Corruption in political discourse of Prime-Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu

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Riassunto: Il presente studio sociologico e un' analisi di contenuto dei discorsi di Calin Popescu Tariceanu sulla legislatura 2004 – presente. Lo scopo dell' articolo e quello di mostrare che il tipo di discorso di legitimazione politica viene costruito del premiere strategicamente sulla stigmatizatione dell'opposizione sociale democrata tramite la continua associazione di questa con un organismo corrupto.

Political discourse is an interesting theme for sociological analysis because there is a possible form of observing the strategy of political actors through the recurrence of certain themes mentioned frequently in the speech. Actually, this is the main assumption that the study presented in this article is based on. More precisely, when certain subjects or topics are used repeatedly in relation to different or same contexts it might be an interesting subject of research to discover the way how a politician legitimizes his discourse by building his image in relation to one or several discourse themes.

The politician analyzed through this perspective is the Romanian prime-minister, Calin Popescu Tariceanu and the recurrent theme used by him in his discourses is the problem of corruption. The methodology used is based on a quantitative and qualitative research, a content analysis on the prime-minister's discourses during his legislature, from 2004 until present time.

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The hypothesis taken into consideration is that actual government of PNL-PD coalition has frequently used the association of the social-democrat opposition with a corrupt party and with corruption in general in order to legitimate its political discourse. The etiquette of corruption appears frequently in the critics addressed by PNL-PD coalition to the social-democrat party and even if other actual parliamentary parties also did the same association in one way on another, The Coalition had a significant role in putting a stigma on the ex-social-democrat governing. In fact, what PNL-PD government succeeded in terms of things that have changed about the image of social-democrat party is what in social psychology is called social representation.

This concept deals with a social construction of one or more groups of people that reduce reality to the configuration made by the social individuals. It is a form of simplifying reality in order to be able to understand and explain it better and to manage to deal with external situations, changes or social actors. Now if we turn back to the hypothesis proposed for observation and if we assume the short theoretical background about social representation, we can make the assumption that PNL-PD Coalition facilitated the construction of people's perspective about social-democrat opposition. In his social discourses transmitted by mass media Prime Minister Tariceanu has accused several times the opposition for the problems that PNL-PD Coalition found unsolved when it started its mandate. For most of the internal problems, corruption seemed to be the answer: corruption of the juridical system, of the public institutions, corruption of the administrative sector or of the custom service or corruption even of the socio-democrats themselves. The present study will not start from the assumption that Calin Popescu Tariceanu or The Coalition would have raised for the first time the problematic of corruption, but they managed to present it in such a way that they have transformed it from simple attribute to stigma of the social-democrat party. This interpretation is confirmed also by the effected that followed: the inevitable need of PSD party for presenting an image of a new, reborn party with new leaders,

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more young members, new, refreshed initiatives and even new emblem of the social-democrat party. And this change was found imperious mostly after the corruption scandals in which some of the social-democrat important members were involved.

After this necessary introduction of the hypothesis that this study assumes, it is necessary to pass now to the analysis of the Prime Minister's discourse from 2004 until present time. Methodologically, the present initiative is a content analysis, a quantitative research method but also a qualitative one taking into consideration the interpretation that this study intends to offer to the construction of discourse.

Beginning with the Prime Minister's investiture discourse, Calin Popescu Tariceanu presents his working agenda bringing in front of all problems "challenges" like corruption in the first place, fiscal problems and poverty. Endemic corruption and fiscal problems are considered factors that stop the economic development and reduce the chances of Romanians to have a prosper life. They are the principal sources of poverty that split Romanians apart and that they are worried about, believes the Prime Minister. In the same discourse when the "exceptional collaboration" with Traian Basescu is mentioned, Tariceanu adds that the first direction taken during this "partnership" will be the corruption problem in association with an independent justice. Concerning the political clienteles Tariceanu mentions that time of local barons has passed. In the next months the administrative apparatus will be completed. The criteria of nominalization in function will be competence and correctness completed by the capacity of answering to citizens' interests.

The long term mission of the government, says the Prime Minister, will be cleaning the public life through fighting corruption, setting the public institutions free from the political clienteles of the ex-government, launching the social dialogue, redefining the liberty of expression.

At "governing strategies" chapter, corruption has, again, a special place. Tariceanu refers to fighting corruption through an integrate type of strategy. The government will focus on prevention and

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effective implementation of the laws having as support the cooperation between the executive power on the other levels: presidential and governmental, legislative, judiciary, local administrations and civil society. The Prime Minister's discourse doesn't always contain in an explicit manner critics of the exgovernment when it comes to corruption chapter but every time when the subject is mentioned, Tariceanu draws an explicit barrier between a "before" and "a present time". And "before" has a social-democrat colour.

One month after the investment speech an essential point in the Prime Minister's political declaration is corruption. In fact, the opposition with corruption is the foundation on which Tariceanu is building his legitimating discourses. Of course, he doesn't use this idea in all his public declarations, but when it comes to justifying the government activity and his role as an active political actor, his activity concerning corruption problematic is rarely mentioned per se, but antagonistically to the unsuccessful social-democratic mandate. Even if it is true that major changes can't be done overnight, states the Prime Minister, since the Coalition has the power, corruption and arbitrary will are not making the law in Romania. The law will rejoin to corruption and political games done until present time by the social-democrats and will triumph.

During an interview at Bruxelles, the Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu, in the presence of Mr. Graham Watson, the leader of ALDE Group from European Parliament, underlined the corruption theme as a priority action of the government with the purpose of completion of the necessary obligations for Romanian integration. Not only that the corruption problem is underlined at the beginning of the declaration, but from a simple content analysis, it seems to outrun the time allocated to other themes. And it is put in relation mostly with Justice.

"When I spoke about problems related to the independence of justice, I believed that we must solve something specific: the nominalization of the ministry of Justice from the civil society, a very respectable person and completely independent politically.

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This was a clear action in the sense of fighting against corruption and rebuilt of credibility and independence of justice. It is important to mention RAFO case in this context, a society which had all debt erased and transformed into actions owned by the state." In conclusion, Tariceanu underlines the importance of corruption problem, identified as a "criminal act that should be punished in conformity with the laws".

There are declarations of the prime minister dedicated totally to the problem of corruption. On the 19th of January 2005 C. P. Tariceanu confirms repeatedly the corruption phenomenon as a major stigma of the Romanian image and finds the reasons in identifying social-democrat party with corruption itself. After the meeting of the Prime Minister with Quinton Quayle, the Britain ambassador in Bucharest, Tariceanu is more specific concerning anticorruption measures, oriented mostly on the three main problematic pillars: government, administration, custom service. After a summary observation of the Prime Minister's political declaration in the context of European integration or concerning his meetings with other important political actors of the European institutions, Tariceanu doesn't forget to remember each time the key-domains in which Romania has important responsibilities and the priority is the corruption problem and the reform of Justice. The international diplomatic context in which corruption is mentioned by the Prime Minister brings a new, wider perspective of presenting corruption. And this difference is perfectly justified in the type of discourse that Tariceanu adopts because in the external, European context, corruption represents one of the weak aspects that Romania faces, a problem that brings difficulties to Romanian integration. At this level it is the European Union the supranational actor that puts pressure and deadlines to domains that leave Romania unprepared for the European integration. In this context, corruption matter is first a question of essential necessity more than of an individual choice of legitimizing political imagine. This doesn't mean that this last dimension disappears because it can be recognized in Tariceanu's discourses. But at international level there are other diplomatic mechanisms, proto-

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cols and even the necessity of stereotypical use of certain aspects (for instance that Romania will complete the engagements assumed). European Union identified corruption with one of the biggest difficulties that Romania has to overcome. And at least, diplomatically, at least at the level of formal discourse, this has to prevail to other perspectives. Romania has to be perceived as a political actor that has to demonstrate that has understood the Europe's message.

This is the reason why the problematic of corruption cannot be interpreted using the same criteria. National discourse of legitimating in opposition to the ex social democrat government using corruption criteria has the same validity as the other perspective, more diplomatic, a response to reaching the standards imposed. It is not about deconstruction of one of these or other contexts in order to see which fits and describes best the orientation of Tariceanu's discourse on the thematic of corruption. There are complementary situations that request different approach.

After analyzing the place that the problem of corruption occupies in the Prime Minister's speech taking into consideration the context and the target group to which the discourse is addressed, the study will focus now only on the discourses addressed to Romanian public and which are based on building a national legitimacy of the actual government in comparison with the unsuccessful results of the social democrat. Using the content analysis of Calin Popescu Tariceanu's discourse I argued that corruption is one of the most central and recurrent themes and that this topic is rarely mentioned – sociologically speaking – per se, but in relation to the social-democrat party.

In another speech there is a strong reference made to the lack of specific measures and the delayed reform of the juridical system during the social-democrat mandate. The ex-government created an embracing and humiliating perception of Romanian institutional system. In opposition to this fail of social democrats Tariceanu legitimates the actual government by the implementation of a detailed plan of action. A new accent has been introduced on the corruption problem in the business and political

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sector as long as an insistent pressure is perceived from the business sector to the political sector in order to gain support and economical advantages.

The actual government, sustains the Prime Minister, cannot afford to lose time. During the programme organized by the Great Britain embassy – "Romania and Great Britain – together in Europe" –, it is mentioned the importance of the activity of the Britain councilors on corruption problems. Their experience was not used during the ex-government at its real value, but the actual government, states Tariceanu, will not afford to lose this chance. Concerning the corruption problem in the Customs Service, the Prime Minister affirms that parasites are no longer going to be accepted to maintain corruption network. The projects that are being implemented by the PNL-PD government coalition are underlined: the creation of a centre for Customs information, the financing of some mobile brigades that make unexpected controls at central and regional level, a general strategy against corruption based on British conciliation. Statistical dates are used in order to demonstrate the positive effect of such measures. Between February and April 2005 the receipts collected from customs taxes are with 30% higher in comparison with the same period of time, in 2004. Also, there has been confiscated three times more counterfeit merchandise than what the ex-government succeeded in 2004.

The Prime Minister's discourses concentrate further on specific domains of the society. He is a passing from general to a more specific aspect in order to build his legitimacy type of discourse. Another sector mentioned in relation with the corruption phenomenon is the fiscal bribery. Corruption has been spreading in the political sector, but also in the business sector perturbing the activity of the ones that work in a correct and honest way because of the ones that use outlaw practices.

As a response to the several attacks of the social democrat opposition Calin Popescu Tariceanu uses again, this time in a more violent way, the association of corruption with the social-democrat party. The discourse is interesting through its content structure and a reproduction of a part of it would be relevant. "If

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Nastase government had applied the necessary reforms for the Romanian preparation for integration, now there wouldn't have been all the discussions about postponing Romania for joining the European Union. You (the social democrats) had, unfortunately, other governing priorities. Instead of economical development, you have enriched the clienteles. Instead of the reformation of Justice you have consolidates corruption. Instead of recede of properties, you have legitimated the abuses. Now you are in opposition and you try to protect this "outcomes". Like us, you know that a powerful and independent Justice will not be convenient to your personal and party interests. This is why, at the end of 2004 you have promised that Romania will make the Justice reformation for closing the negotiations, but there were hypocrite promises as long as you haven't mentioned any funds in this sense. What would have remained of Romania if the elections had been won by another four years of clienteles and barons government?

And today we are governing! We make the reform of Justice in order to fight corruption settled by the social democrats. You show us today how much these things bother you. And I am trying to understand you. The victory of corruption in cities and villages under PSD government was a cynical revenge of the ex-communists obsessed by enrichment in disadvantage of the market economy. Bruxelles considers the Justice and property reformation, criteria of compatibility with the European Community. I strongly underline, here, in front of the Romanian Parliament that we fight for an independent and honest justice."

The style of discourse is an ironical one, sometimes impulsive through utilization of short, cold phrases with the effect of a harsh sentence. PSD ex-government is blamed.

The corruption in the Justice sector remains a priority in the discourses of the Prime Minister. "An inefficient justice, knelled by several political interests is the main factor for the corruption transformation from a marginal phenomenon to an endemic one." Abuses and corruption have to stop being "the skeleton locked in

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the closet". Justice is precisely the fight again corruption, adds Tariceanu.

With the launch of the General Anticorruption Direction, the prime minister sustains that corruption eradication in Romania is a possible thing and that obtaining tangible results in the next period of time must be the most important objective.

Another reference to the inefficiency of PSD government is made concerning the difficulty of taking over the government in moments when social democrat irresponsibility put Romania in front of delay of Romanian integration to the European Union. The Prime Minister concludes: "The results can already be seen: where was Romania in December 2004 and where is now? We took over in December 2004 a laggard Romania. Friends were pushing our backs towards European Union, but the ex-government had other priorities instead of fighting corruption and making reform. More than this, the congregation of PSD barons and political clienteles were fighting against Europe. The integration negotiations were finished in very difficult conditions. I want to underline that there was no state except for Romania that had extra clauses in order to integrate the European structures. In total, there were 11 clauses introduced in order to close the negotiations. It was an elegant more in which the European leaders told the ex-government: "We opened the door, but it seems that you are not capable to come in".

It is clear that in these examples and in the examples mentioned before Calin Popescu Tariceanu integrates corruption as a central theme in building a legitimacy discourse of the government activity in contrast with the social-democrat corrupt "acquisitions". In 2005 there were made more references to the thematic of corruption during the discourses because the PNL-PD government had to win legitimacy after the elections positioning itself in contrast with the ex governing party. The Prime Minister explained the necessary priorities that he identified in his mandate from the investment discourse and developed them separately in further discourse. Corruption occupies a central role concerning

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problematic of reform of Justice, Customs, Public Administration, political and business sector.

The present study can be considered an initiative to further research on the domain. How will the Prime Minister's discourse change now, after Romania joined European Union? What elements and political themes and arguments will he use further in order to legitimate his position? What place will corruption occupy in the plans and declarations of PNL-PD government? Will integration in the European Community structures change the political direction of the executive or strengthen the already launched directions? In what way will these happen and why? These are only potential questions raised by this study, opening new challenges for further approach.

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* * * http://www.guv.ro/, site of Romanian Government consulted for the political discourses of Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu.

* * * *The discourses of Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu*, were taken and consulted from http://www.guv.ro/, site of the Romanian Government.

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