

# Communication - Instrument of Politicians

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**Abstract:** *The following study emphasises the importance of the communication process in political life. In order to show this, we have analyzed several forms of communication, as well as the way in which politicians use these forms of communication in public appearances. For this purpose we have analyzed three party presidents: Emil Boc, president of the PD-L (Democrat-Liberal Party), Victor Ponta, president of the PSD (Social Democrat Party) and Crin Antonescu president of the PNL (National Liberal Party).*

**Keywords:** *verbal communication, nonverbal communication, interpersonal communication, paralinguistic communication, Aesopian communication, wooden language.*

The ideas from which we started to structure this material refer to the importance of the process of communication in political life, as well to the different ways of communication some of the most visible politicians in Romania use in public life. As we all know, the field of politics is a very dynamic one and politicians, be they more or less important, use communication to promote their projects, ideologies or to protect their interests. Being in permanent contact with the electors, the media or the members of his own party or other parties, a politician always has to meet political, economic or social challenges. The higher the position in the party hierarchy or the higher the public function, the higher the daily challenges. Although all top politicians of all the parties in the Romanian political spectrum fully use the process of communication, not all of them seem to be aware of the colossal importance that this process has in their lives. Those who are aware of the power of the word make fewer mistakes, and those who are not make more mistakes during their daily speeches, but it is certain that they all make smaller or bigger mistakes. From our point of view, the value of

a politician is given by content and form. By content we mean the actions of the politicians, as well as the substance, coherence and consistence of their messages. By form we mean the way in which politicians manage to send their message. From our point of view, the value of the messages, the form in which politicians present their content is very much represented by their communication abilities. In regard to presenting the message, there are several categories, as follows:

1. Politicians that verbalize very well, but have a hard time at expressing themselves through writing;
2. Politicians that verbalize very well, but are not very good speakers;
3. Politicians that speak and write very well.

The strongest candidates should be in the third category. Most of the times the oratorical skills are trained with time, meaning that by practicing aimed verbal communication, with time politicians manage to have a certain fluency, intelligibility and power of persuasion. As for the written messages of politicians, these are taken care of, especially in the case of those who are not gifted in this area, by councillors.

Out of the forms of communications most used by politicians we will choose, for the analysis of their communication behaviour, four forms: verbal communication, nonverbal communication, interpersonal communication and Aesopian communication. Political communication is not among them because it encompasses them and it is basically a result of the four.

Our scientific approach will be analytical-descriptive, and for research methods we used content analysis (the analysis of public speeches – direct or through the media) as well as the observation method with its two forms: participative and non-participative. The observation charts focused on the four communication forms in the case of all the politicians we have analysed.

To better understand our scientific approach, we thought that in the theoretical part of this study we should define and describe the four forms of communication through which we will analyze the profile of each politician we considered to be important in the Romanian political spectrum in the practical part.

Verbal communication: refers to the ability of the human individual to use language in order to send a message. Verbal communication is based on the semiotic function. The unit of measurement of verbal communication is the word. Verbal expression can be simple when the individual uses sentences or complicated when phrases are used. Memory and the degree of intelligence are very important parameters which influence the ability of the individual to use verbal communication. From our point of view, there are factors that have an influence on verbal communication, such as: the amount of information, the quality of information as well as the experience of the individual. The personality structure and the mental structure are also extremely important (the way of thinking of a science graduate is different from the way of thinking of an arts graduate). As for the political actors in Romania, a certain aspect must be mentioned: the differences between the reality described through words and the reality described by actions have to be eliminated.

Nonverbal communication: refers to the way the human individuals express themselves using facial expressions, gestures, body and arms position, head and eye movements etc. “A picture is worth a thousand words” is an undisputable truth in advertising. In the same way a gesture can say more about an individual than he or she can express though verbal language. A difference between the two forms of communication could be the following: the truth can be more easily disguised through verbal communication than through nonverbal communication. In other words, from our point of view, nonverbal communication is more honest, with fewer alterations. A very important parameter regarding nonverbal communication is the degree of expressiveness. Charisma and empathy also play fundamental roles in nonverbal communication. In our study we will also analyse the way politicians dress as a way of nonverbal expression.

Interpersonal communication: refers to the individual-individual or individual-group communication. This form of communication uses verbal and nonverbal communication and emphasises the behaviour of the individual during direct semi-direct and indirect contacts. In regard to politicians, we are interested in their behaviour in front of the camera or the microphone in radio studios.

Aesopian communication: refers to the capacity of the individuals to express themselves through fables, proverbs, sayings etc. In regard to politicians we are interested in a special form of Aesopian communication – wooden language.

Along with these wider forms of communication we have also taken into account another parameter that seems less important at first, but which is extremely important, especially in the techniques of collective persuasion: voice pitch, voice tone, voice intensity, the number of words expressed at certain time intervals, breaks between words etc.

Having taken these parameters into account we will now try to analyze the communication behaviour of several present day political personalities which have a higher media exposure compared to others. We will try to analyse politicians from several political parties to see if the ideological expression brings differences or resemblances between these political actors. The resemblances and differences must be understood in respect to the speakers, but also in respect to the audience or receptors. Before analyzing a certain politician we will also provide a brief description of his political career.

### **EMIL BOC:**

Member of the PD (Democrat Party), he became president of the Cluj PD branch. In 2000 he became deputy in the Romanian Parliament, where he was noticed by the media thanks to a very active attitude. In 2004 he became mayor of Cluj-Napoca and also president of the PD. After the PD and PLD (Liberal Democrat Party) merger he became president of the PD-L. He has been the Prime Minister of Romania since 2008.

### ***Verbal Communication:***

With a background of law studies Emil Boc's language has many elements from this area. He has the ability to speak well in public as well as in shows but, from our point of view, he is not an excellent speaker. He has certain verbal tics such as: 'I repeat', or 'let's speak bluntly'. He speaks Romanian correctly, but he sometimes makes small mistakes criticised by the media. Sometimes one can feel through his accent that he is from Transylvania. He does not use long phrases, speaking mostly in simple sentences and he uses the enumeration technique (one, two, three...) in order to be as clear as possible. He speaks English well or at least much better than many politicians his age. He is not a supporter of long speeches and his appearances in the media are usually short, dealing with a certain issue. From our point of view, Emil Boc has a slightly politicized and slightly ideological technical discourse. The public communication of the Prime Minister is not very good because of the numerous contradictory ideas that he has supported, but here much of the blame rests on the image councillors, who either do not archive the media materials in order to avoid future mistakes, or do not have any influence on him. A weak point in his public image is brought by his permanent approval of President Băsescu's ideas, a feature that is always emphasised by political opponents and by people in the media. We think that a positive aspect of his language is that Emil Boc rarely attacks his opponents and even then only as a form of counteraction. He focuses his speech on technical aspects and as far as the political side of his discourse goes he is a proponent of a so-called pacifist language. A last aspect of his language which we want to underline is that it has an optimistic tone, full of promises which should come true in a near or more distant future. After 20 years from the events of December 1989, people do not really have patience in regard to the rise of living standards, and promises made and not kept by politicians for 20 years have transformed the population from trustful to distrustful. We think that, instead of creating cohesion, the Prime Minister's optimism has a boomerang effect and causes even more distrust. In the context of interpreting the Prime Minister's messages an important role is played by the media, which often interprets his words in a not very favourable way.

### ***Nonverbal Communication:***

The Prime Minister's facial expression and gestures are not expressive. We think that he mostly has an inexpressive static facial expression. From this point of view, verbal messages are not accompanied by the power of nonverbal messages in his speeches. This leads to quite flat messages that do not convey power, safety or trust. In public appearances his body is straight, which gives the Prime Minister's image a dignified and sometimes rigid (standing his ground) attitude. Arm movements are seldom noticeable, these being present especially when he makes the enumerations we mentioned when we analyzed verbal communication. The head movements are also not very expressive. As for the eyes and eye movement, we can say that these

are very hard to notice, because Emil Boc wears glasses. But the glasses also have a positive side regarding image, giving a greater presence or an intellectual character to the one who wears them. In regard to clothing, Emil Boc makes public statements while wearing dark coloured suits and white shirts. This standard attire gives a certain weight to his words as well a certain degree of stuffiness. When meeting people he often gives up his suit, and wears light coloured shirts, which gives a certain nearness towards people and makes him more approachable (more humane). In regard to the Prime Minister's height we think that a man's value results from what he represents (what he says, what he does), and we consider all the criticism on this matter as being malevolent and irrelevant. But we have to say that from a social-psychological point of view tall leaders have certain advantages when it comes to the way they are perceived by the public.

### ***Paralinguistic Communication:***

The voice pitch is pleasant to the ear. The tone is medium like in the case of most people. Voice intensity is again medium, not too strong or too weak. Emil Boc speaks very fast, so the frequency of words per minute is very high, but despite this he is clear and intelligible. From the point of view of paralinguistic communication, Emil Boc is a man like most of the citizens of this country.

### ***Interpersonal Communication:***

One of the Prime Minister's great qualities is the fact that the public offices that he has held have not altered the way he relates to people; he is still a man of flawless morals, a man close to the people, with a lot of common sense and modesty. His meetings with people are not very common, but the way he relates to them is not one of Prime Minister to man, but man to man, which gives him a high degree of popularity, despite the unpopular actions he has had to carry out during his term. We think that direct and semi-direct contact with people give the greatest advantage to the Prime Minister's image.

### ***Aesopian Communication:***

Many of the messages sent by Emil Boc in the past are contradicted by present day messages. Despite this he speaks clearly and openly, without using wooden language in order to hide the truth or a problem of the Government. Although he sometimes makes few statements he doesn't use a diplomatic language, but rather a direct language focused on a certain issue.

As a conclusion on Emil Boc as a politician, taking into account public communication, we think that the forms of communication through which he promotes his ideas do not bring a substantial support to the image of his personality, but rather diminish his value as a politician.

## **VICTOR PONTA:**

Former president of the TSD (the youth branch of the PSD). Elected as deputy for PSD. He became secretary general of the PD-L – PSD government in 2009, and is currently president of the PSD. From an ideological point of view we see him as a moderate social democrat.

### ***Verbal Communication:***

He studied law just like Prime Minister Emil Boc but, unlike him, Ponta's discourse does not have any technical elements from this field. Victor Ponta has a very well articulated discourse and we can say that he is a good public speaker. We have not noticed any errors of expression in his speeches, which gives us the right to say that he speaks Romanian correctly. As for verbal tics, these are not as frequent as in the case of Emil Boc, but there are certain words which he repeats with a higher frequency such as: 'I don't think so', 'I don't know' and 'our'. He is not a supporter of long phrases, his discourse having quite short sentences. He uses simple words, understandable by people with average or below average education. He does not have a technical speech, but rather an ideological one with a quite powerful leftist emphasis, while still having a certain moderation in what he says. His discourse presents Victor Ponta as a politically mature man, elegant, with real diplomatic qualities. This is why excessive language (meant as an attack towards political opponents) does not fit into his overall balanced and elegant image. It is his counselors' duty to warn him about this. His speeches are short, usually in the form of briefings or press conferences after party meetings. An important aspect of his speeches is the fact that he does not make promises that are impossible to keep, just like the fact that he steers clear of making false statements. He also appears on various shows where his language is just as simple and relaxed. The fact that he doesn't hide that he is close to Năstase or Iliescu might give him an image boost within the party, but it might not bring the same advantages among the electorate.

### ***Nonverbal Communication:***

Victor Ponta's facial expression is a static one. Often his facial expression is one of a child or of a person too young for the position that he holds. This facial expression sometimes indicates immaturity or even naiveté, which comes into conflict with his balanced and confident speech. In other words his facial expression decreases the value of Victor Ponta's discourse. His nonverbal communication does not contain any hand or arm movements to support his speech, but sometimes has head movements and ironic smiles when he disapproves certain messages of his political opponents, especially Emil Boc and Traian Băsescu. We can also notice a certain facial expression that conveys anxiety or discontent when he is being asked questions by his fellow party member Mircea Geoană. The position of his body is straight or slightly bowed because of his height. The fact that he is tall gives him an air of safety and presence.

Even if he wears glasses one can notice that he has a serious look which supports his speech. His nonverbal communication gives him the air of a cultured and elegant intellectual. He wears standard dark suits which are not to his advantage because his nonverbal language is that of an open person and dark colours flatten this openness or even neutralizes it. While meeting people on television shows he does not wear a tie and his top shirt button is opened, or he wears a shirt and a jumper. He does not have any movement tics or gestures as a part of his visual identity.

### ***Paralinguistic Communication:***

He does not have a deep voice pitch, but rather one of a mature adolescent. His tone of voice is pleasant to the ear, but not charming. The intensity of his voice is average, with slight inflexions in certain moments. From a paralinguistic point of view he fits into the profile of an ordinary man. The frequency of words per minute is also an average one and the pauses he makes between words give a certain weight to what he says.

### ***Interpersonal Communication:***

The way he relates to people is a good one, but we perceive him as less popular (warm) than Emil Boc. We have rarely seen him in the middle of a crowd and then he seemed to be slightly distant. The fact that he has not been the president of the PSD for long and that he has not had functions that needed public appearances covered by the media are reasons for which he has not had this kind of meetings very often. The fact that he had a high number of votes in Gorj county (even if the party is well anchored in this county) underlines the fact that Victor Ponta is notorious and popular at a local level, which indicates that he relates well to people, but unfortunately these meetings have not had a very good media coverage. In press conferences he appears to be an open person, not very aggressive, but firm. He seems just as relaxed on TV shows.

### ***Aesopian Communication:***

As we have already said Victor Ponta steers clear of making false statements even if sometimes his discourse is slightly politicized. He is not a supporter of wooden language and we have not noticed any traits of this kind of language in his discourse.

The conclusion on Victor Ponta's communication profile is the following: his public image is supported by the forms of communication he uses. This advantage also comes from the fact that Victor Ponta's image as a politician does not suffer at the moment from the erosion of being in power.

## **CRIN ANTONESCU:**

Former minister of youth, deputy and senator. he has been accused of being one of the politicians with the most absences in the Parliament. In 2009 he was elected president of the PNL, replacing Călin Popescu Tăriceanu. He is presently the leader of the PNL and one of the most vocal leaders of the parliamentary opposition.

### ***Verbal Communication:***

Crin Antonescu is a very good speaker and speaks well during his public appearances. Compared to the other two politicians we have analyzed, he is a much better public speaker. The leader of the PNL speaks Romanian correctly; he has a well articulated speech but he sometimes makes mistakes ('servisees'). He seldom has a technical speech and, unlike in the case of the other two politicians we have analyzed, the party ideology is very noticeable in his discourse, using many key words which emphasise right wing politics such as: the right, investments, difference, flat tax, PNL etc. He is a politician that always wants to explain a certain idea, a certain vision and this is probably due to the fact that he used to be a professor. Compared to Ponta and Boc, he uses very long phrases which are hard to follow by the large mass of voters. Despite this, his discourse is captivating, dynamic and attractive. Crin Antonescu counts a lot (when creating his public image) on this discourse. Not only is the structure complicated, but even some of the words that he utters are quite pretentious and are not used in the simple, day to day language. The main ideas in his public statements mainly refer to right wing programs and solutions to the problems in our society. He is not a pacifist; he is an attacking politician who does not hesitate to label (sometimes roughly) his political opponents. By contrast, it is exactly this structure which sets him apart from the two politicians we have analyzed previously. We cannot speak of tics in his discourse because it is ample and always changed thanks to his oratorical abilities, but there are two that he repeats frequently: 'considering that' and 'PD'. If the first one is automatic (he is not aware of it), the second one (PD) is used on purpose and wants to emphasise the following: the current PD-L is actually the PD and the PNL is the only (authentic) liberal and centre-right party in Romania. He mentions Traian Băsescu's name many times in order to show that he is the actual leader of the PD-L (PD). On television Crin Antonescu appears as a relaxed, good humoured politician who loves to speak in public.

### ***Nonverbal Communication:***

Crin Antonescu has an expressive facial expression, managing to send or reinforce verbal messages through face and eye movements. In our opinion this is one of the reasons why, although complicated, his discourse is still attractive. Antonescu manages to give weight to his words through nonverbal language. Along with face, head and eye movements, Crin Antonescu also uses hand and sometimes arm movements associated to the words he utters. These movements also give strength to his discourse. The body position is straight, but very straight, which is a disadvantage for the weight of his words. He has the advantage of being a tall leader, which gives a certain presence to his public image. He does not have any tics but sometimes on television shows he puts his hand on his chin, he leans on his right hand and leans his body on the same side. Crin Antonescu is a fan of the suit with or without a tie. We rarely see him dressed otherwise during his public appearances Unlike Boc and Ponta, Antonescu

is advantaged by dark suits because he is a political actor who attacks, not a pacifist. His face, facial expression and way of being go well with certain colours, as we said Antonescu is advantaged by the dark colours of the suits that he wears. As a last remark concerning Crin Antonescu's nonverbal behaviour we want to say that he sometimes has sudden (quick) hand and head movements and we think that these are a result of his dynamic way of being.

### ***Paralinguistic Communication:***

Crin Antonescu's voice pitch is the normal pitch of a mature person. The tone and inflexions are, in our opinion, a little bit high and not very pleasant to the ear, which is a disadvantage to his discourse. The intensity of his voice is above average but, because of the higher than average tone, his voice does not seem to be so powerful. The frequency of words per minute is quite high, which contributes to the amplitude of his discourse, but does not diminish its value. One cannot notice significant pauses between words; on the contrary, he seems to be hasty in his exposition, wanting to say many things in a short period of time.

### ***Interpersonal Communication:***

His meetings with people were covered more during the presidential campaign at the end of 2009. The media coverage of semi-direct and direct human contacts presented Crin Antonescu as having the same behaviour as all the liberal leaders, a little bit distant with people, or in other words he is not very popular (warm), having the attitude of a 1920's-1930's Romanian gentleman, but less so than Călin Popescu Tăriceanu. This attitude comes from a certain personality structure, but also from the fact that the PNL addresses a target group with an above average educational and cultural level. Indirect contacts or media statements show Crin Antonescu as a relaxed person, aggressive but not brutal, an attacking politician which we could compare to a swordsman who uses a rapier rather than a broadsword, who can score a lot of points (he can sting his opponent many times) but who does not deliver the final blow (tough, politically lethal).

### ***Aesopian Communication:***

He does not use Aesopian communication during his public appearances. Wooden language is not used but it seems to be used. We will explain this in the following. Our opinion is that Crin Antonescu does not use wooden language on purpose but, because of his oratorical qualities or because of the fact that he offers a lot of details about an issue, using many various words per time unit, he sometimes seems to be using wooden language, although he doesn't. Due to the very broad language he sometimes confuses the audience, involuntarily eliminating the main idea of the speech and wasting time with details.

We think that Crin Antonescu's public image is supported mainly by verbal communication but also by the other means of communication.

The conclusion of our whole study is represented by the fact that the communication process is indispensable to political life, with an extremely important role in creating the image of political actors and the forms of communication are almost identical for all politicians. The difference is in the way they build their image using some forms of communication more and other forms less. The public image of political actors is a whole formed by the personality structure of the political actors, by their physical and psychological abilities, as well as by the way in which they use the communication process.

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