatized identity. This observation applies well to the case of NR discourse: the party rejects the government parties labelling them as totalitarian, but it would have been impossible for any party to exist and take such a stance, had it not been a democratic environment.

The in-group is first represented by the party NR. Such references occur in all the five texts analyzed, usually in order to assert the party’s standpoint on specific issues. The nomination of NR as a social actor is realized through the use of the name (Noua Republică), through the first-person plural pronoun ‘we’ (noi) and corresponding verb forms or through constructions with the corresponding possessive adjective (partidul nostru ‘our party’). The use of the party’s name creates the impression of objectivity and at the same time, represents the party as a monolithic force. No persons are individualized within this group, a strategy which creates the impression of solidarity and coherence:

‘The New Republic sustains a real constitutional reform.’ (‘Noua Republică susţine o adevărată reformă constituţională.’) (NC).

Occurrences of the ‘we’ pronoun and/or the corresponding verb forms were found in four of the five texts examined and they fulfilled more complex functions. The first-person plural pronoun mitigates the impersonal character of the e-mailed messages as a mass communication technique and adds to the value of personalization. ‘We’ is frequently used in the corpus as a synonym for NR, suggesting the idea that the political organization is not represented as a mere abstract entity, but as a group of people:

‘Our party defends the two fundamental axes of democracy and of the rule of law: economic freedom and independent justice. We want money for the Romanians and a justice that is honestly done!’

In the example above, the party fulfills the role of the Agent, while the ‘Romanians’ have the position of Beneficiary. This is an instance where the ‘we’ pronoun is used with an exclusive meaning. The receiver of the messages is often cast in the role of the witness, assimilated in the large category of ‘Romanian people’. Similar to all political parties, NR highlights its desire and ability of defending the interests of the common people and, in order to sustain these ideas, NR presents itself not only as a leading political actor but also as a representative party. It is likely that at the beginning of 2013, NR had less members than other political parties. However, the party discourse attempts to avoid the representation of NR as an isolated political organization. By emphasizing the existence of common values and beliefs, the NR discourse extends the in-group until it virtually incorporates all Romanian citizens:

‘We are born to talk to the millions of citizens who stay at home, disgusted. Millions of righteous and honest citizens have grown tired of the torment of surviving from day to day, of the scarce money and of an

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30 Partidul nostru apără cele două axe fundamentale ale democrației și statului de drept: libertatea economică și justiția independentă. Vrem bani pentru români și o dreptate cinstit împărțită! (DL)
undignified life. Millions of hard-working Romanians feel defied by the class of the newly rich people, by the flashiness of the nomenclature emerged in our eternal transition.\textsuperscript{31}

This excerpt illustrates how the representative character of the party and its connection to the citizens are expressed by means of the aggregation strategy, which includes the use of quantifiers (van Leeuwen 2008: 38). The quantifier \textit{milioane} (‘millions’) accompanies here the nouns \textit{cetăţeni} (‘citizens’) and \textit{români} (‘Romanians’) and marks the antagonism between social actors also in terms of numbers: ‘we’, ‘the citizens’ are many, ‘they’, ‘the rich people’, are only a few. In this example, the aggregation strategy is combined with the positive evaluation of the in-group and the negative evaluation of the out-group.

The writer of the mails does not address the receivers directly. The only occurrences of second-person pronouns were found in the speech delivered by the president of the party at the national meeting of the party members and supporters. The speech highlights the existence of an in-group that comprises the current party members and supporters:

\begin{quote}
‘While you, Ladies and Gentlemen, you didn’t only complain, didn’t only think about, didn’t only talk, didn’t only write letters waiting for the news. You, brave people, reliable men and women, energetic young people and wise seniors, from Valahia and Moldavia, from Banat and Transylvania, you, unlike the others, you rolled up your sleeves, gave up comfort, started working and in one year and a half, you perfected a new party, born and not made – a living, bold and clean party, a party of freedom, nurtured with few resources but animated by great values.’\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

The relation with the audience is marked through the repeated use of the Romanian honorific pronoun \textit{dumneavoastră} (a polite version of the second person pronoun ‘you’) which is commonly used for expressing the distance between speaker and addressees. Here, the honorific functions as a marker of respect and even contributes to creating an inclusive, not an exclusive relationship as the speaker praises the audience and evaluates their actions as positive. Instead of foregrounding his role in the creation of the party, the speaker presents it as a

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{31} ‘Ne-am născut pentru a le vorbi milioanelor de cetăţeni care stau acasă dezgustaţii. Milioane de români drepti şi cinstiţi s-au săturat de chinul supravieţuirii de pe o zi pe alta, de bani puţini şi o viaţă nedemnă. Milioane de români gospodari se simt sfidaţi de clasa parveniţilor, de ostentaţia nomenclaturii formate în veşnica noastră tranziţie.’ (DL)
\textsuperscript{32} ‘Dumneavoastră, însă, Doamnelor şi Domnilor, nu doar v-ăi plăns, nu doar v-ăi gândit, nu doar v-ăi vorbit, nu doar aţi scris răvăşe în aşteptarea noutăţii. Dumneavoastră, ca nişte oameni curajoşi, bărbaţi şi femei de caracter, tineri energici şi vârstnici înţelepti, regaţeni şi moldoveni, bănăţeni şi ardeleani, Dumneavoastră aşadar, spre deosebire de ceilalţii, v-ăi suflecat mâncile, aţi renunţat la confort, aţi trecut la treabă şi, într-un an şi jumătate, aţi desăvârşit un partid nou, născut, iar nu făcut – un partid viu, curajos şi curat, un partid al libertăţii, hrănit cu resurse puţine dar animat de valori măreţe.’
\end{footnotesize}
collective work. The representative character of the party is suggested by the description of its founding members, comprising virtually all categories of age, gender, and also geographical origin. Throughout Mihail Neamțu’s discourse, the group represented by ‘us’ is often distinguished from other groups, which are either referred to by indefinite pronouns as unii (some) or mulți (many) or by nouns or noun phrases, especially in relation to other political parties, as will be discussed below.

The examples introduced above show a clear tendency of constructing a marked positive identity of the party as in-group. In addition to that, the ‘people’ are also represented as a secondary social actor, in a highly idealized manner. The Romanian citizens are depicted as being honest and hard-working (having only qualities), but also poor (as victims of the context and, more precisely, of contemporary politicians). They are represented as being threatened by the political elites at present but as certain beneficiaries of the NR policies in the future. It should be noted that the idealized representation of the ‘citizens’ is also very homogenous: they are all Romanians and come from all historical regions of Romania, but no word is mentioned about the ethnic or religious minorities living in Romania. In spite of the fact that the corpus contains no explicit rejection of minorities, the references to the category of party supporters as being ‘Romanians’ may represent a form of implicit suppression of the minorities, thereby excluding them from the public sphere.

An interesting characteristic is the extensive depiction of the villified Other in all the analyzed texts. Though the main purpose of the e-mails should have been the construction of NR’s identity as a political party, this goal is never fulfilled independently of the depiction of the Other. The positive presentation of the party NR is achieved through the parallel construction of an out-group that encompasses various negative traits. The e-mails have therefore a mixed character, juxtaposing the presentations of both social actors. In contrast to the few nomination strategies used to designate the in-group, references to the out-group comprise a wide array of nomination strategies.

First, the out-group is represented by the contemporary political parties and NR’s differentiation from these parties is made through ‘ideologically contested’ terms33 like ‘socialist’ or ‘communist’. In the case of NR discourse, the antagonism is intensified by the fact that the right wing party is in opposition while the left wing alliance forms the current government. In the following excerpt, the repetition of the term ‘socialist’ enforces the negative connotation and underrates the alliance formed by the governing parties:

> The regime installed after the misappropriation of the Revolution in December 1989 by a group of important members of the former Romanian Communist Party was an authoritarian one. [...] The partial democratization between 1996 and 2000 had no consequences for the long

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The elections remained corrupt. The dirty money remained at the politicians’ disposal. The local administration and the Justice have remained in a state of disorganization.

The Socialist Alliance (USL) pretends now that they want to revise the current Constitution. This action is of a rarely seen hypocrisy, even for the miserable standards introduced by the Ponta regime.’

We remind [you] that the same Socialist Alliance (USL) organized a coup d’état during 3 – 6 July 2012 that frightened the civilized Europe, being condemned by the European Union and the Venice Commission as a menace against the state.’34

The real name of the alliance appears only between parantheses, as the acronym ‘USL’ which stands for ‘Uniunea Social-Liberală’ (‘the Social – Liberal Union’), formed by a left-wing party, the Social – Democrat Party together with the National Liberal and the Conservative Party. The adjective social might have had positive connotation for the large public as it is frequently used in structures like măsuri sociale (‘social measures’) or protecție socială (‘social protection’). The writer replaces this term with socialist which is more likely to have negative connotations for many Romanian electors, reminding them of the abuses of the communist dictatorship.

The critique directed against the contemporary politicians is embedded in a more extensive frame which appeals to the collective memory of the audience by giving a particular interpretation of recent history. According to this perspective, the last two decades in Romania’s history represent only a period of stagnation. In the example discussed above, one of the lexico-grammatical means of expressing this idea is the repetition of the verb a rămâne (to remain’) in three parallel structures. Besides, what NR states is that the Romanian governements after 1989 have not been different from the dictatorial communist government. Even if some political leaders of today were not members of the government after 1989, a negative judgment is cast upon all of them by the mere association with the Romanian Communist Party. The members of the first post-revolutionary government are not nominated here, but, instead, they are referred to by means of functionalization, as activiști ai fostului Partid Comunist Român (‘important members of the former Romanian Communist Party’). The NR discourse thus

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Alianța Socială (USL) pretinde acum că dorește să revizuiască actuala Constituție. Acesta este un gest de ipocrizie rar întâlnit chiar în raport cu standardele lamentabile introduse de regimul Ponta. Amintim că tot Alianța Socială (USL) a organizat o lovitură de stat în perioada 3-6 iulie 2012 care a speriat Europa civilizată, fiind condamnată de Uniunea Europeană și de Comisia de la Veneția ca un atentat la statul de drept’.
assimilates the class of actual political leaders to the former communist elites, responsible for countless abuses towards Romanian people and violations of human rights.

The vilification of the Other is frequently performed by means of assimilation. This strategy implies the reference to a social actor as a group\textsuperscript{35} and as a consequence it allows no place for differences within this group. According to the view advanced by NR, all political actors are equally bad. This is a strategy which directly enforces the uniqueness of NR as being the sole political force that truly serves the citizens’ interests:

‘Every day, the actors of the political life seem to distance themselves more and more from the Romanians’ expectations. The socialist power buries the country in bankruptcy. Putting an end to poverty and driving away injustice seem to be vain promises.’\textsuperscript{36}

In this fragment, the ideological antagonism is associated with a polarized social relation, viewed in terms of a class struggle. This representation additionally activates the powerful rhetorical topos of threat, drawing attention to what the behaviour of the political elite, depicted as contrary to the citizens’ welfare.

The negative representation of the Other is connected to a negative depiction of the current economic and social situation of Romania and the out-group is depicted as a culprit and held responsible for the current state of affairs. In addition, the collective identity of NR is constructed through the recourse to a symbolic frame, aiming to make the party stand out among the other Romanian parties. This dimension was particularly salient in two of the texts analyzed, one presenting the party’s perspective on Romanian politics in general and another one including the speech held by the president of the NR party in February 2013. The symbolic representation of social actors is realized especially through metaphors that carry highly affective evaluations. For instance, the out-group is sometimes represented through metaphors of illness and death. The last excerpt included the verb \textit{a îngropa} (‘to bury’) used in order to represent the activity of the government parties. In the speech delivered in front of the party supporters, Mihail Neamțu refers to the out-group in terms of physical illness, especially cancer. All such references appeal to a powerful script, regarding the attack on a human body by an insidious and evil enemy.

‘The New Republic appears today in the life of the Romanians from everywhere as continuing an older project of a country, but also as a work


\textsuperscript{36} ‘În fiecare zi, actorii vieţii politice se îndepărtează parcă tot mai mult de așteptările românilor. Puterea socialistă îngroapă țara în faliment. Ieşirea din sărâcie şi alungarea nedreptăţii par nişte promisiuni deşarte.’ (DL)
of healing the open wounds in the body of our nation, a work of exorcising an endemic evil and an attempt to stop a cancerous metastasis.'

Following this argumentative thread of the speech, the identity of NR is constructed by means of symbolic references to life. Not only is the party represented as being able to ‘heal’, but the discursive construction of the party’s identity undergoes a process of anthropomorphization, NR being presented as a person. The texts examined include references to the ‘birth’ of the party and Mihail Neamţu even speaks of the party’s identity card. A further characteristic of the NR discourse is that the party even acquires Messianic traits. For instance, NR is depicted through an apparently ambiguous construction in the following excerpt of the party president’s speech. The expression născut, iar nu făcut (‘born, and not made’) appears in the Orthodox prayer Crezul (‘Credo or the symbol of faith’) referring to Jesus Christ and his miraculous birth.

‘you perfected a new party, born and not made – a live, bold and clean party, a party of freedom, nurtured with few resources but animated by great values.’

Another connection to the figure of Messiah occurs in the depiction of the three major hardships that the party founders had to overcome, according to Mihail Neamţu. What stands out here is the number of three and the reference to the second impediment as the ‘second temptation blown away’. The lexical choices allude to the three temptations which, according to the Christian religion, the devil presented to Jesus while he was praying in the desert. This representation casts the political struggle into a more complex frame, not only of Good versus Evil, but the fight led by Christ against the devil:

‘First, we defeated the apathy of an abused people. […] The second temptation blown away by the New Republic was the struggle against the kafkian bureaucracy of an oversize State. […] Finally, the New Republic survived the fight against the USL propaganda and upheaval machine.’

The appeal to ideas stemming from the Christian theology is not random. It functions as another means of differentiating the party from the communist doctrine, which dissuaded religious beliefs, labelling them as ‘mysticism’. The

37 ‘Noua Republică apare astăzi în viața românilor de pretutindeni ca o prelungire a unui mai vechi proiect de țară, dar și ca o operă de tămăduire a rănilor deschise în trupul națiunii noastre, o operă de exorcizare a unui rău endemic și-o încercare de stopare a unei metastaze caneroase.’ (NR)
38 ăți desăvârșiți un partid nou, născut, iar nu făcut – un partid viu, curajos și curat, un partid al libertății, hrănit cu resurse puține dar animat de valori mărețe.’
39 ‘Mai întâi, am înfrânt pasivitatea unui popor dezabuzat. […] A doua ispită spulberată de Noua Republică a fost lupta cu bireroația kafkiană a unui Stat obez. […] În sfârșit, Noua Republică a supraviețuit luptei cu mașinăria de agitație și propagandă a USL.’
presence of Christian elements in the NR discourse links its ideology with that of the Romanian ‘legionari’.

The construction of in-group identity is based on shared opinions about the current state of affairs. Generally speaking, criticizing somebody implies holding a sort of authority over the targeted persons, the ability to notice their errors and the advantage of being in a position to judge them. As NR is not a party represented in the Parliament, the construction of such critical messages addressed to the large public is one of the few ways available in order to assume for itself a special type of authority. The asymmetric power relationship existing between governing and opposition parties is thus inverted at least on the discursive level, if not in real life. By means of the dichotomic representation of the social actors, NR assumes a political but, even more important, a moral authority. The negative values connected with the advanced representation of the ‘political Other’ are: lack of democracy, lack of transparency, an authoritarian regime, even lack of civilization. The NR party presents itself as immune to corruption and to compromises and as the only party that understands the dissatisfaction of the ‘common people’.

Legitimating change

The discursive legitimation of social actions concerns the act of providing reasons for a specific practice. In the case of political discourse, legitimation regards the practice of the elections: voters must be persuaded that they should vote for a specific party or person instead of for another. Legitimation is an important dimension of NR messages, as NR needs not only to persuade as many citizens as possible to vote for it, but also to financially support the party. Further, NR needs to show that the change of the current government is necessary and that NR is the only reliable actor in the political sphere.

Van Leeuwen identifies four categories of legitimation strategies: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization and mythopoesis. All categories are represented in the corpus which indicates the importance of the discursive legitimation for the party. The most frequent category is that of moral evaluation, deeply connected with the positive presentation of the in-group and the negative presentation of the out-group. The critique is expressed in terms of moral values: the out-group is portrayed as corrupt, deceitful and lacking the knowledge and the abilities required to govern a state. At the lexico-semantic level, most texts (4 out of 5) show a strong tendency towards overlexicalization in the depiction of reality, towards the accumulation of lexical items with strong negative meanings, like ‘poverty’, ‘bankruptcy’, ‘injustice’ or ‘blackmail’.

The negative evaluation of the out-group (especially of contemporary politicians) is connected to one of the main ideas stated in the NR e-mails: the need for justice. As one of the examples above showed, NR doctrine includes two key points: an economic one, regarding the free market, and a legal one, referring to the need of making justice.

‘The New Republic [party] exists in order to question the rusty patterns and the hypocrite appearances of the politics deployed along the banks of the Dâmboviţa river. Romania needs radical, not conventional solutions; we want a
New Republic led by brave leaders and not by persons who can be blackmailed or who are corrupt.40

Moreover, what seems to be another characteristic of NR discourse is the tendency to impose moral evaluation upon time. In other words, specific segments in time are evaluated as being good or bad. The words associated with the current state of affairs have negative meanings or connotations, while the words associated with the future change and with NR imply positive judgments. This classification scheme holds whether the subject is punctual (the health system, the economic development) or general (Romanian political life as a whole). A negative depiction of a present situation represents an important step in the argumentation in favour of change. By presenting the present as entirely negative and the alternative future as entirely positive, the writer manages to naturalize the need for change, making it appear as a natural consequence of the given premises.

This evaluation is manifest in the semantic relation of antonymy which recurred in the texts analyzed. The relation is established between the semantic fields of ‘new’ and ‘old’ which acquire positive, respectively negative meanings. For instance, the headline ‘Reforma Sănătății: proanunțații vechi și soluțiile la fel de vechi’ (‘The Health Reform: old actors and just as old solutions’) is based on the opposed meanings of the terms within. The term reformă (‘reform’) implies the idea of renewal, while the adjective vechi (‘old’), used twice, acquires a negative meaning in this context and it is used in order to contradict the reader’s expectations. The positive meaning assigned to the adjective nou (‘new’) is visible in headlines such as ‘O Nouă Constituție pentru o Nouă Românie’ (‘A new Constitution for a new Romania’) and in the party’s name, ‘Noua Republică’. The name already shows the positive meaning attributed to change, which, in this case, equals renewal: what is new is good as it is necessary. The name also includes an ambiguity, because, from a strictly legal point of view, Romania is a republic and has been so since the last king abdicated the throne and the communist party took the power. The choice of the party’s name indicates that the party does not view the present statal organization as truly respecting democratic principles.

The strategy of rationalization is less frequent in the corpus, being employed especially in the texts following a news article genre, where financial or diplomatic issues are discussed. Still, this is the main strategy used in the text ‘Reforma Sănătății: proanunțații vechi și soluțiile la fel de vechi’ (‘The Health Reform: old actors and just as old solutions’) whose main claim regards the inefficient use of public money in the health system. The writer appeals to numbers, statistics and official documents in order to sustain the critical stance, but also to the repetition of some negative words. For example, the term risipă (‘waste’) is used four times, twice marked, once by an adjectival determiner, risipă suplimentară (‘additional waste’) and another time by capitalisation. Another word with a similar meaning is

40 ‘Noua Republică există pentru a contesta tiparele ruginie și aparențele ipocrite ale politiciei dâmbovițene. România are nevoie de soluții radicale, nu convenționale; vrem o Nouă Republică condusă de lideri curajoși, iar nu de persoane ștантajabile sau venale.’
the adjective inutil (‘useless’), which is also repeated in the text: bunuri inutile (‘useless goods’), cantităţi inutile de produse (‘useless product supplies’).

The strategy of authorization is more clearly manifest in Mihail Neamţu’s speech which acknowledges the recent formation of the party and, at the same time, presents it as continuing a former doctrine, that of the opponents of communism. Authorization serves here to avoid the risk of NR being considered a new and minor party; instead, it is linked to the more prestigious Peasants’ National Party (Partidul Naţional Țăranesc), which existed before the communist dictatorship. NR does not construct its identity as merely opposed to communism but it legitimates its existence and its standpoint through an appeal to the collective memory. An important model brought into discussion is the Romanian politician Corneliu Coposu. Because he was a member in the Peasants’ National Party, he was accused and sent to prison by the communist authorities; still, he managed to survive and lived to see the fall of the communist regime.

‘Many of those who joined the New Republic loved Corneliu Coposu in their youth because the Senior wanted not only for him, but mostly for the descendants, a free, dignified and prospering Romanian nation. [...] Humbly taking up this historical mandate, the New Republic translates optimism into political action and makes boldness a cardinal virtue.’

The figure of Corneliu Coposu embodies values such as resistance to communism, tenacity and courage. The reference to this politician also contributes to the creation of a common ground between the speaker Mihail Neamţu and the public: the in-group encompasses also people who reject communism because they or their relatives have suffered in communist prisons. This type of legitimation adds value to the political programme of the party. Its actions signify more than the will to replace the actual government, namely the desire to do justice and to restore the ‘normal’ democratic state of affairs, which prevailed before the communist regime.

According to van Leeuwen’s framework, the strategy of mythopoesis is achieved through storytelling. The speaker inserts a myth, in fact a story, that suggests the legitimate course of action. Mythopoesis is employed in all the instances when NR discourse represents the party as a divine figure fighting against the evil. Moreover, the reiteration of the myth of genesis is visible in Mihail Neamţu’s speech. Creation myths represent a significant element in all cultures and it is not a coincidence that the party president transforms the official acknowledgement of NR into a symbolic event. Talking about the acknowledgement, Mihail Neamţu creates the image of an anarchic world, which allowed the existence of a reversed set of values.

41 Mulţii dintre cei care au venit la Noua Republică l-au iubit în tinereţe pe Corneliu Coposu pentru că Seniorul şi-a dorit nu doar pentru el, ci mai ales pentru urmaşi, o naţiune română liberă, demnă şi prosperă. [...] Preluând cu umiliinţă acest mandat istoric, Noua Republică traduce optimismul în acţiune politică şi face din îndrăzneală o virtute cardinală.’
‘On January 29, 1990 […] People were booing a lot and insulting without restriction. Broken windows, broken doors, mutilated objects, wounded bodies and dead souls.

The disciple of the late Iuliu Maniu (who died at Sighet sixty years before) […] was threatened, humiliated and chased like a wild beast. Why? Because the great Corneliu Coposu wished another Romania, because he was dreaming, like so many other former political prisoners, of a clean and worthy country.

January 29, 1990 remains a dark day in the calendar of Romanian democracy.

January 29, 2013 represents, on the contrary, the equinox of hope – the moment of the passage to the zodiac sign of freedom and responsibility.’42

This speech establishes a connection with a specific past event, the street protests that took place in Bucharest at the beginning of 1990. Such intense social events are considered to be linked to the concept of ‘political crisis’ and also imply a mobilization of values43. The insistence on this specific past moment acquires a symbolic function when it is linked with the foundation of the NR party. Its legal acknowledgement is thus transformed in a mythical Genesis, the time of order and creation comes after chaos. The birth of the right-wing party comes after the disorder created and preserved by communists, in a manner similar to God’s creation of the world. This overdetermination based on references to Christian beliefs makes the NR party stand out and it is sustained in the party founder’s speech by various further references to Christian religion.

Conclusions

The characteristics discussed above show that social actors are represented in the NR discourse in a dichotomic manner. The in-group formed by the party and its supporters is depicted in a positive, even idealized way, while the out-group is formed by the contemporary governing parties and negatively represented. The two representations are juxtaposed in the messages issued by NR, still the negative representation of the Other is sometimes so extensive that it becomes the core of the article, leaving the party’s identity and standpoint in the background. The representation of the social actors on the level of reality is accompanied by a representation on a symbolic level, with the party NR in a Messianic role, while the

42 ‘În 29 ianuarie 1990 […] Se huiduia abundant și se proferau calomnii fără opreiși. Geamuri sparte, uși rupte, obiecte desfigurate, trupuri rănite și suflete moarte.

Ucenicul răposatului Iuliu Maniu (mort la Sighet acum 60 de ani), […] era, așadar, amenințat, umilit și hătituit ca o fiară. De ce? Pentru că marele Corneliu Coposu își dorea o altă Românie, pentru că visa și el, ca atâtia alți foști deținuți politici, la o țară curată și demnă.

29 ianuarie 1990 rămâne o zi neagră în calendarul democrației românești.

29 ianuarie 2013 reprezintă, în schimb, echinoctiul speranței – momentul trecerii către zodia libertății și a responsabilității.’

governing parties incarnate a villified and demonic Other. Such polarized representations cannot exist without an important legitimation strategy, that of the moral evaluation of the social actors. This strategy serves here to legitimate the existence of NR as a social and political actor and the neccessity to replace the current government. It is not clear, however, how this change could be accomplished, as the e-mailed messages include more or less ambiguous formulations, such as the reference to ‘radical solutions’ for example, but also to the democratic practice of elections. The role of the religious references and the marked deontic dimension evoke the discourse of the former extremist organization ‘Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail’. A possible direction of research would therefore need to focus on the comparison between more texts issued by the two political formations.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the strategic grant POSDRU / 159 / 1.5 / S / 140863, Project ID 140863 (2014), co-financed by the European Social Fund within the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

I am grateful to the Professors Cornelia Ilie and Donatella Padua for the valuable comments on the manuscript draft. I am also grateful to Professor Liliana Ionescu-Ruxândoiu for the fruitful discussions and observations during the preparation of the article. The responsibility for the remaining shortcomings is entirely mine.

WORKS CITED


