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ADOLF HITLER AND THE NSDAP'S POLITICAL DISCOURSE BETWEEN 1920-1933
Adolf Hitler şi discursul politic al NSDAP între 1920-1933

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Abstract: *The following article presents the evolution of the political discourse used by Adolf Hitler, from the moment he became the leader of the Nazi Party, 1920, until 1933 when he seized official power at the helm of Germany. Moreover this study follows step by step the gradual changes and techniques in the propaganda that both Hitler and the NSDAP adapted and relied during their fast-tracking that culminated into a new fascist totalitarian ideology, known as "nazism".*

Keywords: Adolf Hitler, NSDAP, power, Nazi Party, political discourse, propaganda.

The European political map created as a result of the Treaties of Versailles and the new democracies that emerged after the Great War, proved to be much more fragile than they seemed. The new European liberal regimes had real difficulties in adapting to the challenges of the postwar world (Soviet victory in Russia in 1917, the German revolution of 1918-19 in Berlin, the Soviet Hungarian Revolution in 1919) caused many political crises.[1]

Disappointed and unable to find solutions in the newly established democratic countries by the Versailles Treaties, millions of common people started to look at the *authoritarian* and *totalitarian discourses*, which will become in some countries political or social systems. The start began with the Communists in Russia, followed by Benito Mussolini's fascism in Italy, Horthy's regime in Hungary, the Nazi regime in Germany, the regimes of Salazar in Portugal and Franco in Spain.[2] In each of these countries the political discourses of the leaders will gradually transform into authoritarian and totalitarian ideologies, that caught ground being directed against class or certain social categories.

The political discourse of the leader reached its zenith in Italy during the time of Benito Mussolini and later in Germany under Adolf Hitler. It must be stressed that no one can speak of a dictatorship imposed on the masses, but one in which the majority of the population accepted this meaning (the Nazi Party rose to power through democratic elections and not through *coup d'etat*. In these regimes different social classes or categories which in other systems would have been in opposition (in Germany we have the case of workers and the bourgeoisie), eventually were united by the political leader's (Hitler) nationalistic discourse. This unity of the masses under the leadership of Hitler can be seen very easily if we compare the results of the elections in Germany, from May 20, 1928 and September 14, 1930. In the elections from 1928 the NSDAP only gained 2.6% (12 seats), but 2 years later, in 1930 the percentage rose to 18.3% (107 seats) becoming the second most powerful political party in Germany.[3] Thus we can notice that in only 11 years (1919) since

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[1] Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*, New York, Perennial, 2001.

[2] Imanuel Geiss, *Istoria lumii din preistorie până în anul 2000*, Bucureşti, Editura All, 2002, p. 472.

[3] http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/weimar_elections_1928_1932.htm.

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Hitler took the lead of the German Workers Party (later NSDAP), it became one of the most powerful political parties in Weimar Germany.

In this study I will focus on the political discourse of Adolf Hitler and his party, the NSDAP. I consider that this was the most vehement and acutest (for the masses) political speech in the first half of the XXth century that had the most adverse consequences among the German population and not only. The case of Germany after the Great War is related to the very complex political relation between Liberals and Conservatives, or between the Extreme Left and the Social Democrats.

When the First World War ended Germany was in chaos. For a nation of soldiers it was necessary to give them items that defined their moral and civic training. The population was convinced that the country could not be saved from this imminent collapse by the responsible parties "for the great shame of November 1918", or by the national bourgeois parties. In these troublesome times, on the political scene of postwar Germany, a simple Austrian corporal will make his appearance, called Adolf Hitler, but who through his actions will influence both Europe's and the world's history for the upcoming three decades.

In September 1919 in München, Hitler took charge of a small workers party, called the German Workers Party. During a meeting where over 100 people were present Hitler held a speech that lasted over 30 minutes; he later will recall this in his autobiographical book "*Mein Kampf*" as his first moment of his future political discourse: *"I talked for 30 minutes, and what until then seemed something impossible, now proved to be achievable; I could talk!"*.[4]

This could be considered the starting point of Adolf Hitler's political thought and action, and later the NSDAP's (Nazi Party) beginning. In April 1920 he finally left the army in order to dedicate himself exclusively to his political career becoming the party's head of propaganda. He managed to transform the NSDAP into the core of a great party, by attaching to it on one hand an external policy (repeal the Treaty of Versailles, unite a Greater Germany, expand to the East, and withdraw the citizenship from Jews) and on the other an internal one, by reorganizing the economic policies in a radical program comprised in 25 points: confiscation of war profits, abolition of earnings through gambling, acquisition by the state of industrial trusts and profits, expropriation of land without compensation for national needs.[5]

During this period Hitler on one hand added the National-Socialist words to the old name of the party extending it to NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party) and on the other, created a new party emblem in 1923, thus initiating the cult of the flag. His personal creation, the Nazi swastika from September 1933 will become the official flag of the Nazi Party. The red color represents the socialist movement, white stands for the national attitude and the black swastika represents the fight of the Aryan as a symbol of productive labor, but also anti-semitism. During the late 1920's the new party already had

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[4] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Bucureşti, Editura Beladi, 1996, p. 23.
[5] Marian Podkowinski, *Hitler şi clanul său*, Bucureşti, Editura Colosseum, 1991, p. 75.

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3000 members (only 100 in 1919).[6] In a short time Hitler earned the reputation in Germany as a man able to lead the country and who could detain a Communist revolution similar to the Russian one. Thus in 1921 Hitler went to Berlin to seek support from the other nationalist parties. Other leaders of the NSDAP were jealous or even skeptical and didn't want Hitler to lead the party. In his absence from Münich, these political leaders formed an alliance with another nationalistic party from Augsburg in order to depose him, but when Hitler returned, he demonstrated once again his political manipulative techniques. Arriving on July 11, 1921 to Münich he resigns from the Nazi Party forcing somehow the other political leaders to realize the mistake they made, because this resignation meant the loss of the advantages that the party gained so far. Adolf Hitler realized that without him the Nazi party will perish so via a letter that he sent to the current leaders of the party he emphasized that he will return only if he will be named chairman of the NSDAP and will have supreme power. After the vote, 543 for and 1 against, Hitler was elected as the new leader of the Nazi Party and on July 29, 1921, was presented to the crowd with the title of *"Führer"*,[7] a name that he will carry all his life.

Adolf Hitler used until his rise to power *"a programed plurality so perfect, that there was no class, or social category, or even a professional one, which hadn't received a program, according to the strivings of those who composed them."*[8] He was never in any sense a bourgeois politician, a conservative or a defender of capitalism, nor did the Nazi Party represent the small bourgeois class: *"The truth seems that the active Nazis were recruited from among the unsatisfied from all the social classes (except the peasants and farmers) so that in 1923 from the total members of the NSDAP, 34, 5% were workers, 31% small bourgeois, 6,2% lower servants, 11% state clerks, 13% small business people"*.[9]

The political discourse of Hitler followed an organized plan in order to create a party of elites, the avant-garde which would be capable of finishing successfully a fundamental revolution, because in his opinion *"only a disciplined and strongly centralized party that reached the peak of autocracy, is the only instrument capable to take over power in all bodies of the society"*.[10]

In order to better understand this political discourse of Hitler and the propaganda of the Nazi Party during its early years, we must look back to "*Mein Kampf*" in which he presented his concepts about the future German Millennial Reich. From the start he was very clear with the necessary plans and steps that had to be carried out (the deadline being 1945) but he was not taken seriously. This general doubt will change after 1939 (the attack on Poland) and 1941 (the invasion of the USSR) when the entire world saw that what he emphasized in his discourse between 1923 and 1925, had to be taken seriously. Even at the beginning of his political activity, Hitler laid out a few basic ideas for his political future: *"The task of one, of establishing a program of action is not at all the establishment of various possibilities to realize one thing, but to display clearly, how this is feasible; that is to be concerned about the less means than the purpose. What you decide in these conditions is the adequacy of an idea in its essence and not the difficulty of*

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[6] http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/timeline/nazirise.htm.

[7] Henrik Eberle, *Scrisori către Hitler*, Bucureşti, Editura Meditaţii, 2009, p. 29.

[8] Marin Voiculescu, *Doctrine politice contemporane*, Bucureşti, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, 1985, p. 120.

[9] Paul Johnson, *O istorie a lumii moderne (1920-2000)*, Bucureşti, Editura Humanitas, 2003, p. 137.

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 138.

its shape taking".[11] In addition the leader of the NSDAP stated that *"the person who sets a program of a movement must establish its goal, while the political person has to pursue its fulfillment. The first person will guide his thinking towards the eternal truth, while the other's action will depend rather on the practical realities of the moment. The importance of the first one resides in the adequate dealing with the absolute idea seen in the abstract, and the second one in the just appreciation of the given realities and their useful values".*[12] Here I consider that the political discourse of the self-proclaimed Führer caught ground among the great majority of German people within the situation created after the Great War (economic crisis, territorial losses, reduction of army, lack of a strong political elite, etc.).[13] Hitler argued further that *"the more an idea is fair from an abstract point of view its achievement is impossible in so far as it depends on people. Therefore the value of the creator of the doctrine can be measured only by the influence exerted on the population ".*[14]

Regarding the role of the NSDAP's movement, Hitler was of the opinion that it *"must not proceed towards an organization of satisfied and happy people, but to recruit the tortured, suffering, unhappy and dissatisfied persons (the majority of Germans were after Versailles). Before any actions we must not float at the surface of the social body, but we must let our roots to penetrate deep into the popular masses",*[15] furthermore *"a nation doesn't consolidate with weapons, but with the people and our movement must reach before any, the nationalization of the masses".*[16]

Referring to the necessary tactics that must be followed in order to achieve his political discourse and the propaganda of the Nazi Party, Hitler had in mind a series of obligations: *"in order to win the masses for the national reawakening, no sacrifice is too big (economic concessions made on the workers); the national education of the masses, carried out on the path of social rising; the nationalization (Germanization) of the masses can't be done by half-measures, but through concentration of forces deployed through fanaticism; winning the soul of the people (Volk) by destroying any enemy; the mass is only a part of nature and it conceives only the victory of the stronger or at least subjecting without conditions and maintaining the breed in the social body".*[17] Regarding the essential role of propaganda in his political discourse, a few key ideas were pointed out in "*Mein Kampf"*: *"in order for the propaganda to be an effective support for the movement (NSDAP) it must be exercised in a single direction, if not, because of the difference of the present two band intellectual camps (German bourgeoisie and workers), propaganda would be only understood by one of them, or rejected by the other".*[18] Additionally Hitler talks about propaganda as being *"the action on the broad masses, the limitation to a few points, few in number and repeated constantly, the use of a concise text, focused, known by heart and*

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[11] Adolf Hitler, *op. cit.*, p. 190.
[12] *Ibidem*, p. 191.
[13] Sir Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: A Biography*, New-York, W.W. Norton&Company, 2008, p. 194.
[14] Adolf Hitler, *op. cit*, p. 195.
[15] *Ibidem*, p. 293.
[16] *Ibidem*, p. 294.
[17] *Ibidem*, p. 296
[18] *Ibidem*, p. 319.

using affirmative formulas; maximum of perseverance in the propagation of the idea and patience in awaiting the results".[19]

I consider that Henrik Eberle was right when he described the situation of Germany after the Great War, as a country where "*the German population saw in Hitler a new Messiah, the Savior of the State from its shame and humility. They understood him as being the leader who would lead them out of the shame of the Treaty of Versailles and would lift them up to heights they never attained until then"*.[20] Hitler saw in people a useful material (the masses) to achieve his personal vision of domination and grandeur. In his opinion "*the German people had fallen because of the mixture of races but remained however broadly Aryan"*.[21] Influenced by various racist philosophies, mainly that of *ariosophy*[22] (term promoted by Lanz von Liebenfels), Hitler saw in the "Aryan" the warrior-creator of a new civilization, the *unchained Prometheus*.[23] Thus it's not surprising that in "*Mein Kampf"* he stated that "*the Aryan looked like a conqueror which subdued inferior people, whom later adjusted their practical activities under his direct orders, personal wills and goals"*. The German man represents according to this discourse, the master with whom he will make fantasies related to world domination come true. He found naturally millions of people who have submitted voluntarily in turn to become masters over others. The people followed him because they identified themselves with his initial goals and ideals. Hitler was aware of the fact that not everybody will follow him, recognizing this univocally in his book: "*the foundation for building authority is always popularity, and this is created by propaganda, propaganda that is more effective when it's guided exclusively according to the feelings of the masses"*.[24]

The second pillar of domination in the opinion of the Nazi Party's leader was violence. A question was raised many times, but no one could come up with a definitive answer yet, related to which of these two factors was in the last instance decisive in the process of rising to power by the National-Socialists. A recent attempt was made by Felicity J. Rash in the book, *"The Language of Violence: Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf"*, where she identifies in the doctoral thesis of Manfred Pechau (1935), an elite National-Socialist Party member, the importance of propaganda and violence, stated many times already by Adolf Hitler in *"Mein Kampf"*. According to Pechau propaganda is regarded as *"Kampf"* (derived from *"Mein Kampf"*) and the National-Socialist language is coined as *"Sprache der Kampfformen"* (language of violence), thus we can identify a strong interconnection.[25] On one hand Nazi propaganda was spread mainly through violence (role of the S.A. troops, or the failed Münich Putsch from 8-9 November 1923), on the other, this violence needed a more effective tool than just brutal force, a tool which became political propaganda. Various other attempts to answer this question were made by: Heinz Pechter –"*Nazi-Deutsch: A Glossary of Contemporary German Usage"*(1944), Victor Klemperer–*"LTI: Notizbuch eines Philologen"* (1947), Cornelia Shmitz-

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[19] *Ibidem*, p. 322.
[20] Henrik Eberle, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
[21] *Ibidem*, p. 14.
[22] Mickael Streller, *Istoria Societăţilor Secrete*, Bucureşti, Editura Litera Internaţional, 2009, p. 117.
[23] Adolf Hitler, *op. cit.*, p. 202.
[24] *Ididem*, p. 15.
[25] Felicity J. Rash, *"The Language of Violence: Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf"*, New-York, P. Lang, 2006, p. 29.

Berning–"*Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus*", Konrad Ehlich – *"Sprache im Faschismus"* (1989),[26] etc., where each of them presented various approaches towards Nazi propaganda and violence. I think an adequate answer will never be found regarding this question, because at one certain point both elements merged and became a single part of Nazi ideology. Violence or propaganda, were in Hitler's vision, the tools with which each individual could be eventually integrated into the national community.

For those who wanted to be integrated, the regime offered important benefits especially after the seizure of power by the Nazi Party; thus having the opportunity to climb the social ladder and get rich. According to the philosopher Ralph Darhendorf those who believed of themselves that they were against politics (apolitical) were also exposed to the *"temptations of lack of freedom"*.[27] In his opinion one of the decisive promises made by the National-Socialists was the link between the feeling of belonging and cohesion. Be it national euphoria or affiliation to a structure of the Party, this desire *"to be part of something"*, was found more and more in the souls of Germans either they were rich or poor.

The psychologist Stephan Marks connected this feeling of nostalgia, of belonging to something and the lack of freedom, to the "pleasure of regression", typical for human nature: *"The majority of Germans of that time transferred voluntarily their personal decisions on liability to a higher court (in our case Hitler or the Nazi Party), precisely because the magical world seemed more appealing than the real one. Acting in this way they tried deliberately to remain outside the responsibilities"*.[28]

The metaphysical element of National-Socialism responded to the need for meaning, probably always present and met with the desire of "belonging".

With the disappearance of order (very stable during the Empire) now a significant part of trust in the divine power was lost, thus the interpretation of the diffuse world proposed by the political discourse of Adolf Hitler gained attractiveness. This fondness was caused because of the highly fragmented type of political discourse offered by Hitler, which was regarded by many as a quote in which each could get what they convened. Only the clear headed and familiar with political thought and terms understood before 1933, that this discourse consisted actually in the hatred of Judaism and Jews.

In conclusion I want to point out a few ideas:

-The political discourse of Hitler objectified in the propaganda of the Nazi Party, appeared and developed in Germany during the Weimar Republic when there was a fierce political battle for hegemony between the left and right.

-Hitler understood perfectly that the two antagonistic social classes (bourgeoisie and workers) separately couldn't succeed, and it takes a new force to approach them in achieving a single goal (in his view this was the revival of Germany through a National-Socialist state).

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[26] *Ibidem*, pp. 30-31.

[27] Ralph Darhendorf, *Versuchungen der Unfreiheit- Die Intellektuellenin Zeiten der Prüfung*, Munich, Editura C.H. Beck, 2006, p. 25.

[28] Stephan Marks, *Warum folgten sie Hitler ? Die Psychologie des Nationalsozialismus*, Düsseldorf, Editura Patmos, 2007, p. 42.

This was recognized even in *"Mein Kampf"*: *"the task of the Party is to create a common platform on which both sides in the dispute should meet. This platform is National-Socialism"*.[29]

-To motivate his future decisions or concrete actions, Hitler stressed from the outset his position within German society: *"I don't need the German bourgeoisie, it needs my movement. The blame is on the bourgeoisie that failed to make the industrial proletariat, instead of taking the leadership they gave it on the hands of Marxism. I have created the idea of National-Socialism and I will realize it brutally, if necessary by force"*.[30]

-On his way to absolute power, Hitler encountered some moments of difficulty (1923 and 1932) but managed to adapt to the new events. It is interesting that although he clearly stated his intentions, he was not stopped in time, exposing clearly that: *"I'm ready to create together with the Conservatives a coalition Government for the awakening of Germany, but in the future only a National-Socialist Government can act"*.[31]

-Another example of the flexibility of his political discourse, was formulated in a plastic way by the future Propaganda Minister of the NSDAP, Joseph Goebbels: *"What record must we put on today, national, social, or sentimental. We have all of them we only need to choose the proper one"*.[32]

-Regarding the ideological problems and racism, he clearly specified in the basic ideas of his discourse the following: *"Where wood is cut there are chips flying. Do not believe that reaching out to power there will no longer be brutality. We have no intention to hang all Jews to the telegraph pillars, but the spirit of Judeo-Marxism must disappear from the National-Socialist state governed by the best forces of the nation"*.[33]

After seizing official power (January 30, 1933) nothing more stood in the way of achieving Hitler's or the NSDAP's policy, thus gradually acting through official measures (Nürnberg Racial Laws against Jews and foreigners), the use of symbols or other graphics (flag, the swastika), social ones (language, religion, ethnicity) or genetic ones (skin color, hair color, stature, race), all important elements in creating the domination of the Aryan race – the cornerstone of Hitler's political discourse.

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[29] Adolf Hitler, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
[30] *Ibidem*, p. 89.
[31] *Ibidem*, p. 90.
[32] Marian Podkowinski, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[33] Adolf Hitler, *op. cit.*, p. 101.