

## Summary

Originally, the starting point of the project was to show that in the first half of the 1990's, when the period of Eastern European "transition" began, the analyses devoted to this topic exaggerated the role, the responsibility of the intelligentsia, of the opinion-makers in fuelling nationalist passions. This led further to a more general question: how efficient, persuasive was the rhetoric of the elite during the first period of transition. The mainstream interpretations considered the intelligentsia to be significantly responsible for the conflicts that accompanied the beginning of the new regime. These explanations rested on the following assumptions: a. during the period of transition, within the framework of formal democracy, the most important driving motor of democratisation is the "people"; b. if its mentality is not democratic, then the political system (or the "country") may fail in democratising; c. one can prevent this only by strengthening the values of democracy; d. the themes, values, goals circulated by the elite mould, transform in an indirect manner the mentality of the population. Consequently, the (intellectual) elite is largely responsible for the undemocratic politics pursued by the new governments. Following this assumption, a major stream in conflict analysis took the texts of the opinion leaders as a starting point.

The hypothesis of the research is that this approach has exaggerated the role played by the intelligentsia, the opinion leaders in general. The mentality of the public is not a „sponge“, but a „sieve“ that interprets according to its own spheres of reference the texts formulated within the framework of the High Tradition. In spite of the fact that terms like „democracy“, „truth“,

„justice”, „freedom” were frequently used in the context of common everyday life, their meaning differed significantly.

Around the same period, a radically different standpoint was formulated in the Hungarian literature. According to it, the Hungarian elite in Transylvania does not know the society it wants to represent, and its rhetoric has nothing in common with reality, with what everyday people think about reality. The explanation lies in their different interests. The Transylvanian Hungarian elite is interested only in a self-affirmative symbolic politics that can lead to no pragmatic results that are important for the everyday members of society. Consequently, its activity concerning the construction of society can also lead to no results. So, the guilt of the elite lies in inefficient, not in efficient social construction.

In order to verify these two opposite points of view, one needed texts formulated by “common”, “everyday” people in the context of everyday life. The choice fell on the letters written to a Hungarian provincial newspaper by its readers. The period investigated was limited to the first five years after the change of regime.

First, the county and the foundation of the newspaper are presented. From the perspective of this investigation, the most important element is that the paper started building a partnership with the readers already from the beginning. The editors wanted to offer – beside the compulsory propaganda – help and education to the public. The paper offered its readers the possibility to write about their problems of an administrative or another nature (and helped in solving them), or to present local news. This partnership was accepted by the public from the beginning.

Further some topics are treated that are important in understanding the Hungarian (intellectual) elite in Transylvania both before and after 1989. On the one hand, its self-image is discussed, the role in had/wanted to have within the Hungarian minority. Further, it was shown that a major way of communicating toward their public was through gestures, a “style” that was developed

during the former regime, when open discussion of certain issues was impossible: this involved the use of certain key words, symbols, with critical reference to a certain minority situation, or to state socialism. This involved that it did not have to demonstrate its statements – neither with proof, not with arguments. On the other hand, symbols, topics used by the Hungarian intelligentsia are presented: people, serving the people, community, tradition, custom, roots, preservation of values, unity. After 1989 new concepts were added to this list: “democracy”, “tolerance”, “liberty”, civil society. The last concept is analysed in more detail showing that it is hardly useful any more, since everyday realities contradict some of the basic characteristics of what is called “civil society”: they are not associations of free individuals, usually they are not grassroots organisations, but often large bureaucratic hierarchical, organisations that are able to collect resources in order to achieve certain – more or less public – goals, but without being accountable.

The next part treats the phenomenon called here “ambivalent discourse”. It is argued that the key to interpreting the Eastern European (or just Romanian) frame of mind is not the distinction between the private and the public sphere (as suggested by Katherine Verdery). On the contrary, one should see how the borders between the two spheres are regularly crossed, how the elements of one sphere are used in the other one. Further, that ambivalence is not the characteristic of a cynical, immoral or amoral personality. On the contrary, under certain conditions it makes possible the creation, (self)-presentation of a coherent individuality that is acceptable both inside and outside. The chapter concludes with three short case studies presenting ambivalent discourse and the building of a public.

Then some of the topics discussed in the letters are presented. It is analysed how the images of the letter writer and the addressee are built up, what is the role of opening and closing formulae, what are the limits of being a “personality”, and how a letter is

transformed into a case. From the rich variety of issues offered by the letters, the following were analysed: common matters and the moral code of social being (cohabitation, police, law and order, common property, urban mentality and local authority), social issues, the problem of the “people” and of the “nation”, what is the role of the elite, and the image “common people” have of an ideal society.

In the last part, on the basis of material offered by the letters, it is discussed that the new order (in a Weberian sense) produced after 1989 is legitimate, but not valid. This refutes both radical assumptions presented at the beginning, i. e. that the opinion leaders have an (almost) absolute mastery of the values, beliefs of society, respectively that the two realms are completely separate. The views, beliefs, values that appear in the letters show something different: a. most of the major topics around which public good was thematised during transition either had a different meaning (democracy, equality, property, freedom, free enterprise, etc.), or were practically absent (market economy); b. certain topics – first of all justice – received an attention well beyond that discernible in the official public sphere; c. often the topics commonly present in the public sphere received an instrumental function: they were used in order to help the letter writers present their private problems, grievances, etc. as public issues.

The period of transition in Eastern Europe was dominated by two types of hope. One considered that democracy, market economy could be easily put into practice because – due to some historical antecedents – this political and economic order was the normal state of affairs for them. It was neglected that those societies could have several traditions, and they could often be contradictory. The other hope believed in a “grand solution”. This meant the existence of a clear, consistent model and that there were techniques, methods already tested somewhere else, and that they could be applied practically anywhere. Further, this also

meant that there were principles that were able guide any society in a good direction. This also implied that conflicts are either inexistent, or can be easily “managed”.

Belief in a natural, organic development of society and belief in a universal model are self-contradictory. Nowadays it is clear that the former was mistaken, but the second still rules the public sphere. However, at the level of everyday life none were used (even if they were known, or maybe even accepted). It seems that common people simply improvise. Their reactions to the challenges of radical changes can hardly be ordered around a coherent system of values, norms and goals. They try to do their best in understanding and manipulating reality, so that their idea of what is true, good, and beautiful, so what is right for them, receives the support of might.

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