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***THE UNITED KINGDOM 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS. UKIP AND THE ISSUE OF IMMIGRATION***

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*Abstract: The United Kingdom 2015 general elections have outlined some of the major issues of interest in British society, elements that were deeply embedded in the political debate during the campaign and which were abundantly used for electoral purposes. One such topic was immigration, a favourite of Western European parties embracing strong populist strategies. In Britain, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) championed the rhetoric against immigrants, accusing the latter of representing, among others, a medical threat for British nationals. Our paper analyses the 2015 electoral discourse of Nigel Farage and his party, focusing on the issue of immigration. We find out that immigration remains a central element of the UKIP manifesto and of Nigel Farage's discourse, offering however very vague and unsustainable solutions.*

**Keywords:** *populism, politics, discourse analysis, elections, United Kingdom Independence Party.*

### **Introduction**

The post-2014 European elections period has marked a new era for right-wing populist parties, providing strong arguments in favour of the "pathological normalcy" thesis developed by Cas Mudde (2008). The results of local and national elections held ever since have demonstrated that populist parties are here and they are here to stay. Their leaders are now familiar faces within the national and European political landscape and their success or failure is nothing but a stage – and not an end-point - in their sinuous political adventure. Strongly correlated with the difficulties brought about by the economic crisis at the end of the 2000's, populist parties were predicted a short-lived success. However, this was not the case. After gaining unprecedented interest from scholars and surpassing the status of a more or less marginal topic in political science, it was determined that populism is a far more complex phenomenon than a simple single-issue political manifestation. Among the many factors that contribute to the success of these challenger parties is *immigration*, the effects of which have triggered insecurity and fear of the "otherness" for a significant part of the electorate. Studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between the levels of immigration and support for right-wing populist parties (Knigge, 1998; Golder, 2003; Smith, 2010).

Right-wing populist parties act as movements of exclusion, militating against too much of a relaxed legal framework for immigration and demanding immediate and most of the times total obedience to the national cultural setting of the host-country. They use a strong nationalist rhetoric to show their sentiment against multiculturalism and denounce diversity - under its ethnic, racial or cultural forms - as being an element that threatens national identity (Betz, 2015). Moreover, fueled by the effects of the economic crisis, welfare chauvinism has become a defining aspect of the right-wing populist discourse. Populists claim that social welfare should be available only for those who share the same ethnic background with the majority of the people (Taggart, 2000). They also portray immigrants as fierce competitors

over scarce resources, arguing that immigration does nothing but to contribute to high unemployment rates, given what they believe to be the tendency of the new-comers to “steal jobs” (Rydgren, Ruth, 2013).

Populist parties consider that the political and cultural elite of the country is to be blamed for the unsatisfying *status quo* and aim to discredit existing leaders, which populists claim to poorly represent the real needs of citizens. The elite is portrayed as being a social and political class striving only for its own material benefit, hiding behind complicated procedures so that they can hold unbothered a strong grip on power (Fennema, 2005). And it’s not only the national elite that should be ousted according to populists: it’s also the European bureaucrats, who work restlessly for keeping alive the so-called “Monster in Brussels”<sup>1</sup>. Populist parties therefore feature a strong euroskeptical dimension and promise to undermine the European project, even from within. Farage aims at putting an end to what he considered to be the undemocratic rule of the EU, an idea rooted in Margaret Thatcher’s famous Bruges speech of 1988 (Tournier-Sol, 2015).

The goal of this article is to show the marks of populism in an electoral speech and their correlation with the party’s policies. We will focus on emphasizing their importance in receiving the message and their role in creating the message itself.

### **Why study the United Kingdom Independence Party?**

Many factors contributed to the increased academic interest in the activity of both UKIP and its leader Nigel Farage. Despite the fact that the party does not represent a novelty anymore on the British political scene, recent achievements made UKIP stand out both on the national and on the European level. The 2009 elections marked a very important step in the development of UKIP, when the party came second during the European elections (Hayton, 2010) and five years later UKIP won the biggest share of votes in the same elections. Not only that it shook the national political system, but Farage’s party also managed to gain enough support from its fellow right-wing populist parties around the continent to create a new political group within the European Parliament, called *Europe for Freedom and Democracy* (since July 2014, *Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy*). Farage managed to successfully surpass the difficulties in recreating his group in the European Parliament after the 2014 European elections, when his immediate political interests clashed with those of Marine Le Pen, whom he refused to join forces with in pursuing their political aims. The avowed goal of UKIP is that of removing the United Kingdom from the European Union and its leader has pledged to make use of all political means to do so (Sutcliffe, 2010). Euroskepticism is therefore deeply embedded in the actions of UKIP and has become a prominent element of its discourse, relating uncontrolled immigration to the relaxed legislation imposed on Great Britain by the European Union. UKIP’s attitude feeds on the public belief, quite widespread in the United Kingdom, that membership to the EU has not been beneficial for the country.

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<sup>1</sup> This is how Geert Wilders, the leader of the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheit (Party for Freedom) called the institutions in Brussels at the launch of his and Marine Le Pen’s joint EU campaign strategy in the Hague, in 2014.

The electoral system of proportional representation used for the EU elections in the United Kingdom brought advantages for UKIP, but under the first-past-the-post system the party has barely managed to secure one seat in the House of Commons (in May 2015), as opposed to its 23 Members of the European Parliament (in May 2014). UKIP's failure to win more seats in the most recent British elections has triggered the decision of its leader Nigel Farage, who himself was defeated in his constituency, to tender his resignation<sup>2</sup>.

## Methodology

Due to the fact that UKIP is a rather controversial party, many scholars paid a lot of attention in studying its impact among other European parties. Not only they set themselves as being a nationalist, Populist Party, but they also set a clear position against immigration. Furthermore, UKIP members took the subject of immigration to the next level and they transformed it into one of the party's major policies. It is of great interest to study this phenomenon, given the fact that May 7<sup>th</sup> marked the Election Day in Great Britain. As stated before in the article, the aim of this study is to emphasize the great impact that populism has in politics nowadays. Our focus is on Great Britain's UKIP and its leader, Nigel Farage.

In order to undertake this analysis, we have chosen the content analysis as the main research method. This implies that during the analysis we will focus our attention on studying video materials, articles, photos and other data that are to reveal the character of the UKIP's position during the 2015 elections. Therefore, we have chosen to analyze the UKIP's 2015 manifesto and a video that presents Farage's immigration speech from March 2015. In order to present this analysis, we will use the critical discourse analysis. The critical discourse analysis represents "*multidisciplinary, and an account of intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture.*" (van Dijk, 2015)

Firstly, we will present an analysis of the UKIP's 2015 manifesto. The so entitled "*Believe in Britain*" manifesto<sup>3</sup> is a 76 pages document, which sets the party's position towards the main topics of interest. For this analysis, we will take into consideration the themes that the party approaches and their position towards these topics. The themes of interest for UKIP are: economy, immigration, social care, pensions, welfare, childcare, transport, energy, employment and so on. It is very easy to see the party's preference for topics like economy and immigration, topics that come in front of other themes in the pages of the manifesto. Therefore, we can shape an idea of their position in the elections, even before studying the document. In the first pages of the manifesto we can find Nigel Farage's words, as he talks about the first change that is to come in Britain, after 100 years. They set themselves as the only party that can make a difference and the only one that is worth voting for. Moreover, Farage presents the four main campaign themes of the party: immigration, economy, health service and living standards. During the pages of the manifesto, we can find

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/generalelection/ukip-leader-nigel-farage-loses-in-south-thanet-10235307.html>, accessed on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from [https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/ukipdev/pages/1103/attachments/original/1429295050/UKIP\\_Manifesto2015.pdf?1429295050](https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/ukipdev/pages/1103/attachments/original/1429295050/UKIP_Manifesto2015.pdf?1429295050), accessed on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015

the policies that the party sets for the main issues taken into consideration. As stated before, Farage presents UKIP and their program as the only one that could work for Great Britain. Contrary to the establishment parties, that – according to Farage – raised people’s expectations only to let them down, UKIP presents what they themselves have called a well-structured, healthy and documented strategy that will improve the living in UK. We can associate this with the myth of “*the brave leader*”<sup>4</sup>, which emphasizes an efficient and courageous leader that puts all of his efforts for the people he leads. This appears to be a very popular political myth that is used by many political actors, in order to emphasize their power of saving the whole system. We can extend this myth to the UKIP’s policies that will come as a salvation for Great Britain. From the point of view of a researcher, it is easy to see this as a manipulation technique that is meant to increase the assigned value of the party, in the electorate’s mentality.

On the other hand, it is important to mention the fact that during the manifesto, all the policies to be found on the party’s agenda are presented by the party’s spokesman, the one responsible for that particular topic. We will present a short analysis of the four main themes of UKIP, for the 2015 elections. Moreover, the manifesto has many pictures, in order to make it more user-friendly and to create a stronger connection with the electorate, by presenting images with the party’s members.

First of all, the most important theme of the party is immigration. The motto of this section is “*immigration is not about race, is about space.*” The members of UKIP underline the fact that Britain is compassionate, caring nation and their party is not against migration, but against “*uncontrolled, politically-driven immigration that has been promoted and sustained by Labour and the Conservatives.*”<sup>5</sup> They propose a set of policies to control this phenomenon and to make sure that the citizens of UK won’t be affected by this. The main points on this subject establish: control of the borders, a five-year moratorium for the unskilled workers and the control of the sham marriages. They offer solutions for all this problems, as they set a better working visa system, controlling the illegal migration by ending the EU freedom of movement of people, improving the granting of British citizenship for immigrants. All in all, even if they state they are not against migration, all their policies prevent this phenomenon. Of course, they shape it in a manipulative technique that presents a “*controlling system*”, rather than a “*forbidding one*”.

Secondly, the economy section of the manifesto talks about cutting taxes and increasing spendings on vital services, such as the health system. Their plan also includes raising the personal allowance, abolishing inheritance tax, increase the transferable tax allowance for married couples and civil partners and raise the threshold. All this seem to be populist methods, used by raising parties that are against the system. Not only that most of these methods are surreal, but also require lots of time to make them work.

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<sup>4</sup> Raul Ghiglione, apud Delia-Felicia Marga, *Repere în analiza discursului politic*, Fundației pentru Studii Europene, Cluj – Napoca, 2004

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from

[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/ukipdev/pages/1103/attachments/original/1429295050/UKIP\\_Manifesto2015.pdf?1429295050](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/ukipdev/pages/1103/attachments/original/1429295050/UKIP_Manifesto2015.pdf?1429295050), May 2015

Thirdly, health service seems to be one of the most debated topics in all the countries. There are few health care systems that really work, even if they require constant improvements. UKIP calls NHS (National Health System) the best-loved institution of Great Britain. They begin their chapter about the health system by announcing the crisis that transgresses the system. They even started a campaign that is aimed to abolish hospital parking charges, as they see this one of the major problem for the people. They militate for an affordable health care system and they focus on mental health services, the research and treatment of dementia. Their solutions seem to be ambiguous, as they focus more on blaming the past and current Governments, rather than offering real solutions. Once again, this represents a populist maneuver of pointing out the weaknesses of the problem, instead of setting working-policies on the matter.

Living standards incorporates most of the social problems that are included in this manifesto. They set policies for pensions, disabled people, education, childcare and family, employment, political reforms, etc. Once more, they offer pretty vague solutions for most of these problems, as they focus their attention on immigration. This topic distinguishes UKIP from the other parties and sets them as a national party. The members of UKIP focus their attention on immigration most of the times, during debates and interviews, offering less attention to the other topics.

All in all, the UKIP's 2015 manifesto underlines the main policies of the party and establishes a clear ranking of the topics of debate, during the campaign. We can conclude the fact that the solutions they offer are populist and not sustainable and they set a clear statement against migration.

In order to have a more accurate analysis, we have decided to take into consideration Farage's immigration speech, that shows not only the main theme of the campaign, but also the reactions of the candidate Nigel Farage in front of the audience, his arguments that sustain his idea, and his position to his contra candidates and some elements of the nonverbal communication. This discourse aims to points out the main characteristics of the nonverbal communication and the characteristics of a live streamed discourse. Moreover, undertaking such an analysis allows us to see whether the candidate has a good live speech or not and to see how he can handle the reactions of the public.

First of all, the theme of the speech is immigration, UKIP's main campaign theme for the 2015 elections. The video has a length of 8:03 minutes and the source of the speech is YouTube.<sup>6</sup> Farage starts by presenting the problem of immigration in Great Britain. His main concern and the party's concern are the great number of immigrants from south-east Europe that threaten the safety of the British workers and families. He states that the main problem with this situation is the fact that they are cheap workers and most of them are not qualified. As he states, he is concerned on "*the quantity and the quality*" as well. Farage blames the current Government for this situation and he calls this a "*big mistake*" of them. His concern goes to the 10 former communist countries that are granted with freedom of movement in the great majority of the European countries. Even if he admits that Great Britain is a country of immigrants, he points out the fact that this wave of immigrants came in a period of a hundred years, not for a few years as it happens nowadays, with the eastern Europeans. According to

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<sup>6</sup> Retrived from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFz5rFdHyIc>, accessed on May 2015

Farage, a great number of unqualified workers from the ex-communist countries stop skilled immigrants from India and New Zealand to come to UK. He claims that his party's proposal is to set a better control on the borders and to impose a better system from granting the visas. It is also very important to mention the fact that UKIP's concern as well as Farage's is the fact that Great Britain is not prepared for all the implications that come along with the immigrants. The British health system is not prepared to face all this great wave of immigration. Also, the economy is of great concern, as there are millions of immigrants that come to Great Britain in a short period of time. These are the most relevant examples that Farage offers in order to state a better position of his party, related to the migration problem. He argues that they are concerned for the British people and that this is not a discriminatory problem. The real discrimination would be, according to him, a great number of eastern European immigrants, contrary to the skilled workers from India and New Zealand. In the end, he supports the main topic of the party with pretty stable arguments that emphasize the fact that immigration represent a real problem for UK and that a poor management of the problem led to this situation.

When analyzing a political speech, it is very important to take into consideration the nonverbal aspects of the speech. This can shape the qualities of a good political actor and can enhance the qualities of a speech, even if the arguments are poor. During the whole speech, Farage has a very relaxed attitude and has very good control upon his moves. He seems to have the position of a professor that explains the main issues of a question to his pupils, in Farage's case, to the audience. He keeps an ironic smile on his face the whole time, thing that underlines the fact that he is against the system, but at the same time, the system is the one who has lots of flaws. Of course, it is his duty to reform the whole British system. Moreover, the way he moves his arms is intent to explain his point of view and to offer a better understanding of the situation. Not only has this, but a great openness of the arms transmitted the fact that he is open to all kind of suggestions, even if this doesn't seem to be the case of Farage. The audience seems to be formed of his supporters and in order to show support for his ideas, he is backed-up by the members of his party. His speech is interrupted only by rounds of applause that enhance the greatness of his words and are meant to give approval. Furthermore, we can see that among the members of the party, there are immigrants: a black man and an Indian woman. Thus, according to Farage, this kind of immigrants doesn't represent a problem for UK. Contrary to this, we would claim this as being a contra argument to the party's policy, which militates against immigration. Another thing that contradicts Farages is the fact that he sees himself as being part of a family of immigrants. Of course, he is of French descendents and according to his arguments this nation is not a threat for the British people. All in all, from a nonverbal point of view, he has a well-calibrated speech, that sometimes goes against the verbal part of the discourse.

While delivering the speech, Farage uses a few sentences that are considered to be marks of populism: "*us*", "*the British people*", "*our borders*", "*we have to take back the control on the borders*", etc. These phrases are meant to highlight the uniqueness of the British people and it also seems to be a call for action, a request to vote for the "*real change*". From a linguistic point of view, we can appreciate this discourse as being filled with metaphors and subliminal messages. The speech is a call for "*normality*", for a "*normal*" country. The meaning of this phrase is actually a statement for discrimination against

migrants. It is a logical error to claim that a normal country is a country that doesn't allow immigrants to come and work there. Therefore, we see this as a manipulative technique, addressed to a lower segment of the electorate, the uneducated electorate. They take the raw information, without analyzing it. This is the kind of electorate that responds to these kinds of statements and also approves it.

## Conclusions

After analyzing both the political speech and the manifesto, we can only conclude that UKIP and its leader follow the trend that assured their rise years ago. The speech delivered by Farage during this year's electoral campaign reveals the main types of policies that UKIP would have wanted to pursue if elected: anti-migration, nationalist, social policies. Moreover, there are lots of populist elements that can be retrieved from his speech. Therefore, he continues with the same style started years ago on the British political arena, namely that of a populist leader trying to undermine the European Union and to pursue strong anti-migration policies. On the other hand, both the manifesto and the speech address an anti-EU electorate that shares the same vision with the party. Studies have shown that the electorate with a high propensity to vote for populist parties is usually under-educated and less capable of critically interpreting the political messages.

All in all, the main goal of this article was that of emphasizing the populist strategy in a political speech and in order to obtain that we started by setting the ground, by analyzing UKIP's manifesto. Therefore, we can conclude that the marks of populism in a political speech can redirect the focus on unimportant matters, while the primary subject of the speech is lost. This represents a communicational strategy that is aimed to attract mainly the uneducated electorate.

To sum up, populism remains a communication strategy that has enough power to seduce a significant part of the electorate without offering real solutions, and Nigel Farage together with his UKIP have proven yet again that they master this strategy.

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