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ETHOS AND PATHOS IN THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF DIANA IOVANOVICI-ȘOȘOACĂ

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Abstract: *This paper aims to analyze how ethos and pathos operate within the parliamentary speeches of Senator Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă, a controversial figure in the Romanian political landscape, widely known for her deeply confrontational manner. Taking as its starting point the classical Aristotelian model of the three means of persuasion – ethos, pathos, and logos – the paper concentrates on the first two, regarded as essential both to the construction of a credible public image and to the affective mobilization of the audience.*

Keywords: *political discourse, ethos, pathos, Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă,*

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INTRODUCTION

At a time when political discourse is becoming ever more personalized and emotionally charged, an analysis of its persuasive components offers a valuable vantage point from which to observe how contemporary politicians build their relationship with the public.

The research draws on qualitative discourse analysis, informed primarily by classical rhetoric, pragmalinguistics, and the study of contemporary (parliamentary) political discourse. Two representative speeches by Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă are examined to trace the ways in which *ethos* and *pathos* are constructed within them. The speeches are approached from the standpoint of their rhetorical strategies, their persuasive function, and their impact on the audience.

Through this research, we aim to bring into focus the mechanisms by which the components of persuasion can substitute for, or even override, rational debate – showing that in a political climate dominated by polarization and a crisis of trust, ethos and pathos move to the forefront as rhetorical resources in the exercise of political influence.



MAIN TEXT

1. Theoretical framework

In the introduction to her study on the evolution of Romanian parliamentary discourse, *Discursul parlamentar românesc (1866–1938). O perspectivă pragma-retorică*, Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu argues that political discourse is not merely a reflection of an external reality but also an instrument through which that reality is actively shaped (2018, p. 55). Through both its structure and its content, discourse can foreground certain interpretive models – nuancing some aspects of reality while leaving others aside – and it is in this way that the convictions of listeners and interlocutors are formed. The author further notes that political discourse occupies a central place in both the formation and the transmission of ideologies and worldviews, since every linguistic choice already carries within it a particular reading of reality. The relationship between discourse and ideology is, in this respect, crucial to understanding why certain words are chosen over others.

Andra Vasilescu, in *Metapозиționarea în discursul parlamentar: trei studii de caz* (2018), discusses the formal and structural nature of parliamentary discourse, which is far from a simple conversation and instead follows a set of forms, rules, and conventions. Speaking in Parliament entails adherence to a particular type of communicative behaviour, one that reflects mental structures and institutional norms closely tied to its spatial context. The author further distinguishes between the two broad aims of parliamentary discourse: a general one – essentially “doing politics” – and a set of specific, or “global” aims, such as questioning, criticism, and debate. She also discusses the multiple, simultaneous roles taken on by participants in parliamentary discourse, who may act as speakers, listeners, supporters, opponents, or representatives of a particular political ideology.

Parliamentary discourse is thus marked by a range of characteristics, among which its rhetorical dimension stands out as particularly important – above all, the interplay of its persuasive components, which shapes both the speaker’s efforts to capture attention and to convince the audience. Our analysis focuses on *ethos* and *pathos*, two of the components of the “tripartite model of persuasion – *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*” (Zafiu, 2010, p. 27), as defined by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* (I, 2, 1356a, *apud* Zafiu, 2010, p. 27). Within the Aristotelian model, the three components interact continuously, although, depending on context, one of them may come to dominate the others, since their relative weight is never fixed but shifts under the influence of various historical, cultural, and even behavioural factors.

Ethos, or the image projected by the speaker, concerns both the orator’s character and their capacity to persuade through discourse. In her study *Ethos, pathos și logos în textul prediciei* (2010), Rodica Zafiu observes that *ethos* – a component Aristotle regarded as central to rhetoric – was long neglected by the philosophical and logico-rational currents of modern theory. The author notes, however, that this component is currently undergoing a revival, particularly within pragmalinguistic research, where growing attention to how subjectivity is expressed in language has brought *ethos* back to the fore.

As for *pathos*, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* tells us that the passions comprise the full range of emotional states capable of shaping human thought and judgement. Aristotle groups these emotions into adjacent pairs, such as anger and calm, or friendship and hatred. His reason for including *pathos* among the essential elements of persuasion is that, in a deliberative setting, conviction depends in large part on the emotional state of the audience: emotions alter how people receive and subsequently judge a message. As with *ethos*, however, emotions can only function as genuine and credible means of persuasion when deployed in a controlled manner, rather than manipulatively or haphazardly. *Pathos*, then, centres on stimulating emotions and feelings with the aim of persuading the audience and prompting empathy. Rodica Zafiu (2010, p. 31) identifies a range of linguistic devices that shape the construction of emotion in discourse, including paralinguistic markers (gesture,

intonation, tone), linguistic markers of affect, prototypical emotional scripts, and evaluative or emotion-laden vocabulary (grief, bitterness, fear). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958) treat emotions in terms of “presence” and “specification” (Perelman, Chaïm and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2012 [1958], p. 147, p. 184), since attention to the role of emotion in argumentation forms part of a broader interest in affect within communication – an interest itself shaped by the cognitive turn.

The concepts of *ethos* and *pathos* are, moreover, closely bound up with the notion of identity, particularly in parliamentary discourse, where the speaker’s parliamentary identity is directly at stake. In *Identități: identitatea parlamentară* (2018), Andra Vasilescu discusses the construction of political (parliamentary) identity, in which the emphasis falls not on professional competence as such but on how that competence is put to use through discourse. An orator’s effectiveness, in other words, is judged by their capacity to persuade. Within the framework of parliamentary identity, as Charaudeau likewise observes (2005, p. 224 *apud* Vasilescu, 2018, p. 276), *logos* becomes a secondary component of discourse, overshadowed in importance by *ethos* and *pathos*, which are in fact what generate it. Here, the orator’s credibility is won through a presumed sincerity, and parliamentary identity thereby “metamorphoses into discursive identity” (Vasilescu, 2018, p. 276).

2. Analysis

In this part of the paper, we will analyze two speeches by Senator Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă delivered in the sessions of the Romanian Parliament. In the analysis carried out, we followed how two of the components of persuasion, *ethos* and *pathos*, work. We will consider the ways in which the two components are achieved, the purpose for which they are used, and the effects produced by them.

2.1. Speech by Mrs. Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă on the end of her term as senator

In the speech under analysis, Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă announces her resignation in the plenary session of the Romanian Parliament. This speech offers a particularly instructive case for examining how *ethos* and *pathos* intertwine within contemporary parliamentary discourse. Read against the theoretical framework outlined above, it allows for a nuanced understanding of how Iovanovici-Șoșoacă, in her role as orator, constructs her authority while at the same time generating emotional responses in her audience.

The pre-existing *ethos* of Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă is already firmly established in the audience’s mind: she is perceived as a populist political figure whose discourse tends to be virulent, nationalist, and staunchly anti-establishment. This prior image directly shapes how her speech is received, since the audience already holds certain assumptions about her character – what Rodica Zafiu (2010, p. 28) terms prior *ethos*. This dimension intertwines with her discursive *ethos*, that is, the image she constructs within the speech itself. Here, Șoșoacă cultivates the image of a politician willing to sacrifice herself for the good of the nation, a voice of courage and dignity within a weak and corrupt system. She makes her moral intent as senator explicit: “I came with one intention – to do good for Romania and the Romanian people”, a statement that reinforces her *ethos* further. The speech also constructs a collective *ethos*: through the pronoun “we” in the phrase “we will defend our country and you, cowardly and boorish men who...”, the speaker builds an idealized group identity made up of courageous women, set against traitors, cowards, and boors – thereby forging a sense of solidarity and belonging.

Another key feature of this address is its use of *pathos*. From the outset, Șoșoacă turns to emotionally charged formulas: “Thank you from the bottom of my heart”, “God bless Romania and the Romanian people”. These formulas serve to establish an affective bond with the audience and to prime it for the reception of a speech laden with symbolic weight. The emotional register that



Șoșoacă deploys is varied and polarizing, marked in equal measure by indignation and contempt, and by pride and courage. The passage in which she denounces the conduct of "boorish men" toward the women of Parliament provokes outrage, gender solidarity, and hostility from the colleagues she targets. In keeping with the Aristotelian model, these emotions function as a mediating force between speaker and audience, reshaping the audience's disposition and, by extension, their receptiveness to the message and their capacity for empathy. The gesture of putting on a military coat during the speech takes on symbolic significance: a staged act that projects heroism and patriotism, marking a deliberate departure from the conventional restraint expected of a rational, measured parliamentarian. This theatrical gesture feeds directly into the discursive construction of pathos and may be read as a paralinguistic marker (Zafiu, 2010, p. 31).

Stylistically, the speech is marked by a vehement, polemical tone, punctuated by direct address and by the shouting that accompanies or interrupts the intervention. The senator's discourse also displays an atypical deliberative dimension, insofar as it does not seek to persuade through rational argument but rather through the performance of a credible and emotionally forceful identity.

This speech thus becomes a form of rhetorical self-legitimation, achieved through the mobilization of both individual and collective emotion.

2.2. Joint Solemn Sitting Marking the Day of Solidarity and Friendship between Romania and the State of Israel

Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă's speech before the Romanian Parliament, delivered on the Day of Solidarity and Friendship between Romania and the State of Israel, brings into sharp relief the overlap between the deliberative dimension of discourse and the invocation of a national and identitarian mission. Here, the senator constructs her authority and emotional appeal not only in relation to her fellow parliamentarians but also before the national public. Her discursive ethos is built through an unyielding opposition to the rest of Parliament, whom she accuses of betrayal ("You traitors! Traitors!"), as well as through her invocation of a higher moral role – that of defender of the martyrs of the Romanian nation and of historical truth ("Today, first and foremost, we should have commemorated, in accordance with Law no. 127/2017, the National Day honouring the martyrs of the communist prisons"). Șoșoacă presents herself as the sole voice denouncing what she calls the symbolic and cultural "enslavement" of Romanians. The recurrent use of the first-person plural ("let us commemorate," "We have a Jewish member on the CSAT," "We have Israel's national day in Romania") marks what Zafiu (2010, p. 30) calls the "persuasive plural", positioning the speaker at the centre of an imagined, symbolic community in which she becomes the voice of the people – of those marginalized and ignored.

As for pathos, the speech is emotionally dense, drawing on a broad register of appeals to indignation, national shame, historical pride, and betrayal. From the very beginning, the senator accuses her colleagues of disrespecting the history of the Romanian people and the martyrs of the communist prisons, drawing a stark contrast between their sacrifice and the ingratitude of contemporary institutions. This emotional charge is heightened through jarring juxtapositions – "we saved over 400,000 Jews", set against the accusation that "the Judeo-Bolsheviks [...] killed over 800,000 Romanians". Such statements are designed to provoke strong affective reactions grounded in a sense of injustice. Pathos thus operates not merely as a tool of persuasion but as a means of constructing an emotionally perceived reality, in which the Romanian nation appears as a victim betrayed by its own leaders. Linguistic markers (Zafiu, 2010, p. 31) – exclamations, questions, and interjections – further intensify the pathos of the speech. Illustrative examples include: "Have you ever seen such a thing?!", "Stop commenting so much!", "Aren't you ashamed?! Shame on you!", "Shame! Shame!" – expressions that push the emotional charge of the speech to its limit. The



reactions from the floor – retorts, uproar, shouting – form part of the interactional echo characteristic of parliamentary discourse, illustrating both the affective intensity of the moment and this discourse's underlying tendency toward conflict.

In this light, Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă's speech becomes less a logical plea than an identitarian manifesto, one in which ethos and pathos are placed in the service of a confrontational rhetoric of symbolic claim-making.

3. Conclusion

Based on the analysis carried out on the two selected speeches, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the use and interplay of ethos and pathos in Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă's parliamentary discourse.

Ethos and pathos function as central rhetorical strategies in Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă's public discourse, serving both to construct the speaker's self-image (discursive ethos) and to systematically appeal to the collective emotions of her audience (pathos). The analysis of the selected speeches reveals a coherent and recurring rhetorical profile, in which her pre-existing ethos – built in the public sphere as that of an anti-establishment, nationalist, and nonconformist political figure – is consistently reinforced and projected in each parliamentary intervention.

Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă's discursive ethos is shaped through linguistic and pragmatic strategies aimed at constructing a political identity grounded in courage, authenticity, attachment to national values, and vehement opposition to both domestic and external political elites. This construction is sustained by an intense pathos that mobilizes fear, outrage, shame, pride, and empathy, in a deliberate effort to connect emotionally with an audience she portrays as abandoned or humiliated. Emotion thus becomes not merely a stylistic feature but a substantive instrument of discourse.

Whether directed at criticizing Parliament, evoking the sacrifices of those held in communist prisons, defending domestic research, or upholding a conservative vision of family and nation, Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă consistently draws on ethos and pathos to challenge institutional authority and to reassert her own symbolic standpoint. Her rhetorical approach, then, lends weight to the broader claim that conviction is rarely achieved through argument alone, but rather – and perhaps above all – through image and emotion: two rhetorical dimensions essential to understanding the mechanisms of influence at work in present-day parliamentary discourse.



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