

# The Metamorphoses of Political Myths in Central and Eastern Europe in the Contemporan Period

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**Abstract:** *Political myths vary of a group or historical period and include a wide range of examples from general (for example, the myth of the clash of civilizations, savior's myth, myths about the origins of the state and nation, the myth of Latinity – Romanian identity landmark, the myth of the ruler) to the specific ones (migration is specific only for poor countries, the migrants have better living conditions, a vindictive mith is the legend of the "knife on the back", the myth of Baroque architecture as origin and common denominator of Central Europe new parts are better than old parts) and more others. As the planetar political life is conditioned and explained by geography (Ion Conea), the concept of Central-Eastern Europe is a new one, with no distinction between Western and Eastern Europe for a long time. The contributions of this article will fall into the following topics: Defining political myths (including their category) and identifying the component elements. 2. Analysis of the constitutive mechanisms of the political myths, as well as of the causes and the factors that promote them. 3. Elucidation of the political myths of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe from the contemporan period. 4. Finally we will try to expose the consequences attracted by one of the most obvious effects of manipulation by mitigating the political imaginary: its fear and instrumentalization and the consequences of mythization.*

**Keywords:** *political miths, Central and Eastern Europe, imaginary knowledge, "Golden Age", the Myth of Unity, the myth of the Conspiracy.*

A myth is an essential element of human civilization. It is a living reality, which we do not cease to resort to. It is not an abstract land. It is a true cidification of primitive religion and wisdom. Moreover, the political myth is a discourse that organizes, incites and mobilizes feelings, emotions, hopes and collective apprehensions. It is not necessary false in its entirety, but it may include, and often even include, elements that deliberated distort historical truth. A classic example of a vindictive political myth is the "back knife" legend used by the extreme right in Germany after World War I to delegitimize the Weimar Republic and to justify the most abject anti-Semitism. In fact, it is often a rationalization of political resentment and inaudible phobias.

The political myth appeals to the infra-rational layer of social action, it has galvanizing capacities that ideologies often do not possess. Thanks to political myths such as "class struggle"

or "race struggle", the strong ideologies of the twentieth century were able to transform into political religions. To reprise the title of a famous book by Raymond Aron, this is spiritual opium. The first major thinker who addressed the issue of modern political myth was the revolutionary trade unionist Georges Sorel. From Sorel Benito Mussolini learned how a set of political passions can be transformed into an ingredient of a revolutionary movement that demands the regeneration of humanity (in this case, fascism). Lenin praised Sorel, the latter admired Lenin.

The political myth has great power to penetrate the consciousness of the masses. The political imaginatio intervenes permanently to exploit the past and legitimize the present – in both totalitarian and democratic societies. In his work *Myths and political mythology* political mythology, Raoul Girardet observes that from the classic inventory of the intense political imaginary used by the communist societies belong the myths of the Golden Age, the saving Revolution or the evil plot<sup>1</sup>.

The problems of myth-making are becoming increasingly relevant currently. The myths penetrate all spheres of human life: they can be found in art, politics, advertising, science, etc. The modern myth is being reborn, changing its ontological status. If earlier, in the archaic era, the myth was a naive attempt to comprehend reality, now the myth becomes a significant reality of contemporan culture. The myth seems to be an effective means social governance: applying myths to influence voters' behavior is one of the ways to achieve political goals, myths are actively used in ideology and propaganda; in social communication and advertising, when creating brands; when manipulating the mass consciousness also uses the techniques of mythologization.

People need to believe in all phases of their lives and in all stages of knowledge. There are necessary, explicable, breaks between rationality or rational and imaginar knowledge. Beliefs start, first and foremost, from an individual need. We must resist unknowns, riddles that escape rationality, such as death or the wonders of faith, life beyond and so on. Living at least a twentieth century that exacerbated reason and its dominance, not only Malraux, but other authors began to anticipate a break between reason and emotion in the case of decisions, our decisions not being as rational as one thought at one time, psychology demonstrating the independence of the cognitive from the affective, with a priority of the affective in the decision, the cognitive coming only afterwards to justify the reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> Raul Girardet, *Mituri și mitologii politice*, Institutul European, Iași, 1997, p. 16.

The political myth is a transformed form of political consciousness in which knowledge and an understanding of the facts of politics is replaced by images, symbols, fiction, legends and faith in them<sup>2</sup>.

There are some functions of political myths in contemporary society:

- cognitive function and the function of interpreting reality (this function includes simplification of political processes, their adaptation for the population, description political system with the help of symbols and images, the creation of mythological reality);
- integrative (using this function, an individual considers himself to be one or another social group in accordance with the division on the basis of "friend or foe");
- legitimization of the political system and the political elite (the function of legitimation based on traditions and customs, precedents of the past, mass stereotypes);
- suggestive (the function of programming society, introducing new patterns of behavior in mass consciousness);
- the function of harmonization of relations between the individual and society, the social group and its environment (myth defines a value scale, dictates the rules of behavior in a particular society);
- modeling function (this function offers relationships in society, models of human behavior based on past experiences. The same function is fundamental. for a myth acting as a technology of influence).

The contemporary myths are related to the compensatory need for evasion, repressed desires. People are living an increasingly dry existence, more and more isolated and in a period when the general myth of continuous progress is in decline, and their imagination and sensibility have not dried up. People dream of something else, they build dreams and illusions, they seek to "force", through the imaginary, the gates of a terrestrial paradise in which they want to participate especially in the realm of personal utopias.

Politicians often resort to myths to convince voters. Through myths of great persuasive force, used especially during election campaigns, is Great Time or Golden Age (Eternal Return). The Golden Age is represented by the ancient society, perfect from the point of view of organization. Every Golden Age myth is characterized also by the fact that a person performs certain actions that the gods allow him to perform. But there is always an action that cannot be performed. Committing this action leads to the end of the "Golden Age" and means expulsion from paradise. The mythology of the "Golden Age" is also expressed by actions that can be

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<sup>2</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *Psihologia mulțimilor*, Antet XX Press, București, f.a., p. 112.

performed, and at the same time, it is detected only then, when the cycle is broken action and the moral attributes of those who composed it.

So, the myths of the "Golden Age" that arose as a result of the transition of societies through the stage of the Neolithic revolution to sedentary have a common structure. In these myths, the following semantic grounds existing in the form of an inextricable relationship of three mythologies:

- mythologies of the "lost paradise", which is the descriptive basis of myth;
- the mythology of the "noble savage", which represents the idealized image of a person in myths;
- mythologemes Golden Age.

The mythology of the "Golden Age" is dissolved in the mythologies of "lost paradise" and "noble savage". On the one hand, a "Golden Age" exists as the sacred "Time to Time"<sup>3</sup>.

The myth of the Golden Age is declining in the period post-communist mainly in the form of hyperbolization interwar periods. The political myth of the Golden Age is one of the political myths that appear in the company moments of a society and is not found in a single nation. The Golden Age myth expresses nostalgia for the original, a desire to return to the paradise state. The political myth of the Golden Age as it appears in the central and post-communist Eastern European society is manifested by "nostalgia for the purity of origins, with the conclusion that from here, from a certain moment, the inhabitants of this Earth have started on a wrong way"<sup>4</sup>. This impression is due to the fact that man has always dreamed of a different world; he continually sought to build utopias and could not be satisfied with his current history and condition.

Communist nostalgia is due to the persuasive character of the communist ideology, which promised a new set of moral values capable of protecting the weak, of giving man what belongs to him, of eliminating differences between classes, etc.<sup>5</sup>

The communist society wanted to be exactly this type of closed, solidarity framework (nationalization, collectivization, common possession) that gives people security, a predetermined role in the sense that everyone knew what they were going to do, how much to produce, even how much to consume; everything was under surveillance and no one could get out of the communist pattern to differentiate themselves. Because of these things he feels nostalgic that the communist regime represented the Golden Age of humanity.

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<sup>3</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Aspects du mythe*, Academia, 2010, Moscova, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Lucian Boia, *Mitologia științifică a comunismului*, Humanitas, București, 2011, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.rasfoiesc.com/legal/administratie/stiinte-politice/Mituri-si-mitologii\\_politice83.php](http://www.rasfoiesc.com/legal/administratie/stiinte-politice/Mituri-si-mitologii_politice83.php), accesat pe 18 noiembrie 2019.

Another vital element of the mythological "constellation" is the Myth of Unity. After G. Ballandier, as a rule, the Myth of Unity, expressed through the call to race, the people, finds its application the most spectacular in the celebration, which places the whole nation in a ceremonial situation. Into the in the context of political theatricalization, we could say that the Myth of Unity is nothing more than a "fusion" delirious" of a civil society<sup>6</sup>.

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe were occupied by the Red Army, but they were culturally and politically identified with Western European traditions. In order to become economically and politically viable, they need the European Union; and for security they look towards the Atlantic Allied. In fact, membership in one institution implies membership in the other.

The myth of unity works so well it is intense at the level of the imaginary that gives authors the belief that outside of unity humanity does not can survive. In the last two decades, especially in the countries of Eastern Europe, there was the tendency to search for identity, to find and rediscover it and at the same time to empower it.

We can speak, in full process of European construction, of a revival of the national myth. Contrary to the opinions that confuse the myth with the irrational, the illusion, the ghost or the mystification, I consider that the myth should not be thought in opposition to reality but because of its revealing character it should use as the main vector of the interpretation of our relations with reality.

The post-communist eras are a reality for him fragmented. The myth also adapts to this reality. Complementary mythological constructions assert themselves complement each other in the public space contemporary of Central and Eastern Europe. The mythology of the "revolution", of the "Golden Age", a "Collective victimization" corresponds to the needs of social identification, understanding of the past and design of the future.

Moreover, all these countries, after half a century of Soviet ideological oppression, were refractory to any "supranational" construction and looked with some suspicion at the idea of relativizing the functions of sovereign states in the context of desperately trying to save more. Something from the Soviet empire, Gorbachev had launched the theme of the "common house" as a possible support for the continuation of a cohabitation to which the Eastern European countries had been forced to adhere. If it were not for the seduction force of the values of civilization and liberal well-being that the developed countries of the Western Europe were proving, it is certain that the East Europeans would not have even discussed integration into the wider Europe.

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<sup>6</sup> Georges Ballandier, *Scena puterii*, AION, București, 2000, p. 21.

Starting from the concept of geopolitics to the origin of Europe, there is no original founding principle, said Edgar Morin. The central and east-European space represents a complex notion, with vague borders, with a variable geometry, suffering slips, breaks, metamorphoses.

At the conclusion of the mythological constellation is, of course, the myth of the Conspiracy. From the documents what would be at the origin of the Myth of the Conspiracy are considered the Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion, inspired by Freemasonry, which at the end of the century. The nineteenth century had prints equal to those of the Bible.

The great mystery about the secret services, raised in some places near the rank of cult, has produced an ocean of myths. And everywhere where, as in the socialist part of Eastern and Southern Europe, secret services have served state repression, these myths are particularly prominent and ingrained.

Myths are not always devoid of truth. The myths fill the void arising from the lack of reliable public information about this very special state institution. Therefore, its demystification is a contribution to democratic control. For one thing is clear: secret services are part of daily life and in a democratic Europe. To question their myths is a precondition for a sovereign and democratic treatment applied to secret services throughout Europe. Here we can include the following: only the states have secret services, Fake News is a novelty, the European Union does not have an information service, secret services are not controlled, the secret services are capable of global conspiracy.

Many myths are related to secret services. And they are not always lacking in truth. But questioning these myths is about the democratic approach to secret services, says Christopher Nehring<sup>7</sup>.

The Conspiracy argument is ubiquitous in political life. Hofstadter believes that the conspiracy can be invoked when three factors acting on it are met to the public: the fear of losing something of price, the recording of a partial loss already, the inability to it prevented the loss. This is how charismatic leaders are born. In difficult times it is hoped that the masses to follow true leaders to avoid conspirators<sup>8</sup>.

From a mythological perspective, post-socialist Europe offers a fascinating field of research. In many regions of Central and Eastern Europe there have been tumultuous economic and political changes and developments, which have generated strong emotional responses from the population, from hope and euphoria to disappointment, envy, disappointment, sadness,

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Nehring, born in 1984, is the head of the research office of the Espionage Museum in Berlin. He studied the history of Eastern Europe and recent history at Heidelberg and St. Petersburg is the author of a doctoral thesis on a topic of the history of secret services. His latest book is entitled "77 of the greatest spy myths" and appeared this year at Heyne Publishing House in Munich.

<sup>8</sup> Ricard Hofstadter, „The Paranoid Style in American Politics and other Essays”, *Harper's Magazine*, November 1964, pp. 77-87.

loneliness and hatred. The transition process, or rather, various transformation processes, creates specificities that attract the attention of researchers in different fields. But they rarely focus on the emotional dynamics involved in the political universe, focusing their scientific efforts towards analyzing the economic, political and social dimensions of the transition.

In the same sense, through contemporary „myths there is an aestheticization of the world” Gilles Lipovetsky writes in his latest works<sup>9</sup>. About the aestheticization of the world and the birth of a capitalist-artist who no longer produces only goods that have a commercial component, but also an aesthetic-emotional one. At the same time, a communication industry is developing which postulates the return of the heroes and, through them, brings to the world a new myth of salvation. Politics comes out of the area the vulgar spectacle and passes into that of the exigency of style. Politicians collect likes on Facebook and become centers of collective attraction, inspiring guru.

In conclusion, in the post-socialist era, the politicization of nationalist sentiments, in combination with the public's desire for a better life, becomes an effective manipulation tool for politicians seeking to gain influence and power. The new governments established after the overthrow of the socialist regimes relied on the desire of the population to increase the welfare, promising rapid economic growth. The economic changes in the post-socialist countries were more profitable for some than for others; including within the same categories of social positions, between individuals with similar economic status, there arises a rivalry in consumption, and changes produce feelings that reach from burning desire to alienation. Once a decade has passed since the collapse of socialism in Central and Eastern Europe, and the radical changes and rapid improvement of living standards among the majority of the population have been delayed, the initial feelings of hope and enthusiasm have been largely replaced. those of skepticism and disillusionment.

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<sup>9</sup> Gilles Lipovetsky, Jean Seroy, *L'Ésthétisation du monde*, Gallimard, Paris, 2013, p. 20.

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