

## **INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL APOLOGIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

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The article focuses on the analysis of six apologies addressed by the political leaders from the Republic of Moldova to other states. It discusses the functions and the constitutive elements of these apologies.

Key words: political apology, explicit apology, reconciliation

In the Republic of Moldova the import of the international practice of issuing apologies for past wrongs can be traced back to the year 2009. This year carries a special importance in the political life of Moldova. Its significance is due to an event that had been cherished for a long period of time – during the elections the democratic parties succeeded in winning the majority of votes and the Communist party remained in opposition. The coming to power of the democratic parties marked the beginning of a period when wrongs started to be acknowledged. However, it is important to point out from the start that apologies issued by political leaders from the Republic of Moldova differ from those offered by other politicians worldwide. The key difference lies in the severity of the transgression that apologies are issued for. While political leaders from other countries apologized for severe transgressions, like slavery, war, Holocaust, etc. political leaders from the Republic of Moldova apologize for mid-range transgressions. The second difference is that political apologies on the international arena are offered for events that happened in the distant past, several decades or even centuries ago. Political leaders from the Republic of Moldova apologize for more recent events. As such, we support the view expressed in recent literature that the „genre of public apology has evolved and spread to other areas of social and political misconduct” [6, 43-44], and that the term „the age of apology” does not refer only to „moral and historical apologies for grave wrongs” [6, 43-44], like „past aggressions, war, racial intolerance or injustices” [5, 2]. It also includes apologies for „severe short-term transgressions and apologies for mid-range transgressions of societal or diplomatic norms” [6, 44].

The majority of apologies, issued by politicians from the Republic of Moldova may be characterized as belonging to the second group. They refer to certain breaches of societal and diplomatic norms. The apologies issued to other countries referred to some wrongs committed by the former Communist government.

In what follows, we will analyze the text of six international apologies issued on the political arena of the Republic of Moldova. By international apologies we mean political apologies that were addressed to other states. The data for analysis were taken from mass-media sources, since, as pointed out by S.Harris, political apologies are ”highly mediated” [4, 720]. Unfortunately, we did not always have access to the full text of the apology. Very often what the media did, was to report that a certain politician from the Republic of Moldova apologized for something, sometimes giving some parts from his speech, sometimes only reporting, without making the whole text of it public. Anyway, this proved to be important for our discussion and analysis of apologies in the Romanian political discourse.

As has been mentioned earlier in this paper, unlike apologies issued by political leaders worldwide, the political apologies issued in the Republic of Moldova do not refer to injustices that happened in the distant history. All of them refer to more or less recent events. Politicians seem to worry a lot about the future of our country and whenever there is something that could have a negative impact and thus endanger the relationships between the Republic of Moldova and other countries, apologies are presented. Three apologies were addressed to Romania, one –

to the European Council, one – to the citizens of the European Union and one to Azerbaijan. In this article, we analyze these apologies to discern things they have in common regarding their purpose and their constitutive elements.

*The purpose of international political apologies in the RM*

From the start it is important to point out that none of the international apologies from the data that have been analyzed was preceded by a demand to apologize. This fact, we believe, emphasizes the idea that the political leaders from the Republic of Moldova strive to have good relations with the other “citizens” of the “global village” and are willing to counterbalance the offences that have been caused. Half of these apologies were issued for the errors committed by the preceding government. This fact is in assonance with J. Coicaud’s idea that in the case of political apologies “the apologizer is oftentimes not the same party who committed the transgression” [2, 85-86]. The other half were issued by politicians who were in office while the unpleasant incident occurred. However, in the majority of cases the politicians who delivered the apologies cannot be held responsible for what happened. In other words, they apologized for the misdeeds of other people. In our opinion, this fact influences the form and the structure of apology. Oftentimes it might be difficult to admit one’s own fault, while apologizing for somebody else’s fault seems to be easier. However, this does not diminish the force of the apology to open the path for dialogues and reconciliation and thus solve or prevent conflicts.

The apologies issued by President N. Timofti, interim President M. Ghimpu, Prime Minister V. Filat, the Minister of External Affairs and European Integration I. Leancă and the Leader of the social-political movement ”European Action” A. Petrencu share an important purpose: they all aim at repairing the relationships between Moldova and the European Union, Romania and Azerbaijan. They serve as a bridge between the past, present and future. The past insults that have been caused to representatives of these states or to the states as a whole have to be mended in order to live peacefully in the ”global village” at present and, more importantly, to lay the groundwork for a better future. A look into the future is what characterizes all of these apologies. Every politician explicitly stated that Moldova cherishes good relations with these countries, relations that would be based on mutual understanding and support. Thus, President N. Timofti emphasized the importance of establishing contact with the representatives of the Romanian Royal Family taking into consideration the openness of Chişinău authorities to the European civilization. The Interim President M. Ghimpu pointed out that the Alliance for European Integration, which is in power, would like to have special and privileged relations with Romania. He added that the Republic of Moldova continues to count on Romania’s support. M. Ghimpu called Romania “the unreserved lawyer” of the Republic of Moldova in moving towards European integration. Iurie Leancă, who was the Minister of External Affairs and of European Integration at the time of issuing the apology, stressed the fact that the government of the Republic of Moldova will do its best to continue firmly the implementation of democratic reforms and of the values of the European Council. He recognized the mistakes made by the past government and explicitly said that the present government would do its best to eliminate such illegal and harmful practices.

The apologies issued by these leaders serve as an important step toward reconstituting, rebuilding and strengthening the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union, Romania and Azerbaijan. In the apologies issued to the European Union and Romania, the present leaders acknowledge the mistakes committed by the former government, whose decisions affected the relations between these countries, bringing them under strain. With their apologies, M. Ghimpu, I. Leancă and A. Petrencu imply that they would like to clear away the stains created by the preceding government. Today they want to repair the misdeeds which endanger the future collaboration between these countries. A peaceful co-existence, based on mutual trust, respect and support is what politicians strive to reach.

The apology issued by the Prime Minister Vlad Filat is, in a way, different, in that it seeks to correct a political mistake made by representatives of government while he was in office, and namely for selling weapons to Armenia. The conflict began in September 2011, when

Moldova sold 60 tons of guns to Armenia. The President of Azerbaijan Iiham Aliyev expressed his worry about it and said that this might stand in the way of the peaceful solution of the conflict from Nagorno-Karabakh. Analysts said this incident could raise anger in Azerbaijan, which faces a two-decade-long conflict with neighbouring Armenia over its occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region. They said it could also hamper cooperation within GUAM, a group of four former Soviet Republics including Azerbaijan and Moldova. In this case, Prime Minister V.Filat's apology carries a special significance and value. It has a direct impact not only on the future relations between Moldova and Azerbaijan. More importantly, his decision to stop selling guns seems to have a direct impact on the peace in Nagorno-Karabakh. By recognizing the wrong and by putting an end to it, the political leader from the Republic of Moldova corrects the error of the persons who were directly involved in this affair and expresses Moldova's desire to restore the relationship with Azerbaijan.

By issuing apologies, all of these politicians indicate what behaviors should be avoided in the future. Apology also seems to be a mechanism for claiming a different direction, a different attitude of the present government as compared to the attitude of the past government. It is like saying "We are not like the previous government. We understand that what they did was wrong. Today we would like to change things for the better and the apology is the beginning of this process". In such a way their apologies mark new relationships, built on respect and support. They represent a powerful tool, aiding societies to confront past wrongs and achieve reconciliation. Their primary purpose is to repair, heal and rebuild relationships which were shattered by the policy of the former or of the present government.

#### *Strategies of international political apologies in the RM*

Having examined the purpose of international apologies, we will now discuss the strategies that make up this discourse. An analysis of these apologies reveals one thing in common: all the politicians used an *explicit apology*. The explicit apology is, according to E.Olshtain, a "general" strategy, which can "realize an apology in any situation" [7, 157]. In the political discourse using an explicit apology is highly important. This idea is emphasized by S.Harris et al., who point out that an explicit IFID (illocutionary force indicating device) will help the media and viewers to perceive the issued apologies as "valid" [4, 721]. Indirect apologies are less likely to achieve their effect in the political discourse. Sometimes they might be "perceived negatively as evasion and shiftiness" [4, 731].

In Romanian the explicit apologies may take various forms (*scuză/scuzați*, *cer/cerem scuze*, *iartă-mă/iertați* - *mă*, *cer/cerem iertare*). In the apologies that have been analyzed not all of these forms were used. The structures with the verb "a ierta" (for give) (*iartă-mă/iertați* - *mă*, *cer/cerem iertare*) were not used at all. This fact leads to the idea that asking forgiveness is different from apologizing. It carries an additional semantic loading. The noun "scuze" was used in all the apologies but in slightly different structures.

I. Leancă: *Permiteți* i-mi să exprim Consiliului Europei și i lui Radivoje Grujic personal *scuzele noastre sincere* pentru acțiunile neîntemeiate întreprinse împotriva sa.

M. Ghimpu: *Vreau să-mi cer scuze* prin intermediul Radio Europa Liberă cetățenilor României.

M. Ghimpu: *Scuze*, dragă Românie, că n-au știut ce fac.

M. Ghimpu: "*Imi cer scuze* pentru insulta adusă României din partea vechii conduceri, fiindcă, așa cum au procedat ei, i-au insultat pe cetățenii români și i România, ca stat".

I. Leancă's apology is different from the other apologies. He uses a very formal expression: *Permiteți* i-mi să exprim (...) *scuzele noastre sincere* (...), which may be characterized as "asking permission to apologize". It is a special type of apology form, which in Romanian sounds very formal and is not often used. It is more characteristic of formal written discourse. In fact, I. Leancă made a written apology: he addressed a letter to the European Council in which he apologized. Although it looks more like asking permission to apologize, the given apology may be treated as an explicit one since it contains the word "scuze", which in Romanian indicates the illocutionary force of the utterance. The force of apology is intensified

with the help of the adjective "sincere". The use of the given intensifier has a special significance. It adds to the force of the apology, by explicitly stating its sincerity. Another interesting thing is I. Leancă's use of the plural possessive adjective "noastre" (our) with the noun "scuzele". Is he apologizing on behalf of the government or on behalf of the whole country? The title of the article is "Moldova își cere scuze de la Consiliul European pentru abuzurile admise de guvernarea comunistă", but even this leaves a kind of confusion.

M. Ghimpu issues three apologies; all of them contain the noun *scuze* and every time the structure is different. In one apology he expresses his willingness to apologize – *vreau să-mi cer scuze*. According to the taxonomy of interpersonal apologies, proposed by B. Fraser, such a structure would belong to the strategy "Offering to apologize", which is regarded as direct, since the speaker mentions that an apology is at issue [3, 263]. In the second one he uses the elliptical form of the performative construction *cer scuze* and his apology has the form *scuze*. The third time he uses the full performative construction *cer scuze*. As M. Owen points out, with the help of a performative formula "ambiguity is avoided and the addressees' interpretation of the utterance (or text) as an apology is guaranteed" [8, 65]. The formulas *Permiteți-mi să exprim (...) scuzele noastre sincere (...)*, *vreau să-mi cer scuze*, *scuze*, *îmi cer scuze* make it explicitly clear that these are direct, unambiguous and unqualified apologies.

Of particular interest is M. Ghimpu's apology *Scuze, dragă Românie, că n-au știut ce fac*, which is part of a very formal speech that he made at an official reception organized by the Romanian Embassy in Chișinău, dedicated to Romania's National Day. The leader of the Republic of Moldova addresses the whole neighbouring country by using a word of endearment – *dragă Românie*. As such, he addresses not only the leaders of Romania, but all the other citizens, too, that is, the whole country. In Romanian such a form of address (*dragă...*) emphasizes closeness. It belongs to the strategies of positive politeness, which focuses on building rapport and close relationship between the parties involved in communication (cf. [1, 107]). With the help of this element M. Ghimpu emphasizes closeness between Moldova and Romania. Romania is addressed informally, as a friend. In this particular context, using such a form of address might be treated as a rhetorical strategy, which is directed towards achieving a political aim. In this case we can speak about the attempt to erase (if that is possible) the unpleasant attitude of the previous government towards Romania and to start a new phase in this relationship – a collaboration based on mutual respect and support.

The direct apology is followed by an allusion to the Bible "că n-au știut ce fac". Such words were said by Jesus when He was crucified and asked His Father to forgive the wrongdoers for they did not know what they were doing. The idea is that if the wrongdoers had known that what they were doing was bad, they would not have done it. In the same way, if the previous government had known that it was not good to treat Romania the way they did, they would have had a different attitude to it. The use of this intertext, i.e. of the Biblical text, emphasizes a cultural tradition, shared by people living in the two neighbouring countries, and namely the Christian tradition. A great number of people in these two countries are Christians and live by Christian principles. One of these principles is always to forgive the wrongdoer, no matter how severe the offence might be. Another religious implication is that when a person does not know that what he/she does is bad, God's punishment upon him/her will be less. If we transfer this to our case, we can say that by choosing such a formulation, M. Ghimpu emphasizes two things: firstly, that Moldova hopes to receive forgiveness from Romania (according to the Christian teaching that one should always forgive the others) and secondly, there is hope that Romania will not be too harsh with Moldova for what happened in the past since people who were directly involved in the wrongdoing did not know at that time that they were doing a bad thing. In such a way, M. Ghimpu's usage of the Biblical text within his speech aims at getting a faster solution to the created conflict. Moldova's future relations with Romania should not have to suffer because of some mistakes committed by the previous government. M. Ghimpu also points out the friendly relationship and the trustworthy partnership between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, emphasizing both the help Moldova got from Romania and the hope for a future

support. The given apology has the aim of soothing the harm that has been done and of establishing good relationship with a neighbouring state, which is called by M. Ghimpu "the lawyer of the Republic of Moldova on its path to European integration"

Some political leaders from the Republic of Moldova expressed their feelings towards the incident they were apologizing for. There were two kinds of feelings expressed: shame and guilt. Shame was explicitly stated in M. Ghimpu's and A. Petrencu's apology. "A fost o rușine pentru noi", said M. Ghimpu in an interview for Radio Free Europe when he apologized to the citizens of Romania after the visa system, introduced by the Communist government for the citizens of Romania, was cancelled. A. Petrencu also explicitly states the feeling of shame: "Ne este rușine că actualul regim recurge la astfel de acțiuni (...)". It is important to mention two things about expressing shame in political apologies. Firstly, it is a collective expression of shame (o rușine pentru noi, ne este rușine). Secondly, the politicians express shame for others' misdeeds. In the examples that have been analyzed, political apologies issued for the wrongs committed while the politicians were in office do not contain reference to any feelings. This fact leads us to the idea that a public expression of shame for one's personal misdeeds is not easy. In P. Brown and S. Levinson's terms, it may have a face-threatening character. On the other hand, expressing shame should not be confused with feeling shame. These two things stay apart. One may express shame without really feeling it. Or one feels shame without really expressing it. How to measure this is a difficult, if not an almost impossible task. However, although it may only be expressed, without any true feeling, we consider it is a way of intensifying the force of the apology and of making it sound more "sincere".

Guilt was expressed implicitly in the apology issued to Azerbaijan, when the Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova in Azerbaijan, Igor Bodiuc qualified Moldova's selling guns to Armenia as "a wrong step from the political point of view".

Some apologies issued by politicians contain pledges that similar offences would never occur again, referred to in apology research as "promising forbearance from a similar offending act" [3, 263] and/or a description of actions that will be taken or have been taken to repair the harm, referred to as "offering redress" [3, 263]. In our opinion, such strategies intensify the force of the apology. They cannot be used in absolutely all the situations that require an apology, but when possible, they represent useful tools to make the apology more convincing and to start the remedial work *per se*. In the examples that have been analyzed, the apology issued by I. Leancă contained a promise to the European Council "Guvernul de la Chișinău va face tot posibilul pentru a elimina aceste practici ilegale și dăunătoare și pentru a avansa în mod ferm în implementarea reformelor democratice și a valorilor Consiliului Europei".

In the apologies that have been analysed, "offering redress" represented, in most cases, a description of actions that have already been taken to repair the harm. This fact stresses the desire of the guilty party to solve the created conflict. It shows that the party who has wronged has already made the first step towards reconciliation. Thus, M. Ghimpu issues his apology to the Romanian citizens a day after the system of visas, introduced by the Communist government, was abolished. First, he shows through actions that the mistake has been repaired and after that he issues the apology in which he acknowledges offence, by stating explicitly that it has been a political mistake which has been made on purpose.

It is interesting to point out the way in which the members of the social-political movement „Actiunea Europeana” decided to „repair” the wrong committed by the Communist leaders. The wrong could hardly be erased, but in order to express their solidarity with the citizens of Romania, who were not allowed to enter the Republic of Moldova, the members of this movement wore a banderol with the EU sign on which it was written „Nu corupți ie! Da UE!”. In such a way they condemned the decision of the Communist government and showed support for the EU citizens who were the victims of this incident.

Soon after the conflict which arose between the Republic of Moldova and Azerbaijan, immediate measures were taken to repair the wrong. Moldova ceased to deliver guns to Armenia and two commissions were created to investigate this incident. The wrong that was done cannot

be undone, but at least it can be stopped from continuing into future. This fact, together with the apology presented by the Prime Minister V.Filat, aimed at solving the conflict created between the two countries. The Ambassador Igor Bodiou expressed his hope that the given incident would not damage the future relations between the Republic of Moldova and Azerbaijan.

In our opinion, describing what actions have been taken in order to repair the harm intensifies the force of the apology, for actions speak louder than words. It shows that the guilty party has already started the remedial work. However, this does not underestimate the importance of the apology in restoring the equilibrium. For, as argued by Robinson (2004:293), "as a social action, apologizing is different and separate from other offense-remedial-related actions" and, as a consequence, more essential to "the maintenance of social harmony because it communicates awareness and acceptance of moral responsibility for offensive behavior"(cf.[4, 721-722]). To put it another way, the apology that follows is reconciliation at the moral level. Both elements are equally important for the solution of the conflict that has been created and using several strategies together intensifies the force of the apology and gives more hope for reconciliation.

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