

Humor as a branding strategy in political discourse. A case study from Romania

*El humor como estrategia de branding en el discurso político.
Un estudio de caso de Rumania*

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Recibido: 9-IX-2012 / Aceptado: 27-IX-2013

Abstract

Abstract: In this paper we discuss the construction and consolidation of the political brand ‘The Tribune-Jester’ in relation to the use of ethnic humor in the form of joking in Romanian parliamentary discourse by a controversial political figure of Romanian politics, Corneliu Vadim Tudor. The data come from transcripts of the meetings from the internet section ‘Parliamentary Debates’ of the Senate and are analyzed using concepts from discourse analysis, pragmatics and conversation analysis. Under the guise of humor, the Member of Parliament (MP) profits by the rules of parliamentary politics and succeeds in portraying himself as a populist politician, in rebelling against the establishment and in voicing his nationalistic attitudes.

Key Words: Joking mode, political brand, parliamentary discourse, ethnic humor.

Resumen

En este ensayo se comenta la construcción y consolidación del *brand* político ‘El Tribuno-Bufón’ en relación con el uso del humor étnico en forma de chiste en el discurso parlamentario de una figura política rumana controvertida, Corneliu Vadim Tudor. Los datos proceden de transcripciones de las reuniones del Senado de Rumania, en la sección de Internet, llamada ‘Debates Parlamentarios’, y son analizados utilizando conceptos del análisis del discurso, de la pragmática y del análisis de la conversación. Bajo el disfraz del humor, el Miembro del Parlamento (MP) se aprovecha de las reglas de discurso parlamentario y se presenta como una figura política populista, se rebela contra el establecimiento y da voz a sus actitudes nacionalistas.

Palabras Claves: Marco chistoso, *brand* político, discurso parlamentario, humor étnico.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we start from the concept of ‘political branding’, particularly Fairclough’s (2006) discussion of ‘the Bănescu brand’, in order to argue that ethnic humour is used in parliamentary interventions as a strategy in order to style the identity of one of the most unconventional and controversial political figures in Romanian politics, Corneliu Vadim Tudor. Secondly, we aim to show that ethnic humour can be used in parliamentary discourse to mark a shift from the ‘serious’ to the ‘humorous mode’ (Mulkay, 1998). This shift is accompanied by changes in the turn-taking structure of the discourse, which challenge the rules of this activity type (Levinson, 1992), allowing for more interactional patterns to occur and acting as a trigger for a more relaxed atmosphere, where political judgments can be made to look relative.

Using Goffman’s notions of ‘frame’ and ‘footing’, as well as Levinson’s notion of ‘activity type’ and concepts from conversation analysis, we argue that joking, although a phenomenon in its own right (Davies, 1990), can also be used to further other purposes, such as political branding, an extension to politics of this commercial strategy.

The data we used are the transcript and our translation of the transcript of the meetings from the internet section ‘Parliamentary Debates’ of the Senate (www.cdep.ro), which offers a database that can be accessed by selecting the date of the meeting in the annual calendars.

We will first set the scene by providing an overview of Romania’s parliamentary system and then move on to the discussion of the place of the parliamentary debate in the larger context of political discourse, as outlined in the literature.

1. The political setting, actors and issues involved

The Parliament of Romania is a relatively young bicameral system, whose main function is the passing of laws in a general debate and a debate on articles, appointing and revoking high officials, including Romania's President.

Starting from Goffman's (1972, 1981) distinction between 'direct participants', 'side participants' and 'overhearers' further development of dialogue roles, i.e. participants vs. non-participants, Ilie (2010a) develops a corresponding taxonomy of parliamentary participant roles and institutional identities. Parliamentary discourse may be analysed following Ilie's (2010a) proposal of discourse frames: spatial-temporal, participant and interaction. When it comes to the participant frames, it is worth mentioning that, apart from deputies and senators, other overhearers may attend the sessions: representatives of the Government, representatives of the mass-media or ordinary citizens. The most important person during the session is the President of the Chamber of Deputies as he/she presents the agenda, establishes the order for voting, chairs the proceedings, gives the floor to speakers, moderates the debate, makes sure that the debates are orderly organized.

Interaction within the Romanian Parliament is conventional and regulated by a set of rules contained in various official documents. When it comes to the interaction frame, Ilie (2010a: 202) identifies and discusses two concurrent practices: "the use of an **institutionally** ritualised discourse and the use of an **individually** tailored discourse". In the Romanian parliamentary community of practice this is often translated as a desire to follow the procedures when delivering a speech (i.e. the MP puts his/ her name on the list and waits for his/her turn, speaks to the point, does not reply to the comments from the audience), which is mixed with a desire to add a personal note in his/ her speech (i.e. the MP makes remarks, uses quotations, references to previous speeches of other MPs, makes digressions, starts verbal exchanges with the audience while at the rostrum).

The interaction between MPs is governed by rules and conventions. Deputies and senators take the floor from the rostrum in the order recorded on the speakers' list and must not digress from the issues on the agenda (article 146 (2), article 148 (2) from the Statutes of the Chambers of Deputies). The regulations of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies do not allow dialogue between the speaker at the rostrum and the audience. What is more, in case of digression or non-observance of 'parliamentary deontology', the President draws the speaker's attention and if digression continues, may ask the speaker to yield the floor (article 148 (2) from the Statutes of the Chambers of Deputies). The President may even interrupt the session and have the speaker evacuated. Dialogue between the speaker and the audience is not allowed (article 151 (2) from the Statutes of the Chambers of Deputies). According to article 149 from the Statutes of the Chambers of Deputies, the president will give the floor to a senator anytime he/she wants to rebut personal attacks to his/her person made in the course of the debate. The time allotted for the reaction is not specified.

In her study on Romanian Parliamentary debates, Ilie (2010a) argues that this genre shows a tendency towards mitigating confrontations, in spite of the frequent direct and individualised addresses. Debates in Romania's Parliament are oriented towards "handling cross-party confrontation and interpersonal differences by means of diversified rhetorical devices" (Ilie, 2010b: 204). The author concludes that a strategy to mobilise audience is the use of parliamentary *ad-hoc* dialogue with the whole audience or with individual members of the audience.

Corneliu Vadim Tudor (b. November 28, 1949 in Bucharest) is a far-right veteran of Romania's political scene, leader of România Mare (Greater Romania Party), writer and journalist. Tudor was a court poet for the late dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu. He has written more than ten volumes of poetry and political commentary. Tudor was accused of having collaborated with the former 'Securitate' (secret police) under the code name Cornel. Essentially populist, he is known for his strongly nationalist and xenophobic views, as well as his reliance on the denunciations of political opponents. He is popular with some of the Romanians who feel left behind by free-market reforms.

In 1991, Tudor founded the Greater Romania Party, a nationalist populist party that mixes racism, mainly antihungarianism and anti-Semitism, and nostalgia for the good old days of communism, "with a membership of retired Securitate and army officers, as well as fierce nationalists" (Ilie, 2010b: 210). Statements made and articles written by Tudor and his party colleagues can also be described as ultra-Nationalist, anti-Hungarian, anti-Roma, anti-Semitic, and homophobic, irredentist.

In 2000, Tudor received the second largest number of votes in Romania's presidential elections, i.e. 33,17% of the votes. This ensured he would compete in the second round run-off against former president and Romanian Social Democratic Party candidate Ion Iliescu, who won by a large margin. Parallels are often drawn with the situation in France two years later, when far right Front National Party leader Jean-Marie Le Pen similarly drew the second largest number of votes and was elevated, but defeated, in the presidential run-off against Jacques Chirac. That is why, Tudor is sometimes called 'Jean-Marie Le Pen of the Carpathians'.

Roma and Hungarians represent the most important minorities in Romania (the results of the census in 2011 are the following: Roma –3,3%, Hungarians –6,5%). They are perceived differently by Romanians and 'pose' different problems (Băican, Toma, Csata & Zsigmond, 2010). In the following paragraphs, we will briefly describe their historical and social background.

Roma is an alternative English name for Gypsy, the plural of 'Rom', used to refer to the Romani people in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Numerous programs for the integration and social advancement of the Roma are taking place in Romania. However, they are still the most socially disadvantaged minority group, hardly

managing to integrate in society. The opportunity of unrestricted travel that rose with the accession of Romania to the European Union led to a movement of significant numbers of Roma people towards the West, mostly to Spain, Italy, Austria, Germany and France, in search for a better life. Roma minority is perceived by the Romanians as a source of national shame and Romanians tend to believe that, without this problem, the international prestige of the country would be much higher. According to Csepeli and Simon (2003), the public discourse on the Roma is dominated by hate speech and often touches on issues such as Roma living on government subsidies and charity, criminal activity and begging. A common belief is that Roma do not value education (Băican et al., 2010) and many remain illiterate. Because of their high birth rate, they are also perceived as a demographic threat.

Situated in the north-western part of Romania and neighbouring Hungary, Transylvania has been subject to border movements between the two countries according to various treaties and awards recorded in older and recent history as well. Consequently, it has been the centre of inter-ethnic tensions between Romanians and Hungarians. This confrontation reached its climax with the inter-ethnic violence in Tîrgu Mureş in 1990, followed by the freezing of diplomatic relations with Hungary between 1990 and 1994. In close connection to this, Kontler (2001: 89) notes that:

“While decision-makers in Romania and Hungary became somewhat more conciliatory throughout the 1990s, negative clichés and reciprocal stigmatization continue to pervade the political and the cultural discourse. The difficulties of transition [...] created a space for political groups who seek to exploit inter-ethnic tensions.”

In September 1996, in a ‘basic treaty’ signed between the two countries, the acceptance of the existing borders and the implementation of the European standard of the rights of ethnic minorities were stipulated. However, prejudices and negative stereotypes have continued. Turda (2001) comments that many Romanians share the concern of Romanian nationalists, that Transylvania is in danger of being occupied by Hungarians.

The Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (DUHR) is not a legally registered political party, but, importantly, takes part in elections. It is classified as a ‘union’ or ‘alliance’ with a cultural platform. DUHR was part of all of Romania’s governing coalitions. Gyorgy Frunda is a pre-eminent ethnic Hungarian representative, and thus a main target of Tudor’s attacks.

In his overview of the main themes of Romanian jokes, Nedelcu (2006) argues that the vast majority are based on stereotypes about the Roma, such as: promiscuity, excessive birth rate, violation of basic commonsensical cohabitation rules (e.g. playing loud music, holding noisy outdoor weekend parties, breeding horses in flats), the refusal to learn and work, *macho* attitudes. As far as Hungarians are concerned, the first on Nedelcu’s list of stereotypes is the linguistic issue: “not knowing the Romanian language and being discriminated against” (2006: 191).

2. Some views on political discourse

According to Fairclough (2006), a distinction should be made between discourses, genres and styles. He describes the relationship between the three as follows: a discourse is operationalised through the following processes:

- a) enactment (via genres, i.e. ways of interacting communicatively),
- b) inculcation (via styles, i.e. ways of being in their discursive aspect) and
- c) materialization (in infrastructures, technologies, architecture).

A ‘discourse’ is a way of representing some part or aspect of the world, characterised by specific vocabulary and grammatical features, e.g. “the neo-liberal economic” discourse (Fairclough, 2006: 3), political discourse, parliamentary discourse.

‘Genres’ are “particular forms (...) of communication which are specialized for trans-national and interregional interaction” (Fairclough, 2006: 3), a way of communicating and interacting, for example a format of the websites of international organizations and corporations, “ways of working, governing or conducting politics” (Fairclough, 2006: 28).

A ‘style’ is ‘the discourse moment’ (Fairclough, 2006), i.e. how things are said by a social or personal identity of various social actors: managers, politicians, teachers.

The three categories of ‘discourse’, ‘genre’ and ‘style’ combine in what Fairclough (2006) calls ‘order of discourse’, to be found both at the level of social practices and at the level of texts. He observes that discourses, genres or styles can mix, either from different orders of discourse, or from different and conventionally incompatible discourses, genres or styles from the same order of discourse, a case that he terms ‘interdiscursive hybridity’ (Fairclough, 2006).

There are other approaches to the analysis of genres and –whether it is the new rhetoric, systemic functional linguistics or ESP– they have much in common. Miller (1994) argues that genre is a rhetorical action based on recurrent situations. In the new rhetoric studies, ethnographic research or case studies shift the focus from the ‘features’ of the text to the ‘relations’ between text and context. In other words, new rhetoric genre theorists focus on “tying the linguistic and substantive similarities to regularities in human spheres of activities” (Freedman & Medway, 1994: 1). Miller (1994: 69) suggests that genres are bearers of “knowledge of the aesthetics, economics, politics, religious beliefs and all the various dimensions of what we know as human culture”. This means that one should discuss the regularities in discourse within the broader context of social and cultural behaviour.

In systemic functional linguistics, the theoretical claim is that language is not a monolithic entity, but it is part of the social system. Martin (1984: 25) described genre from this perspective as “a staged, goal-orientated, and purposeful social activity that

people engage in as members of their culture”. In this line of thought, Halliday and Hasan (1985: 101) add:

“A culture is expressed by the totality of what is meaning; this domain of meaning has been formed by the various semiotic systems – systems that cover ways of being, saying and doing. These formed meanings construct significant situational values; and it is the operation of the semiotic systems that permits the perception of what is or is not a significant situational variable.”

Swales (1990) proposes genre from the perspective of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Thus, genre is “a class of communicative events with some shared set of communicative purposes” (Swales, 1990: 58) which are recognised by members of the professional or academic community in which the genre occurs, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre.

Drawing on these distinctions, we can say that political discourse is enacted, among other discourses, by parliamentary discourse, that “displays particular institutionalised discursive features and ritualised interaction strategies” (Ilie, 2010c: 62). Parliamentary discourse is therefore a particular genre of political discourse, which in its turn displays several subgenres (Ilie, 2010a: 8-9), the debate being one of them. A debate is “a formal discussion on a particular topic and which is strictly controlled by an institutional set of rules and a moderator, who in Parliament is the Speaker or the President” (Ilie, 2010a: 10), therefore a mediated discourse, whose major strength is “the necessity of confrontation” and “the existence of opposite sides” (Ilie, 2010a: 10).

Van Dijk (2002: 150) further points to the complexity involved in defining the debate:

“A parliamentary debate is a discourse genre defined by a specific style, specific forms of verbal interaction (talk) under special contextual constraints of time and controlled speaker change, in the domain of politics, in the institution of parliament, as part of the overall act of legislation, engaged in by speakers who are MPs, representative of their constituencies as well as members of political parties, with the aim (for instance) to defend or oppose bills, with formal styles of address and argumentative structures supporting a political point of view... And this is merely a short summary of such a definition of a genre, which usually needs both textual and contextual specification.”

When discussing parliamentary debates, van Eemeren and Garssen (2010) start from the premise that there are specific conventionalized communicative practices which are dependent on institutional requirements. Thus, in order to fulfil such institutional needs, it is necessary to implement a specific genre of communicative activity: adjudication, disputation, deliberation, negotiation, consultation and ‘communion-ation’.

In our study, we will take into consideration Bhatia's (2004: 203) comprehensive definition of genre:

“Genre essentially refers to language use in a conventionalised communicative setting in order to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of a disciplinary or social institution, which give rise to stable structural forms by imposing constraints on the use of lexico-grammatical as well as discoursal resources.”

Thus, the communicative events that will be analysed are characterized by a set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by members of the professional community in which they occur, i.e. members of the Parliament. What is more, our attention is focused on a well-established member of this professional community, a fact which leads to the idea that he will have a much greater knowledge and understanding of the use and exploitation of genres than those who are apprentices, new members or outsiders. In the Analysis section, we will discuss the way the MP acts as an expert member and exploits resources to express not only ‘private’ but also organizational intentions within the constructs of ‘socially recognized communicative purposes’. Throughout this study, we will refer to a combination of textual, discursive and contextual factors in order to argue that ethnic humour can be used in parliamentary debate as a strategy meant to shape political identity.

The fact that parliamentary debates are public and official and now open to a very large public due to their transcripts on the internet, the expected style is formal and polite, without interruptions, heckling, backchanneling and many rhetorical styles. The examination of deviations in (verbal) behaviour during parliamentary debates can shed light on what is going on in this type of interaction. We will now present several theoretical concepts on which our analysis draws.

3. Analytical framework

We will briefly describe the way in which we are using these concepts.

3.1. Ethnic humor

We use the term ‘ethnic humor’ to refer to non-canned, intended, informal, and ‘applied’ humor (Mulkay, 1988), i.e. when social actors make use of humour for serious purposes, in various types of difficult interaction, and whose butt is an ethnic group. In the present paper, ethnic humour refers to occurrences of joking about ethnic targets (Hungarians) by the activation of two scripts (Davies, 1990), i.e. stupidity and opportunism.

3.2. Goffman’s notions of ‘frame’ and ‘footing’

The interactive model of frames (Goffman, 1981) helps a hearer interpret utterances by providing information about the activity in which he/she is engaged

as being, for example, delivering a political speech, making serious conversation, performing a play, joking. (for a discussion of parliamentary participant roles based on the interactive model of frames, see Ilie, 2010b). People use multiple frames to make sense of events even as they construct these events.

‘Frame’ refers to participants’ sense of what activity they are engaged in, and it is reflected in specific linguistic choices and in ‘footing’, which is a way of talking. This reflects the speaker’s adoption of one or several social roles in which he/she is active, or of a set of positions that individuals may take in relation to what is said. The two concepts interrelate in the sense that a change in our ‘footing’ signals a change in our ‘frame’ for events, our alignments, i.e. interpersonal relationships – to ourselves, to the others in the situation:

“A change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production and reception of an utterance.” (Goffman, 1981: 128)

Therefore, we use Goffman’s (1981) notion of ‘frame’ to distinguish between the serious frame, i.e. ‘the parliamentary discourse’ and the ‘non-serious frame’, i.e. ‘the joking frame’, characterized in the data by a particular trigger, i.e. ethnic humour, humorous topics which are mostly culturally bound and a turn-taking system similar to conversation.

3.3. Levinson’s notion of ‘activity type’

Levinson (1992: 368) defines “activity type” – which he distinguishes from “speech activity” but equates with “speech event” and “episode” – as:

“a fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded, events with *constraints* on participants, setting, and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions. Paradigm examples would be teaching, a job interview, a jural interrogation, a football game, a task in a workshop, a dinner party and so on.”

We used Levinson’s (1992) notion of ‘activity type’ to explain the role of restrictions on the kinds of contribution to the talk and the deviations from the norm., i.e. the disruption of the activity type at two levels:

- a) The ‘form’ of the discourse traditionally associated with its turn-taking structure. When this is ‘broken’ and turn-taking patterns similar to conversation take its place, this is apparently perceived by the participants as funny.
- b) The ‘content’ of the discourse traditionally associated with in terms of the expectations of the participants, i.e. ‘the rules’. Behaviours non-permissible among the participants as initiators or terminators of (humorous) topics and

violations of the code of conduct accepted for this activity type also have a humorous potential.

In our understanding, ‘the parliamentary debate’ is an activity type with strict rules, governing a highly formal type of institutional discourse, whose main characteristic is solemnity. These constraints can be noticed for example in the participants’ orientation towards monologue and in the fact that allowable contributions to talk are made only ‘via the President of the meeting’. Ideally, an MP should use this type of discourse in order to build a serious, trustworthy figure.

4. Analysis

4.1. Branding and politics

Political branding is an extension to politics of a commercial strategy which seeks to put a positive spin on political messages. While ‘branding’ has become an industry in its own right and has gone global, political branding is the result of blurring the boundaries between politics and the media. Fairclough (2006: 102) enumerates the principles of this technique:

“your brand should reflect your strengths, commitments and values – your ‘brand values’; your brand is your promise to the customer; you should consistently communicate your brand values in what you do and how you behave.”

Political branding was used for the first time in Romania in Traian Băsescu’s presidential campaign of 2004. The Băsescu brand (Fairclough, 2006) presents the politician as being characterised by the following attributes: unconventional, direct, disruptive, controversial, dynamic, flexible, simple. He uses communicative resources from colloquial language, popular entertainment and commercial advertising; he also uses humour, i.e. jokes, and laughs in a ‘clownish way’.

Senator Corneliu Vadim Tudor is often referred to in the media as The Tribune. In Latin, ‘tribunus’ designates a magistrate that had both military and civilian functions. In Romanian history the term has a more combative meaning, i.e. an activist in the self-defence of Romanian communities in Transylvania against the Revolutionary government in Hungary (1848) in the Habsburg areas.

According to Tismăneanu and Kligman (2001: 83) Tudor’s image is that of a person who fights for justice, the cause and the rights of the people, but also jokes a lot and uses theatrics to accompany his rhetoric: “a combination of antisystem nationalist caudillo and self-indulgent jester”. In a previous article (Săftoiu & Popescu, 2012), we identified and analysed the most widely discussed topics on Tudor’s agenda in

both the Romanian Senate and the European Parliament: *mafia* and ‘corruption’ in his home country. In one of the speeches in the European Parliament, Tudor takes a stand and blames the communist regime, although he was one of the ‘court poets’ of the Ceaușescu family:

(1)

Din păcate România a devenit frontiera sălbatică a Europei. A fost rău cu dictatura comunistă, dar e infinit mai rău cu dictatura mafiotă. Principalele brațe ale caracatiței mafioate sunt justiția și poliția care sunt roase de cancerul corupției. Din ianuarie 1990 și până acum, în România au fost comise peste 5 000 de crime rămase cu autori necunoscuți. România este raiul clanurilor de interlopi autohtoni protejați de justiție și de poliție, dar este și placa turnantă a pedofililor, șarlatanilor și a celor mai primitivi agenți străini.

Unfortunately Romania has become the wild border of Europe. It was bad with the communist dictatorship, but it is infinitely worse with the mafia dictatorship. The main arms of such an octopus are justice and police, which are devoured by the cancer of corruption. Since January 1990 to the present day, more than 5,000 crimes have been committed and they do not have an identified author. Romania is the heaven of shady gangs who are protected by the police and by justice, but it is also the turntable of pedophiles, charlatans and the most primitive foreign agents.

22 November 2010, Strasbourg

In his one-minute speech, Tudor foregrounds general issues from Romania (the *mafia* of opinion polls [...] has reached monstrous proportions, shady gangs are protected by the police and by justice) and presents himself as speaking for the country (I can testify that, in my country, Romania). Tudor blames the state institutions for not taking action against criminal gangs, but does not suggest solutions to the issues he raises. Thus, he only acts as a ‘speaking trumpet’, presenting himself as the defender of the homeland, and a fierce fighter against the mafia. Even the slogan of Greater Romania Party (*Jos Mafia! Sus Patria! Down with the Mafia! Up with the Homeland!*) is constructed on the dichotomy mafia –homeland and their attributes: corruption on the one hand, and honesty, on the other.

In his speeches, Tudor uses direct language and calls to action, presenting himself as a populist¹ politician, who speaks on behalf of ‘the people’ against a corrupt ‘establishment’. Tudor succeeds in drawing the attention of the audience by directly expressing his point of view, as in examples 2 and 3 below.

(2)

Eu nu acuz pe nimeni, dar au fost create și perfecționate mecanisme ale fraudei absolut scandaloase: sondaje de opinie mincinoase, turism electoral, liste suplimentare, voturi anulate ale oamenilor vii și voturi valabile ale morților, imense sume de bani și produse pentru mituirea cetățenilor săraci, convingerea părinților prin mituirea copiilor din școli, fraudă pe calculator și multe alte ilegalități. Salvați România! SOS poporul român!

I am not accusing anyone, but absolutely scandalous mechanisms have been created and improved to carry out fraud: lying opinion polls, electoral tourism, additional voting lists, annulled votes of living people and valid votes of the dead, huge amounts of money and products to bribe the poor, persuasion of parents by bribing children in schools, computer fraud and many other unlawful acts. Save Romania! SOS to the Romanian people!

7 October 2009, Brussels

(3)

Astăzi, 16 decembrie, sărbătorim jubileul a 240 de ani de la nașterea lui Ludwig van Beethoven, compozitorul imnului Europei unite.

În virtutea acestui excelent raport al Comisiei pentru cultură și educație, ca istoric și scriitor român, eu propun ca marcă a patrimoniului european un loc excepțional, unic în lume – Peștera Sf. Andrei, situată aproape de vărsarea Dunării în Marea Neagră.

Today, 16 December, we celebrate the jubilee of 240 years since the birth of Ludwig van Beethoven, the composer of the anthem of United Europe.

In virtue of this excellent report of the Committee for culture and education, as a Romanian writer and historian, I suggest as mark of the European heritage a unique place in the world – the Cave of St. Andrew, situated in the vicinity of the Danube mouth to the Black Sea.

16 December 2010, Brussels

In Romanian, a pro-drop language, the syntactic position of subject may be occupied by a full pronoun (*eu, tu*, etc. – I, you, etc.), but most often the pronoun is omitted since the category of subject is rendered by the verb form (*vorbesc, vorbești* etc. – I speak, you speak, etc.). If a full pronoun is used in the syntactic position of subject, it may have pragmatic meanings: the speaker either wants to emphasize his/ her position while uttering the words or the speaker wants to differentiate him/ herself from the interlocutor.

Tudor's use of first person singular pronoun is a discursive characteristic as The Tribune differentiates between himself and other categories of people, implicit in

agentless passive constructions: *Eu nu acuz pe nimeni, dar au fost create și perfecționate mecanisme ale fraudei absolut scandaloasei* – ‘I am not accusing anyone, but absolutely scandalous mechanisms have been created and improved to carry out fraud’. At the same time, Tudor presents himself as an authority, displaying expertise in a specific area: *ca istoric și scriitor român, eu propun ca marcă [...]* – ‘as a Romanian writer and historian, I suggest’ [...]. Membership categories² are classifications that may be used to describe persons and their associated activities: worker, brother, mother, friend etc. Tudor’s explicit use of a specific category (historian, writer, nationalist, Christian) is relevant for understanding how the speaker relies on his displaying legitimate power and it may also be discussed as an attempt to persuade his audience that his actions derive from high-minded principles on behalf of the ‘community’ or the ‘public good’, and not from personal motives.

5. The joking frame

In what follows, we argue that by using humour, ethnic humour in particular, Tudor consolidates his brand, which is thus better characterised by the name The Tribune-Jester.

Politicians introduce conversational resources and themes from everyday interaction in their discourse, with the purpose of creating:

“a more personalized view of political affairs, hide the unequal distribution of discursive resources along different social groups, and avoid political argumentation” (Márquez, 2010: 84).

Politicians cross the boundaries of their official role and social status, getting engaged in the so-called ‘political cross-discourse’ (Álvarez-Cáccamo & Prego-Vázquez, 2003). In this particular type of institutional discourse, humour is an instance of crossing the border: humour is ‘informal talk in formal settings’ (Archakis & Tsakona, 2011).

Parliamentary humour has been under scrutiny for more than ten years and it has been discussed as a means of identity construction (Tsakona, 2009) with a special focus on enhancing positive face of the politician and, at the same time, distracting the attention of the audience from more important issues. Humour in parliamentary debates has also been described as “a means of expressing criticism and aggression in a mitigated manner, without violating parliamentary rules of conduct” (Archakis & Tsakona, 2011: 63). In a recent study on parliamentary humour, Young (2012) draws on Fairclough’s (2006) notion of ‘orderliness of interaction’ and identifies acceptable vs. unacceptable form of orderliness in the *Dewan Rakyat*, the Malaysian House of Representatives. Young (2012) discusses hostile types of humor which are typically unacceptable, since they tend to promote animosity which may escalate disorderliness. Humor is also discussed as tolerated and acceptable when it plays a positive role in fostering in-group solidarity, and when it functions as a coping mechanism “easing dullness and tensions” (Young, 2012: 280).

We will move to analyse humorous interventions by Corneliu Vadim Tudor and identify their function in close connection with Tudor's attempt to build a personal political brand as opposed to a professional political brand (Traian Bănescu, 2004, 2007).

The data are transcripts of meetings from the internet section Parliamentary Debates of the Senate (www.cdep.ro) in which the senator delivered speeches. The criterion used in selecting humorous sequences was the presence of the comment 'laughter' inserted in the transcripts.

In the fragment below, an excerpt from a Senate Meeting in 2007, Corneliu Vadim Tudor (hereafter CVT) replies to a comment coming from the Senate House:

(4)

Colegul Puiu Hașotti vrea să ieșim din registrul serios și mă provoacă la glumă.	Our colleague Puiu Hașotti wants us to switch from the serious register and provokes me to start joking.
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14 May 2007, Bucharest

This remark points to the fact that the senator seems to be fully aware of the existence of two distinct frames: the serious and humorous frames as well as of their triggers. Moreover, he is perceived as a person who is known to go along with such invitations and to switch from one frame to another, depending on the context of situation or his agenda.

The fragment we have chosen to illustrate the strategies that CVT uses in order to consolidate his political brand, that we have referred to as The Tribune-Jester, is taken from the transcript of the Senate meeting (May, 27, 2002), whose topic is the necessity for a moratorium. Although the agenda of the meeting is serious, the meeting is not entirely framed in the serious mode owing to the speech given by CVT, where applause, comments, laughter, as well as dyadic talk occur, transcribed in the verbatim record of the meeting. CVT is in the opposition:

(5)

Domnule președinte de ședință, onorați colegi,

Nu mi-am scris un discurs, am să vorbesc liber, pentru că la urma-urmei, așa cum spunea Nicolae Titulescu, în familie nu se țin discursuri, nu se rostesc toasturi. Noi vorbim noi între noi, pentru că suntem legiuitorii acestei țări și interesul național reclamă, într-adevăr, să ne dăm mâna pentru a scoate țara din prăpastia acestei crize politice, economice, sociale și, în primul rând, morale.

Mr. President, honourable colleagues,

I have not written down my speech, I will speak freely because, as Nicolae Titulescu said, when one is in the family, there can be no speeches or toasts. We can talk as a family because we are the law makers of this country and the national interest requires that we take action together in order to raise the country out of the abyss of this political, economic, social, and, more importantly, moral crisis.

27 May 2002, Bucharest

The senator begins his speech according to the rules of this activity type, i.e. by addressing the President of the meeting and the honourable colleagues. Next, he sets the type of speech that he is going to make, i.e. a free speech, unrehearsed and from the heart, underlining that his speech will not seek conflict: ‘We can talk as a family’.

After this rather predictable and clichéd beginning, he deals with serious topics such as injustice, the mafia, the National Bank, unemployment, corruption – recurrent topics on his agenda. His strategy is to attack his opponents by giving concrete examples of facts and names from the opposition. The attitude that he manages to convey is that of a true fighter for justice, ready to make sacrifices in the name of the ‘public good’. What is more, CVT delivers his speech in a threatening and solemn tone:

(6)

Pe mine mafia și hoții nu mă vor îngenunchea; și ne mirăm că nici un rechin mare nu este băgat la pușcărie.

The Mafia and the thieves will not beat me to my knees; and we are amazed that there is no big shark in jail.

27 May 2002, Bucharest

This goes on for approximately half of the speech, i.e. 1980 words out of the total 3600, where the discourse stays in the serious frame. This first half, conceived in the serious frame, reinforces qualities such as ‘seeker of justice, vigilant guardian of national wealth, culture and values, honest, tough, and vehement’. The second part goes on as if to allow the audience to take a glimpse of the man behind the official

role: a relaxed, benevolent and full of humour conversationalist who can elegantly rise above differences outside the political debate, which rounds up the politician's image. In Fairclough's terms (2006), this is a case of interdiscursive hybridity, a characteristic feature of the Senator's unique style, i.e. his brand.

Both parts of the speech contribute to the consolidation of the Tribune-Jester brand, in distinct ways. This original combination of The Tribune and The Jester could be explained by Goffman's (1972: 93) observation that "joking is a way in which the individual makes a plea for disqualifying some of the expressive features of the situation as sources of definition of himself". In other words, CVT uses in his speeches 'joking' about DUHR, having as a butt the Hungarians' political union, as both a superiority stereotype and dissociation from the stereotype (Davies, 1990). The senator affects a style different from the one appropriate to the situation, conveying the implication that he disagrees with what he is actually saying. There is a discrepancy between what the senator is saying and what he is actually doing with words. CVT uses humour as a disclaimer for a disguised attack. Van Dijk (2002: 156) observes that "positions on ethnic policies taken and defended in parliament are not primarily personal opinions, but expressions of shared political party attitudes". In CVT's case, this is conveyed by the use of ethnic humour.

The senator skilfully shifts from the serious to the humorous mode by inserting humorous narratives, typically targeted at both minorities and Romanian MPs. Here is an example from the transcript of the same meeting, when CVT introduces a short humorous remark whose target is the Ministry of Justice during legislature 2000-2004.

(7)

<p>[...] distinsa noastră colegă, mereu absentă, Rodica Stănoiu. Și-a mai rupt ceva? (<i>Râsete, discuții.</i>) Vreun picior, vreo mână?</p>	<p>[...] our distinguished colleague, forever absent, Rodica Stănoiu. Has she broken anything again? (<i>Laughter, discussion.</i>) A leg? An arm?</p>
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27 May 2002, Bucharest

The butt of the joke is Rodica Stănoiu, a representative of 'the establishment'. In his speech, CVT foregrounds a particular situation (at one moment, Mrs. Stănoiu broke her leg and could not take part in the parliamentary sessions) and turns it into a general practice: skipping parliamentary sessions so that quorum could not be achieved and laws could not be passed. While CVT seems to be interested in the well-being of the person, what he is actually doing is to perform an indirect attack on the practice promoted by the corrupt elite. Under the guise of humour, he profits

by the rules of parliamentary politics (once he has the floor for a certain number of minutes) and succeeds in portraying himself as a rebel against the establishment. Such use of humour allows him to be disingenuous in disclaiming personal attacks; by only focusing on facts, he is successful in performing personal attacks.

Using humour in general and ethnic humour in particular may serve to attain some goals.

Firstly, it can help create a pleasant but potentially ambiguous image of the politician. The retractability of humour (Mulkay, 1988) or *decommitment* (Attardo, 1994) allows the eventual serious content of humorous discourse to be denied in the event of the speaker finding his/ her assertions to be socially unacceptable. This feature of humour is used by CVT to present himself as a second option for a large spectrum of voters, including both nationalists and non-nationalists. Actually, he claimed to have changed his anti-Semitic views in 2003, but as this more moderate stance lost him votes, he immediately reverted to the core GRP tenets in 2005.

Secondly, it allows CVT to act the unique role of self-appointed ‘Jester’ of the Romanian Parliament, which gains him popularity. Part of his political brand draws not only on (ethnic) humour but also on the paralinguistic features that accompany his rhetoric, which grant him this role. This is nicely captured in his nickname, *Rudotel* – a mild tranquilizer popular in Romania, hinting at the aggressiveness of his attacks, which are perceived as funny, and which could benefit from the administration of the drug.

Thirdly, CVT’s interventions contribute to debunking serious topics, a fact which is often tolerated and used by those in power in order to undermine criticisms or to delay serious unwanted discussion. Humour that occurs in formalized structures such as parliamentary debates is closely linked with contradictions built into those structures. According to Mulkay (1988), humour is used in such settings in accordance with the requirements of those who occupy positions of formal control. While apparently used to challenge, condemn and disrupt existing social patterns, in reality it often works to maintain the social structures that gave birth to it.

The non-serious (joking) frame occupies an important place in the speech, both quantitatively (the last 1620 words) and qualitatively, by the role that it plays in consolidating the senator’s brand. There are 13 occurrences of ‘laughter, discussion’ in the final part of the verbatim transcript of the meeting. Joking about the Hungarians functions as a signal for the audience, that the senator is about to start performing one of his acts. He switches to the humorous mode, which is characterised by the use of both ethnic and non-ethnic humour, dyadic talk and introducing topics outside the scope of the meeting.

5.1. The shift in the use of ethnic humor

In example (8), CVT shifts to the humorous mode from the very beginning and Gyorgy Frunda, leader of DUHR, immediately joins in.

(8)

Domnul CVT: Profit că este aici și U.D.M.R.-ul, mă rog, care nu e partid... (*Râsete, discuții.*) ... nici el nu știe, nu s-a hotărât dacă este uniune culturală sau altceva. (*Râsete, discuții.*) Dar dacă vor domnii de la U.D.M.R. să fie credibili și eu le vorbesc frumos, pentru că...

Domnul Frunda Gyorgy (*din sală*): Vorbește!

Domnul CVT: ... pentru că acesta este stilul meu... (*Râsete, discuții.*)... toată lumea îl știe. Voi puteți să luați notă. Deci, dragă Frunda...

Domnul Frunda Gyorgy (*din sală*): ... dragă Tudor...

Domnul CVT: tu știi că nu am nimic cu tine și eu nu am nimic cu persoanele, ci cu faptele.

Mr. CVT: I take the opportunity that DUHR is here too, although it is not a party... (*laughter, discussion*) ... they don't know themselves if they are a cultural union or something else (*laughter, discussion*). But if the gentlemen from DUHR want to look credible, I will speak politely because...

Mr. Frunda Gyorgy (from his seat): Speak!

Mr. CVT: ... because this is my style... (*Laughter, discussion*) ... everybody knows it... you can make a note of that. So, dear Frunda...

Mr. Frunda Gyorgy (from his seat): ... Dear Tudor ...

Mr. CVT: you know I don't hold anything personal against you and I don't pick on people, I focus on facts.

27 May 2002, Bucharest

This shift is signalled by several triggers:

- a) the **topic** itself, i.e. antihungarianism, that won the speaker his votes during the Presidential campaign in 2000. CVT initiates an ironic remark and the implication that the members of DUHR are often absent in parliamentary debates;
- b) an **attack** on the status of DUHR, as a cultural union/ alliance not legally registered as a political party, which takes part in national elections and has been part of all governing coalitions so far, unlike GRP, which was never a part of any coalition;

- c) a different **footing** (Goffman, 1981). Although the transcript does not allow for subtle interpretations, the use of dots for the first time in the transcript does point to a change in the prosodic features of this speech. In addition, this change is perceived as humorous by the audience, who laughs and makes comments.

Encouraged by the audience's reaction, i.e. laughter, which signals agreement to enter the joking frame (Jefferson, 1979), CVT further escalates the issue of the 'ambiguous' status of DUHR with the utterance: *nici ei nu ştie, nu s-a hotărât dacă este uniune culturală sau altceva* ('They don't know themselves if they are a cultural union or something else'). What he actually does is to activate a script, more precisely the 'stupidity script', which triggers further laughter and comments from the audience.

Raskin is credited with a significant contribution to the notion of 'script', a central concept of the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH). The script is defined as a cognitive structure that "represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world" and contains semantic information about a word or information evoked by it. Formally, it can be represented by "a graph with lexical nodes and semantic links between the nodes" (Raskin, 1985: 81). The scripts store encyclopaedic information and express approximations of reality.

Raskin (1985: 180) applies the notion of 'script' to a special category of humor, i.e. ethnic humor. He argues that "most of ethnic humour is functionally deprecatory or disparaging". Thus, the behaviour of a minority is seen as being different from the 'normal group' represented by the majority. Raskin (1985) identifies two popular ethnic scripts: 'stupidity' and 'canniness' common to all languages and countries. Actually, ethnic jokes can be quite similar with the minor substitution of the target group with another for which the same ethnic script holds. The author also introduces more specific ethnic group scripts for instance the script of 'efficiency' and 'beer-loving' for the Germans, the 'oversexed minorit'y script for many Latino cultures, asexuality, 'methodicity' and 'blind obedience' for the Germans, 'respect for tradition' and 'cold politeness' for the British.

CVT's next utterance – "*Dar dacă vor domnii de la U.D.M.R. să fie credibili și eu le vorbesc frumos, pentru că...*" ("But if the gentlemen from DUHR want to look credible, I will speak politely because...") – associates DUHR with the opportunist script and also marks a change in the turn taking structure of the discourse, i.e. the shift from the monologic structure of the speech to the dyadic structure. CVT alters his footing from an official role to a jokester, by teasing DUHR about their credibility and by selling his brand, in which humour is used to attack, and at the same time to entertain, thus mitigating the attack. His promise to the 'customers', i.e. voters, is to attack (ironically described as 'speak politely') and then entertain by making fun of the attack itself. The speaker explicitly refers to his political brand ('this is my style'). Frunda, pre-eminent ethnic Hungarian representative, interrupts CVT, thus

transgressing the turn taking rules of this activity type, i.e. that a speaker can address another MP only via the President; all the other interpellations are part of the rhetoric of the parliamentary speech, but direct answers are not allowable contributions permitted, and therefore not expected. The audience goes along and laughs. Next, CVT directly addresses Frunda, using 'dear'. In his turn, Frunda ironically repeats the term of endearment, joins the joking frame and directly reciprocates in backtalk, momentarily complying with the speaker's redefining the official situation they were in as an informal one.

Satisfied with this short episode and the dialogue with the Hungarian representative, the senator re-enters the serious mode by referring to the ethics of his interventions: 'you know I don't hold anything personal against you and I don't pick on people, I focus on facts.'

5.2. Dyadic talk

We will use example (9) to illustrate the changes in the turn-taking structure of the discourse, i.e. its orientation to dyadic talk similar to casual conversation, inserted in the mainstream political speech, which takes the place of the monologue. In the example below, CVT initiates dyadic talk with Adrian Păunescu, representing the ruling party at that time. It is worth mentioning that both CVT and Păunescu used to be 'court poets' of the late dictator Ceaușescu, and they interact not as political opponents, but as old acquaintances. This is evident in the use of forms of address such as 'dear', in the discursive mode itself (informal conversation in a formal context), friendly teasing on a sensitive topic (privatization of Sovata health resort). CVT uses this topic and turns it into an opportunity to attack both neoliberal economic practices and his 'favourite' ethnic target – the Hungarians, since the privatization of the resort did not serve the 'public good' and was sold to a Hungarian company for a dubious low price.

(9)

Domnul CVT: Așa e, dragă Adrian Păunescu? Îți mai menții opinia că ceva necurat s-a întâmplat la privatizarea stațiunii Sovata? Da sau nu? Tu răspunde aici, ca la detectorul de minciuni, nu-mi ține un discurs. (*Răsete, discuții*)

Domnul Adrian Păunescu: Nu sunt obișnuit să fiu întrebat în felul ăsta, dar dacă erai la ședința la care s-a discutat raportul comisiei de anchetă vedeai că am votat împotriva.

Domnul Athanasiu (Presedintele Senatului): Vă mulțumesc.

Domnul Adrian Păunescu: Era de ajuns sa fii prezent.

Domnul CVT: Bine, îți mulțumesc. Înseamnă că rămâi un om de caracter (*Răsete, discuții.*)

Domnul Athanasiu (Presedintele Senatului): Domnule președinte...

Domnul CVT: Ce? Câte minute mai am?

Domnul Athanasiu (Presedintele Senatului): O eternitate! (*Răsete, discuții.*)

Domnul CVT: O eternitate! Ai vorbit ca Goethe, ca Shakespeare.

Domnul Athanasiu (Presedintele Senatului): ... singura problemă este că atunci când doriți să dialogați cu sala întrebările se pun prin președintele de ședință.

Domnul CVT: Dar noi nu suntem la tribunal, domnule președinte. (*Răsete, discuții.*)

[...]

1 Mr. CVT: Is it so, dear Adrian Păunescu? Do you still maintain the view that something dubious happened with the privatization of Sovata health resort? Yes or no? You better answer here, as if you took a lie detector test, don't give me a speech. (*Laughter, discussion*)

2 Mr. Adrian Păunescu: I am not used to be asked questions in this manner, but if you had been present at the meeting you would have seen that I voted against.

3 Mr. Athanasiu (President of the Senate): Thank you.

4 Mr. Adrian Păunescu: It would have been enough to be present.

5 Mr. CVT: All right, thank you. It means you remain a man of character. (*Laughter, discussion*)

6 Mr. Athanasiu (President of the Senate): Mr. President!

7 Mr. CVT: What? How long do I have?

8 Mr. Athanasiu (President of the Senate): An eternity! (*Laughter, discussion*)

9 Mr. CVT: An eternity! You spoke like Goethe, like Shakespeare.

10 Mr. Athanasiu (President of the Senate): ... the only problem is that when one wants to interact with the audience, the questions are asked via the President of the meeting.

11 Mr. CVT: But this is not a law court, Mr. President!

(*Laughter, discussion*)

[...]

Domnul CVT: Toți au furat. (...) Așa e, Radu Vasile? Îmi dați voie să-l întreb pe domnul Radu Vasile?

(*Râsete, discuții.*) ... că a fost premier... că văd că râzi pe sub mustață, pe acolo. (*Râsete, discuții.*)

12 Mr. CVT: They were all thieves. (...) Is that so, Radu Vasile? May I ask Mr. Radu Vasile?

13 (*Laughter, discussion*) ... because he was Prime Minister... because I can see you are laughing up your sleeve (*Laughter, discussion*)

27 May 2002, Bucharest

The replacement of the monologue by dyadic talk is visible in two direct addresses to other senators (exchanges initiated by CVT in lines 1-6 and 12-13) and a rather long exchange (six turns, lines 7-11) with the President of the Senate, with whom CVT negotiates something non-negotiable in principle, i.e. the rules of the activity type. After two unsuccessful attempts of disciplining the speaker (lines 3 and 6), starting line 8 the President of the Senate, inspired by the humorous interaction initiated by CVT, enters the joking frame himself, transgressing thus the rules of the activity type, which is well received by the audience in the form of laughter.

Discussion and concluding remarks

The analysis of the data in the present study suggests that humour can be an important ingredient in the construction and consolidation of political brands. In parliamentary debates, humour has a real connection with actual conflicts (Morreall, 2005) and therefore can play a direct role in criticizing or ridiculing political opponents and can contain aggressive overtones. Aggressiveness is even more obvious with the much contested ethnic humour, a weapon in conflict between groups that have a hostile relation (Kuipers, 2008).

Interestingly, the significance of the joking frame lies in what it tells us about the 'serious' frame. Who can say when this 'character' spoke in earnest and when he did not? When did he attack and when did he pretend to attack? Thus, the joking frame questions the truth-value of the serious frame. This ambiguity opens the door to unthinkable changes of doctrine and alliances which can be thus explained and made to look pardonable. When involved in a debate, the 'humorous' or the 'serious' modes are not given, but constructed and negotiated during interaction. This means that it is framing (or shifting) that redefines 'serious' into 'non serious'.

From the point of view of the content, this shift allows humour to be used so that the speaker can bring up sensitive topics, such as political opinions (Paton & Filby, 1996), or debunk the serious topic on the agenda. Mueller (2011) distinguishes between hostile and conciliatory behaviour (laughing vs. amusement), observing that amusement is a marker of a positive attitude in the German Parliament (Bundestag), and it is mainly associated with topics such as the negotiation of time limits, absence during sessions and with the use of formal vs. informal language. On the other hand,

laughter seems to be associated with rebuttal of statements, dismissing them as non-serious, or with denigration. Unlike in the Greek Parliament, where humour is used as a weapon of political attack and criticism, in the German Parliament, MPs use humour to negotiate parliamentary roles and rules or to create a relaxed atmosphere, a feature evidenced by our data as well.

Aggressive forms of humour have also emerged in other parliamentary settings in former communist countries in Eastern Europe, due to the political instability that characterises the post-Communist era. When analysing data from the Polish Parliament, Ornatowski (2010) discusses the development of complementary rhetorical functions of identification and division in the context of Poland's move from the political and cultural 'periphery' of Western Europe to the 'centre'.

From the point of view of the form, institutional talk is disrupted and the regular flow of the turn-taking patterns is changed. Thus, humour functions as a conversational 'coup' on the part of the joker (Kuipers, 2008), having as effect a more involved audience and a more informal atmosphere, closer to casual conversation (Georgalidou, 2011). The construction of the political brand is achieved by mixing the two discourses that characterise the serious and the joking frame respectively. This is not uncommon, as Ilie (2010c: 70) comments:

“MPs are expected to perform in a double capacity as institutional representatives [...] and as private persons [...], while carrying out their institutional commitments”.

This combination of mundane, light joking is in strong contrast with solemn nationalistic discourse and extremely violent personal attacks and constitutes the element that distinguishes Tudor from other politicians, i.e. his political brand. A similar combination of discourses and the effects of this 'coup' have been identified and discussed in the Parliaments from Greece (Archakis & Tsakona, 2011), Germany (Mueller, 2011) and Poland (Ornatowski, 2010).

When analysing narratives in the Greek Parliament, Archakis and Tsakona (2011: 74) comment on the use of a familiar and conversational mode so that the MPs “secure the attention of the wider audience and present themselves as ‘one of them’”. Yet, such informal resources are adjusted to the MP's particular needs and purposes, i.e. to criticize the political situation or even other MPs. The speakers succeed in creating the image of an objective and well-meant MP who focuses on moral principles and facts. In our understanding, one of the main purposes of this 'hybrid' discursive style is to build an image that will ensure further public support. As found in our data, the politician presents himself as a vigilant guardian of national values, but also as a cultured and relaxed man of the world who can speak politely and joke about anything, delicate topics included. Humour triggers the joking frame and the effect is a more involved audience and a more informal atmosphere, closer to casual conversation.

In open public spaces, politicians can add to their popularity by using humour targeted at specific political decisions and figures. This strategy could also be used as an indicator of the degree of openness of a state (Ilie, 2010c); thus, political humour can indicate how the political context influences the functions of humour:

“to silence, marginalize and even eliminate political opponents, to divert audience attention from significant political issues, and for political branding” (Tsakona & Popa, 2011: 14).

Whether in old or new democracies, the studies focusing on the use of humour in political discourse show that politicians resort to humour, puns and popular sayings in order to create a sense of affiliation with the audience. MPs talk the ordinary people’s language, ‘conversationalising’ a type of institutional talk, in order to attain their main goal: obtaining a high percentage in the national elections.

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NOTES

- 1 Populism is an “ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.” (Mudde, 2004: 543)
- 2 Discussed by Sacks (1974), Psathas (1999), Pomerantz and Mandelbaum (2005).