

THE CONSTRUCTION OF ROMANIAN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CLASS'S PUBLIC IMAGE – ITS CONTENT AND ITS ORIGINS

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Abstract: This brief and general study tries to uncover the ways in which is born the public image of Romanian contemporary political class at the level of public perception. The method used is disclosing three key elements which in our view could shed a consistent light upon the way in which is build public image of contemporary Romanian politicians.

Firstly, we uncover the modes in which the public image of contemporary Romanian politicians is configured in the present at the level of public opinion. As we discovered this process is relatively a rudimentary one and it is not required, in order to understand it, some specific and elaborate sociological tools of investigation in order to shed a substantial analytical light upon it. Also at this point the general content of the Romanian political class's public image in the eyes of the Romanian public opinion it is disclosed.

Secondly, by continuing the first step, the study tries to argue that in order to unveil the frame and the content of Romanian political class's public image, at the level of public opinion's perception it is not necessary to use some sophisticated or too elaborated psychological or sociological research tools. The reasons for this situation are also analyzed.

Thirdly, the study also tries to indicate and to explain the failure of a misguided public communication approach, a one which was consolidated in time due to the poor management that Romanian politicians unfortunately promoted in this domain. Thus, in the end, this study tries to draw a brief picture upon the conditions which ultimately conducted to the failure of an unprofessional public communication and also to the failure of one unprofessional PR approach by the Romanian political class regarding the way in which it was constructed, in time, its public image and its public perception.

Keywords: Public Image, Public Opinion, Political Class, Media, Public Relations.

Introduction

Which are the fundamental things that are defining a public image in general of a well delimited class of individuals? This question is not restricted to the general conceptual frame from within public communication or sciences of communication but it is involving additional theoretical components from sociology or social psychology for example. However, this study is limiting its perspective by including this question mainly in the field of sciences of communication. In concrete terms our purpose was initially to disclose two ingredients of the contemporary Romanian political class.

Firstly, we intend to disclose the main content of this general public image at the level of Romanian public opinion's perception and, secondly, to disclose, in its main coordinates, how the content of this public image was born in the mind of general public opinion from contemporary Romania.

The Content of Romanian Contemporary Public Image and its Building Process at the Level of Public Opinion

For an external observer but also for someone who is specialist in the field of sciences of communication it is not very difficult to obtain in a very quick mode the key ingredients

which are defining the content of the contemporary Romanian political class in the mind of the general public from Romania.

Briefly speaking these ingredients are translating a profound *negative* perception about the way in which this political class is fulfilling its duty for the people but also about the general and particular set of characteristics of this special social segment from the top of contemporary Romanian society. People are in general unsatisfied and unhappy about Romanian political class and in terms of perception a very strong negative one was consolidated in time especially about the parliament but also about the other elements from the political structure. As a general perception this negative trend could be thus analyzed in its two major components.

Firstly, we have in mind *the results* in time of this political class in terms of its commitment to the real needs of the Romanian society. It is not difficult to see that for a significant majority from the contemporary Romanian public opinion there is a very negative perception about the general performance of Romanian political class as this segment was configured in Romania after the collapse of communism in 1989. For the general public, because of various reasons, these results are generally viewed as poor or at least unsatisfactory. Even some small successes are not considered as essentials as long there are the perception that in the process of obtaining them the Romanian political class had only minor contributions. This would be the case, at least for a part from the Romanian public opinion with the European integration or with the process of admission in NATO finalized for Romania in 2004.

Also, a number of other key elements for this public perception are disclosing the fact that for the majority of the Romanians the political class was not able to start and to maintain a structural development of the country towards a definitive western trajectory with all the consequences which can occur from this situation.

It is not the aim of this study to discuss in a deeper manner the reasons for which the things are now looking like this. For the general purpose of this study it is enough to disclose just this negative perception which Romanians have about them own political class and to disclose to reasons for which this was configured within a conceptual frame from the sciences of communication.

Secondly, in addition to what has been already said we must also underline that this negative perception is present regarding *the quality*, from various perspectives, of the members of Romanian contemporary political class. In this context it is also present a powerful negative opinion at the level of Romanian public opinion.

These are the facts and there is no need for further disclosure. In terms of our purpose the next question is about how this negative perception was build and, eventually, how it is still sustained?

Without entering here in too many details we believe that we can yet answer to these questions in a simple and clear manner: in our view there is no need for an extensive conceptual research frame to uncover to content of the process through which the public perception about the quality and about the results of the contemporary Romanian political class is build at the level of nowadays Romanian public opinion. We sustain this point of view even if, in rare cases, some extensive studies were made not only upon this issue but upon

some general symbolic aspects regarding the general pattern in which Romanian society has evolved after 1989.

In our view this image is constructed through a relatively small number of rudimentary media processes and is hugely fueled by a traditional bad self perception of Romanian people.

In terms of media impact the main frame of tools, so to speak, is reduced to an already some sort of a traditional approach through which contemporary Romanian media is used to brought into the public scene the negative side of Romanian political class. We do not say that this situation is triggered by some artificial reasons. By the contrary the Romanian contemporary media has all the reasons to behave in this manner as long the Romanian political class did not offer something different in order to be shown in front of the Romanian public opinion. *What it is important within the context of this study is the fact that this media habit as a profound impact upon the way in which is build the public image of the Romanian contemporary politicians in front of the Romanian public opinion.*

The second reason for which in time was coagulated at the level of Romanian public opinion such a negative perception about the political class of the country, a one which, in our view, is closely linked with the first one, is a traditional negative self perception of the Romanian people in general. The reasons for this are complex and they had been recently analyzed within Romanian cultural space (Boia: 2012). Anyway, what is certain is the fact that this negative self perception is linked, at least in our view, with the way in which Romanian people is perceiving the quality and the practical results for society of its own political class.

Within this general frame of approach in our perspective there is no need for an elaborate or sophisticated set of research tools in order to understand how is born the public image of the political class within contemporary Romanian public opinion.

The Cultural Tradition and the Causes for the Failure

Even if in their general coordinates the ways in which the public image of the Romanian political class is configured nowadays at the level of Romanian public opinion are clear some additional observations could be made.

Firstly, at least to our knowledge there are no consistent studies which could indicate a link between the public perception about the value of Romanian politicians in the eyes of the public opinion and a tradition which, as we saw, has a profound negative element about the self perception of the Romanian people. And this is exactly what we intended to develop in this study. From our perspective there is no possibility to independently consider, from a strict public communication frame, the forming of public image of the Romanian contemporary politicians at the level of public opinion. Of course it could be never denied the role of reality, so to speak, in configuring this bad perception because, as everybody knows, the contemporary average Romanian politician has indeed a poor performance. But we think that this negative perception could be hardly modified even if things will start to improve. And this will be, anyway, a long and difficult process. So, in our view, the causes for the significant negative image of the contemporary Romanian political class in front of the public opinion could not be reduced to only their poor performances of to their poor management of their public communication strategy. The causes are in our perspective much deeper and it

could be discovered within a historically configured mentality which describes a people with a serious negative self perception. This is indeed very strange if we have in mind the fact that this nation has also moments when it thinks about itself in very good terms and perspectives. This phenomenon has been often described during Romanian cultural history by many prestigious authors and sometimes, we consider, this description is very accurate but also very disturbing (Pleșu: 2005, pp. 297 – 299).

Secondly and speaking now only from the perspective of a public communication approach, the causes responsible for the very poor images of Romanian politicians could be indeed explained through their very poor management of public communication. This process was analyzed by us in some different other studies but, however, we can mention here that the poor public communication of the Romanian politicians is a result of large set of public communication errors. They made almost every possible mistake which is described in every standard manual of public communication.

As a set of conclusions we can now summarize our perspective as it will follow bellow.

The public image of contemporary Romanian political class is mostly created by its own quality, so to speak, and this situation is only reflected through Romanian media. Further, there is no need for sophisticated research tools in order to understand how this image is formed at the level of the public perception and public opinion because in this process are involved some elementary media aspects which do not need special investigations.

Secondly, the public image of Romanian contemporary politicians is strongly linked with a bad traditional self perception and self image of the Romanian people itself. This historically configured situation has not only general cultural implications, at least not in our view, but has also tremendous impact about that way in which Romanians nowadays perceive their own political leaders. Of course, from a cultural point of view the analysis could be extended and many significant Romanian authors have gone deeper in this direction even from the beginning of Romanian contemporary history (Zeletin: 2006, pp. 25 – 84).

Thirdly, and with this the entire circle is enclosed if we can say so, this negative image of the Romanian contemporary political class is returning and it maintains the negative image of the country not only in front of the internal public opinion but also in front of the external perception of Romania (Vișniec: 2013).

Briefly, our point of view is claiming that in order to understand how it was created such a negative public image for the Romanian political class is not enough to use tools from the field of sciences of communication. Here is present something much deeper and we all as Romanians must be aware of this.

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