

POLITICAL DISCOURSE - A MEDIUM IN THE FIGHT FOR SOCIAL AND NATIONAL EMANCIPATION. THE KOGĂLNICEANU CASE.

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Abstract

Although political discourse is often characterized as manipulative, however, universal history and rhetoric records a series of speeches that have had the power to change the destiny of nations, having implications even on the destiny of the world.

Romania was not an exception in this regard. If in the years after the Second World War and even in those after 1989, speeches that served the party propaganda were declaimed, on the Romanian political scene there were also orators whose interest was the national interest.

The writer, historian, speaker and great politician, Mihail Kogălniceanu has assumed the role of reforming his country, contributing decisively to its modernization, by creating and adopting laws with impact on education, culture, social and economic life of the people.

He understands, from the time of studies in Germany, that a state cannot be strong and master of his destiny, except through his citizens. Aware of their belonging, educated and with a civilized level of life, they will be able to actively involve in creating a country to represent them worldwide. That a higher political class is the exponent of a higher society.

In other words, the political discourse is the expression of putting into practice the vision of the political man, his interests and relations with the society he represents. Through the ideas and reforming principles affirmed from the Parliament Tribune, Kogălniceanu remains a landmark for a whole Romanian political class.

Keywords: *political discourse, political class, synchronism, manipulation, society*

Motto:

*To be valid, political discourse must be moral,
not serve group interests and
be able to write a history for the majority.*

Introduction

To the generations of the 20th century and those at the onset of the 21st century, political discourse, specifically in countries ruled from authoritarian positions, has merely been a medium of propaganda. A transparent, often unconvincing propaganda, an overdramatic act through the mediation of which political histrionics, abusive and obtuse characters would come to feign an interest in the prosperity of his society, condemning individuals to poverty. Posing as defenders of social and national interests, rulers would manifest as oppressors of their people. They would deem themselves architects, but act as destroyers. The years that followed the fall of communism brought with them a freedom grandparents, parents and children alike had longed for. After 45 years of communism, democracy, the golden dream of any individual raised within the confines of a barbed wire fence, was finally taking shape. An entire world would change and with it, political discourse - an expression of political action that ought to revolve around the interest of the people and the country.

Romania in the 90s was revealing itself in a new way. Every day, more opportunistic orators would claim the role of saviours of the nation. Political speeches were in high demand, expected, analysed. Only recently disgusted by party activists' propaganda, one had suddenly turned into a fierce defender of new party ideologists. A new, changed press was emerging out of thin air, determined to judge and condemn the obedient parties in the past. Old journalists had magically changed their tune. The wooden-tongued doctrinaire had become ...the wooden-tongued dissident. A new political discourse would usher in the new political analyst. Endless debates would become a guarantee for increased ratings and readership. Still, post-revolutionary history can only record circumstantial, passionate, by

no means reformatory speeches. After 30 years of clear manipulation through various political speeches tailored to contexts and audience, Romanian society is still seeking its saviour among those who have pledged its deliverance.

Political discourse as a form of expressing reform-driven views

Nevertheless, political discourse has been and to this day stays the only way of expressing liberating ideas, emancipating and modernising societies. In times of social and national crisis, political rhetoric has ceased to resort to populist and manipulative formulae. At certain turning points, visionary and revolutionary spirits, driven by the epiphany of their role, have acted decisively on behalf of the majority and to their benefit. In pivotal moments in the evolution of nations, political discourse has dictated the course of social action. Placed in the service of reforming ideals or as a form of conveying messianic messages, political discourses mirror orators who, aware of the course of things and the sign of times, have resolved to act in the direction of social conscience awakening. As a consequence, their speech holds valid as it is moral, does not serve group interests and shall be able to write the history of the masses. It soars on par with the spirits it addresses or ones it means to address, as a result, society's civilisation can be measured by the quality of public discourse, by the ability of the citizen to laud or sanction it. Social evolution occurs when the discourse serves the cause and not the person, when the principles of rhetoric are instrumental in dissolving anachronistic factual states, and when the orator's talent solely has the interest of the audience at heart, not the cult of their own personality.

Romanian and universal history can provide examples for any of these types. In a series of upcoming articles, our intention is to show that real political discourse may either be an expression of a visionary mind and messianism, or strictly pursue a manipulation of masses aimed at serving petty interests and convictions that, regrettably, only the future will be able to identify.

The catalytic influence of the German School in shaping the reforming vision of a young Kogălniceanu

Known for his oratorical skills, which have prompted the great Transylvanian scholar Timotei Cipariu to dub him the "Demosthenes of Romanians", Mihail Kogălniceanu is the intellectual, historian and politician who has laid the foundation of modern-day Romania. Showing maturity and clarity in seizing the social and political context pertaining to the Principalities from a very early age, young Kogălniceanu intuited, as early as 1834, upon leaving for the Lunéville College with Prince Mihail Sturdza's sons, the actions required for the social and national emancipation of his people. His interest in history is already manifest at this time, when he begins to collect a series of treatises that will prove of use in the drafting of his future research. Six years later, in his address published under the title: *Introduction to the National History Course* delivered at the Mihailean Academy, he proclaims: "The need for national history is mandatory for the very protection of our rights against foreign nations."¹. At the same time, his interest in history, equally apparent in the issued *Chronicles* [original diachronic name: *Letopisește*] target an awakening of national self-awareness in order to modernise the country by adopting reforms that would facilitate a synchronisation with European values.

The nearly three years spent at the University of Berlin from 1835 to 1838 will prove to be decisive in the shaping of the future statesman, as he himself admits. It is now that he has the opportunity to learn due to companion and novelist Willibald Alexis, as well as through his own observations, about the theory underlying the agrarian reform and the principles of its implementation. At the same time, he will, throughout his life, embrace and espouse the view of his teacher, Leopold von Ranke, on the importance of being a history pundit, as this is a science quintessential to the activity and conscience of any politician set on working towards the good of his people.

The principles of asynchronously applied synchronism are of a Hegelian nature and concern adjusting enacted laws to national specificity. It follows that a reform deemed

¹ Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Works* (Selected and established texts, notes, comments and glossary - Dan Simionescu and Andrei Nestorescu. Philological revision, chronology and indices - Monica Vasileanu. Critical notes - Dorina Rusu and Nicolae Mecu. Foreword - Alexandru Zub. Introduction - Eugen Simion) Bucharest, Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, National Sciences and Arts Foundation, 2017.

Note: The three volumes of the above-mentioned work have constituted bibliographic resources in the drafting of this paper. Herein the thesis of "asynchronous synchronicity" is announced, which has been dedicated extensive research in time and is the object of a follow-up, comprehensive study.

functional in one given society can become utterly useless, even harmful in another one, if the specific social context is not taken into consideration. Said principles, shared among Kogălniceanu's professors and himself, such as jurists Friedrich Carl von Savigny or Eduard Gans, have been embraced by the young student who, under the influence of the German school, has an epiphany of changes in need to be carried out in his homeland.

In his conversations with Alexander von Humboldt, Kogălniceanu will for the first time employ the concepts of "Romanian" and "Romania" in lieu of "Moldovan" and "Wallachian". At the request of the German scientist, he will, during his Berlin stay, pen a study entitled *The History of Wallachia, Moldavia and the Transdanubian Wallachians*, as well as an outline of the customs, history and language of the Roma, *Esquisse sur l'histoire, les moeurs et la langue de Cigains*, the latter of which seeks "to momentarily serve those voices emergent in favour of the Gypsies". It is noteworthy that Mihail Kogălniceanu would be the first to mention in 1837 that, amongst themselves, Gypsies have always called one another "Roma".

A letter sent to his sisters in May of 1837 attests to the fact that the future politician and reformer of his country, even at that time held an awareness of the messianic role he was meant to play in the life of his nation: "If I have travelled to these foreign places, it was not so that I can learn how to hunt; I could have more readily acquired this skill in Moldavia than in Prussia, where hunting is not every man's privilege. May other younglings, such as Mr Răducanu and the likes of him, will go hunting! This is what they are made for; but, tell me, is their name one to be celebrated and shall they leave glorious memories behind after their demise? No, my darling sisters; such people do not even live, for they vegetate! To me, hunting is not what makes up a career; toiling day and night... this is my calling. Upon my return to Moldova, I will not step out to flaunt luxury and ostentation; if I get to see my homeland again, it will be to serve it and to lay down my life for it, if needed."

Before analysing the manner in which he fulfils this role, it is also necessary to pinpoint that, a close acquaintance of historical figures of the German space, such as the Duchess of Cumberland and her son, George V of Hanover, a guest to the house of Pastor Jonas Calvin, Kogălniceanu has the opportunity to partake in meetings of campaigners for the unification of Germany. An ardent proponent of the same ideal, Willibald Alexis would maintain that without raising the standard of living of all citizens, a modernisation of the country in the

true sense of the word was inconceivable. Future reforms later conceived and applied by Kogălniceanu are rooted in the German experience. Even at this time, he would write to his sisters that: "Merit is that which indicates true distinction; birth does not mean a thing" and that "all men are equal", and one year before returning to the country, in February of 1837, he would express the following stance: "True civilisation consists in loving thy country and neighbour, obeying the law, abolishing slavery - which is, to our shame, preserved to this day in our homeland -, in the equality of persons, regardless of standing and birth".

For this reason, upon his return to the country, he begins to promptly act towards educating the masses in the wake of future reforms. His steadily paced publishing and literary activities, carried out despite censorship, demonstrates strategic thinking with long-term goals. In the twenty years since his arrival in the homeland and until the Union of the Principalities, young Kogălniceanu will act in the direction of a spiritual union of Romanians from all provinces. He will found magazines, such as "Literary Dacia", spur the emergence of literary criticism and indicate appropriate themes for Romanian literature to address in order to attain universal value. As a theatre director, he is intensely involved in cultural life, prompting the awakening of a national consciousness amongst the middle class, an extremely modestly represented stratum in Kogălniceanu's time. The scope of the middle class had been equally deplored by the poet Mihai Eminescu in his articles for "The Time". All such actions are imperative so that synchronisation with European values can occur. This is why we deem that the formula of *asynchronous synchronism* accurately circumscribes the way in which the complex process of Romania's modernisation initiated by Kogălniceanu, continued by Maiorescu, Eminescu, then Blaga and the "Sibiu Literary Circle" has been executed.

Therefore, the catalytic contact with the German School and German cultural figures during his studies at the University of Berlin have enabled Kogălniceanu, along with the other above-mentioned scholars, to act in such a way as to produce real advancements in cultural, economic, political and social life. The direct and indirect reception of the various social and national breakthroughs and principles determined by the progressive-revolutionary thinking and actions of the German luminaries has been conducive to launching a viable process of modernisation of our country.

There is a causality between the studies issued within the German Confederation at the behest of Alexander von Humboldt and a statement found in the speech delivered at the jubilee marking quarter of a century since the founding of The Romanian Academy, in the year of 1891: "In my entire life, both as a young and as a mature man, I have on several occasions confessed, that to the German culture, The University of Berlin, the German society, the men and great patriots involved in the achievement and unity of Germany, I largely owe everything I have become in my homeland, and that the torch of Romanian patriotism has been fuelled by the fire of German patriotism!"

The messianic political discourse

Though it was not a political speech in the literal sense of the word, the "Literary Dacia" program published by Kogălniceanu, in 1840, in the first issue of his magazine, served political objectives that had come to the attention of the 23-year-old youth and towards which he would act his entire life. Truth be told, his journalistic, artistic, social and political endeavours seem to be aimed at reforming a feudal state, still administratively divergent within the space of the two Principalities, united into a modern and independent Romania. It can be stated, from the vantage point of time and history, that he has succeeded therein. On the scene set by him, other visionary figures have then been able to act in the direction of addressing further social and national ideals: "In the moral world, as in the physical world, things do not unfold that swiftly, for each generation has its mission; each man can only lay a brick in the edifice of future".

In his *Introductory Word* to "Literary Dacia" changes on a societal cultural level are sought, by educating the public treated to literary writings of subpar value until that point that had been left unsanctioned by a critical authority, as there was none of this kind. The handful of writers at the time would, on their artistic journey, wander, as it were, aimlessly and unguided by a set of critical principles. Their duty was not only to raise the cultural level of the people, but also to hone their feeling of belonging to national values. Imitation, poor translations, an over-fondness for everything foreign and contempt for everything Romanian did nothing but divide the social strata, undermine the national spirit and, thus, alienate them from themselves. All of that was making the unity a young Kogălniceanu had dreamed

of and that he had envisioned since his Berlin times, unattainable. In other words, although culturally veered, his rhetoric would ultimately serve political ideals.

Upon careful consideration of his strategy for activities coordinated from 1838 up to 1891, with only three months prior to his passing, when he would deliver his famous address at the quarter-of-a-century jubilee since the establishment of The Romanian Academy, in the presence of King Charles I [Carol I] and Queen Elisabeth [Elisabeta], we cannot but observe the lucidity, patience and determination of this exceptional political and cultural figure with which he minutely underwent each stage to ensure that the process of modernisation and unity of the Romanians be irreversible. Nothing was accomplished under the impulse of a momentary, passionate whim, and at no time did he forfeit his clarity of vision. He would ask of the writers from all the Romanian Provinces, to turn "Literary Dacia" into a magazine that would reflect domestic specificity. "Literature needs unification", and "our goal is to achieve the dream for Romanians to have a common language and literature for all".

Despite vowing not to engage in politics, the magazine was suspended after three issues precisely because it served the noble ideals of unity, with the leaders of the moment clearly getting the message. Kogălniceanu does not venture into political asperities or polemics, his actions are significantly more "dangerous" as they are bound to form and mobilise consciences. Freshly returned to the homeland, the 21-year-old issues "The Romanian Lute". He is not apprehensive when censorship suspends it and issues another publication, prefaced by an even bolder program and more firmly committed to the unionist cause, "Literary Dacia". This is followed up by the "Romanian Archive" where historical writs and studies are to be circulated, then by a "Calendar for the Romanian People". Censorship will, however, mobilise against "Progress", prompting Kogălniceanu to launch "The Danube Star". From 1838 until 1859, these periodicals will achieve their goal of turning the Romanian Principalities into Romania, and its citizens into Romanians, those same "Romanians" brought up in casual conversations with Alexander von Humboldt in his Berlin student years.

At the same time, Kogălniceanu will not confine himself to this course of action. His cultural discourse, with a political foundation, reveals a conscious, skilled approach to history. *The Introductory Word to the National History Course* delivered at the Mihăilean

Academy advances the imperative necessity of this science, "a primer for the peoples" right "after the Bible". The "ruler," the "lawmaker," the "statesman," the "soldier," the "mere citizen", together and by themselves, will draw strength from history. "History takes our ancestors out of their graves and brings them before our eyes as if they were alive, with all their virtues, passions, customs. Thus it is meant to connect us to eternity, establishing a link between us and long-departed peoples and making us, in our turn, speak to future generations, to whom it then imparts the story of our deeds. Apart from all of this, history also has the unmatched gift of impartially judging the feats of our contemporaries, which we lack the courage or the skill to know in a just and truthful way". The steps taken towards Romania's entry into the war of independence against Turkey alongside Russia are rooted in the now overtly expressed conviction that "the necessity of history is indispensable to us for the very protection of our rights before the foreign nations". His prophetic, messianic spirit also becomes apparent in the following assertion: "I deem my homeland as this entire stretch of land where Romanian is spoken, and our national history as the history of Moldova [...], Wallachia and our Transylvanian brethren [...] To this day, all of those who have engrossed in national history have only had the biography of rulers in mind and have failed to make any mention of the people, the source of all movements and achievements sans whom rulers would be nothing".

His literary programs, magazine articles, the afore-mentioned introductory word, the preface to *Chronicles of The Moldovan Principality* published and promoted despite censorship and Prince Mihail Sturdza, the radical program entitled *The Requests of the National Party of Moldova* drafted in Chernivtsi along with other refugee revolutionaries, among whom the future sovereign of the United Principalities, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, as well as Costache Negri, Vasile Alecsandri, Alecu Russo - all are meant to pave the way not only for the establishment of national unity, but also for state reform.

Aware that no state can accept a nation incapable of tending to each and everyone of its citizens' needs, Kogălniceanu will act towards the pursuance of social ideals. And from this standpoint, his speech proves to be prophetic. The brief study published in Berlin on the life, customs and language of the Roma is complemented by the follow-ups *The Liberation of Gypsies* (1844), *Slavery, Neighbourhood and Boyardom* (1855). Subsequent proposed

reforms are a testament to the understanding that Romanian civilisation must synchronise with the European one, at its natural, organic - inherently asynchronous - pace, because "insignificant and weak, they (Romanians, author's note) can only be significant and strong by dint of civilisation".

Political speech, which we can only briefly address in our study, is the expression of the implementation, on his part, of capital reforms introduced to the life of the country without, in any way, disturbing the nature of its renewed essence. To introduce such novel forms, for twenty years, Kogălniceanu had taken all the necessary steps to prepare the right mindset. While the landed gentry was not prepared to give up their privileges acquired by birth, meanwhile, the peasantry, the common folk who would fight and die for the independence of their homeland, had become self-aware and knowledgeable of their due rights. His speech is 1862, *Improving the Condition of Peasants [Îmbunătățirea soartei țăranilor]*, in which property rights and the abolition of the labor and mills are advocated, is a precursor to the agrarian reform. Of equal bearing are the legal acts in which Kogălniceanu has had a decisive part, e.g. the secularisation of monastic assets, the elimination of privileges and noble ranks. In the launch of the agrarian reform he has received support from Alexandru Ioan Cuza, whom he imposed as ruler of the two Principalities, thus foiling the plans of the opposition. After Cuza stepped down, Kogălniceanu, the then foreign minister, managed not only to proclaim the independence of Romania from Turkey on 9 May 1877, but also to act decisively in the direction of general recognition on the part of all European states.

One further factor that was decidedly instrumental in the success of Kogălniceanu's plight, is noteworthy: the attention he has constantly lent to educating the masses. To be fair, a major political class cannot exist as a counterpart to an ignorant people, but rather only a handful of potentates. Endowed with social ability and vision, he will ceaselessly tend to this realm, including in the following stance according to which "politics have become the soul of the modern world; they are courted by overall trends in literature, in which ideas are worded and spread, as well as by the advancement of industry, which collaborates, organises, produces and distributes. Politics are the powerful movement that spark all thought and all the feats. All ideas revolve around today's politics. Therefrom spring the entirety of theory trends, projects, systems that tend to incessantly bombard public opinion and prod the

commoners' activities onto new paths. The study of politics has thus become the first and noblest of all sciences and has come to be an absolute necessity". Politics are not exerted for their own sake, but for the people, therefore the people must be "initiated into the fundamentals of this science".

In the end, it needs to be pointed out that to him, political discourse, be it manifested socially or culturally, has taken on a messianic role due to what that has always been at its core and which has been subject to his focus until his passing: the nation. Similar to all prophetic spirits, Kogălniceanu constitutes a landmark to an entire political class due to the ideas and principles he has applied, his vision: "In the betterment the peasants' fate, I see the entire future of my country, I see the foundation of Romanian nationality. As long as peasants are under the yoke, as long as they are only looked upon as worthy tools for wheat and corn production; until they are bound to the country by rights and wealth; until, to put it briefly, they are not real citizens, we shall have no nation... Gentlemen, two thousand boyars are not a nation. This is a truth that no one can dispute!"

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