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‘Of the People or for the People’? An Analysis of Populist Discourse in the 2014 European Parliament Elections in Romania

Abstract

Populism is on the rise in Europe; this is a fact attested by the success of populist parties in recent elections (regional, national, European). Populists’ electoral performance can be explained from a variety of perspectives, depending on the focus of the analysis; e.g. ideological, socio-economic, political factors. This paper aims to contribute insightful observations to the attempts to show how these parties have managed to score so well in elections by analyzing the communication and discursive practices used by populist politicians. I will focus on examining elements of populist rhetoric used by populist politicians, as well as by mainstream politicians in televised debates and election posters from the 2014 European Parliament election campaign in Romania.

Keywords: populism; communication style; 2014 EP elections; Romania.

Introduction

The recent success of the right (and extreme right) parties in the regional, national and European elections should not be too surprising, given the rise of populism in Europe, especially in Western Europe, during the last two decades. The growth of populist parties and ideologies comes from numerous and various sources, ranging from general disappointment with mainstream politics to increasing fear of immigration (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). As far as the European Union is concerned, populism in many member states has also been fueled by the criticism surrounding the processes of European enlargement and integration. Undoubtedly, the 2008 financial and economic crisis and its grave negative impact on the EU have contributed to the spread and consolidation, in many European countries, of popular sympathy towards populist ideologies. Seizing the opportunity, populist politicians have capitalized on European citizens’ discontent. This is a very brief outline of the context in which populist parties in Western Europe have gradually thrived and gained ground, up to the point of scoring top positions in many electoral races, culminating with the impressive success in the 2014 elections to the European Parliament. What about the populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe? Have they been as successful as their fellow Western populists? What communication style, discursive strategies and metaphors defined the Eastern populists’ rhetoric during the 2014 EP election

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campaign? To answer these questions, this paper aims to analyze the populist discourse of three Romanian populist parties that have participated to the 2014 EP race. Furthermore, this study seeks to shed light on the dynamics of populism in Romania and on the features that the populist discourse in Romania does not share with its Western counterpart.

What is Populism and Why is It Successful?

Populism is a widely spread phenomenon that characterizes political movements from different geographical areas from the world over: the US, Latin America, Europe. Apparently, it is a “pathological normalcy” (Mudde, 2010) that accompanies mainstream democracies. Populism has been the subject of heated academic debates for more than four decades (Mudde, 2004; Rooduijn, 2013). The scholarly literature surrounding populism focuses largely on defining the concept, although many of the definitions advanced so far have been contested (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969; Mudde, 2004; Taggard, 2000; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). However, there is large consensus among scholars over some characteristics that all populist parties or politicians share. Whichever the perspective chosen to “define the undefinable” (Mudde, 2004), populism is an anti-elitist and anti-establishment ideology. It is essentially people-centered, moralistic rather than programmatic (Mudde, 2004), proclaiming the evilness of the corrupt elites that oppress the good and pure people. While a unanimously accepted definition of populism might not be easily formulated, some scholars have suggested that finding a lowest common denominator shared by a many populist parties and politicians might be a viable solution to accurately describe what seemed to be disparate tendencies, spatially and temporally scattered (Rooduijn, 2013).

In the literature in the field, populism is conceptualized as a (thin) ideology (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Mudde, 2004), as a communication style (Canovan, 1999; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), and as a political strategy (Kriesi, 2004). These three possibilities to approach populism are not mutually exclusive; features of populism in different countries and across different times may (and usually do) include elements that are consistent with ideology, rhetoric and communication or political organization. However, this paper seeks to identify and analyze features of populist communication in televised debates broadcast during the 2014 EP election campaign. As a special style of communication, populism displays proximity to the people, the ordinary citizens, while, at the same time, taking a stance from the ‘corrupt’ elite (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Populists identify themselves to the people on behalf of whom they pretend to speak. There are no intermediaries between a populist and the people he or she represents and talks about. According to Jagers and Walgrave (2007), populism is rhetorically appealing to people; it uses communication tools and techniques to mobilize support and gain voters’ sympathy.

Does adopting a certain (populist) style and rhetoric ensure electoral success of populist parties? We cannot properly answer this question without a substantial empirical investigation. However, given the recent success in European, national or regional elections of populist parties across Europe, we may speculate that the communication style adopted by these parties, by their leaders, has contributed to their success in attracting voters on their side. Addressing voters directly, using simplistic, even tabloid-style language, employing highly emotional slogans, relying on the oratorical skills of a charismatic leader, populist parties seemed to have managed to obtain surprisingly good results in electoral confrontations, especially in

the 2014 elections to the European Parliament in member states from in Western Europe. Thus, Ukip in Great Britain, le Front National in France, Podemos in Spain or Five Star Movement in Italy scored very well in these elections. We cannot say that the success of these parties is due entirely (or exclusively) to the use of a specific communication style during the campaign. However, the populist rhetoric that their leaders have constantly used has attracted a lot of sympathy from people who may have perceived them as “taboo breakers and fighters against political correctness” (Mudde, 2004, p. 554).

This paper aims to examine the populist communication of parties that entered the 2014 race to EP in Romania. The analysis focuses primarily on the discursive strategies used by populist parties, without, however, excluding the populist rhetoric employed by mainstream parties. Transcripts of televised debates broadcast during the election campaign and posters used by the parties (both populist and mainstream parties) will be analyzed. Since populist parties in Romania are far less known than their relatives in Western Europe, a brief presentation of these parties and their leaders will precede the section displaying the method used and the results of the study.

Populism in post-1989 Romania

The political road that post-communist Romania has embarked on does not differ significantly from the one taken by other Central and Eastern European countries that came out from behind the Iron Curtain. The fall of communism and the never-ending transition in many of these countries has not necessarily brought them closer (at least not as quickly and as genuinely as one would have hoped) to the ‘old’ Western European liberal democracies. Undoubtedly, the EU accession and further integration have contributed heavily to the democratization of the ex-communist countries, and of Romania, in particular. Nevertheless, gaining membership and securing a place at Europe’s top table came at a high price; despite Romanians’ relatively constant high level of trust in the EU, as shown by Eurobarometers, many of them acknowledge that EU membership has not generated substantial improvement of their welfare and purchasing power (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001, 2007; Sum, 2010). People’s discontent and disillusion with the perceived effects of EU accession have been exploited by populist parties and leaders who have managed to gain important popular support, which has contributed to the political capital that these parties have managed to raise after 1989. As a matter of fact, the success of post-communism populism is not a particular feature of Romania; other ex-communist countries in the region have witnessed the rise of populism as an “alternative politics” (Shafir, 2008), a reaction to the region’s lack of “ideological alternative to democracy” (Krastev, 2007, p. 58). Romanians’ disenchantment with politicians and party performance (irrespective of the ideological stances or programmatic statements) and their dissatisfaction with their socio-economic situation have paved the way for populist parties to virulently express their voice and gain significant ground on the national political scene, and even achieve important electoral success.

Populist parties in post-communist Romania have not been a constant and stable force in Romanian politics. With some notable exceptions, they rarely accede to power, and many of them have undergone many transformations that have ultimately led to their dissolutions. In this brief overview of populists in Romania, I shall focus exclusively on the parties that have either actively participated in the national and European political life, either by gaining seats

in the Romanian and/ or European Parliament or by participating in the EP elections, albeit unsuccessfully. It is worth mentioning that such parties are not the only purveyors of populist ideas and themes in the Romanian society. Officially unrecognized parties such as Everything for the Country Party (TPT) and political movements like The New Right (ND) are perhaps the most prominent representatives of populism, especially among young, educated segments of the population, whose substantial presence on the Internet cannot easily go unremarked. Despite their absence from recent electoral politics (ND has never actually participated in any post-communist elections because of the courts' rejection of its application to become a party), TPT and ND continue to spread extremist, nationalist, fascist, racist and xenophobic discourse in Romanian society, inspired by the Iron Guard, Romania's inter-war far right Legionary Movement (see Cinpoș, 2013).

The most renowned Romanian populist party, often mentioned in the literature (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001; Mudde, 2007; Sum, 2010; Cinpoș, 2013), is the Greater Romania Party (PRM), which is also the most consistently present and the most electorally successful. As early as 1992, PRM entered the Romanian Parliament and even participated to the creation of the government as a coalition partner (Cinpoș, 2013, p.170). However, the peak of its participation to Romanian politics was reached in the 2000 parliamentary and presidential elections, when PRM secured 121 seats in the Parliament (across both chambers), becoming the largest opposition party, and the leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor was a runner-up in the race for the highest position in the state. In 2008, PRM didn't make it to the parliament, but it participated to the EP elections held in the following year and secured 3 seats in the EP, one for Vadim Tudor himself. PRM displays almost all features of populist parties described in the literature (Canovan, 1999; Taggart, 2004; Mudde, 2007; Rooduijn, 2013): it lacks a clear ideology and consistent internal structure and organization; it presents itself as a party of the people and for the people, whose will and expectations are ostensibly voiced by the leader Vadim Tudor; it obsessively proclaims a systemic crisis of the Romanian society and blames the corrupt elites that lead the country for destroying the economy; it fears the attacks from external 'others' - often identified as Hungarians, Roma people, (Jewish) Mafia, America, Russia - to Romania's territorial integrity, Christian Orthodox faith and values. PRM is an anti-system party, supported by former members of the communist nomenklatura, a fact that may partially explain its easiness in accommodating far-right features, such as anti-Semitism and ethnic nationalism, with far-left elements, such as exalting the communist nationalization of economy and industry (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001; Cinpoș, 2013). Clearly, the charisma of its leader, the flamboyant Vadim Tudor, is an undisputable populist asset to the party. Ceaușescu's former 'court bard' and one of his most trusted political ideologues, Vadim Tudor has adapted rather quickly to the new post-communist political reality and has managed to build quite an extraordinary political career. A sociologist by profession, Vadim Tudor has excellent oratorical skills and is a fierce adversary in a political debate; he has a vast cultural background and never ceases to brag about his intellectual qualities and awareness of various facts whenever he gets the chance. The televised debates for the 2014 EP elections provided him with the opportunity to show off his extensive knowledge of history, literature and sociology. A quick glance at the results of the most recent parliamentary and EP elections reveals that PRM and its charismatic leadership are in accentuated decline and that the force that the party, mainly through its leader, had once exerted may have faded. The presence on the political scene of the New Generation Party – Christian Democratic (PNG-CD) may have contributed to the

erosion of PRM's strength. Fed up with Vadim Tudor's erratic behavior and personality cult, many members defected from PRM and subsequently adhered to PNG-CD.

The New Generation – Christian Democratic Party (New Generation Party prior to 2006) was founded by Viorel Lis, former mayor of Bucharest, who, rumor has it, "sold" it to George (Gigi) Becali in 2004. It is this transaction that propelled both the party and its buyer-become-leader to the premier league of Romanian politics. To gain power, Becali played the populist card and, to some extent, he played it pretty successfully, not necessarily for the party, but for himself. He became a politician in addition to his other public personae, self-made millionaire and businessman, owner and sponsor of Romania's all time greatest football club. Similarity with the former Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi is observable: both are filthy rich businessmen, both own prestigious football teams. However, unlike Berlusconi, Becali is a promoter of ethnic and Christian nationalism, his discourse abounds in anti-Semitic, racist and xenophobic statements, and he has little or no former education at all (he used to be a shepherd). Furthermore, one important factor to PNG-CD and Becali's success was the mainstream Romanian media. Becali enjoyed huge amounts of airtime from TV channels in search of high ratings and publicity. The populist leader's simplistic, direct, unsophisticated discourse uttered in a poorly commanded Romanian, lacking basic grammar notions, has attracted many less educated, socially, economically and politically disoriented and frustrated Romanians.

Becali and PNG-CD are an example of what Shafir (2008) calls "neo-populism from below" (p. 443), which means that they seek to accede to power by whatever means. In his political career, Becali has managed to secure two mandates as member of the Romanian and the European Parliament on the lists of other parties (the National Liberal Party (PNL) and Greater Romania Party) then his own, given that PNG-CD has never met the required electoral 5% threshold in Romania. However, the party's influence in Romanian politics has declined constantly in recent years; many of its members have defected and have joined other parties, especially People's Party Dan Diaconescu, which will be presented next. In May 2014, Becali was in the worst position he could have ever imagined himself: he was in jail, serving a 3-year sentence for bribery. PNG-CD did not enter the race for the 2014 EP elections, but I have decided to include it in this section because this party stands out when discussing post-communist populism in Romania.

People's Party Dan Diaconescu (PP-DD) was founded in 2010 by Dan Diaconescu, a contested self-employed television presenter at a TV station called OTV. At the time, both PRM and PNG-CD were facing difficult times, both in terms of electoral success and internal stability. Dan Diaconescu seized the opportunity to politically capitalize on the misfortune of the two established populist parties in Romania and formed PP-DD. The party participated to the parliamentary elections in 2012 and, to almost everybody's surprise, including its founder, scored very well, managing to gain 68 seats in both houses. Ideologically, PP-DD could be labeled as a left-wing populist party, despite the fact that it lacks a coherent and consistent platform. As the same time, the party also shares some features of right-wing extremism (e.g. strong anti-homosexual views), but cannot be truly included in this latter category (Cinpoie?, 2013). PP-DD and its leader mimic the media populism displayed by Venezuela's former President Hugo Chavez. One memorable populist episode in the history of the party is Diaconescu's attempt, in 2012, a couple of months before the start of the parliamentary elections campaign, to buy the state-owned chemical plant Oltchim, 'in the name of the people and for the people'. Eventually, it was revealed that he never actually intended to buy the plant, nor had he the money to do so, but this sham brought him and his party a good deal of

votes. Behind the wheel of his opulent Rolls Royce, Dan Diaconescu promises the eradication of poverty in Romania, the destruction of the corrupt political class and the instauration of people's dictatorship. Nowadays, PP-DD seems to be in no better shape than PRM or PNG-CD. Dan Diaconescu is currently in jail, serving a 5-year sentence for blackmail. As many populist parties that are dependent on their leaders usually do, PP-DD has lost momentum. The void of power created by Diaconescu's imprisonment has led to numerous internal struggles ending in many party members' migration to other parties. PP-DD participated to the 2012 EP elections, albeit unsuccessfully.

The last party discussed in this section is also the newest apparition on the Romanian political scene. The New Republic Party (PNR) obtained the official decision of the courts acknowledging its existence at the beginning of 2013. The party was founded and is currently led by Mihail Neamțu, a young well-educated Romanian philosopher and theologian. PNR positions itself towards the centre-right of the political spectrum, and its manifesto (published under the section called "Manifesto" on the party's website www.nouarepublica.ro) contains many populist elements, from fighting for total recovery of the power by the people and for the people, to proclaiming an unprecedented economic and, more worryingly, moral crisis of the Romanian society. PNR is an anti-system party, denouncing the corrupt and rotten ex-communist elite whose power they hold to have spread like an illness over the otherwise pure and uncontaminated destiny of the Romanians, while appealing to the values of Christian Orthodoxy for recovery. PNR entered the 2014 race to the EP, although without success. However, its leader's discourse in the electoral campaign shared many features with classic, textbook populist discourse, as shown in the next section of the paper.

Finally, I add a brief note on the role of the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) in supporting more or less overtly nationalist, ethnically and religion-based movements in Romania. (Cinpoș, 2013). BOR has tacitly meddled in Romanian politics and especially in electoral campaigns by endorsing one or more candidates. The Church's intolerant and, at times, violent attitude towards religious and sexual minorities has inspired many populists, among which Becali is a good example of how populism uses religion to justify itself as doing God's work in the war against Satan and its deceitful servants, i.e. Jews, the LGBT community, etc. BOR is not the only church in the region to get involved in politics and inspire and heighten populism; the politicization of the religious discourse in Greece under the aegis of the Greek Church is another example (Stavrakakis, 2005).

Features of Populist Discourse in the 2014 EP Elections in Romania

In May 2014, political parties, alliances and 8 independents participated to the second EP election held in Romania, in order to determine who would occupy the 32 seats allocated to Romania in the European Parliament, for a full 5-year mandate (not counting the elections of 2007, immediately after the country's accession to the EU, which led to a 2-year mandate for the then elected Romanian MEPs). The 2014 EP elections in Romania did not spark too much interest among voters. This is not surprising, given the perceived second-order nature, where "less is at stake" (Reif & Schmitt, 1980, p. 9), of these elections across Europe. Interestingly, not only voters perceive EP elections as less important than parliamentary or presidential elections (first-order elections, according to Reif & Schmitt, 1980), but politicians themselves seem to think that these elections are less important than the national elections, especially if

both electoral cycles happen in the same year. This was the case in Romania, in 2014, when voters were called to elect both Romania's MEPs and its president for the next 5 years. The EP elections held in May were considered by some political parties and alliances, especially by the alliance in power, as the following analysis will show, as a general rehearsal for the presidential elections that took place in November 2014. This would explain the high penetration of populist elements into the Social Democratic Party's discourse (especially in the campaign posters). But this was not the only case of populism in the 2014 EP elections, since 3 populist parties that have been previously described entered the race.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the populist discourse in the 2014 EP elections in Romania. Populist rhetoric and communication style will be examined, with a particular focus on metaphorical framings used by populist leaders to translate abstract concepts and ideas (pertaining to European and national politics and economy) into simpler, more accessible notions that would resonate with their audiences. My aim is two-fold: on the one hand, I intend to analyze the discourse of established populist parties and, on the other hand, I aim to identify and investigate the elements and themes belonging to populism and populist discourse used by mainstream parties in the elections.

Populism has been a constant of the last year's EP elections across several member states, with populist parties scoring high in countries such as France or the UK, where rampant right-wing extremism threatens the EU. In Romania, the prospects of electoral success for populist parties remained unfulfilled in the 2014 EP elections; none of the three populist parties has succeeded to win a seat in the European Parliament. This does not necessarily mean that the situation is reassuring; populist arguments have substantially penetrated mainstream politics, being present in the discourses of politicians from the parties in power, as well as from those in the opposition.

Corpus and Methodology

The corpus of the study comprises 10 televised debates organized by the Romanian public television (TVR) and 20 campaign posters used by 14 candidates (parties, alliances or independents). The televised debates were broadcast between April 25th and May 2nd, 2014; they all have the same format: 1 hour-long shows, 1 moderator (the same for all 10 debates), 4-5 candidates invited in each show. The distribution of minutes to each candidate was made in accordance with the electoral and broadcast laws in force. The purpose of the debates was to familiarize the Romanian voters with the political offers of the candidates, their objectives as MEPs, the policies they would like to support in the EP, their opinion on key EU-related topics. The moderator tried to guide the discussions into these lines, despite some candidates often slipping into populist arguments and excessive focus on issues related to national politics.

The inclusion of posters into this analysis is motivated by the fact that many of the political parties and independent candidates chose to invest into outdoor print campaign materials, hoping that this would ensure more visibility for them among the electorate who actually goes to vote and, thus, they would increase their chances to catch a ticket to Brussels. Furthermore, this paper seeks to show to what extent the message delivered by the participants to the televised debates matched the content of their campaign posters.

The debates were transcribed and then content analyzed using a codebook that comprised four dimensions of populist discourse: people-centrism (any reference to the people), criticism of the corrupt political class/ elite (including moral corruption), evoking and acclaim-

ing the greatness of the country, and praise of Christian Orthodox values. The first two categories of the codebook have been adapted from established research work on populist discourse (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Rooduijn, 2014), to which the latter two dimensions have been added; these two dimensions were drawn from the literature on Romanian populism (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001; Ietcu-Fairclough, 2007; Shafir, 2008). In addition to grouping the content of the debates according to the categories in the codebook, particular attention was paid to the metaphorical framings used by populist leaders (namely, candidates and representatives of the Greater Romania Party, the People's Party Dan Diaconescu and the New Republic Party) to talk about European and domestic politics. The analysis would provide valuable insights into the use of metaphors in populist discourse and their functions in a particular context (i.e. EP elections debates in Romania).

Self-obsessed Populism – Greater Romania Party

The party was represented by its leader, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, also a candidate to the EP (in three debates) and by Vlad Hoge, who did not run for a seat in the EP. Given the history of the party and the notoriety of its leader, the coded dimensions of populist discourse are found in the televised performance of the PRM leader and his colleague. Vadim Tudor announced that the corrupt political class that rules Romania has destroyed the country:

“We didn't destroy the economy, those who were in power did it.” (May 21)

“Ponta (the incumbent PM) has taken down the economy.” (May 21)

He also expressed his party's intention to organize a meeting to denounce Ponta's corruption and undermining of the national economy. Furthermore, the leader of PRM seized the opportunity to communicate his alternative to the direction in which the country was led:

“I propose, when I come to power...and the history is cyclic, in times of crisis, parties like Greater Romania, despite being kept facing the wall, will come to power...I promise that I'll do nationalization...why is PETROM (*a major oil and gas company*) in the hands of foreigners?” (May 21)

Throughout his interventions in the debates, Vadim Tudor never ceased to praise Romania's glorious past. He took great pleasure in acclaiming the inventions made by renowned Romanians (e.g. the pen, the jet engine, etc.), the work of scholars such as Mircea Eliade, or the fact that the first European Christian church was built in Romania (St. Andrew's cave).

Christianity and appeal to Christian Orthodox values are crucial to PRM and to Vadim Tudor's discourse. He acknowledged that both he and his parents were devout Christians and that Christianity was the only true religion of the world. He also mentioned several times that Christianity is very important for powerful EU countries, such as France or Germany (he quotes a former high official in the German parliament whom he had met during a visit in Germany and who had allegedly told him in confidence that Germany sought to unify Europe based on Christian values). Furthermore, when referring to Turkey's accession to the EU, Vadim Tudor again quoted a foreign official, French this time, who had allegedly confided to him in a meeting that France did not want Turkey in the EU because they “did not want to bring the worm into the apple”. But maybe the most theatrical expression that he used to proclaim the superiority of Christianity and the privileged status of the Romanian people was when he proudly and piously declared that “Romanians are the sons of God” (May 28).

Interestingly, the references to the people are not abundant in Vadim Tudor's discourse. On the contrary, he focused extensively and obsessively on himself, using “I” and active ac-

tion verbs very frequently. In fact, his performance revolved substantially around himself. He bragged about his cultural and educational background, about his accumulated experience as politician, about his meetings with high-ranking officials from all over the world and even about his readings. In all three debates to which he participated, Vadim Tudor brought a pile of books that he placed in front of him. Before answering, almost always, he started with a long introduction in which he boasted about his many and extraordinary achievements. He even showed a picture of him and Pope Paul II and another of him with Nelson Mandela. This is more evidence to show that his erratic behavior and his personality cult have altered his populist rhetoric, in the sense that instead of taking a hard line on his opponents in an electoral debate, he uses the time to talk about his erudition and righteousness. It seems that the fierce Vadim Tudor has gone softer when it comes to attacking everybody on every ground. In the debates analyzed, the leader of PRM used his usual weapon of choice – attacking Hungarians and their irredentism – on May 21, right before election day, when he had already seen the polls announcing a very weak position for PRM. He then attacked the candidate of the Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania and invited them to “go to South Tirol and stay there if they want collective rights and autonomy for Hungarians” (May 21).

The people-centrism is more present in Hogeă's discourse, a well-known Romanian extremist, neo-Nazi and denier of the Holocaust, who, although not being a candidate to the EP, has reinforced PRM's appeal to the people whose interests it solely represents. Hogeă said that “we shouldn't position ourselves in opposition to Europe” and that “we have to show dignity in the EU” (May 7). At the same time, though, Hogeă contributed to his boss's personality cult by reminding a candidate from the Social Democratic Party (the incumbent PM's party) that the socialists' slogan in the EP elections, “Proud to be Romanian”, was actually a plagiarism of Vadim Tudor's book called “Pride of being Romanian”. Hogeă's remark alludes to the scandal surrounding Ponta (the PM), who had been accused of plagiarizing his PhD thesis.

Feeble Populism – People's Party Dan Diaconescu

People's Party Dan Diaconescu was present only once in the televised debates. A party representative, not a candidate, joined the debate on April 25th, 2014 and communicated PPDD's political offer to voters. There is insufficient material to properly analyze PPDD's populist discourse in the 2014 EP elections. It is possible that the party's leader was not sufficiently interested in these elections, or else he may have thought that there were more efficient ways in which to campaign than through participation to televised debates. The moderator asked why a candidate had not joined the debate, and the answer was that all candidates were then travelling across the country campaigning for the EP elections.

The representative of PPDD kept pointing out that her words were transmitting the political message of the party. Her discourse focused on the party's people-centrism almost exclusively. She affirmed that PPDD “made a different politics, a politics for the people and with the people”. The party sought to win seats in the EP in order to “represent the people, to represent the Romanians” (May 25). Her discourse excessively used “we” (we want, we seek) and “our” (our interests, our country, our future) in order to highlight the fact that the party represented the people. There were no occurrences of the other three dimensions in the discourse analyzed. Had it been more substantial, I would have expected at least the presence

of criticism of the rampant corruption of the political class and acclaim of Romania's greatness, which are staples of the PPDD's populism.

As far as PPDD campaign posters are concerned, they all had the same format: the picture of the candidate, on a purple background (this is the color of the party and a hint to Dan Diaconescu's purple signature tie), with the text "Together we win".

Rebellious Populism – New Republic Party

The 2014 EP elections were the first time when the New Republic Party (NRP) participated to an electoral confrontation. In the televised debates it was represented once by its leader, Mihail Neamțu, whose message contained all four dimensions of populist discourse, albeit differing in intensity. The leader announced from the beginning that NRP is an anti-system party. Its goal is to fight corrupt political elites on all fronts.

"Our goal is to fight rampant corruption in Romania, to denounce corruption at all levels. Not only smoking kills, stealing kills, too."

"Romania has been too much led by villains, by individuals with no morality, by criminals even." (May, 28)

NRP's leader mentioned that the party stemmed from a grassroots movement, and he referred to the "free citizens who built this party from scratch" who "gathered together led by a common ideal". Neamțu praised the numerous achievements of the party despite its short political history.

The politician managed to tackle many topics in the little time he had. The corruption of the political class was his weapon of choice. His discourse abounded in examples of corruption in education ("bribery at national exams"), the health system ("the mafia in the health system"), the fiscal system, the implementation of EU-funded projects, etc. He also attacked Ponta's plagiarism and mentioned that "stealing is a sin" everywhere in Europe, not only in Romania. He considered that all these were illnesses inherited from the communist era.

One of the last points that PNR's leader made in his discourse tackled Romanians' Christian values. PNR seeks to defend and preserve these values against EU initiatives such as Estrela and Lunacek, whose aim is "to reverse the traditional, Christian values". He declared himself against the reevaluation of the 2000-year old Christian principles and values in Europe. When the moderator asked him if he thought that these were topics that Romanians were really interested in, PNR's leader responded that "in Romania, there are millions who worship the Christian tradition and expected that politicians embrace the values in this country without betraying our secular creed".

As far as the acclaim for the country's greatness is concerned, Neamțu did not say much, maybe because lack of time. However, he referred to Romanian students who flee to the West, which is usually associated with 'brain drain', denoting a view of Romanian professionals as highly gifted.

The discourse of the NRP leader is consistent with the content of the party's posters. The message builds on the illness metaphor (discussed below) that Neamțu used when framing the fight against the corrupt political elites. The slogan on the poster reads: "Antidote to country's asthenia" and is followed by the image of a pill from which the medicinal substance is coming out. On the pill is written "pro-life". This is a reminder of NRP's opposition to EU initiatives such as Estrela, which advocates abortion, among others. While populists such as

Becali posed as Romania's redeemers on a God-given mission, NRP and its leader assume the role of guardians of the country's physical and spiritual health.

Populist Elements the Discourse of Mainstream Parties

Populism is a familiar presence in Europe not only as a self-standing ideology, but also as component of mainstream politics (Mudde, 2004). Populist arguments have been used by mainstream politicians of the opposition to challenge those in power, while the latter refuted opposition on the grounds of using populism to cover the formers' lack of viable alternate solutions. However, appeals to populist discourse seem to increase during elections, when many mainstream politicians believe that such a strategic move might bring them important votes. In addition to analyzing the discourse of the three identified populist parties participating in the 2014 EP elections, I have also searched for populist features in the discourse of mainstream parties. I have ruled out the discourse of the 8 independent candidates for methodological and space-related reasons.

Not entirely surprising, the major Romanian mainstream parties in the race for EP have integrated populist elements in their discourse. With the exception of the National Liberal Party, whose candidates have not used too many populist arguments, the other three (Social Democratic Party, Liberal Democratic Party and Popular Movement Party) have often slipped into a populist rhetoric. The National Liberal Party has elaborated a programmatic document for the EP elections and almost all participants to the debates have referred to this document. As far as their posters are concerned, the message was built on the conceptual metaphor "POLITICS IS A GAME" and the extended version "LIBERALS ARE WINNERS".

With regard to populism, the examination of the political discourse of the other three, and especially of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), is more thought-provoking. The candidates from the Liberal Democratic Party (PDL) and those from the Popular Movement Party (PMP) have been constantly at each other's throats whenever they met during the debates. The problem was that PMP was formed by a group of defectors from PDL, under the aegis of President (at that time) Băsescu. The weapon of choice that both opposing parties have extensively used has been corruption. They have accused one another of being corrupt and of lacking real solutions to the problems that Romania has been facing; at the same time they have also accused PSD (the party in power) of being the most corrupt party in Romania and for destroying the country. Using populist rhetoric also allowed the candidates of these parties to keep the debate on national-related topics, without little or no reference to EU-related politics.

"PMP is a copy, I invite people to vote for the original, PDL" (Marin Jean Marinescu, PDL, April 30)

"PDL's platform is: we support stained people". (Cristian Preda, PMP, April 30)

"We have a handicap: Ponta has done more harm to Romania than Ion Iliescu, "his political grandfather". (Cristian Preda, PMP, April 30)

"We have the right to a life without corrupt tycoons". (Cristian Preda, PMP, May 19)

PMP and PDL were practically sharing the same constituency, thus the need to attack each other in order to distance themselves from each other.

The messages of their posters did not necessarily directly relate to their discourses in the debates, but the content of the posters displayed no visible populist elements. PDL's slogan present on every poster read "Europe in every household", while PMP's message was "We

lift Romania up”. These two slogans and especially PMP’s deserve a separate analysis, one that is beyond the purpose of this paper.

By far the most interesting case is the discourse of PSD’s posters. The party has snaffled elements of populist discourse and has used them in their own. The candidates of the party have not necessarily used populist arguments during the debates. They had a hard time blocking attacks on government from the representatives of parties in opposition. Basically, with one notable exception (Ioan Mircea Pașcu), all other candidates from PSD fought with candidates from PDL and PMP on issues related to domestic politics.

The content of PSD’s posters reveals more interesting features of populist rhetoric than the candidates’ discourse. I have analyzed five posters, whose slogan is “Proud to be Romanians!”. None of the party’s candidates to the EP appears on the posters; instead, Victor Ponta, the PM, who was not a candidate in the race, is portrayed in two of the posters. He invites people to vote for the candidates of the party, in one case, and states that the party sends to Brussels people who are proud to be Romanians and who will defend the country. Playing the national pride card triggers some resemblances to populism and its predilection for exaggerating *Romanianness*. A different poster displays a collage of pictures of the most renowned Romanian cultural and natural attractions. Why would these be relevant to a voter when choosing who would represent the country in the EP? A plausible interpretation falls into the line of the preference of populists for referring in their discourse to examples describing the greatness of the country. Other two posters contain messages further supporting this idea: “Romania has the biggest growth in Europe!” and “Romania, the granary of Europe”. Out of context, these statements are bluntly false, they are meant to boost the pride of Romanians by distorting the truth. It is also worth mentioning that the 2014 EP elections campaign was conceived by PSD as a rehearsal for the high-stake presidential elections, which took place in November last year. Ponta was PSD’s candidate to the presidential elections. He lost to Klaus Iohannis, after scoring 10 points higher in the first round. Clearly, there are many complex factors that may explain Ponta’s striking defeat in the second round, however, it seems that the campaign messages of posters used during the EP elections (appeal to obvious populist elements) might have backfired during the presidential campaign.

Metaphors in the Romanian Populist Discourse during the 2014 EP Elections

Research on metaphors in political discourse has identified several types of conceptual metaphors that structure our experience with politics and that are frequently used (and preferred) by political actors. Some of these are WAR, SPORTS, FAMILY, AND ORGANISM/BODY. In his analysis of the metaphorical models underlying American politics, Lakoff (1996) highlights the role of the FAMILY metaphor in structuring the ideological divide in the US society between, on the one hand, conservatives who elaborate their view of the nation state on the basis of the STRICT FATHER model and liberals, who, on the other hand, rely on the competing NURTURANT PARENT model. Examining the metaphors used to conceptualize Europe and the European Union, Musolf (2004) shows how elements of the HUMAN BODY/ ORGANISM domains are mapped onto the institutions and the functioning of the Union. The corporeal conceptualization of political entities is widely spread and popular in both political and media discourse on the European Union.

The analysis of the metaphors used by populist parties in the 2014 EP elections has revealed three established ways in which the EU and politics are conceptualized: FAMILY,

ILLNESS and JOURNEY. The family scenario was suggested by the moderator of the debates when he asked about candidates and their parties belonging to a European political family. Given his previous sensitivity on the matter (his application to join the European Popular Party had been rejected, despite his efforts, which also included the changing of the party's name in Greater Romania Popular Party!), the leader of PRM declared that he "didn't want to be in any family". To the moderator's objection that not being part of a European political family means not having much influence in the EP, Vadim Tudor replied: "I have a lot of influence, I have been one of the finalists of the 2000 Romanian presidential elections. They know me in the EP" (April 28). Vadim Tudor switches from the FAMILY metaphorical framing of Europe and European politics to the SPORTS metaphor. He tries to divert the attention from the influent political groups that denied him access. Instead, he highlights his own merits, earned by participating in a race, hence the use of the sports metaphor. His excellent oratorical skills help him easily retaliate and push back with an alternate metaphorical framing of Europe and politics that serve his purpose. Despite his disagreements with the powerful European political families, Vadim Tudor is a promoter of the EU, a true believer in the European project, a Euro-optimist, as he proudly calls himself.

When asked about the objectives of her party in the event of winning seats in the EP, the representative of People's Party Dan Diaconescu described the JOURNEY that both the candidates and the voters that they represent would embark on. She mentioned that "we are Romanians and we intend to go there with dignity, to carry the message of the people" (April 25). She added: "we want to carry the people's interest into the EU". In this case, POLITICS IS A JOURNEY and POLITICIANS ARE TRAVELLERS are the conceptual metaphors used to connect people to candidates to the EU.

The New Republic Party leader's discourse builds on the ILLNESS metaphor. Romania is suffering from an "illness inherited from Communism" (April 28). He is willing to fight this illness that comprises corruption, post-communist presidents' wrongdoings, anti-Christian values among others. The illness has contaminated Europe, too. The metaphor EUROPEAN UNION AS A BODY favors conceptual mappings from the domain of HUMAN BODY onto the abstract domain of EUROPEAN UNION. Attributes of bodies, such as proneness to diseases, are transferred to the EU. NRP is ready to stop the spread of the disease using a "pro-life" pill.

Conclusions

Populism has gained momentum across Europe, culminating in the stunning high scores that populist parties, especially right-wing parties, obtained in the 2014 EP elections. This holds mainly for Western Europe. In Central and Eastern Europe, populist parties and movements seem to have taken a slightly different course. In this paper, I have analyzed the political discourse of three populist parties that participated to the 2014 EP elections in Romania, during televised debates. My aim was to examine if the populist discourse of these parties is people-centric, anti-establishment, acclaims the greatness of Romania and praises the Christian Orthodox heritage of the country. The Greater Romania Party, the People's Party Dan Diaconescu and the New Republic Party have integrated one or more of these dimensions in their political discourses in the elections. The people-centric feature that defines all populist endeavors is visible in all populist discourses, with a notable exception – PRM. In this case, the people-

centric valences of the discourse are overlapped and overridden by the leader of the party's obsession with his own achievements. Vadim Tudor is known to have shown an erratic political behavior that, in combination with other factors, has undermined the party. Despite their leader's charisma (Vadim Tudor), youth-driven exuberance (Neamtu) or repeated appeals to the people (PPDD), plus the presence of the populist elements in their discourse, none of these three parties managed to secure any seat in the EP. Their participation to the race has been entirely unsuccessful. PPDD and NRP are young parties whose internal strength hasn't been eroded in too many electoral confrontations; however, PRM seems to have exhausted its resources and may not be able to engage in future major electoral races.

A more interesting feature of the political discourse in the 2014 EP elections in Romania is the use of populist elements by mainstream parties. The Social Democratic Party has displayed many populist features in the content of its campaign posters. What seemed to be a good option in an attempt to maximize electoral success and to give a momentum to Victor Ponta's (the leader of the party and PM of Romania) candidature to presidential elections has not yielded the expected results. PSD has obtained a good number of seats in the EP, which was the overt goal of the campaign. However, in the long run, it seems that PSD has lost more than it has gained: Victor Ponta is not the president of Romania and, at least for the moment, party's dreams of a brighter political future have hit a wall.

Unlike the populist parties in Western Europe, their Romanian counterparts have not emerged victorious from the EP electoral race. And this comes despite the fact that Romanian populist parties are overt and genuine supporters of the European Union and of (many of) the European policies, unlike their Western relatives.

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