Political Myths in The Context of Political Symbolism: A Case Study on the Social Media Discourses of Three Romanian Politicians
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Abstract: *Focused on the topic of political symbolism and political mythology, the purpose of this article is twofold. On the one hand, the aim consists of exploring certain essential elements of political symbolism, mainly through the appeal to the viewpoint of fundamental authors in the field such as Raoul Girardet, Gilbert Durand, and other relevant authors in the context of this study. On the other hand, the purpose refers to the scope of the application of the theoretical approach to a case study regarding the analysis of the social media discourse of three Romanian politicians on Facebook, starting from Girardet's four political myths while incorporating them into a version of content analysis suited for this type of social media symbolic content.*

The method of content analysis includes a wide variety of potential manners of methodological design and implementation, both from a quantitative and from a qualitative angle. The field of political symbolism in general and the analysis by means of political myths such as the ones of Raoul Girardet in particular also bear the potential for numerous versions of application when it comes to the exercise of discourse analysis, especially in the realm of the specificity of social media usages and content. Hence, what seemed to stand as a more advantageous preference in terms of the construction of the theoretical background whereon this case study was based ultimately amounted to the herein presumed endeavour of rendering several of the distinctive and potentially overlooked elements of these political myths more accessible for an adequate understanding of their manifold versions of appearance in fairly mundane circuits of political discourse such as those on social media.

Keywords: *political symbolism, political myths, social media posts, discourse analysis, Raoul Girardet, Gilbert Durand, Romanian politicians, the Conspiracy, the Unity, the Saviour, the Golden Age, socio-political imaginary, political discourse, political communication, content analysis.*

I. Introduction

On a more general note, we may consider that this endeavour of tackling the matter of political symbolism from the perspective of the main authors in the field in the context of the analysis of the social media discourse of the three politicians stands as an endeavour undertaken in the much broader framework of political symbolism viewed in connection to political communication. In this regard, Claudiu Coman's stance would be relevant, in the sense that when he refers to *"Communication as a process of influencing"*[1] what he notices is that the concept of influencing is intimately

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related to the concept of power[2]. Discussing about the *"Construction of social reality"*[3] in the sphere of communication, he notices that influencing *"is ultimately about power"*[4], which can be exerted over large groups and masses of individuals,[5] while also noting that nowadays *"image is becoming more and more important"*[6].

Even though his example regards the matter of consumption, the logic may very well apply to the political realm in general and to the discourses of politicians in particular, given that politics is all the more concerned with power and that the act of influencing through political communication is not only a high-stakes enterprise but also one deeply focused on image. The image of politicians, in turn, is constructed through the appeal to symbolic images and representations in the discursive communication of politicians, whether it be on television, in the newspapers, or on social media. The discursive appeal to political images, symbols and representations further shapes the discursive universe in which politicians are perceived. Yet what is more important is that these symbolic images and representations are all the more efficient when they operate and rely on configurations of political symbolism and mythology that are well engrained in the collective socio-political imaginary.

In the context of political communication, there is an appeal to symbols in order to influence the perception and actions of citizens, of voters, in the same logic in which the advertising industry to which Coman refers when he discusses about communication and the shaping of social reality is concerned with image in order to influence the act of consumption.

II. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this article is mainly based on the particular attributes of each of the four fundamental political myths, as they are understood by the relevant authors in the field of political symbolism, such as Raoul Girardet, Gilbert Durand and Roger-Gérard Schwartzenberg.

When it comes to the political discourse, the appeal to political symbols and representations can occur at different levels and layers. The deepest and most ingrained layer of political symbolism in the socio-political collective imaginary is the archetype[7], as it is theorized by Carl Gustav Jung. According to Jung, when it comes to the archetype of the Shadow, for instance, this archetype is related to *"the collective unconscious"*[8].

However, given the nature of archetypal representations and also the specificity of the content analysis method applied to the politicians' social media discourse, this study will focus on the intermediate level of political symbolism, represented by the theories of the aforementioned authors such as Raoul Girardet and Gilbert Durand.

III. The Four Fundamental Political Myths

Prior to analysing the key attributes of what is regarded in the specialised literature as the four fundamental political myths from a political symbolism perspective, i.e. the myth of the Conspiracy, the myth of the Saviour (the heroic myth which has been extended to the Common Man rising above the struggles to become a hero of the people), the myth of the Golden Age, and the myth of the Unity, it seems worthwhile to mention one of the common traits of such constructs of the common socio-political imaginary, a trait identified by Raoul Girardet, who views the four cornerstone political myths as having a *"coherent architecture"*[9] in terms of their internal configuration allowing for the design of certain frameworks for their deciphering.[10]

Another relevant author in the field who noticed the existence of patterns of symbolic configurations that are governed by a set of clear principles is Lucien Sfez who, using a somewhat distinct approach, emphasized the importance of the real or fabricated crisis in the efficient operation of symbolic images in the shared imaginary of the societies in which the interested parties, whether it be the media or a particular politician or many other types of individuals or organisations (advocates for social and political movements, individuals working in advertising, marketing, public administration etc.) manage to achieve efficiency in operating with symbolic content by following the fluid patterns of long-established types of symbolic images while changing the ingredients so that their variation can make the general patterns less obvious to the recipients of the concerned symbolic content.[11]

When it comes to clear rules and not just the symbolic configuration hidden in the plain sight of the words printed and uttered in the media, Sfez believes that in order for a well-calibrated symbolic image to effectively operate, the enunciator must be credible in relation to the message being rendered, meaning that the enunciator must have built a form of symbolic capital prior to the attempt of operating with one political symbol or another.[12]

In this regard, what strikes our attention is that the enunciator must be credible enough for the purpose and in the context of the concerned message – it is less about the unhindered credibility of the enunciator and more about the adequacy of the means to the end in that particular socio-political context.[13]

These types of observations would partly explain why politicians with less credibility in terms of symbolic capital are able to overrun their adversaries with a much higher credibility rate when it comes to specific topics that are carefully calibrated to match one politician's assets of symbolic capital while relying on the most pronounced weaknesses of the opponent.

IV. The Political Myth of the Conspiracy

Among the four political myths, the myth of the Conspiracy would perhaps be the easiest to theorize and detect, along with the myth of the Unity. Nevertheless, as it is identified in the specialized literature by the most relevant authors in the field of political symbolism, it bears several key attributes that become obvious only by means of a thorough analysis of this political myth.

According to the taxonomy of Gilbert Durand whereas taking into account the general attributes emerging from Raoul Girardet's view of the myth of the Conspiracy, the first key attributes which we herein refer to are the darkness and the secrecy, the unknown. In the taxonomy of G. Durand, the theme of the darkness is mainly found in the diurnal regime of the Image, in the first part of this regime, particularly in the case of theriomorphic symbols (animality[14], chaos[15] and Kronos[16]), nyctomorphic symbols (the darkness and the colour black[17]), and catamorphic symbols (the fall, the decay and the flesh[18]).

While Gilbert Durand derived his taxonomy from an anthropological perspective on the structures of the socio-political imaginary, the perspective of Raoul Girardet focuses on the political symbolism of the four fundamental political myths. In the case of the myth of the Conspiracy, the main attribute of this mythological structure would be the secrecy, the unknown, which is of course intimately connected to the theme of darkness[19].

From Girardet's standpoint regarding the four fundamental political myths, we can notice that out of the four myths, the Conspiracy represents the myth comprising the most intimate

connection between the idea of power and the idea of darkness.[20] In other words, the thirst for power which stands as an essential attribute entailed by the Conspiracy is depicted as arising from the darkest corners of the soul,[21] a logic that can be juxtaposed to a large extent over Gilbert Durand's category of nyctomorphic symbols[22].

As it is illustrated by Raoul Girardet, the thirst for power comes from a dark place and is intimately correlated to the concept of domination.[23] Moreover, in his view, when it comes to the original, most obvious and undiluted version of the political myth of the Conspiracy, the ultimate type of domination aimed at by the perpetrators of the Conspiracy is world domination.[24]

However, this aspect does not rule out the possibility of small factions and groups conspiring to dominate the world due to the fact that, as it can be noticed from Girardet's description of the attributes of the political myth of the Conspiracy, the conspiracy is oftentimes intended to spread over the long and very long term, sometimes tens or hundreds of years, which makes it all the more difficult to consider that because a group of potential conspirators has only a few members, it cannot be a serious enough endeavour that is worth considering in the long run.[25]

On the contrary, whether the group consists of entire nations or whether it consists of a few members, the fact that the group might, upon a first glance, appear to be ridiculously small may prove to be a strategic advantage from the perspective of the group being less likely to be discovered by an external force such as the general population, the government etc.[26]

However, when it comes to the strategic manner of organization inside the group, Raoul Girardet points out that the pyramid-shape model of distribution of power and knowledge inside the group renders the majority of the members of the conspiracy unable to know the identity of more than one or few other members, which in turn enhances the level of secrecy and mystery inside the group.[27] Hence, the members may thus perceive the group as more extended and more powerful, while maintaining their thirst for climbing higher up the internal hierarchy in order to acquire more knowledge about the endeavours undertaken at the superior levels.[28]

The political myth of the Conspiracy assumes the idea of organisation for the purpose of the efficiency of the Conspiracy, secret protocols often being in place, as Girardet highlighted, internal protocols and manners of operation put in place especially as the dimension of the organisation grows, so that the bottom parts of the pyramid can be efficiently coordinated by the masterminds at the top.[29]

The concepts of knowledge and responsibility[30] to which Raul Girardet refers may be perceived as a double euphemism relating to the dyad light-darkness. On the one hand, from a symbolic perspective, knowledge is interrelated to the concept of light (and to the category of spectacular symbols from the taxonomy in Gilbert Durand's diurnal regime of the image, part I[31]), so by acquiring more knowledge about the internal process and secrets of the Organisation, its members rise to a superior level of nobility and worthiness – the responsibility becoming a burden of the enlightened, more advanced members.[32]

On the other hand, however, given the sombre, dark and shadowy framework in which the myth of the Conspiracy operates (relating to Gilbert Durand's taxonomy in the regard of the category of theriomorphic[33], nyctomorphic[34] and catamorphic symbols[35] from the diurnal regime of the image, part I[36]), the knowledge attained by the trustworthy members of the Organisation after having performed their respective jobs with efficacy[37] actually occurs in the middle of this opposite framework of darkness of the soul and of the means of attaining the goal of domination of the Organisation.[38]

From a political symbolism perspective, in terms of the manner of coordination within the Organisation, we may consider it a symbolic descent into light, given what Girardet suggests, i.e. that by acquiring a superior level of knowledge and enlightenment the members are endowed with the symbolic honour of the responsibility of dark information buried deep into the bleak framework[39] of both the *modus operandi* and of the *raison d' être* of the Conspiracy.

In other words, what might have the potential to turn into what the nowadays field of psychology might regard as a cognitive dissonance is integrated by the members of the organisation in the form of the belief that whatever the means and however bleak or dark they may be, the respective information, knowledge and action stand as a component of a higher purpose[40] – the type of purpose corresponding, in Gilbert Durand's taxonomy, to the category of spectacular symbols, part I.[41]

So we can thus refer to the concept of dominance, both in terms of the internal domination in the hierarchy of the Organisation and in terms of the domination targeted by the Organisation in relation to external forces.[42] Within the structure of the Organisation, there is also the submission in the face of the leaders of the Organisation and especially the submission to the higher purpose of the unified and oftentimes hierarchically-oriented Organisation.[43]

We might consider the concept of domination to be naturally occurring in such circumstances, particularly when employing the logic of Max Weber in this regard. When referring to the idea of domination in the context of the action of governing and in that of rulers in general, Weber points out to the type of domination that is exercised not just by the statesmen but also by others in power based on the ability to appeal to the emotions such as the fears and hopes of people.[44]

From the perspective of Weber, both the state and the types of political groups that used to precede it were deriving the perception of their legitimacy from the personal charisma of the leader, the charisma engendering the peoples' sense of trust in the leader's skills, goals and heroic nature.[45] However, nowadays, as the topic of charisma of politicians, leaders and public persons has been vastly studied and analysed, there is a significantly greater understanding of the topic of charisma so as to manage to efficiently inoculate the perception of a leader's worthiness to exercise domination[46], whether it be a politician or the head of a Secret organisation.

As true as it may be, as Raoul Girardet showed, that in the case of the political myth of the Conspiracy, when referring to the internal hierarchy and management of the Organisation, it is oftentimes better that the true leader, the mastermind remained unknown, this does not fundamentally impact the operating manner in which the perception of the leaders' qualities is created in large organisations, for it is only the identity of the leader that remains unknown even to some of the members of the organisation, and not the qualities of the leader.[47] On the contrary, the good qualities of the leader are emphasized, while the identity is not disclosed so as to prevent the members from seeing the human flaws of the leader.[48]

This is of course not to state that in the context of the structural attributes of the fundamental political myth of the Conspiracy, the head of the Organisation must at all times remain unknown[49], given that what Raoul Girardet refers to represents a more obvious and less diluted version of the operation of the political myths.[50] In one instance, for example, we may see a politician accusing his opponent in the media of being the leader of a secret Conspiracy to subjugate the citizens of a state.

Depending on the case and on whether the message regarding the Conspiracy was calibrated adequately to the context, as mentioned in the above when we referred to Sfez's stance[51], the fact that the opponent is a well-known politician may counterintuitively make the myth of the Conspiracy to be perceived as all the more probable, especially since well-known persons or reputed politicians may not be the first persons that come into mind when assessing who could be behind a secret political conspiracy to dominate a nation – and it would not be a discoursive denouncement of a conspirer if the conspirer were highly perceived as such prior to the denouncement.

In other words, the appeal of the myth of the Conspiracy in relation to heads of state, for example, may originate precisely in the fact that they are in the utmost spotlight, which at a first glance makes them improbable to also be the heads of a secret Conspiracy, which in turn makes them more likely to be perceived as being involved in such a Conspiracy, precisely because it would be unexpected. And the attribute of unexpectedness is a key element in the political myth of the Conspiracy, as we can notice from the standpoint of Raoul Girardet.[52]

The unexpectedness is hence depicted by Girardet when he makes multiple mentions regarding the surroundings in which the Conspiracy is put in place. He thus mentions the modest, desolate, bleak and uninhabited settings in which the conspiracy takes place.[53]

The decor, the region, the accommodation where the members of the Organisations meet, and oftentimes even the home of the head of the Organisation are bleak, dark, poor, seemingly deserted, so as to allow for the privacy and secrecy required by the highly structured plan.[54] Sometimes, Girardet points out, the clothes worn are unkempt and ragged, which could be related to the necessity for maintaining the secrecy through the unexpected and also to the ragged, stained and even unctuous[55] nature of the conspiracy itself and of the soul of the members of the organisation.[56]

V. The political myth of the Unity

The fundamental political myth of the Unity from Raoul Girardet's theory refers to the idea of individuals uniting in order to counter a danger, the danger most often consisting in the perception of a Conspiracy.[57]

In this regard, we ought to mention the interrelation among the four fundamental myths, both in the sense described by Raoul Girardet and in the one illustrated by Vasile Sebastian Dâncu when he referred to what we called symbolic constellations in the context of the polysemy of symbols.[58] While pointing out to the fact that the polysemy of symbols renders it more difficult and time-consuming to design a strong methodological endeavour for the examination of symbolic structures, Dâncu also points out to the need for a transdisciplinary approach in order to better grasp the pillars of symbolic meaning.[59]

Adding to the arguments of the aforementioned authors in the field of political symbolism such as Girardet or Durand, Dâncu insists that any analysis made through the lens of political symbolism has to examine symbolic images and symbols as part of a symbolic configuration comprising multiple polysemic symbols whose operation is both intertwined and occurring in various social contexts which may in turn change their manner of operation by enriching them with new layers of meaning.[60]

When it comes to the fundamental political myth of the Unity, it should thus be regarded in relation to the other three such myths, out of which the myth of the Conspiracy is oftentimes

the most interconnected with the Unity, in that the myth of the Unity implies the concept of mobilisation of resources, first of all of human resources and secondly, the resources of a group of people's attention, time and effort.[61] And, as Girardet points out, the mobilisation of individuals tends to be significantly higher when there is a common enemy to counter, all the more when there is the perception of a Conspiracy.[62]

This occurs in the context in which both the Unity and the Conspiracy essentially imply an association of individuals uniting for a shared purpose. However, in contradistinction to the political myth of the Conspiracy, the myth of the Unity in the context of the configuration of the four myths bears the difference that it is employed in a setting referring more to Gilbert Durand's category of spectacular symbols[63] rather than to his category of theriomorphic[64], nyctomorphic[65] an catamorphic symbols[66] from the diurnal order of the image[67], as in the case of the Conspiracy.

Furthermore, another distinction between the myth of the Unity and that of the Conspiracy that we can arrive at following the examination of Girardet's four political myths, in the context of the resemblance between them, lies in the fact that while the members of the Conspiracy are already mobilised and united, given that the Conspiracy essentially implies more than a singular individual[68], the mobilization and the uniting of efforts is usually called for in the case of the others, the ones who are not already part of the mobilised group of the Conspiracy.

There are of course cases in which some of the discursive attributes of the political myth of the Unity are employed within the group or organisation who is setting up the Conspiracy.[69] However, when used inside of the discursive universe of the secret Conspiracy, such attributes are still mainly a part of the logic of the political myth of the Conspiracy.

In the regard of this interrelation between the myth of the Unity and the myth of the Conspiracy, which is more significant that the relation between the Unity and the other two political myths, in addition to the aforementioned perspective of Max Weber about the concept of domination and the characteristics leading to the creation of the perception of legitimacy[70], we should mention Murray Edelman's standpoint according to which *"Politics always implies group conflict"*[71], in the sense that when it comes to politics in particular and the society in general, assuming that the political sphere is an essential part of society of course, conflict is inevitable between groups comprised of individuals mobilizing and uniting.[72]

Of course, the Conspiracy stands as a particular type of conflict and the political myth of the Conspiracy is incomparably more intricate than the most superficial layer of meaning of the concept of Conspiracy in its most basic form, but this does not affect the nature of the interconnection among these two political myths in light of the resemblances among certain of their attributes relating to the concepts of domination, mobilization and conflict, as shown herein.

Some of the main attributes of the political myth of the Unity illustrated by Raoul Girardet derive from his references to the stances of various other authors such as August Comte, in whose standpoints Girardet notices characteristics such as the appeal to altruism in relation to egoism when it comes to the problems the humanity was facing.[73] Girardet also notices that a more subtle form of characteristics relating to the political myth of Unity would be the appeal to cohesion, whether it be of persons or ideas[74], as well as the appeal to and the appeal of secular celebration rituals[75] and of religious celebrations[76]. Whereas noticing the underlying attributes of the political myth of Unity in the perspective of Rousseau regarding good institutions in the context of governance, institutions who can provide unity[77], Girardet also notices

the political myth of the Unity implied by the commemoration of revolutionary events in human history and by the communist celebrations and doctrine[78].

VI. The political myth of the Saviour

Before discussing about the attributes comprised within the internal configuration of the fundamental political myth of the Saviour, one might see the necessity to mention the existence of the distinction between the term heroism and the perception of heroism. Whereas an individual who performed an act that can be objectively described as heroism, the concept of heroism implied by the political myth of the Saviour is first of all related to the perception of heroism in the common social imaginary, whether an actual act of heroism exists or not.

Even though the perspective of Girardet is essential to our endeavour to understand the intricacies of the myth in question, we should start by referring to the theory of Roger-Gérard Schwartzenberg, whose focus is on the various typologies of political characters who dominate the political scene. Hence, in the context of the political scene becoming more and more like an entertainment show, Schwartzenberg noticed several types of political characters playing their parts on the political scene, such as the Hero, the Common Man, the Leader who fascinates, the Father of the nation type of leader, and the strong women in politics.[79]

In the regard of the attribute of heroism, as we can easily notice, although the attribute of heroism stands as an essential attribute in the case of the myth of the Saviour, either in a direct or in an indirect and rather diluted manner, the hero is only one of the types of political characters identified by Schwartzenberg, and even then, it appeals first of all to the perception of heroism which is ultimately based on the archetype of the hero, rather than to heroic feats and accomplishments.[80]

In spite of the fact that a large part of the specialized literature in the filed of political symbolism approaches the fundamental political myth of the Saviour from the perspective of a singular character acting as the Saviour, this is not to say that this tendency to focus on a singular type of Saviour figure at a time (which renders it less difficult to study and categorize the various types of political leaders and characters) implies the non-existence of the type of collective Saviour, of collective hero[81], comprised within the realms of the political myth of the Saviour.

In the cases when we can discuss about a collective hero, one can notice a more pronounced connection between the political myth of the Saviour and that of the Unity in comparison to the cases of the singular type of Saviour such as the Father of the Nation type of figure[82], as Roger-Gérard Schwartzenberg named the respective typology.

Girardet pointed out to a certain interrelation between the political myth of the Saviour and the *"symbols of verticality, of light"*[83] that come as a result of the presence and actions of the Saviour. These symbols to which Girardet refers are also found in Gilbert Durand's taxonomy of the structures of the collective imaginary, the spectacular category of symbols[84] being the second category of symbols in part II of the diurnal regime of the image from Durand's taxonomy and comprising images and symbolic representations regarding the light and the sun[85], whereas the ascensional symbols from Durand's taxonomy refer to the themes of ascension and verticality[86] and they represent the first category of symbols from part II of Durand's diurnal regime of the image.[87]

VII. The political myth of the Golden Age

Revolving around the key elements of the nostalgic appeal to a glorious past[88] while looking forward to a future as bright[89], as pure[90], as harmonious[91] as *"That lost paradise"*[92], the last of the four political myths of Raoul Girardet, the myth of Golden Age, can be found in many potential versions. As Girardet points out, one of the versions of this political myth would be the appeal to *"times of historical reference, objects of a retrospective cult and also models of collective organisation."*[93], his example being the one of the Roman Republic[94] brought up in various public discourses. As it is known, this type of reference is often employed in the discourse of politicians when they refer to modern democracy, the Roman Republic being in this type of situation a beacon of light, a glorious model of the past evoked in the present and also a landmark comprising the glorious attributes that an idyllic future of democracy should bear, in the logic of the dyad past-future illustrated by Raoul Girardet.[95]

When it comes to less obvious examples of the political myth of the Golden Age, in the case of France, for example, Girardet emphasized a certain type of reminiscence that regards the *joie de vivre* which in the history of France is from the perspective of political symbolism more related to the monarchical regime than to the times after the French revolution.[96] In a similar logic, in his opinion the tools and exhibits in museums – the ones that are nostalgically admired and studied, may also represent a less obvious instance of the myth of the Golden Age[97], for example when they evoke *"the beginning of the industrial revolution"*[98].

These are of course only a few of the examples of the myth of the Golden Age when it appears in the version in which there is an appeal to an identifiable historical event, period, century or age, as Girardet points out, his stance being that even the very recent past may sometimes stand as the temporal universe of reference when it comes to the myth of the Golden Age.[99] However, as he indicates, the Golden age often appears when the discursive appeal is to an unidentifiable distant past of humans, *"an undated, incommensurable time"*[100].

Whatever the temporal aspect may concern, in the overall configuration of the four political myths, the political myth of the Golden Age mainly refers to the overcoming of the difficulties brought up by the Conspiracy, as Girardet highlights, in the sense that the paradisiacal hope for the future and the images associated with it most often stand as the opposite of certain symbolic elements of the political myth of the Conspiracy, such as the theme of darkness which can be associated with death[101].

VIII. Case Study – A Content Analysis of Politicians' Social Media Discourse from a Political Symbolism Perspective: Liviu Dragnea, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, and Ludovic Orban

Methodology and Research Context

The main concern of this case study is to analyse the configuration of the appearance of political symbols and myths in the discourse of the politicians Liviu Dragnea, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, and Ludovic Orban. Whereas the analysis from the perspective of political symbolism in the theoretical framework section of this study occasionally encompasses the viewpoints of various authors in this field, including the interrelation between their viewpoints and Girardet's four political myths, this case study concerns the four political myths of Raoul Girardet examined in the above.

More specifically, the discourses of the politicians Liviu Dragnea, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, and Ludovic Orban represent social media discourses from posts on official Facebook pages regarding the three politicians. The period comprised in this case study is between July 26th, 2018 to October 9th, 2018. Given that the frequency of posts varies from one politician to another and also given that not all of the posts have the same relevance from the perspective of political symbolism, the period of the posts selected for each of the three politicians varies. What remains constant is the number of posts selected for analysis, i.e. for each of the three politicians, I selected ten posts that appeared on Facebook.

The reason behind the general period chosen for the discourse analysis regards the fact that it was a period with many disputes on various topics, among which the main topics included the 2018 Referendum in Romania regarding the definition of the family in the Romanian Constitution (to which all three of the politicians refer), the topic of the secret protocols between The Romanian Intelligence Service and part of the judicial institutions in Romania (to which all three politicians refer), as well as the topics to which two of the three politicians refer, the Victory Square Protests on August 10, 2018 and the topic of the Parallel State. Other topics on the public agenda, more or less prevalent in the discourse of the selected politicians, included debates on justice laws, the offshore law, and the lobbying law.

The three politicians whose discourses were selected for analysis were in those times political leaders (Liviu Dragnea – the Social Democratic Party; Călin Popescu Tăriceanu – the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats Party in Romania; Ludovic Orban – the National Liberal Party in Romania) – as we can notice, the three selected politicians were from the governing parties as well as from the opposition. For Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, the analysed discourses range from September 27, 2018 to October 9, 2018. In the case of Liviu Dragnea, the analysed discourses range from July 26, 2018 to September 11, 2018. For Ludovic Orban, the analysed discourses range from August 4, 2018 to October 9, 2018.

The main methodological approach consists of the research method of content analysis, which can be applied in various manners, as it results from the specialised literature on this topic. According to Roger Mucchielli, when the method of content analysis is employed in relation to discursive formulations[102], the general rules that usually apply to this research method when it is used in the case of mathematics or other hard sciences tend to change[103]. In this regard, what is important in his opinion is the adaptation of the endeavour of coding and decoding the meaning according to the context[104] while focusing on the meaning of the discourse[105]. When applying the content analysis, it is in his viewpoint very important to designate categories, so that the coding of the information is done systematically, based on categories[106], whichever they may be according to context. In the case of this analysis of the political symbolism in the social media discourse of the three politicians, the categories based on which the coding of the discursive information was made are represented by the four political myths of Raoul Girardet, as stated in the above.

Valentina Marinescu also refers to the *"scheme of coding"*[107] of which an important aspect is the unit chosen within the coding scheme, which can be diverse, *"the word, the theme, the sentence, the paragraph etc."*[108]. In the case of this analysis, the chosen unit regards the theme, the symbolic theme of each of the four myths – more specifically, each reference whose meaning regards each of the symbolic themes, from the perspective of the symbolic meaning in the overall discursive context. This provides what Marinescu refers to *as "the frequency of the appearance of each subject/theme derived from the research theme"*[109]. Even though in the context of the specificity of the discourse analysis of the selected social media content regard-

ing the three politicians a rhetorical type of formulation is occasionally present in their discourses, the focus of this content analysis is not on revealing and explaining the discoursive rhetoric, but on operating with the frequency of the references to the various elements that can be regarded as pertaining to the inner symbolic logic of the political symbolism of each of the four political myths of Raoul Girardet.

In the context of the purpose of this case study, this provides a systematic character which is in line with Marinescu's stance when she refers to the advantages and drawbacks of this research method of content analysis.[110] J. J. Van Cuilenburg et al. also refer to the necessity of a systematic character of the analysis when it comes to the method of content analysis[111], their main point relevant in this context being that the interpretation needs to be constant in the analysis and that the categories for the coding must be clearly defined from the beginning.[112]

Referring to media content analysis, Jim Macnamara points out that although the method of content analysis started out as a quantitative method, over time its application evolved towards integrating the qualitative aspect as well, by *"analysing latent as well as manifest content"*[113]. Given that this analysis also encompasses the interpretation of meaning including latent meaning, it is also focused on a qualitative angle, in addition to the quantitative one regarding the coding and later the adding up of the units in order to comprise the three graphs (one graph for each of the three politicians). When it comes to the analysis of media content, whereas some studies such as the one mentioned by Claes H. de Vreese when he referred to the *"five news frames"*[114] of Semetko and Valkenburg such as the *"conflict frame"*[115] take those frames as their references for coding, this study is based on the categories of the political symbolism of Raoul's Girardet four political myths.

Results

Following the content analysis of the social media discourses, as Graph I illustrates, the results of the analysed social media discourses in the case of Liviu Dragnea indicate both an overall high usage of symbolic content from the perspective of the four political myths of Raoul Girardet and an extensive presence of the elements pertaining to the internal logic of the political myth of the Conspiracy, which stands as the most used myth. The second most frequent among the four political myths is the Unity, which indicates that the politician Liviu Dragnea appealed to the logic of the Unity to a large extent (even though significantly less compared to the myth of the Conspiracy). The third political myth in terms of frequency is represented by

■ The four political myths of Raoul Girardet
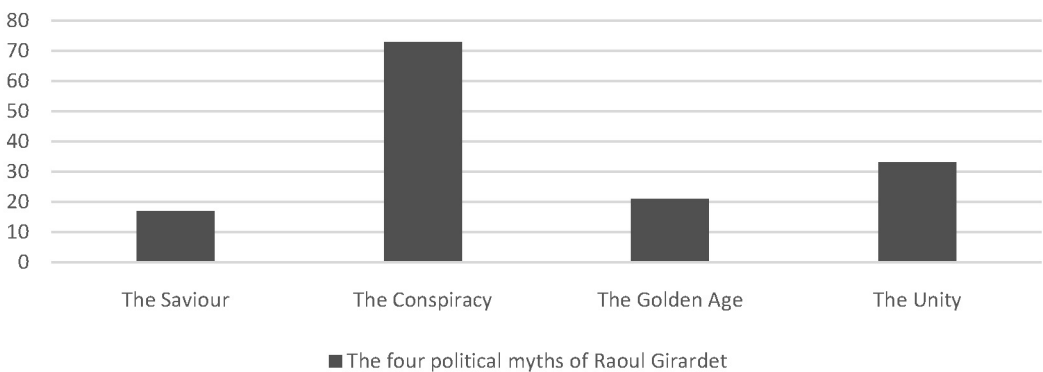
the political myth of the Golden Age in the sense of its logic described in the theoretical frame-work section, whereas with a relatively close frequency to the one of the Golden Age we can notice the presence of the political myth of the Saviour, the less frequently used political myth among the four in the case of the discourse of Liviu Dragnea.

Graph I. The results regarding the analysed social media discourses of Liviu Dragnea

When it comes to the analysed social media discourses of Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, we can notice in Graph II that the political myth of the Conspiracy stands as the most frequent of the four political myths, similar to the results in the case of Liviu Dragnea, whereas the second most used myth in the case of Călin Popescu Tăriceanu is also the Unity, as it was the case with Liviu Dragnea. However, the frequency of the Unity is very closely followed by the po-

The four political myths of Raoul Girardet
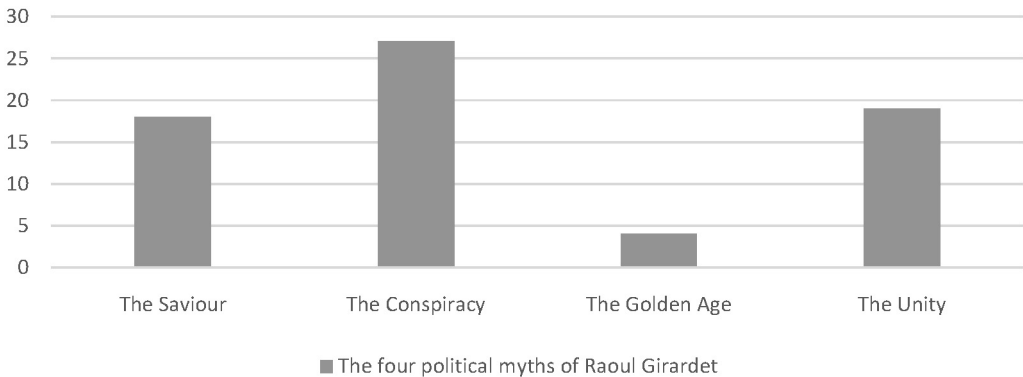
litical myth of the Saviour in the discourse of Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, whereas the Saviour represents the least used myth in terms of frequency in the discourse of Liviu Dragnea. The least frequently used myth in the case of Tăriceanu is the Golden Age, indicating an appeal to the inner logic of this myth that stands as the lowest among all three politicians.

Graph II. The results regarding the analysed social media discourses of Călin Popescu Tăriceanu

Regarding the analysed social media discourses in the case of Ludovic Orban, in a similar manner to the cases of the discourses of Liviu Dragnea and Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, the re-sults illustrated in Graph III show that the political myth of the Conspiracy is the first of the four political myths in terms of frequency. The Saviour represents the second most used myth, yet it is over two times less frequent than the appeal to the Conspiracy. It is followed by the

The four political myths of Raoul Girardet
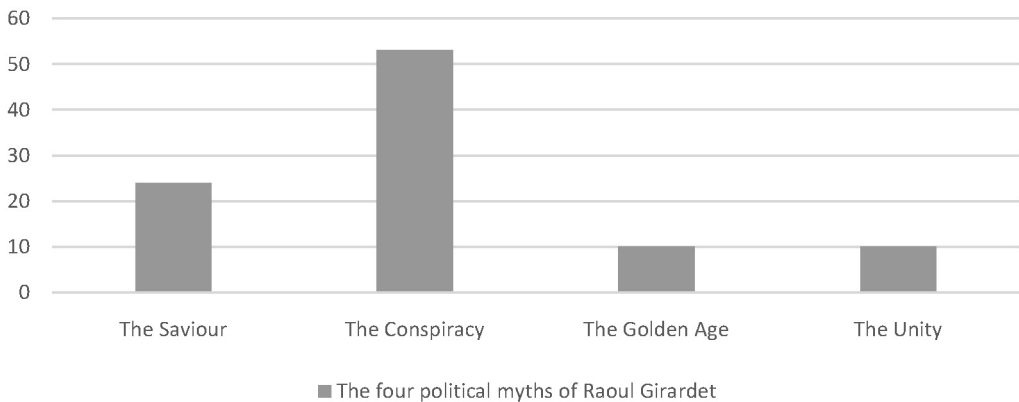
Golden Age and the Unity, which in the case of Ludovic Orban are present to the same extent, while the appearance of each of these two political myths is however over two times less frequent than the presence of the political myth of the Saviour and over five times less frequent than the appearance of the political myth of the Conspiracy in this case of Ludovic Orban.

Graph III. The results regarding the analysed social media discourses of Ludovic Orban

IX. Conclusions

The proposed twofold purpose of this study firstly regarded the construction of the theoretical framework in a manner allowing for a better comprehension of various key elements of political symbolism in general, as well as of the distinctive nuances of the four fundamental political myths theorised by Raoul Girardet.

What the design of this theoretical framework achieved from the perspective of this first purpose was not only to reveal some of the paramount elements and characteristics comprised by the vast field of political symbolism, but also to include the traits and components that would for the most part be neglected due to their imaginative and multifaceted expression and that nonetheless are of a particular importance, especially when it comes to the potential for their application in the context of the nature of a social media discourse analysis.

The second purpose of this endeavour was fulfilled through the merging of the nuances pertaining to the sphere of political symbolism with the diversified opportunities implied by the method of content analysis in terms of the manifold manners of its design and application. The novelty of the approach proposed by this study thus represents the basis which ultimately engendered the social media discourse analysis in the case of the three politicians Liviu Dragnea, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu and Ludovic Orban, as well as the results thereof described in the above.

Notes

[1] Claudiu Coman, *Negotiation Techniques*, C. H. Beck publishing house, Bucharest, 2007, p. 37

[2] Idem., p. 37

[3] Idem., p. 37

[4] Idem, p. 37

[5] Idem., p. 37

[6] Idem, p. 38

[7] Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffe), Humanitas publishing house, Bucharest, 2017, pp. 462-463

[8] Idem., p. 475

[9] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, p. 22

[10] Idem., p. 22

[11] Lucien Sfez, *Political Symbolism*, the European Institute publishing house, Iași, 2000, pp. 66-67

[12] Idem., p. 27

[13] Idem., p. 27

[14] Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, the Encyclopedic Universe publishing house, Bucharest, 2000, pp. 69-72

[15] Idem., pp. 72-74

[16] Idem., pp. 81-85

[17] Idem., pp. 86-91

[18] Idem., pp. 104-112

[19] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, p. 15

[20] Idem., p. 15

[21] Idem., pp. 15-17

[22] Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, the Encyclopedic Universe publishing house, Bucharest, 2000, pp. 86-91

[23] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, p. 24

[24] Idem., pp. 15-17

[25] Idem., pp. 26-28 and p. 37

[26] Idem., pp. 26-28 and p. 37

[27] Idem., p. 23

[28] Idem., pp. 23-24

[29] Idem., p. 23

[30] Idem., p. 23

[31] Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, the Encyclopedic Universe publishing house, Bucharest, 2000, pp. 144-154

[32] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, p. 23

[33] Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, the Encyclopedic Universe publishing house, Bucharest, 2000, pp. 69-86

[34] Idem., pp. 86-104

[35] Idem., pp. 104-112

[36] Idem., pp. 64-67

[37] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, p. 23

[38] Idem., p. 25

[39] Idem., pp. 23-24

[40] Idem., pp. 23-24

[41] Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, the Encyclopedic Universe publishing house, Bucharest, 2000, pp. 144-154

[42] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, pp. 23-27

[43] Idem., pp. 23-27

[44] Max Weber, *The Scientist and the Politician*, Humanitas publishing house, Bucharest, 2011, p. 83

[45] Idem., p. 82

[46] Idem., pp. 83-84

[47] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, pp. 23-24

[48] Idem., pp. 23-24

[49] Idem., p. 23

[50] Idem., pp. 4.5

[51] Lucien Sfez, *Political Symbolism*, the European Institute publishing house, Iași, 2000, p. 27

[52] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, p. 23 and p. 19

[53] Idem., p. 17, p. 19, p. 23

[54] Idem., pp. 15-17, p. 19, p. 23

[55] Idem., p. 17

[56] Idem., p. 17

[57] Idem., pp. 112-115

[58] Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Symbolic Communication. The Architecture of Advertising Discourse*, revised second edition, Eikon publishing house, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, pp. 28-29

[59] Idem., pp. 28-29

[60] Idem., pp. 28-29

[61] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, pp. 114-115

[62] Idem., p. 141

[63] Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, the Encyclopedic Universe publishing house, Bucharest, 2000, pp. 144-154

[64] Idem., pp. 69-86

[65] Idem., pp. 86-104

[66] Idem., pp. 104-112

[67] Idem., pp. 64-67

[68] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, pp. 23-24

[69] Idem., pp. 23-26

[70] Max Weber, *The Scientist and the Politician*, Humanitas publishing house, Bucharest, 2011, pp. 82-83

[71] Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, Polirom publishing house, Bucharest, 1999, p. 55

[72] Idem., pp. 54-55

[73] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, p. 114

[74] Idem., pp. 114-115

[75] Idem., p. 117

[76] Idem., p. 118

[77] Idem., p. 116

[78] Idem., pp. 118-119

[79] Roger-Gérard Schwartzenberg, *The Superstar Show of Government*, Scripta publishing house, Bucharest, 1995, pp. 14-15

[80] Idem., pp. 14-15

[81] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, pp. 111-116

[82] Roger-Gérard Schwartzenberg, *The Superstar Show of Government*, Scripta publishing house, Bucharest, 1995, p. 15

[83] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, p. 62

[84] Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, the Encyclopedic Universe publishing house, Bucharest, 2000, pp. 144-154

[85] Idem., pp. 144-154

[86] Idem., pp. 127-143

[87] Idem., pp. 127-143

[88] Raoul Girardet, *Myths and Political Mythologies*, the European Institute publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, p. 76

[89] Idem., p. 79

[90] Idem., p. 83

[91] Idem., p. 83

[92] Idem., p. 79

93 Idem., p. 77

94 Idem., p. 77

95 Idem., p. 79

96 Idem., p. 78

97 Idem., pp. 77-78

98 Idem., p. 77

99 Idem., p. 76

100 Idem., p. 78

101 Idem., pp. 103-106

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103 Idem., p. 7

104 Idem, pp. 6-7

105 Idem., pp. 8-9

106 Idem., p. 6

107 Valentina Marinescu*, Research in Communication: Methods and Techniques*, C. H. Beck publishing house, Bucharest, 2009, p. 69

108 Idem., p. 69

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112 Idem., p. 127

113 Jim Macnamara, *Media Content Analysis: Its Uses, Benefits and Best Practice Methodology*, Asia-Pacific Public Relations Journal, volume 6, January 2005, p. 4 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267387 325_Media_Content_Analysis_Its_Uses_Benefits_and_Best_Practice_Methodology

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2. October 5, 2018 at 2:17 PM: https://www.facebook.com/ludovicorbanpm/posts/720589188292211
3. October 3, 2018 at 2:02 PM: https://www.facebook.com/pnl.ro/posts/2058717964180230
4. September 18, 2018 at 7:16 PM: https://www.facebook.com/pnl.ro/posts/2040273536024673
5. September 17, 2018 at 10:04 PM: https://www.facebook.com/pnl.ro/posts/2039287376123289
6. August 29, 2018 at 11:14 AM: https://www.facebook.com/pnl.ro/posts/2015281571857203
7. August 25, 2018 at 06:58 PM: https://www.facebook.com/pnl.ro/posts/2010749885643705
8. August 23, 2018 at 05:38 PM: https://www.facebook.com/pnl.ro/posts/2007223032663057
9. August 10, 2018 at 11:05 PM:https://www.facebook.com/ludovicorbanpm/posts/683811845303279
10. August 4, 2018 at 04:41 PM: https://www.facebook.com/pnl.ro/posts/1973572152694812

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1. October 9, 2018 at 5:20 PM: https://www.facebook.com/tariceanu/posts/2403843022963832
2. October 9, 2018 at 4:23 PM: https://www.facebook.com/tariceanu/posts/2403824622965672
3. October 8, 2018 at 7:14 PM: https://www.facebook.com/tariceanu/posts/2402516569763144
4. October 6, 2018 at 5:49 PM: https://www.facebook.com/tariceanu/posts/2399153130099488
5. October 3, 2018 at 5:30 PM: https://www.facebook.com/tariceanu/posts/2394737327207735
6. October 3, 2018 at 4:45 PM: https://www.facebook.com/tariceanu/posts/2394730830541718
7. October 3, 2018 at 3:55 PM: https://www.facebook.com/tariceanu/videos/695557427484866
8. October 2, 2018 at 11:00 AM: https://www.facebook.com/tariceanu/videos/368963840310998
9. September 27, 2018 at 5:30 PM: https://www.facebook.com/tariceanu/posts/2385411818140286
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2. September 11, 2018: https://www.facebook.com/liviudragnea.ro/posts/1921558104589594/ ; https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/mapamond/mesajul-lui-liviu-dragnea-la-17-ani-de-la-atacurile-din-sua-trebuie-construita-o-lume-mai-buna-994528

3. September 10, 2018: https://www.facebook.com/liviudragnea.ro/posts/1920429061369165/ ; https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1920429061369165&id=299049656840455; https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2018/09/10/liviu-dragnea-debutul-unui-an-scolar-prilej-de-bucurie-emotie-speranta—173396

4. September 9, 2018: https://www.facebook.com/liviudragnea.ro/photos/anul-nou-evreiesc-ro%C8%99-ha%C8%99ana-%C3%AEncepe-%C3%AEn-aceast%C4%83-sear%C4%83-pentru-tot-poporul-evreu-

pr/1919398268138911/; https://www.facebook.com/liviudragnea.ro/posts/1919398318138906/; https://www.mediafax.ro/politic/dragnea-mesaj-de-anul-nou-evreiesc-transmit-evreilor-romani-sa-se-bucure-de-un-an-bun-si-dulce-17513641

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