



**Narrative Report concerning the Second Seminar of the  
Ovidiu Șincai European School  
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Odorheiu Secuiesc, 22-25 April 2010**

The second seminar of the “Ovidiu Șincai” European School took place in Odorheiu Secuiesc in the interval 22-25 April 2010. Its main theme was *Preparing the Elites for Communicating in the Public Space*. Lectures were presented by:

- **Doru Pop**, Professor, Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca – **“Preparing the Contact with Mass Media”**;
- **Cristian Pîrvulescu**, Dean of the Faculty of Political Science, State University for Political Studies and Administration, Bucharest – **“Media and Power in Politics”**;
- **Ioan Deac**, Professor, “Carol I” National Defence University, Bucharest – **“Communication in Crisis Situations”**;
- **Anne Jugănar**, Director of the “Ovidiu Șincai” European School – **“Communication and Political Marketing”**;
- **Aurora Liiceanu**, Senior Researcher within the Psychology Institute of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest – **“The Psychological Dimension of Communication in the Public Space”**.

Below are the main ideas which emerged during the presentations and the debates:

**1. Doru Pop – “Preparing the Contact with Mass Media”**

Mass media represents an assembly of instruments specific to the present society. However, sometimes monopolies can have a negative effect over the free press. Manipulation through media can be avoided only by a plurality of opinions. It is true that there are many interests and manipulation from other institutions, but it is not the press that has the power, only the citizen can choose. With the emergence of blogs mass media is democratizing, the citizen becoming a direct source of journalism.

Usually, the commercial element prevails in the choice of media subjects. This indicates the general level of interest of the society. But there is also an educational role of mass media which has to be fulfilled mainly by the public mass media channels. In some extreme cases the law can even preserve a normal environment for the development of mass media system, both public and private. What is more important, though, is applying the existing norms to the daily activity. Public institutions must deliver the public information, by respecting the European provisions and practices in this field.

Non-verbal communication represents the element that significantly modifies communication in all fields, also in politics. People are usually incapable of controlling non-verbal communication, thus sending messages with all their body. According to Albert Mehrabian, communication is achieved 7% by words, 38% through voice or tonality and 55% by the non-verbal.



The fundamental principal of political communication is that a convergence must exist between signals on all channels, so that the message must be credible and clear. The attempt of impersonating somebody else is always doomed to fail. The non-verbal aspect is harder to manipulate, as it belongs to another level than the rational one.

As P. Ackermann shows, non-verbal signals must be read in congruence among them.

The main elements in televised communication are visual contact (glare), facial expressions (mimic), gestures, posture and body language. The face is the most expressive body part; that is why mimic has a great importance in sending the message. Other elements contributing to a good direct communication are proximity, smell, touch, clothes and social symbols.

Although the post-1989 Romania has witnessed several electoral rounds, we can say that only after the 2000 elections and especially after the 2004 elections the stage of “primitive politics” ended and the stage of “systematic politics” began. On one hand, the specificity of events is larger than the one offered by the “deformed” electoral processes from the beginning of the 90s and more specific than the emotional one from 1996. On the other hand, the post-electoral effects of the 2000 and especially 2004 and 2007-2009 campaigns had a major impact over public and symbolic interaction, the imaginary field being totally altered by the new political marketing practices.

The “technological” stimulation of the voters’ attention had replaced the ideological and ideas stimulation, the show irrevocably substituting public dialogue. Paralyzed by media attacks, voters are “brought back to life” by the same methods that “sedated” them: verbal violence, visual aggression, scandal subjects and topics. By turning politics in a market of objects and ideas, image and marketing specialists went on selling politicians as mere products of the consumption society. Caught in all this

image mixture, voters have to make a double effort: one of personal option and the other of ideological clarification.

## 2. Cristian Pîrvulescu – “Media and Power in Politics”

Within the contemporary society the way in which public opinion is formed and in which public opinion has an influence over politics is increasingly important. A fact no longer exists unless it is commented and if people are taking it into consideration (critically or affectively).

As Aristotle shows, the criterion of truth is the correspondence between reality and what is said about it. In the case of the volcanic ash cloud that recently affected European air traffic, media has influenced political decision, however without having a precise certain information. Information without a correspondent in reality leads to political side-slips. In this case, the positions of politicians, joined to the opinions of some scientists and conveyed by the media to citizens created a chain of conjunctions which were unfavourable to the normal continuation of air traffic.

Another case, the tragic accident of Smolensk involving the Polish presidential plane, was reflected by Romanian media without having coherent and concrete information. Ignoring the fact that, usually, the simplest possible explanation is the correct one,

astonishing hypotheses have been launched, so that public opinion was convinced by some conspiracy alternatives. Conspiracy theory is a consequence of modernization and rationalization concerning



communication in the public space. All that escapes direct perception thus becomes a subject of disputes.

In the case of communication related to the economic crisis, things are much more serious. In some cases, ignoring the capitalist type of causes, it was considered that market economy would be the main cause of the crisis, although the latter is only an unpredictable mechanism. As a result of this type of incomplete information, in the United States people no longer believe in the possibility of the “American dream”. Fortune making of regular people is no longer considered as possible, partial models being contemplated.

In Romania, social models of the population, as they are promoted by the mass media, are extremely problematic. Moral figures are no longer emphasized, so that priority is given to models of easy gains by any means. At the same time, the critical attitude towards politics is not at all shared by common people, although those involved in politics are perceived as having more chances.

Romanians' perception regarding democratic institutions was also altered by media. Thus, if we consider the parliament, the effects of its activities are perceived as objectives (for example, law-making, common good etc.), and bicameralism remains an enigma for the majority, according to polls. Therefore, voting in the 2009 referenda (for reducing the MP number and abolishing the Senate) was seen as a punishment of politicians, under the immediate effect of the sustained media campaign, without taking into consideration the content of alternative proposals.

Another result of the perception created by mass media is also the approval by most Romanians of the majority dictatorship, manifested by radical attitudes and increasing violence within the society, ethnic and religious intolerance. Thus, by employing advanced technologies, extremist forces can use mass media, as in the interwar period, for establishing new types of totalitarian regimes. A more recent example of this type of manipulation was the anti-Roma media campaign led in Italy, on the occasion of parliamentary elections. Silvio Berlusconi took profit of the context in order to win the elections, leading the Italian nationalist right of fascist inspiration.

In fact, though, majority democracy is an illusion, while authentically democratic regimes are characterized by representation of minorities and of all social groups, for building a wider consensus. Lack of information leads, though, to the anti-democratic reaction against parliamentarianism. During crisis periods such reaction are usually commonplace, which are based on the legitimacy crisis of politicians, on fragmentation of party systems and on the lack of militant attitude (which, instead, can be found among extremist groups).

In Romania, opinion polls and marketization have brought serious damages to democracy and its development. Polls began to be used in order to manipulate public opinion and to create incorrect perceptions, which started to have an impact over reality, even if the latter was initially different.

### **3. Ioan Deac – “Communication in Crisis Situations”**

Crisis is the state of a system, which cannot fulfil its mission, its role. Crises can be:

- systemic (the system does not fulfil its objective)
- structural (the system's structure is incomplete)
- managerial (leadership of the system is inadequate)
- functional (elements of the system do not function)
- eventful (events affecting the system, the most frequent and visible)

The features of a crisis refer to intervention of new actors, saturation of the communication capacity, increase of public stakes, acceleration of time and growing uncertainty. There are also some internal process causes, such as inexistence of or non-compliance with some internal communication norms and rules (in the processes of information, decision, training, formation and promotion), blocking or distorting messages due to communication channels (speed of reaction or inadequacy),

communication barriers (generated by expectations, interpretation, language, status), inadequate background for informal communication (formalism, tension, rumours, disorder, etc.).



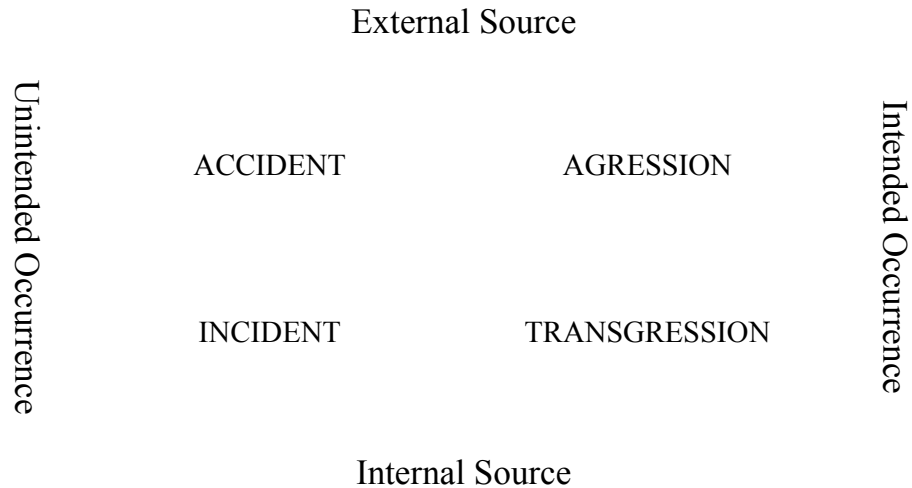
Among the most important external process causes are the excessive volume of information, organisational communication disturbance (manipulation of the public opinion), undermining the organization's credibility (manipulating external collaborators) and

the existence of a pronounced hostility from the public.

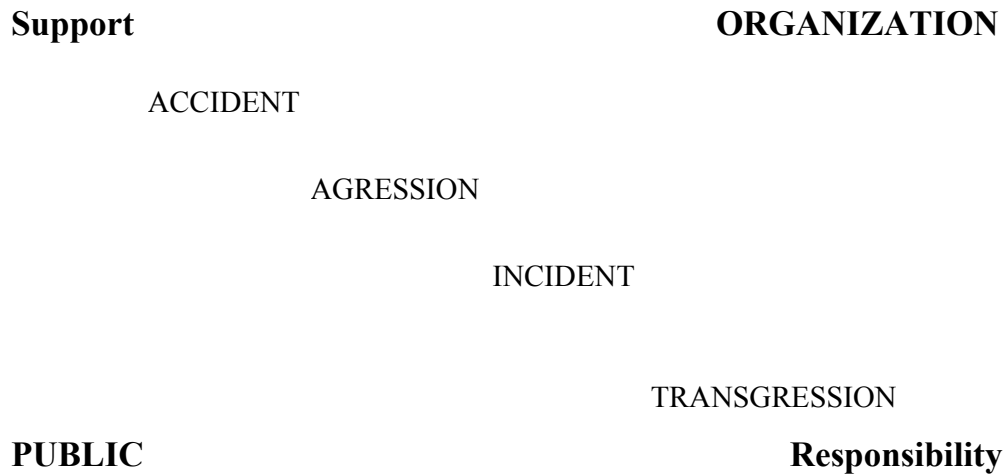
Events producing crises have been structured according to the following table:

External Source		
Technical / Economic	Destroying infrastructure Destroying environment Natural hazards International crises	Human / Social
	Sabotage Attacks Counterfeiting Rumours, denigration Boycotts	
	Production / service errors Information errors False information Bankruptcy	
	Failure to adapt Organizational difficulties Faulty communication Illegal activities	
Internal Source		

The typology of crisis situations can be reflected through the following graph:



In trying to make a hierarchy of situations with crisis potential the example of the Russian administration's attitude in the crisis of Kursk submarine was used to get to the next graphic:



For communicating in crisis situations a series of knowledge is necessary in what regards the specific of the crisis, knowledge of the field, assumed risks, predictable development of events, establishing responsibilities, coordination of communicators and available time. There are three communication strategies during the crisis:

- admission
- hijacking (by changing the interest theme, using the rhetoric of a plot or external accusations)
- refusal (by denial, silence, scapegoat tactics, pretended lack of information)

During a crisis, the role of the media can oscillate according to the media interest and the treatment of the crisis (according to the speed of reaction, its personalization, alarmism, simplification or extension). The principles of relating to the press must take into consideration reactivity, accountability, institutional transparency, message coherence, discourse attitude, management of immediate and long-term consequences, occupying the ground and knowing the journalists.

#### 4. Anne Jugănaru – “Communication and Political Marketing”

Political marketing represents the adoption of strategies and methods used by the economic marketing, in order to promote on the market a product / service, in the political field, for imposing a candidate / party on the political market.

Political marketing also includes electoral marketing. Electoral marketing represents a systematic and scientifically grounded activity implying knowledge of needs, desires, expectations and aspirations of a target-group of voters, in order to address messages for getting a favourable answer, quantified by votes, on the occasion of an electoral consultation.

In the context of political elections, the product or offer which is presented to the electorate is made up of several components which are most of the time indivisible: the candidate, the party and the ideology. These three components of the offer can induce confusion or even contradictions in the voter’s behaviour. For example, a voter can elect the candidate proposed by his favourite party, in spite of not trusting that person. On the basis of the same mechanism, the same voter can support a certain candidate concerning a local problem he considers important, although he is not a supporter of that candidate’s party.

Undecided and non-participant voters are more inclined to express disagreement and discontent towards a certain party, rather than support or loyalty towards a certain political group. For campaign managers, the loyalty level of the electorate is very important because it offers the party and / or the candidate greater

freedom in changing political directions. On the basis of this consideration, winning the vote of those voting for the first time represents a major objective, as usually the people’s first choice tends to be long lasting. More than other consuming activities, voting is an act of social



affirmation. Elections express the major cleavages existing within a society.

In order to understand the political market in a certain country one must acknowledge all the existing rules and restrictions. For example, in most countries television access is restricted. A phenomenon specific to the political market, which is not found on economic markets, is that of the anti-consumer. Within the electorate there might be a group which is not interested in supporting a candidate, but rather preventing another from being elected.

Both for new parties and for those having a tradition it is essential to establish, renew and refine a basic set of values. For this, parties must connect to the electorate in order to articulate a body of values in which the latter would identify itself. This process of articulating values defining the identity of a political group is all the more complex as it attempts to attract a larger segment of the public.

The tendency to give greater importance to the themes rather than to effective problems reflects greater attention paid to the style rather than to substance. In the relation that the politician has with the public through television, for example, the right word, catching phrases, will carry more weight than a “smart” idea.

The process of defining values is decisively influenced by the manner of selecting leaders and candidates. Like in the case of economic organizations, parties are also a reflection of its permanent “employees”. The most important members’ segment is the one the party will use for getting various functions in the case of winning elections. Following election success, parties can fulfil the expectations of those it represents in two ways: by promoting certain public policies or offering some public functions.

In what concerns communication, at an inter-human level it is achieved on four levels:

1. Logical (verbal) – what is communicated by sending and decoding the symbolic meaning of words. The word is the raw material of verbal communication; in its turn, the word is made up from a succession of signs having a symbolic value.

2. Para-verbal – what is communicated by the voice (volume, intonation, intensity, rhythm, accent, pauses etc.) and through verbal behaviours without verbal content, such as: laugh, cough, groan, sigh, burp, shriek etc.

3. Non-verbal – referring to gestures, pantomime, tacit expressions. The gathering of gestures, pantomime and attitude expressions can become a non-verbal language having particular meanings in different cultures.

4. Energetic – two persons situated at closer or greater range, without having a direct contact, based on senses (hearing, sight, smell, taste, touch, intuition) can, in some cases, send and receive messages without error.

If among the three levels (logical, para-verbal, non-verbal) there are no contradictions, communication can be efficient, that is the communication has a major impact over the receiver. The message will not have the estimated effect if between the three levels there are contradictions and not harmony and syncretism, which thus would determine incoherence in the communication act, coming from the different meanings on the three levels of the message.

The obstacles in verbal communication are: message ambiguity; polarization – the tendency of seeing reality in opposing stances and of describing it by extreme words (black or white, good or evil, nice or ugly, positive or negative etc.); generalization –

general type of statements are often generating conflicts, especially when they contain the words: *always, never, everybody, nobody*; obvious and repeated indiscretion; verbal diarrhoea – verbal bombardment without taking into account the interest of the receiver; egocentrism – it creates frustration and gradually removes such interlocutors from communication; secrecy – has a negative effect in communication and connection, as partners which are not made confidences feel excluded, offended, suspected; jargon – where the audience does not comprehend it or where it does not correspond to the status or to the education level, its use leads to communication jams; abstractness – abstract language raises interpretation and credibility problems; moreover, the higher the abstract level is, the more incertitude it develops.

### **5. Aurora Liiceanu – “The Psychological Dimension of Communication in the Public Space”**

Communication is based on inter-human relations. As a thorough research theme, communication has been studied starting with the 60s. Biology reveals that people also communicate unconsciously and video exposure currently led to an increasing role for non-verbal language. Logocentrism has brought into the light the importance of facial elements (eyebrows, eyes, ears).

Current communication channels are much more diversified than before: we now have talk-shows, forums, phones, e-mails and blogs. In current communication the so-called “blogosphere” is an important element, also used for therapeutic reasons.

In the relations between two individuals, the most important are ethnic origins,



personality and sexual affiliation. Adapting to the other is very important, both in the rural and in the urban areas. Age and social positions can be variable factors, according to cultural differences. Posture, body language, mimic, the gap between verbal and non-verbal are also important factors and can lead to rejection. The non-verbal aspect can also

be manifested by clothing and by architecture.

Spatial arrangement is very important, according to the communication purpose, indicating the relation: juxtaposition means equality, face-to-face denotes confrontation and the corner sitting means a close relation. The glance must not be fixed for more than three seconds. If it is too much time fixed there might be cultural differences, psychological disturbances, childishness or erotic interest.

Verbal communication depends on a series of formal elements, such as the voice quality, tonality and diction. Changing the usual presentation can have two effects: it can decrease credibility of the one making the change, but it can also disorient the opponent. In the human emotional register, surprise and fear are very close to each other. Confusion can also arise when we are talking about fear and anger, happiness and hatred, surprise and disbelief.

Physical contact is more or less important according to sex, age and cultural environment. Thus, for women it is more important, while for men it is insignificant. It becomes more important with increasing age. At the same time, within western societies touching has a reduced importance, while within Mediterranean societies it is very important.

Dichotomy is a necessary feature in human societies. Eliminating this difference leads to confusion and mental disorder. Usually, differences are best emphasized by the comparison between men and women. Thus, in general, the attitude towards failure is characterized by perseverance among men and by retreat among women. Also, in spite of the appearances, communication among men is, usually, better than among women.

## **6. Evaluation of questionnaires**

Questions regarded the evaluation of each speaker, according to informational content, novelty, interactivity and efficiency (on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest level), appreciations regard the organisation of the second seminar, compared to the first one, interaction with other participants and speakers and recommendations for future seminars.

Accordingly, the organization of the second seminar was considered superior and above average (most of the participants choosing the answer “Very Good” and “Good”). As far as the communication with other participants and the speakers, it was considered satisfactory at both levels.

Participants have recommended the following: more interactive courses, sending information about the lecturers in advance, smaller working groups and competition among them.