

NEW MEDIA DIMENSIONS: PERSONALIZATION OF POLITICS¹

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Abstract

During the recent years, there has been an increased interest paid for the personalization of politics. At the electoral competitions, modern democracies have witnessed to changes in establishing consensus, more focused on static ideological values, group affiliations and party-centred politics, rather on political candidates' personality characteristics, their image, and voter's personal choices. The new order in the field of politics has redefined pragmatism for political actors, who, in their political action, use many ways that can provide increased visibility and operate with the full potential of media arsenal. So, the general institutional personalization leads to personalization in the media, which in turn leads to personalization in the politicians' behaviour. Respectively, the main sources of political information for society have imposed personalization as the general means of communication. In this context, the relationship between political power and the ability to influence media agendas is a key issue within the field of political communication examinations. That political personalization can be better understood by considering the personalization in the media. This article focuses on the personalization model in the media activity, examines diverse aspects of the concept of personalization, it presents the experience accumulated by the Moldovan and Romanian media in covering the political process through the comprehension of the personalization as test of notoriety.

Key words: personalization of politics, political communication, media, elections, current media paradigm, political behaviour, media influence

INTRODUCTION

Among the multiple and diverse definitions given to the contemporary era we can not overlook the one that describes it as the *era of power personalisation* (Morato, 1997, 232). This description does not appear to be random, since the current political process shows an increase of the personal aspect in politics,

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highlighting the tendency to identify the power with the person holding it. The features of the personalisation, found in the political processes, the changes that modify the way the politics act, this attracts, justifiable, the attention of the researchers around the world (McAllister, 2007, 571-588)

However, the launched thesis, generalizing a phenomenon as complex and uneven as customizing policy implies the need for prior clarification. It is risky, to attribute the hypertrophy primarily to our time to personal elements in politics: human history is replete with examples of twinning between political action and personal qualities of leaders and personalization temptation is by no means a novelty. It is enough to recall, in this context, the perennial concern of leaders, known since antiquity to promote the cult of personality. Napoleon's words, „The throne is a man, and that man is me with my will, my character, my fame” (Morato, 1997, 231) are explicit in this regard.

Another question related to the ratio of amplifying the personalization of political power and advancing the democratic principles in the contemporary society. These trends are consistent in a situation where, as scientists say, „Political leadership is the case, the most significant and obvious element of political life” (Mosneaga, 1995, 5). Is it widely spread the idea that power, at least the beginnings of democracy, was almost anonymous, and that democracy would be conducted throughout the ages, a consistent struggle against the power of the monarchy or dictatorship personal present, tending instead to impose non-specific power system, and eventually to „degenerate” towards customization again (Dader, 1998, 14). Since before World War I, Robert Michels showed that oligarchic tendencies of democracies determines that a party is first and foremost an organization of its leader (Michels, 1977, 127-149).

Over the last century one may observe that these trends are being strengthened. Explaining the phenomenon, Maurice Duverger upheld application of the concept of „republican monarchy” regimes based on popular legitimacy but concentrates power in one person having at the moment so extensive a power that could be the envy of kings of the old monarchies. And this is true not only for presidential regimes, the logical choice to direct or indirect state supreme position in supplying the personalization of power, but even parliamentary system, the executive is a product of parliament, which owes its power and in which he is responsible (Alonso, 1989, 73).

It is obvious from the above, that the examination of policy customization phenomenon must be taken into account both objectively size and the subjective. In terms of objective, personal power into the institutional reality that determines visibility and exceptionality functions performed, as long as this function (or president of a country or the leader of a party) is a single person in focusing power. In other words, personalization is an immanent attribute of the institutional system of power itself. Subjective dimension, less related administrative hierarchy or party, is due to psychological issues: a person may symbolize the character and aspirations of a country, of a people, of a social movement, group, and represent respectively the power that the entrusted. In this case, the political consensus

achieved leadership is favoured more by intuition and feelings expressed by supporters than behave rationally. Researchers show that the personalization of power can also be an expression of uncertainty that includes the society in a crisis or political and economic instability. (Hermansson, 2011) Psychological mechanisms of personalization processes lies in political mythologizing so in times of crisis popular perception peculiarities stimulate myths like the Hero, Saviour, Father of Nation (Frigioiu, 2008, 76).

A trenchant elucidation of the causes and consequences of political advancement customization belongs to Max Weber who, in the pages of his famous works "Economy and Society", remarked that the action is intentional as the masses and the more rigorous is bureaucratic organization parties, the less important is the content of speech. The effect is pure emotional speeches and has the same purpose as demonstrations and celebrations organized by the parties: to reveal to the masses the power and confidence in victory party, and especially present charismatic qualities of the leader (Weber, 1977, 3-6). In examining the question „the politician and the scholar", Max Weber, always in irreconcilable dilemma of making choice between rational and charismatic model of power between parliamentary democracy, with its inevitable slide of corruption and mediocrity, pilasters true of irresponsible bureaucratic power, and democracy-Fuhrer, a controlled democracy, Caesar-lick that in extreme situations inevitably turns the charismatic leader towards absolute power, that „with the advent of constitutional rule and, more fully, with the establishment of democracy, „demagogue” is typical figure of political leaders in the West. Unpleasant resonances of this word should not make us forget that both Cleon, as Pericles was the first who bore that name. Demagogy serves modern discourse, but used especially in quantity terrible speech (it is enough to consider the amount of electoral speech that is to say any modern candidate), they permanently tool is the word ...” (Weber, 1981, 116). As it results from the foregoing conclusion and it generates substantial ways, able to justify the definition mentioned at the beginning: personalization of politics appeared not today nor yesterday, but today, it has reached a stage of proliferation due to the intrinsic connection that is established between policy and communication, which characterizes so much the current political process. We are entitled, therefore, to talk about an increase in the personalization of politics, in some cases about hyper-personalization, driven especially by the audio-visual media. Moreover, therefore unchecked policy coverage becomes a pressing imperative of the current political space.

Therefore, if the meaning of policy customization is that the personal qualities of the leader of the tender relevant content are proposed political party, political party, and successive central element of coverage, we have reason to find that the phenomenon practically global customization policy manifested in terms of Moldovan society and current Romanian. There are plenty of signs that may confirm that the political process trends and events in this area are often ostentatious and contribution of the media associated with certain figures of politicians who appear in the foreground, subordinating and sometimes reducing

his own person whole complexity of political life itself. It is enough to note the frequency in the pages of the Moldovan press, radio and TV in phrases like „Ghimpu's political party”, „Filat's party” so recourse to the most elementary observation, we can see that the material published in the first pages of various publications political stage actors name is mentioned many times. Any monitoring may confirm this finding. Statistics and the frequency of names may obviously vary from case to case, from name to name, from publication to publication, different contexts and nuances of appreciation, but a trend in the case of regular observation, however, is emerging: the Media exploits to limit politicians' name and helps to personalize. A fact confirmed by the frequency of the politicians appearing on television programs. Thus, for example, monitoring television stations in Moldova (1997, 2009) show that the most covered in these periods were the president of the republic, the prime minister and other political leaders (Moraru, 2009).

Not that these things would be a „canonization” of the politician, but it is obvious, however, media hyper-presence of the politicians. To be noted, for comparison, the issue of 15 February 1989 of „The Voice Nation”, which announced itself as the first independent publication from Chisinau, a messenger of major changes, included, in fact, only a few elements that could be attributed to the phenomenon of personalization, including the photo of the first secretary of the party in the republic Ivan Bodiul on the second page. Over a few years the media focus on the leader and its image is but overwhelming. The media evolves ever more towards personalization, which becomes a priority and basically a prerogative. The Media personalities compete when awards are for the man of the year, month, or of the week, to detect „the hero of the day”, recruited, of course, from the political camps, thus establishing their hierarchy, awarding them with different grades. Whole pages are devoted to discussions on qualities of the next president, interviews, often wordy, with „New Olympians”. Launching of new television shows also revolves around the throne or the seat of Parliament. The title of "persona grata" of the TV is awarded to the same political leaders, clearly showing the position and preferences of those who make the information agenda of the day.

The focus is on power, on people who embody it or people who aspire to conquer it. A personalization occurs of positions and political issues, programs and options parties, images are launched that could catalyse a consensus. Politics is now, somehow, less ideological, attention is becoming increasingly focused on the personal characteristics of the characters in the media, rather than on purely political issues. Thus, from personalizing the message we reach the personalization of politics. These are truly innovative features that have characterized the political process in recent years, profoundly changing it in relation to previous experience, as confirmed by numerous undertaken studies.

It would be wrong, however, to believe that the phenomenon is only present with new democracies or established democracies of the West and that within the totalitarian regime there were no effects from promoting political

personalization. The communist propaganda arsenal did not lack these tools, but the mechanism operation was special. In the absence of political competitiveness, accession to the political class and thus advancing the forefront of public attention was done in a very strict and centralized way, unified under certain strict principles that allowed the inclusion in the highest peaks of power only of an integrated and mono-coloured elite. The role of the media, in this case, was less significant, secondary and ultimately, irrelevant. It was admitted, however, that the media may create some characters, but to create political figures, the actual meaning of the word, was downright unimaginable in those conditions. The new political atmosphere favoured in the post-communist area the extinction of those walls which prevented political competitiveness and helped launch the so-called „generation of politicians of the 1989”, various in terms of composition, but clearly marked by the sign of the new. And for society, the „discovery” of politics meant a discovery of new leaders. And if politics has become exciting and attractive in the full meaning of the word, this is due to the personalities that were included in it. For the first time in the political arena, in the dialogue with the masses, leaders have emerged who did not speak from the sheet with a text written, who were not simply representatives of political-ideological doctrine but expressed themselves and others. New circumstances led to the redefinition of politics as an activity, henceforth focused on a different kind of communication. The rigid portraits, never allowing a smile, or a detached presence of the members of the Politburo of the time, as well as their posters - colourless, unified, representing a model requiring a tie and all the jacket buttons were replaced by others (more humanized, developed new communication style, of the custom).

With the assimilation of the personalization model, the political actors have adapted to the media communication, ensuring desired visibility. Consequently, there was a converting into media icons of the politicians and when it came to electoral decisions, the ordinary people „favours individual figures at the expense of political plans and platforms” (Calvo, 2013) as confirmed by the notorious political scientists (Pasquino, 1990, 65-85). Thus, the leadership personalisation of the political party is a consequence of this new media model that undoubtedly produces substantial changes in the relationship between the elected and the electorate, where the political culture is mostly focused on image rather than on traditional culture, mediated by the written word. And the significant effects of the apparition of party personalization are political crises (such as „Tangentopoli”, Italy).

Obviously, the assertion of politics personalization occurred not only due the unchaining of the society, along with the rise of mass media. One factor that can not be neglected in this regard, to which testifies the existence of sociological data, is the prevalence in the masses of a sense of frustration, a state of mind characterized by a specific form of disillusionment and confusion in determining social orientation, and, as a result, there is an increase of paternalistic aspirations. Political scientists noted that „psychology of addiction continues to be manifested in Moldovan society attitudes of citizens to their elected, to the power structures of

the country” (Fruntașu and Rusnac, 1999, 82). A source of increasing politics personalization is undoubtedly from this state of mind of the population. The vertiginous climb and remaining of Vladimir Putin in the pyramid of power in Russia, for example, and other examples of political leaders in other post-socialist countries (Romania, Ukraine and others) (Solonenco and Ruthland, 2011) constitutes probative evidence in this regard.

In the case of Romanian politics personalization, it was found that on the political arena, many times, the behaviour and decision making depends or is influenced by personal factors that exceed institutional logic. The personalization of politics, which is always at the expense of institutions, takes different forms and affects a wide range of areas (Huiu, 2011). With reference to the political actions of Traian Băsescu, analysts noted that one of the aggravating factors of this phenomenon of politics personalization is the persistent intervention of Traian Basescu, based in the highly conflict context: "Throughout his political evolution, Basescu constant wears a series of personal conflicts with other political actors, some of them based on a particular theme. Basescu's conflicts are not resolved by negotiation and are only win-or-lose. Although the development of a „conflict” there are periods of apparent calm or waiver, in fact it does not cease, like he said, only by „his victory” (Huiu, 2011). .

With all the dynamism which characterizes the evolution of the phenomenon of politics personalization in Romania, as well as in Moldova, it is, however, still in its initial phase of implementation, only of some of its elements. And the development prospects of personalization involve actually even more danger, perhaps inevitable, like: the hyper-mediatisation of the political characters, at the expense of journalistic coverage of the entire spectrum of current socio-political issues, making a spectacle form the political life, simplifying the political message, reducing the field of political communication. Finally, a real threat where as some authors found: "for us, a political party is, at best, „a team of drummers”, but often it's just a „formalized” relationship between a „soloist” and „fans” ... a kind of "comet tail" that takes the name of the leader” (Serebrian, 2000).

The fact that this is not a singular and extraordinary case is confirmed by our western democracies experience with a more advanced process of leader personalisation: „The game is played only between a dozen of stars, always the same. Instead of the old democracies debate and internal political forces it was set up the „signal system”, through television or the big newspapers ... This is how politics die. Only politicians survive, few and always the same” (Sensini, 1999, 69). After all, it is obvious that various aspects, often contradictory, of the personalization of politics, as a circumstance that marks significantly the political process of the recent years, deserve a special attention from the researchers.

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