

NATIONALIST DISCOURSE AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. THE CASE OF MARINE LE PEN AND NIGEL FARAGE

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Abstract: *Nationalist discourse and nationalist parties reappeared on the political scene as a consequence of some recent events, such as the economic crisis, globalization and massive migration. The leaders of the nationalist parties try to make their voice heard not only in their respective countries but also in the European Parliament. The present paper analyzes some of the characteristic features of nationalism and of nationalist discourse. The method of investigation will be that of discourse-historical analysis, as it is appropriate to describe the main discursive strategies and the linguistic features that characterize right-wing political parties discourse. We choose to discuss some of the most vocal representatives of such parties, Marine Le Pen and Nigel Farage.*

Keywords: *nationalism; populism; communication, discourse-historical approach*

1. INTRODUCTION

When some former European leaders such as Robert Schuman, Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand advocated for the creation of the European Union as a means to consolidate peace, to fight nationalism and to prevent another world war, they hardly imagined that some decades later the European Parliament would be the scene where those reasons should be advocated for again. The European Union was meant to be a construction built step by step, based on solidarity of the member states and to become, in time, an economic and political force. The principles on which that union is based were seen as leading to general progress and prosperity. All the member states are supposed to benefit from them, as they have been established on mutual agreement. A single market, free movement of people, goods, services and capital were meant, along with other treaties and agreements, to ensure economic development for each and every member state. There was even an attempt to put in place a European Constitution, failed due to the opposition of some member states, such as France, Ireland, and Portugal, among others.

The fall of the Iron Curtain and the enlargement of the European Union by the admission of some Eastern-European countries from the former Soviet Bloc led to the revival of the nationalist discourse in many countries. The reasons were the same everywhere, be it in France,

in Great Britain, in Germany, Austria and Italy: the common “threat”: the invasion of their country by migrants from the former socialist countries, now members of the European Union. In the nationalist view, these migrants represent a danger for their fellow nationals as they would “steal” their jobs, they could represent a danger for their national integrity as they are concerned about their national views, culture and civilization. Another great “fear” is that caused by the Muslim migrants, Roma people, Jews and Turks, all representatives of a minority which is responsible for all the bad things happening in their respective countries. The economic crisis which began in 2008 and struck all the countries contributed in a great measure to the revival of nationalist ideology and, consequently, to the revival of nationalist parties. They developed a specific discourse, as a means of communicating their ideas and influence the peoples thoughts and beliefs, and more important than that, as a means of gaining their supporters’ votes in national and European elections.

In this article we intend to present an analysis of nationalist discourse in Europe. We intend to focus on the nationalist discourse developed by the parties described as right-wing parties or radical-right parties and on the main characteristics of such a discourse, pointing and illustrating the main strategies and linguistic features specific to this kind of political communication. The point of view from which the analysis will be conducted is that of discourse-historical approach, which is put into practice and

recommended by most scholars dealing with that particular matter (Wodak and Nugara, 2017).

2. NATIONALISM. CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

2.1 Nationalist ideology. Nationalism as a concept and then as an ideology is closely linked to the concept of nation. Nations on the old continent, Europe, began to take shape by the end of the XVIIth and the beginning of the XVIIIth century, when the communities of people began to be more stable and to share a common territory, common ideas and beliefs, a common language, even, if not always, the same religion. No doubt that religion was important at the time, and it was to become an important nationalist asset in time. Apart from that, those communities found out that they have in common habits, customs, ceremonies linked to official events, so some kind of sameness was in place. A nation is also based on a common language, spoken within the limits of a “national” territory. What happens when your territory is no longer inhabited by those you used to call your co-nationals? What will be the consequences if your national values referring to civilization, national heroes, national myths, national symbols such as the flag, the anthem, heraldic symbols are threatened? Should one protest against it? Should one try and prevent it? Should one engage in a fight (ideological or military) to protect what is considered to be one’s nation, one’s national state and nation values? The answer is obvious, so all this lead to the creation of an ideology. Unfortunately, social and political factors, such as wars, invasion of sovereign states by other states, limitation of some rights and liberties, the imposition of an official language different from the native one, the imposition of certain rules perceived as oppressive laid o solid foundation to nationalism.

At its beginnings, nationalism referred to maintaining the same language, culture and civilization within the boundaries of the same state. More exactly, it meant neglecting dialects as being unimportant compared to a unique language, the national language, which was to be recognized as a European national language. (G. Lüdi, 2010:22-24). The same author mentions that nationalist discourse insisted upon the importance of founding a homoglossic society within the boundaries of a nation-state, regardless if the language precedes the creation of the state or the other way round. Nevertheless, the author specifies that this is a received idea, based on the existence of a single language, which will reinforce the idea of a nation-state.

The single language is not the only value put forward by nationalist ideology. F.-B. Huygne (2010, 39-44) discusses another concept supported by representatives of this ideology, which is the mentality of a community. This mentality is based on the conception that “we”, a community of people living in a territory, have some important values to preserve and to fight for. The author specifies from the beginning that he disapproves mentalities such as those of Milosevic, former Serbian leader, insisting on forming a national state, enlarging a nation, giving a state to this nation as this is a national claim. The scholar’s work is about identifying types of historic ideologies: the Wilsonion one, based on the spread of American values as being universal, the Marxist one having at its bases the dialectical materialism and the German Nationalist-Socialist ideology, the most hideous, the expression of the superiority of a race.

When we speak and think about nationalism, nationalist ideas and values, we should be tempted to consider them as positive values. Such positive values are embodied in early historic heroes, of their heroic efforts to preserve their national specificity. This aspect is sometimes over evaluated and used to increase the importance of such examples, which may or may be not based on real facts, in the end. So, urging people to follow the example of such and such legendary hero, or comparing a contemporary leader with one of them is an attempted manipulation of nationalist speakers, aiming at psychologically influencing the public attitude. Volker Fuchs (2010, 59-61) states that, in this case, the idea of nation is linked to the identification of race, blood, original country and is supported by cults and myths. In his opinion, it is not a correct interpretation of the idea of a nation.

We cannot overlook the evolution of the nationalist discourse which is more present than ever in the contemporary society.

Nowadays, globalization, which was once seen as positive, productive and beneficial, became one of the worst and gloomy perspectives. From now on, it is not a purpose to be achieved; it is no longer the intended objective or the ultimate end. The new conditions, such as massive migration, free circulation of goods and persons within the European Union, lead to a new orientation of the nationalist discourse.

2.2 Nationalist discourse. The literature about nationalist discourse is vast and it tends to become even vaster, since new factors intervene and changes in the whole world are rapid, dramatic, unexpected and not without

consequences. Such consequences are reflected in the studies of numerous scholars who analyzed the discourse developed by various representatives of the nationalist ideology, promoted by parties which put forward the idea of nation and nationalist values.

At first, studies were conducted about political discourse since it is the most common and widespread variety of discourse. The most common perception is that political discourse should be identified by means of its actors or authors, meaning the politicians. (T.van Dijk, 1997). In his opinion, politics field should be limited to some major concepts denoting official and unofficial political actors, events, encounters, settings, political systems (like democracy and communism), political ideologies like “perestroika” or liberalism and political group relations, such as power, inequality, hegemony and oppression.

One of the keenest analyses of national discourse is that of Ruth Wodak (2018, 403-420). The author discusses the concept of nationalism, which, at the beginning, was considered as a “project of modernity, related to the tendency towards homogenization of populations, thus defining modern statehood”.

She cites several definitions of nation, nation-states, national identity and nationalism. The definition of nation-states given by B. Anderson (1995, cited in R. Wodak, 2018) although criticized by the author, but recurrent in many other studies about nationalism refer to an imagined communities or to imagined political communities. The respective communities are imagined and limited at the same time as they are not unlimited and as the members of the respective community may have never met or seen face to face. The same author discusses some other concepts as transnationalism (“the establishment of social, cultural economic and political ties that operate beyond the nation state”, being conducted by powerful actors, members of the government or of political organizations or representatives of multinational corporations). Another related concept is cosmopolitanism, referring to the belief that all humans belong to a single community, sharing the same values, based on the same principles and, generally speaking, pursuing the same target, that of surviving. According to this concept, all human beings share common moral views and principles and they are not limited to national boundaries.

Since national identity plays an important part in the so-called nationalist discourse, we shall elaborate upon the theme saying that the most common way of constructing this national identity

is to put in plain view symbols of the nation: the flag, the anthem and specific turns of phrase. They are considered as being harmless, but it is not always the case. Sometimes, those harmless symbols can incite to conflicts, more or less violent, as it has been seen during sporting or political events.

At the same time, the author discusses the discursive construction of national identity, explaining that this is based on some key assumptions, as she calls them. One of them is that “nations are primarily mental constructs” (Wodak: 2018), which has already become a “received idea”; then we have another assumption, stating that national identity includes a set of dispositions, attitudes and conventions internalized through socialization. We chose to mention these assumptions because they appear repeatedly in nationalist discourse nowadays.

Some other scholars, such as R. Eatwell (2005) analyze the rise of, as he calls them, the New Right Wing Parties in post-war Europe. This article is important because it specifies that nationalist discourse is made up and/or presented by party leaders, charismatic, able to seduce their public and voters. We find that in this article, the author made the most explicit portrait of a nationalist leader: he must have „a sense of a great mission”; he must have a discourse of leader-follower symbiosis”, he must make proof of abilities in communicating with his followers (via social-media and other means of communication, old and modern). The author indicates that it was important, during the 1980s, to notice that issues on cultural and national identities appeared due to the changes of political chess-board: then dissolution of the former Eastern bloc, the reunification of Germany and the immigration, affecting many countries in their economy and in their ethnic structure.

Ruth Wodak, R. Eatwell and other authors who studied and wrote about nationalism considered that the best method to approach this concept is the Discourse-Historical Approach.

2.3 Methods of analysis of nationalist discourse. In an interview to the specialized publication (“Mots”, 115/2017), Ruth Wodak speaks about the main discursive strategies and linguistic features that characterize right-wing political parties discourse. The same methods are described in “Methods for Critical Analysis” (R. Wodak M. Meyer, 2009:93-94). This analysis is based on three dimensions: the identification of the specific contents and topics of a specific discourse;

the investigation of the discursive strategies; the examination of the linguistic means and the specific, context-dependent linguistic realizations. These strategies consist, mainly, in nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation and, finally, intensification and mitigation. All these strategies pursue precise objectives and are linguistically expressed by specific devices. For example: a strategy as nomination pursues as the main objective the discursive construction of social actors, objects, events or actions and the devices are various tropes, such as metaphors, synecdoches or metonymies. Predication has as an objective the discursive qualification of social actors, phenomena or events and is presented through stereotypes, mostly attributions of negative or positive traits, collocations or explicit comparisons. Another strategy, in our opinion, the most relevant, is argumentation, which is meant to justify the statements of the speaker, and the most common way to realize that from a linguistic point of view is the use of topoi or common places. The most usual strategy, as it is the most expressive and it creates an immediate effect is that of identification and mitigation. It is linguistically realized by the use of diminutives, tag questions, indirect speech consisting in paraphrasing some statements, insisting on some specific aspects.

2.4 Nationalist parties. The number of nationalist parties that exist nowadays in Europe is quite impressive. They are known as nationalist parties, Radical Right parties or Right wing parties. They are to be distinguished from far-right parties and populist parties. In her interview to the specialized French scientific magazine “Mots” (115/2017), Ruth Wodak defines right-wing populism as a “political ideology that rejects political consensus and usually (but sometimes not) combines *laissez-faire* liberalism and anti-elitism. Populism is anti-pluralism and anti-elitist.” They pretend to defend the rights of common people, the people in the street, the so-called native inhabitants of a country whose life, social status and well-being are endangered by the arrival of immigrants. They are characterized by a chauvinist discourse; they instrumentalize a minority, ethnic, religious or linguistic as the cause of all current misfortunes. Populist right-wing parties promote a politics of fear and they portray themselves as the defenders of their nation. It has to be said that nationalist and populist parties represent a part of the political forces in a country, taking part in the elections, whereas far-right parties do not.

Nationalist parties exist in almost all the countries of the European Union, but not all of them take an active part in the political life in their respective country. Some of them take advantage of certain social and political circumstances to appeal to the votes of their supporters in some period of crisis. It is the case of the French Nationalist Front, renamed The National Rally, having as a leader Marine Le Pen, and the case of the United Kingdom Independent Party from Great Britain. It is quite remarkable that those two parties succeeded in winning many votes in a period of time in which the European Union had to face some major crises, such as the financial crisis, the massive immigration crisis and the Brexit situation. All these factors led to internal debates concerning the sovereignty of the member states. It was the occasion seized by nationalist parties to present themselves as the saviors of the nation.

In this respect we are going to analyze the discourses of Marine Le Pen and Nigel Farage, the most prominent figures of nationalist parties in Europe, discourses made in the very core of Europe, the European Parliament.

3. MARINE LE PEN’S NATIONALIST DISCOURSE AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Although she needs no introduction, we will say, briefly, that she is a French politician, the president of the National Front, a nationalist party formed by her father in 1972. The party is now Le Rassemblement National/ The National Rally. This party promote nationalistic ideas and ideology, being opposed to the participation of France in the European Union, to the euro as a unique coin, to euro zone, to free migration, to globalization, to a unique law for the members of the EU, to the Schengen Area, briefly, opposed to all the values promoted by the European Union. She „inherited” the leadership of the Nationalist Front from her father, whom she is at loggerheads with at present.

As a political leader opposed to any rule of law which is not that of the National Front, she opposed Sarkozy, Hollande, Macron and, perhaps she will again run for president for the next elections. She is also a European Parliament member belonging to the group called Europe of Nations and Freedom. She gave some speeches at the European Parliament, not so many, as she was more often than not absent, but she was there when she thought the moment was important.

For instance, she gave such speeches in 2015 and 2016, on two different occasions, when she found an opportunity to present the point of view

of her party. The two discourses are two very good examples of what a nationalist discourse looks like.

As for the first speech we are going to analyze, it is a speech delivered when the relationship between France and Germany were very good and when Europe was confronted with a massive refugees crisis.

Here are some considerations about Marine Le Pen's discourse.

a) We identified, first of all, the termes of address:

- *Madame Merkel*, (Madam Merkel) without indication of her official position; it is the first mark of disrespect;

- The second term of address, the most disrespectful, is „*Monsieur le vice –chambellan, administrateur de la province France*” (Mister vice –chancellor, governor of the province of France) ; the purpose of the use of this term of address is to diminish and depreciate the political position and official position of François Hollande, the president in office of the French Republic.

b) The next remark concerns a succession of reasons for which M. François Hollande should not be regarded as the president of a state. In order to justify her words, she uses some grand terms, such as „sovereignty”, „interest of the country”, „to depend on Germany concerning the issue of migration”.

We also notice the presence of a short narrative sequence, meant to diminish the members of the European Parliament, described as being obedient to Angela Merkel.

After insulting both European leaders, Angela Merkel and François Hollande, separately, she insults them altogether:

„*Vous venez ici tous deux en séance de rattrapage*” (You come here to try again to pass your exams), as if the two leaders of two important countries in Europe were poor students, trying hard to finish their academic year or their education.

After diminishing the importance of the two outstanding European leaders, Marine Le Pen presents herself as the unique person capable of saving the nation, the French nation and not only that, but all the other peoples who want to fight for sovereignty, so she addresses her colleagues from the party called Europe of Nations and Freedom.

c) We should also take into consideration some other means which are not linguistic. It is about non-verbal communication. She uses her mimic, her gestures, her voice and the intonation of her voice to underline the ideas of her speech. She points her finger at those she considers guilty for

the crisis or even disasters she predicted. She is like an actress in a play she wrote herself, promoting herself in the leading role.

On another occasion, in 2016, the same Marine Le Pen gives a speech at the European Parliament after the vote for Brexit. All of a sudden she describes the British people as „nos amis britanniques” (our British friends), she says that the vote is a remarkable event, compared in its importance to the fall of Berlin wall, so, once again she uses those terms to impress the audience.

This is another opportunity to show her support for the political entities who advocate against the European Union, against Euro-zone, against migration, against national interests of the sovereign nations. It is interesting that she calls this rise against European values „democracy”. Her speech is a little more structured and we notice a sequence of arguments in favour of all entities willing to quit the European Union”.

This is an important characteristic of nationalist discourse: to express a strong opposition against the present state of facts, which is bad, to enumerate plenty of arguments against it and to leave the audience with the conclusion that she is right in everything she advocates against.

4. THE DISCOURSE OF NIGEL FARAGE AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Nigel Farage is another nationalist leader; his party is UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party). He became famous after his campaign in favour of Brexit and for his promises in favour of British citizens, which proved to be false.

His speech at the European Parliament is characterized by:

- The use of irony: he addresses the members of the European Parliament telling them that they are in denial, as if they were suffering of some kind of illness; he mentions, as Marine Le Pen has done before, that they imposed a lot of sacrifice on some people (the Greeks) in order to impose their policy.

- The use of diminishing words: „I know that you have never worked in your life, none of you have ever done a proper job in your lives”.

- The use of a discourse that has as a conclusion: „I told you so”, explicitly insulting the fellow members of the European Parliament, but presenting himself as the clever man, the only one capable of saving the situation.

- When he is frequently interrupted by the audience, he finds the moment to produce another populist phrase: he knows they protest because

they are in favour of the so –called „establishment” which he despises and criticises. He uses again the argument of a superior thinking and of the idea that what he supports is the benefit for his country.

When he is confronted with Jean Claude Juncker, he has a violent approach, insisting again on his superior thinking and on the fact that he had predicted all the crises that struck the peoples of the European Union and that he is the only one who has the proper solution to the predicted crises.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It is a fact that nationalist discourse addresses a specific public, consisting of the voters and supporters, who, obviously, embrace the same ideology. This kind of discourse is meant to offer some comfort and confidence to a community of people who still believes in “traditional values” such as the nation and the sovereignty of nations, the need to protect those values against those who endanger them. Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate nationalism from populism. The leaders of nationalist parties take advantage of each and every political context to promote their ideas. These moments are usually moments of crisis and of difficulties either on national or international level. The strategies are more often than not those of an argumentative approach, meant to convince the audience.

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