

## ROZPRAWY I ARTYKUŁY

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### **Some European roots of the personality cult phenomenon – the attempt of comparative approach**

#### **I.**

The most visible examples of modern cult of personality had been connected with the three totalitarian political systems that emerged in Europe after the first world war, namely Soviet communism (Lenin and Stalin), Italian fascism (Mussolini) and German Nazism (Hitler). Certainly, every political regime tries to preserve its power as long as it is possibly. Nevertheless, in case of democratic political systems the best way is simply to win the next elections (parliamentary or presidential or even both at the best). On the other hand, authoritarian political systems can use even force (or so-called “naked power” in B. Russel terminology) to achieve this goal. Moreover, totalitarian political systems not only aim to stay at power at all cost but also try to change whole economic – social – political situation in the country and sometimes even try to create “new man” for a new society. Certainly, especially in case of totalitarian political systems (and quite often also in case of authoritarian political systems), the position of strong leader – quite often representing also some charismatic virtues (in terms of Weberian ideal type) – is of utmost importance. Moreover, on the base of such strong leadership the personality cult phenomenon can be developed. The personality cult not only can strengthen the position of such the totalitarian political leader but also can create very useful base for the legitimation of power (Beetham, 1991, 2005).

However, the phenomenon of personality cult is much older than the modern totalitarian political systems. Already Augustus, not only the first Roman emperor but also founder of the whole political system of Principate (or early Roman Empire) deliberately built the whole power system and the personality cult centered on his person (Żyromski, 2007). Nevertheless, the first example of modern personality cult emerged in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century and had been created for French emperor Napoleon III who obtained the imperial crown in 1851. Jan Plamper presented (in his book devoted to Stalin’s cult of personality) as many as five features that distinguished modern personality cults from the previous similar manifestations of supreme power:

- 1) “all modern personality cults were the children of mass politics”;
- 2) “they all used modern mass media that allowed for the mass dissemination of cult products”;

- 3) “modern personality cults emerged only in closed societies”;
- 4) they are “children of a secular age”;
- 5) “the modern personality cult was an exclusively patricentric phenomenon” (Plamper, 2012, XVII–XVIII).

Afterwards, Daniel Leese enumerated three more features of the modern personality cults: „first, are often deeply imbued with nationalism and tend to identify the fate of the nation with the fate of the party and its current leader [...] Second, the emergence of leader cults is strongly encouraged through the lack of rules governing political ascent and survival [...] Thirdly, party dictators mostly relief on mass festivals and rituals to stage participation and approval” (Leese, 2014, p. 342). Daniel Leese underlines that the modern personality cults (especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century) are closely connected to the political system of party dictatorship. This form of political system quite often has very clear populist face. Emilio Gentile described not only Nazism and Fascism but Bolshevism as well as the kind of “political religions” (*religioni politiche*) (Gentile, 1993, p. 309. In contrast with Nazi and Fascist dictators who obtained their position in (more or less) democratic way, the communists reached power as the result of October revolution and civil war later on. And so, the cult of personality had been especially important in the case of communist system. “The communist leader cult served three different but related functions. Firstly, its role was to legitimize the power of the small ruling group around the leaders. Secondly, it was intended as a mechanism to manage and defuse the potentially explosive conflicts within the governing stratum itself. Thirdly, it aimed to manage relations between the ruling group, the governing stratum, and the wider society” (*Leader Cult*, 2004, p. 24).

The cult of personality enables (at least to some extent) the political regime to establish the kind of bond between the ruling strata and the ruled population. This kind of a social interaction is very important not only in democratic political systems but in the case of totalitarian (and/or authoritarian) regimes as well. “All leader cults made a presumption, which never needs to be justified, to command the support and affection of its subjects” (Rees, 2004, p. 5). Taking this under the consideration, E. A. Rees presents his own definition of the personality cult which presents this notion not only as the political but also as the social phenomenon. “A leader cult is an established system of veneration of a political leader, to which all members of the society are expected to subscribe, a system that is omnipresent [...] is expected to persist indefinitely. It is thus a deliberately constructed and managed mechanism, which aims at the integration of the political system around the leader’s persona” (Rees, 2004, p. 5).

## II. The cult of personality in the communist Soviet Union

Already in medieval times in Russia existed (and certainly still exists) a great and widespread need for the strong and efficient political power embodied by the strong political leader. Obviously, „throughout its history, the Russian state was usually centered on a single person” (Plamper, 2012, p. 89. Not only many representatives of the tsarist power but also many first secretaries of the communist party (CPSU) or Vladimir Putin as the president of the Russian Federation present themselves as the strong leaders and/

or rulers of the ruled population. Many sociological reports and analyzes show even today (for instance made by the independent Levada center) that a lot of Russians prefer rather the strong and effective political leader than some weak but democratic politicians – even at the price of gradual diminishing of some citizens' rights or the weak position of media – in practice closely connected with the current political power. The last Russian tsar Nicolas II was very far from this ideal of the strong and effective ruler. However, it was Nicolas II who “attempted to become the first modern tsar, addressing his myth to the masses and employing the latest technical means to do so” (Plamper, 2012, pp. 7–8). In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (but after the revolution of 1905) Nicolas II ordered the organization of some celebrations of events most important for the glorious Russian history. Especially important were some celebrations of anniversaries of two battles (Poltava 1709 and Borodino 1812) and first of all the sumptuous celebrations of 300-hundred years of Romanov dynasty in 1913. It is interesting that all these ceremonies “were modeled on festivities of Victorian England, shifting the site of ceremony outside the palace” (Plamper, 2012, p. 7).

Moreover, in the turbulent months between the February and October revolutions of 1917 some personality cults of a few Russian military leaders can also be observed. “Kerensky became the next tsar and the object of an elaborate cult [...] His theatrical capabilities and because he was the only politician who belonged both to the Duma committee and the Soviet executive committee” (Plamper, 2012, p. 11). As wrote quite recently Simon Sebag Montefiore in his marvelous presentation of the Romanov dynasty, this 35-years old lawyer and socialist politician presented in his person the only link between these two structures of power in Russia of 1917 (Montefiore, 2016, p. 690). Afterwards, there was also the cult of Kornilov, connected with his unsuccessful *coup d'état* of July 1917. The current political situation in Russia (between the two revolutions of 1917) resulted in rather short-lived character of both these two Russian leaders.

On the other hand, it is very interesting that among leaders of the Bolshevik party the personality cult was not only unknown but even seemed unnecessary. Because “cults of personality, supposedly alien to the party collectivist, class-based ethos” (Davies, Harris, 2014, p. 137). Nevertheless, even before the October revolution, “the party had a tradition of lauding heroic and exceptional individuals who had served the revolutionary cause” (Davies, Harris, 2014, p. 137). Of course, in concordance with the core bases of the communist ideology, the position of the given person (even the greatest and most genial one) had to be subordinated to some common values, first of all to the future happiness of the working class (and of the great masses of the population, in general). “Most attempts to justify personality cults within communist party dictatorship relied on the argument, of certain individuals being able to synthesize the current needs of the times and of guiding the masses towards the historically predetermined solution” (Leese, 2014, p. 343). How it could be possible to combine the overall dominant position of the working class (at least in theory) with the cult of a leader? Why not to create the cult of a dead leader? And so, the posthumous cult of Lenin proved to be very sensitive and clever solution. Nevertheless Lenin, as the leader of the October revolution started to build the cult of his personality just after victory of the revolution (certainly during the civil war), as Nina Tumarkin showed in her book. “The cult was built gradually during Lenin's lifetime and just after his death

by people at all levels of Soviet political life” (Tumarkin, 1997, p. XVII). Robert Gellately also presented the opinion that Lenin’s cult existed already during his lifetime. “A Lenin cult emerged even before he died. ‘Lenin corners,’ which would have a picture of the hero and quotations, became a standard feature of many official buildings, from schools to prisons, and was consistent with the tradition of the religious icon and ritual” (Gellately, 2008, p. 155). However, in the opinion of some other scholars the cult of personality appeared after the death of Lenin only. Allan Todd wrote that during Lenin’s lifetime “there was no leadership or personality cult [...] after his death a ‘cult of Lenin’ was created by Stalin” (Todd, 2002, p. 42). Quite the similar opinion presented also (already cited in this article) Jan Plamper. “During Lenin’s lifetime there was no modern political personality cult around him” (Plamper, 2012, p. 22). Nevertheless, some forms of Lenin’s cult already existed during his lifetime because already in 1918 some places had been named after him (Davies, Harris, 2014, p. 141).

It is interesting that already during Lenin’s lifetime (in April 1923) Moscow Party Organization decided to establish Lenin Institute In Moscow (with Kamieniev at its head). Certainly, the death of Lenin (21.01.1924) marked the real beginning of vast cult of personality centered on the person and position of the leader of October revolution. The great and sumptuous funeral celebrations of Lenin marked both the popular support (more or less voluntary) for the new communist system of power and at the same time signified the personality cult of Lenin as well. “Over the course of three days, between half a million and one million people passed by Lenin’s open coffin in the Hall of Columns at the House of Trade Unions, enduring queues a mile and a half long in outside temperatures of – 28 degrees F” (Kotkin, 2014, p. 536). Certainly, such the low temperature is nothing strange in January in the Soviet (or Russian) capital. Quite the similar situation could be observed almost thirty years later (in March 1953) after the death of Stalin. It is interesting that the wooden mausoleum of Lenin had been replaced by the stone structure that represented at the same time quite interesting and modern piece of architecture. Certainly very deliberately “the regime commissioned the architect Alexei Shchusev, noted for his art nouveau Kazan railway station in Moscow [...] design of three cubes arranged horizontally and connected by corridors, based upon ancient Mayan motifs” (Kotkin, 2014, p. 543). The anniversary of Lenin’s death functioned even (at least in 1928) as the “state holiday” (Kotkin, 2014, p. 679).

Undoubtedly, the cult of Lenin formed the model for many subsequent personality cults – both in Soviet Union (Stalin, Brezhnev) and also – after the second world war – in other communist (or perhaps rather socialist) countries. For instance, in Yugoslavia after the second world war developed the cult of “comrade Tito” (*družo Tito*). Recently, Slovenian historian Jože Pirjevec shoved in his detailed biography of Tito that his cult of personality began already before the war (Pirjevec, 2018, p. 759). Nevertheless, the most important example of communist cult of personality was created around the person and position of Joseph Stalin who for the quarter of century (1928–1953) remained on the dominant position in the Soviet Union. “The cult of Lenin was followed in Russia by the extravagant Stalin cult, and subsequently by the many cults of personality” (Tumarkin, 1997, p. 2). However, the very important difference between Lenin’s cult and some other later cults of personality can be observed. Lenin’s cult developed mainly after the death of the leader of October revolution. And so, Lenin’s

cult served mainly to legitimize and strengthen the position of the ruling communist party (CPSU). On the other hand, some subsequent cults of personality (for instance Stalin, Mao, Tito) were cults of a living leader. So, first of all these cults of personality served to strengthen the position of actual leader.

In contrast with the position of Lenin (as the leader of victorious October revolution) the position and power of Stalin mainly derived from his place in the bureaucratic structure of the Soviet party. Thanks to the position of the secretary of Bolshevik party (nominated by Lenin himself) Stalin was able to create the whole group of loyal supporters and adherents whose position (political, social and even economic) depended solely on good relations with the dictator. Moreover, Stalin proved to be very successful politician – especially in winning struggles and intrigues with his presumed enemies (and even former friends). “It was at the time of the defeat of the ‘right’ opposition that the propaganda organs started to emphasize Stalin as an individual” (Mawdsley, 2003, p. 21).

The cult of personality centered on Stalin was very complex in its character. “In the case of Stalin the cult projected various images: a) Lenin’s pupil and heir; (b) the defender of state; (c) the prophet, apostle and teacher; (d) the builder of the new world; (e) the inspirer of his people” (*Leader Cult*, 2004, p. 15). Undoubtedly, the crucial point in the process of creation of Stalin’s cult was marked by the huge celebrations of his fiftieth birthdays in 1929. “Stalin’s fiftieth birthday in December 1929 saw the launch of a personality cult to rival Lenin’s” (Merridale, 1990, p. 23). Although the Soviet dictator in fact was born in 1878 and not in 1879, but this difference appeared only after some Soviet archives opened its gates (in part at least) for some historians in the 1990s. “As late as the end of 1920, he was still giving December 6, 1878, as his birth date, but in 1922, one of his assistants issued a ‘correction’ to December 21, 1879 [...] It remains unclear why Stalin choose a different day as well as different year” (Kotkin, 2014, p. 742 n. 25). By the way, it is interesting that in 1935 Tito changed the date of his birth from 1892 into 1893 (Pirjevec, 2018, p. 45). Moreover, during the second world war Tito introduced the May 25 as his official birthday – instead of May 7. (Pirjevec, 2018, p. 221).

At that time, even with the invention of film or radio, the press still fulfilled a role of the main vehicle of the Soviet propaganda. And so, as many as 8 pages of *Pravda* „were filled with laudatory articles by fellow Party bosses” (Plamper, 2012, p. 29). Moreover, also the „ordinary” citizens of the Soviet Union were encouraged to write many letters of support on occasion of Stalin’s birthday. „*Pravda* alone printed 200 messages of congratulations, 117 of them between December 21 and 28” (Gellately, 2008, p. 181). As the kind of comparison it is worth to mention Stalin’s birthday celebrated four years earlier. “The celebration of Stalin’s forty-sixth birthday in 1925 was a local Georgian event reflected in the Tiflis press only” (Tucker, 1973, p. 462).

However, in the beginning of 1930s Stalin’s cult of personality greatly diminished. Perhaps it was connected with the disastrous outcome of the collectivization of agriculture, resulting with the death of millions of Soviet citizens – mainly in Ukraine. “In the mid-thirties, the cult underwent both qualitative and quantitative transformations, becoming both larger in scale and more populist. Stalin became ‘father of the people’ as well as *vozhd* of the party” (Davies, Harris, 2014, p. 144). Moreover, gradually appeared another notions and epithets that underlined not only the dominant position of Stalin in Soviet party, state and society but that presented him as the real genius – “the

greatest strategist of the proletarian revolution,' 'architect of communism,' 'creator of the new life,' 'powerful heart of our land,' and 'the greatest man, the leader and teacher, our genius'" (Gill, 2011, p. 117). Moreover, starting with 1934 Stalin used some real successes of Soviet scientists, workers or sportsmen in the process of building and enlarging of his own personality cult. "The Stalin cult intersected with the cultic representation of the other heroes of Soviet society. Pilots and explorers, record-breaking miners and milkmaids were all inevitably guided by the wise Stalin [...] He was their inspiration as well as their father and teacher" (Gill, 2011, p. 120). And so, nothing strange that the best Soviet pilots and best students of Moscow university obtained their nickname after the name of Stalin (*Stalinskie sokoly* and *Stalinskie stipendiaty* respectively) (Plamper, 2012, p. 250 n. 28).

The next important step in the process of development of the personality cult built around Stalin had been connected with his sixtieth birthday in 1939 (in concordance with the false date of his birth). "With the celebrations of Stalin's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1939, the process of iconizing his persona was complete. For six weeks tremendous number of congratulations were published daily, indicating a broad social mobilization within Soviet society [...] He was called 'Lenin of today'" (Ennker, 2004, p. 85). Even in Yugoslavia in 1942 Tito choose Stalin's birthday (21.12.1942) as the day of creation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Proletarian Brigade (later on the whole division) as the main partisan military force (Pirjevec, 2018, p. 146). The next (and last at the same time) celebrations of Stalin's birthday occurred in 1949. At that time the position of Stalin had been already recognized on the international stage. Based on Soviet military power and the political position gained during the second world war by Soviet Union also Stalin cult gained the international importance. "Stalin's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1949 was the most extensive celebration of his leader cult" (Behrends, 2004, p. 161). In the sharp contrast with celebrations of his fiftieth and sixtieth birthdays, in 1949 Stalin birthday "was an international affair" (Behrends, 2004, p. 161).

Nevertheless, the process of promotion of the personality cult centered on Stalin greatly diminished during the first phase of the Soviet – German war (up to the Soviet victory at Stalingrad in the beginning of 1943). "Stalingrad marked the decisive turning point in the wartime cult of Stalin. As the Red Army's fortunes rose, so also did the quantity of propaganda featuring Stalin. With victory at the end of January 1943 came fresh emphasis on his role as military leader" (Barber, 1993, p. 42). Certainly during the war Stalin's image was mainly a military one; not only his name but also his position had been closely connected with war successes of the Red Army. And so, mainly the year "1944 would become known as the year of 'the ten Stalin's blows' [...] Stalin's image as great military leader was certainly the central feature of his cult by the end of the war" (Barber, 1993, pp. 43–44).

### III. The cult of Mussolini and the ideology of *Ducismo*

Similar to the process of gaining the supreme position in Soviet Union by Stalin (1924–1928) also Benito Mussolini gained the dominant position in Italy after few years (1922–1925), starting with so-called "march on Rome" (the most of Fascists

travelled in vehicles and Mussolini himself arrived in Rome by train in sleeping-car). In contrast, the highest and undisputable position of Lenin in Soviet politics resulted from the successful October revolution. Nevertheless, also Adolf Hitler gained the dominant position just after few months, starting with the office of Chancellor (30.01.1933). Just after Mussolini took the sole responsibility for the death of Matteotti started the process of creation the cult of personality centered on the person and position of *Duce* (derived from Latin *dux*). Already in 1925–1926 Margherita Sarfatti published the biography of Mussolini with significant title *Dux*. This book had even 17 editions in Italy (at about 200th copies had been published). Moreover, some translations emerged in no less than 18 different languages. Whether Stalin himself had to care for his personality cult (perhaps he was afraid of too close collaborators) and Hitler had his propaganda minister (Goebbels), also the cult of Mussolini had been thoroughly orchestrated. “The cult of the Duce owed much of its early momentum to Arnaldo Mussolini, who used his position as editor of *Il Popolo d’Italia* to portray his elder brother as a man of incomparable ability. From the mid-1920s the cult accelerated rapidly” (Duggan, 2008, p. 477). Certainly, some close family relations even today play quite the considerable role in an Italian politics. Margherita Sarfatti was a close friend (and a lover at the same time) of *Duce* and Arnaldo was his brother. After the death of Arnaldo Mussolini (in 1931) the task of preserving and developing of personality cult centered on Mussolini passed to Achile Starace. “Achile Starace, party secretary from 1931 to 1939, was appointed to become both ‘the priest of the cult of the Duce’ and the chief choreographer of mass rallies and goose-stepping parades. [...] he was totally loyal to Mussolini” (Whittman, 1995, p. 66). Starace in some way put the cult of Mussolini even to some absurd forms— for instance, he demanded that officials (and even ministers) had to stand during the phone conversations with *Duce*.

Just like Hitler, also Mussolini kept close contact with social masses of his adherents (or perhaps even true worshippers). Both Hitler’s and Mussolini’s speeches and public performances can be treated as the true spectacles. “His speeches, a crucial ingredient in his charismatic appeal, were intended as theatrical performances, to generate enthusiasm and unthinking faith” (Duggan, 2008, p. 477). Of course, it make the task of propaganda much easier than in the case of Stalin who successfully avoided public speeches or any contact with Soviet people in general. “Stalin made it a rule not to come into direct contact with the masses. With rare exceptions, he never visited a factory or collective farm, never travelled to any of the republics, or to the front during the war” (Volkogonov, 2000, p. XXI). The great Soviet victory at Stalingrad marked at the same time not only the terrible disaster of German Wehrmacht but also resulted in loss of the great Italian contingent sent by Mussolini to the Eastern Front. In practice at the same time (winter of 1943) Italian and German military forces (famous *Africa Korps*) in Northern Africa had to surrender. When the Anglo-American forces conquered Sicily, the position and fate of Mussolini were doomed. The interconnection between *Duce*, the Fascist party (PNF) and the Italian society finished very quickly. “The Fascist system rested on the principle of charismatic leadership and was coherent by the myth of the infallible Duce” (Morgan 2008, p. 18). Thanks to the cult of *Duce* (and the ideology of *Ducismo*), the position of Mussolini had been situated above both the Italian government and even above the fascist party. Certainly, thanks to this

situation Mussolini had been immune from the critics (in the similar way as Hitler or Stalin) but at the cost of diminishing the efficiency of Italian administration, economy and even armed forces. And so, the fateful (for *Duce*) day of July 25, 1943 marked not only the end of Mussolini but the end of fascism in Italy. Just after the war the famous joke predicted that Italy was the most populous country in Europe because before the war in Italy there was 40 million Fascists and after the war – 40 million anti-Fascists.

#### IV. The cult of *Führer* in the Third Reich

Similar to the situation in Russia (already analyzed in this article) also the cult of personality in Germany had quite a long history. Already in 1897 the huge monument of Wilhelm I had been erected and financed for the greater part by some war veterans' organizations. Moreover, in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century (1900–1910) even at about 500 so-called “Bismarck towers” had been planned to construct all over the Germany. These towers resembled the famous Theodoric mausoleum in Ravenna. “More than 200 *Bismarcktürme* (Bismarck towers) [...] had been erected throughout Germany to commemorate the ‘heroic’ leadership of Bismarck, the Chancellor who had united the country” (Rees, 2012, p. 42).

It is interesting that Hitler's cult of personality can be dated even before the Munich putsch of 1923. The first sight of Hitler's cult of personality had been connected with Hitler's 34<sup>th</sup> birthdays (20.04.1923) – with Rosenberg's article published in „*Völkischer Beobachter*” and with the poem deliberately written by Eckart. At the beginning of his political career both Fascist Italy and the position of Mussolini created the important role model for Adolf Hitler.

“While Mussolini kept a bust of Napoleon in his study, Adolf Hitler [...] had long kept a bust of Benito Mussolini in his” (Kertzer, 2014, p. 199). In the result Hitler started to be stylized and presented by his close collaborators not only as the leader (*Führer*) but also as the man who would save the nation.

When Hitler had been released from the prison (at Landsberg near Munich) after his unsuccessful Munich putsch he started the process of reorganization of the Nazi party (NSDAP). “The introduction in 1926 of a compulsory ‘Heil Hitler’ fascist-style greeting and salute among party members was an outward sign of their bonds with their leader” (Kershaw, 2001a, p. 43). When in August 1927 Nazi Party rally (*Partei-tag*) for the first time took place in Nuremberg, Hitler's cult of personality had been already celebrated very pompous (Volker, 2015, p. 274). Moreover, first portrait photographs taken by Hitler's personal photographer (Heinrich Hoffmann) show already some leadership gestures that characterized Hitler's pictures and photographs almost up to the end his political career (and end of life at the same time). He presented very masculine posture, his hands were split on his chest and his lips were tightened under his famous moustache.

Undoubtedly, the process of creating the cult of personality around the person and position of Hitler greatly developed after the receiving the Chancellorship on January 30, 1933. Already in the first half of 1933 many towns and villages in Germany chose Hitler as their honorary citizen. Moreover, many streets and squares all over



the Germany had been named after Hitler. For instance, a tiny locality in East Prussia (Sutzken, modern Suczki near Gołdap in Poland) asked for permission to change its name to *Hitlerhöhe* [Hitler's hill]. Besides, one Nazi Party member in Düsseldorf wanted to give his newborn girl the name *Hitlerine*. But the registrar's office suggested him rather the name *Adolfine* (Volker, 2015, p. 661). And so, nothing strange that there were many examples of „women writing to Hitler asking him to father their children” (Overy, 2004, p. 130). Moreover, all over the Germany there were many “Hitler's oaks” or “Hitler's roses” and even “Hitler's cakes” had been baked.

Hitler's private chancellery (directed by Albert Bormann, the brother of Martin) had to employ four officials more because there were so many letters, postcards and even poems specially written for Hitler. In the great hall of Reich Chancellery, where in 1878 Bismarck presided over the Berlin Congress, had been gathered whole “mountain” of gifts connected with the 44<sup>th</sup> Hitler's birthday (20.04.1933) (Volker, 2015, p. 663). Every public and school library in Germany had been obliged to buy at least one copy of *Mein Kampf*. Moreover, starting with 1936 every new marriage couple received this book as the wedding gift at the office. And so, nothing strange that up to 1944 almost 12.5 million copied had been published. Quite similar to Predappio in Italy also *Berghof* (Hitler's house on *Obersalzberg* near Berchtesgaden) functioned as the place of pilgrimage. „Women, so it was claimed, were to be seen at Hitler's Bavarian retreat at Berchtesgaden eating handfuls of the graced that the Führer had just walked” (Overy, 2004, p. 130). However, in the beginning of Hitler's rule even the wooden fence was not safe, as show some reports of Nazi secret police. “According to reports reaching the *Sopade* in mid-1934, pieces of wood from the garden fence of Hitler's house in the *Obersalzberg* were being taken away ‘as relics’ and one woman had ever stretched up the earth which Hitler had trodden on while walking to his house” (Kershaw, 2001, pp. 60–61 n. 31] Ulf Schmidt in his biography of Karl Brandt described even in a poetic way the question of mass pilgrimages connected with the person of Hitler. “Spontaneous, unorganized mass rallies were snaking up the narrow mountain road – supporters wishing to see the Führer with their own eyes. They waited for hours, sometimes days, until Hitler would briefly appear by the entrance of his house [...] By July 1933, the authorities had banned all kinds of unorganized mass pilgrimages and semi-religious chanting along the mountain road. The levels of adoration had reached worrying proportions. Himmler, as chief of the Bavarian political police, also banned the use of binoculars in the region after it had been reported that holidaymakers were monitoring every move of the Reich Chancellor from afar” (Schmidt, 2007, p. 58).

Nevertheless, the cult of personality centered on Hitler survived much shorter time that it happened in case of Stalin (1929–1953) or Mussolini (1925–1943). Ian Kershaw underlined that Hitler's popularity lasted only at about ten years – and so, from the acquisition of supreme power in the end of January 1933 up to the disaster at Stalingrad in the beginning of February 1943. “For almost a decade after 1933, Hitler enjoyed a remarkable degree of popularity among the great majority of the German people [...] The Hitler myth was a double-sided phenomenon. On the one hand, it was a masterly achievement in image-building by the exponents of the new techniques of propaganda, building upon notions of ‘heroic’ leadership [...] On the other hand, it has to be seen as a reflection of ‘mentalities’ value-systems and socio-political structures which

conditioned the acceptance of a 'Superman' image of political leadership" (Kershaw, 2001a, p. 41). Perhaps the greatest success of his policy had been achieved with the victory over France – treated as the "eternal" enemy of both Germans and Germany. "On 6 July 1940 Hitler drove back into Berlin, after overseeing the capitulation of France, to scenes of joy bordering on hysteria. Hundreds of thousands of Berliners crammed the streets to cheer him. Schoolboys climbed lampposts to see their Führer. Flowers were strewn under his car. A forest of waving swastika flags lined the route" (Rees, 2012, p. 275). On the other hand, it would be very difficult to overestimate the significance of German defeat at Stalingrad – both for the further German military effort and for the development of Hitler's personality cult. It was the "catastrophe of Stalingrad, a defeat for which Hitler's personal responsibility was widely recognized" (Kershaw, 2001a, p. 53). Certainly, after Stalingrad both the faith in Hitler's infallibility and the Hitler's myth itself started to diminish and deteriorate. "The shame of Stalingrad caused a widespread deterioration in beliefs in Hitler's charisma" (Rees, 2012, p. 371).

Certainly, it would be very difficult to underestimate the role of Joseph Goebbels (and his ministry of propaganda) in the process of creation and development of the personality cult centered on Hitler. The similar role played Achille Starace for Mussolini (although in lesser degree), whether Stalin had no such the "cult ministry." „As far as we know Hitler's cult was orchestrated from a single institution, Goebbels propaganda ministry, while Stalin's cult had no such central directorate. Many of the techniques used for the cults were inspired by American commercial advertising" (Plamper, 2012, p. 19). Similar to Mussolini also Hitler presented at the same time the double image of his person – not only the great leader of almost superhuman leadership's qualities but also a perfect "ordinary" man who could perfectly understand the needs of his fellow citizens. „Goebbels' greatest achievement as a propagandist was the creation of the Hitler's myth – the *Führerkult* [...] The necessary double image of Hitler as a superman and a man of the people" (Zeman, 1973, p. 35). It is interesting that all three totalitarian dictators analyzed in this book had been presented in such a way. At the same time they were propagated as the greatest leaders of their state (or nation) and additionally they functioned as the simple men who perfectly understood some desires and needs of the social masses. Similar to Mussolini, Hitler presented himself as the ordinary German citizen who perfectly understood both the needs and desires of German society. Hitler – "in his public portrayal, he was a man of the people, his humble origins emphasizing the rejection of privilege and the sterile order in favor of a new, vigorous, upwardly-mobile society built upon strength, merit, and achievement" (Kershaw, 2001a, p. 44). This populist appeal was essential, as it seems, in the process of creating the Hitler's cult. "The single most important precondition for the creation of Hitler's charisma was his ability to connect with the feelings, hopes and desires of millions of his fellow Germans. It was in the nature of this connection that the power of his charisma resided" (Rees, 2012, p. 175).

Certainly, very important elements of Hitler's cult of personality had been formed by Nazi Party rallies held on specially created by Albert Speer huge grounds at the outskirts of Nuremberg. "The symbolism was replete from the very beginning, as Hitler's aeroplane descended through the clouds over Nuremberg casting a cruciform shape

over the marching storm-troopers and the thousands awaiting him in ecstatic expectation in the streets below” (Kershaw, 2001, p. 70). In the famous movie created by Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph des Willens* [Triumph of the Will] completely lonely Hitler dominated over thousands and thousands of his adherents, pictured as the homogeneous mass of people. It is interesting that the title of film (*Triumph des Willens*) had been invented by Hitler himself.

Ian Kershaw analyzed in his book devoted to the “Hitler Myth” many different images of Hitler simultaneously presented by the Nazi propaganda. „Firstly, Hitler was regarded as the personification of the nation [...] Secondly, he was accepted as the single-handed architect and creator of Germany’s ‘economic miracle’ of the 1930s [...] Thirdly [...] Hitler was seen as the representative of ‘popular justice’ [...] Fourthly [...] as a ‘moderate’ opposed to the radical and extreme elements in the Nazi Movement. [...] Fifthly, in the arena of foreign affairs, Hitler was commonly regarded as an upholder and a fanatical defender of Germany’s just rights, a rebuildler of the nation strength, a statesman of genius [...] Sixthly, in the first half of the war Hitler appeared to be the incomparable military leader [...] and understood the ‘psychology’ of the ordinary soldier [...] Finally, there was Hitler’s image as the bulwark against the nation’s perceived powerful ideological enemies – Marxism/Bolshevism and above all the Jews” (Kershaw, 2001, p. 242–243).

In the opinion of David Welch, Hitler’s cult of personality had the greatest impact on the success of Nazi propaganda. “The cult of the leader, which surpassed any normal level of trust in political leadership, is central to understanding of the appeal of National Socialism, and undoubtedly the most important theme cementing Nazi propaganda together” (Welch, 1998, p. 42). He repeated this opinion five years later using exactly the same words (Welch, 2003, p. 94).

## V. Some common features of the personality cult phenomenon

On the base of more detailed presentation of the personality cult phenomenon developed after the first world war in three European totalitarian political systems (Soviet communism, Italian Fascism and German Nazism) it seems suitable to present some common features of this political and social phenomenon. These are as follows: the so-called “cult products,” some methods used in the cult’s propaganda, some functions of the cult of personality and finally also some attitudes of totalitarian dictators toward cult of personality.

### 1. Some so-called “cult products”

The very common and widespread “cult product” was the publishing of books and articles written by some totalitarian dictators. It was specially visible in the case of the communist system – not only Lenin and Stalin but also Mao really wrote a lot. Whether Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* reached “only” little more than 10 million copies, “editions of the works of Stalin reached over 672 million copies (1953 figures), of Lenin 483 million

(1975 figures) and of Marx and Engels 108 million” (Borejsza, 2006, p. 15. This was especially the task of Soviet propaganda office (*Agitprop*). Already in 1934 at about 16,5 millions “copies of Stalin’s various works were in circulation, complemented by increasingly large amounts of hagiography in the party press” (Brandenberger, 2005, p. 253). Nevertheless, the first great communist agitation campaign had been connected with Lenin’s fiftieth birthday (23.04.1920). “As part of its campaign, Agitprop published two popular biographies of Lenin” Tumarkin, 1997, p. 101). One of these biographies, wrote by V. I. Nevsky had been published even in 200,000 copies. Moreover, on that occasion such the communist leaders as Trotsky, Zinoviev, Stalin and Bukharin published many articles, mainly in two most important Soviet newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestia*. Mainly the central press in Soviet Union was filled with greetings, articles and poems honoring Lenin’s.

Already before the October revolution even in some remote Siberian villages the kind of little shrines at homes had been organized with some pictures of tsars and their families. And so, nothing strange that just after the death of Lenin in many villages, factories and offices appeared so-called Lenin Corners, it means deliberately established small chapels with a photograph (or even painting) of Lenin. Of course, when Stalin finally gained the dominant position in Soviet party and state such the little chapels contained some photographs of a new Soviet dictator. In general, some visual aspects of communist propaganda were very important because of the high (but in practice impossible even to estimate) level of illiteracy first in tsarist Russia and afterwards even in the Soviet Union. And so, the important part of some parades and celebrations – for instance connected with the May Day or with the anniversary of the October revolution – formed many pictures or even posters depicting some greatest and most popular communist leaders. For instance, on November 7, 1933 during the celebration of the anniversary of October revolution (the difference in date there is connected with change of calendar from Julian to Gregorian), one American press correspondent noticed and counted as many as 103 portraits and busts of Stalin. At the same time Lenin appeared 58 times, Kaganovitz 56 (not speaking of less important communist leaders) (Gill, 2011, p. 117). “A 1936 poster with a portrait of Stalin appeared in an edition of 250,000” (Bonnell, 1999, p. 160).

In order to propagate the position of totalitarian dictators and political leaders even some newest and modern (at that time) technical achievements had been used. For instance, on August 3, 1937 on the occasion of the Day of the Soviet Air Force – “group of airplanes forming both a Soviet star and the letters ‘S – T – A – L – I – N’” (Plamper, 2012, p. 71). No less than 45 planes were needed to form the name of Stalin. Jan Plamper presents also the photograph published in *Pravda* (of 5.10.1935) showing like the group of 51 tractor-drivers formed the name of Stalin on the Kazbek mountain. Moreover, on September 13, 1937 the group of climbers reached the peak of Stalin Mountain in Pamir (7495 m) and placed on it the bust of Stalin. In 1940 two sailors from ice-breaker *Siedow* placed two flags on the North Pole – one presented the Soviet emblem and the other one contained the portrait of Stalin.

The film was intensively used in case of all three (analyzed in this article) totalitarian dictators. However, whether both Mussolini (mainly in newsreels created by LUCE Institute) and Hitler (like in *Triumph des Willens*) appeared in documentary

films only, but Stalin appeared in movies as well. And so, in the second half of 1930s Stalin started to be presented also in some films. In 1937 in Soviet cinemas appeared *Lenin in October* and Michail Romm – „was the first movie starring an actor as Stalin” (Plamper, 2012, p. XV). All three totalitarian dictators were (in practice) omnipresent in public space and sometimes even in private houses. Already in 1930s it was very difficult not to notice any image of Stalin (poster, portrait or photograph) in any Soviet town or even village. Certainly, “in the collective imagination Stalin had become indistinguishable from his portrait. Stalin’s portraits had saturated Soviet space and through portraits Soviet citizens formed an image of their omnipresent leader” (Plamper, 2012, p. XIII). The image of Stalin appeared on many so-called cult products. “A great variety of media were involved in the Stalin cult, including cinema, photography, poster art, oil painting, sculpture, songs, poetry, prose, folklore, drama and crafts (from Armenian tapestry weaving to vases from the Leningrad porcelain manufacture)” (Plamper, 2004, p. 125).

Quite the similar “cult products” were clearly visible both in Third Reich and Italy during rule of Benito Mussolini. In both these countries there were innumerable paintings, posters, graffiti, photographs, sculptures, statues and medals. For instance, in Italy “every year the fascist party printed a calendar iconographical dominated by Mussolini and encouraged every good citizen to buy it” (Falasca-Zamponi, 1997, p. 78). As wrote Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, Italians could even buy a soap produced in shape of Mussolini. “In schools, as well as in other public establishments, every room was adorned with a picture of Mussolini. [...] Mussolini’s photograph was distributed to children who received a gift package for the Epiphany (*Befana fascista*)” (Falasca-Zamponi, 1997, p. 78). Undoubtedly, even some religious feasts and celebrations had been connected at that time with the fascist ideology.

As I wrote already in this article, both the Mussolini’s place of birth (*Predappio*) and Hitler’s mountain retreat (*Berghof*) had been treated in practice as the place of pilgrimage. On the other hand, not only Stalin’s birthplace in Georgian Gori functioned as a museum. “In 1934, a Stalin museum was founded in Stalin’s love nest, the Pereprygin *izba*, which was expanded on his official seventieth birthday, in 1949 into a pillared pavilion with the hut preserved in a glass bell. A giant statue of Stalin was built. [...] In 1961, during de-Stalinization, the museum was destroyed, the statue pushed through a hole in the ice, the *izba* burned” (Montefiore, 2008, p. 316 note).

Moreover, as quite important “cult product” can be treated also some geographical names. Except of a tiny village in East Prussia (as I wrote already in this article) Hitler did not want to place his name in the geographical space. Mussolini planned to construct one town bearing his name in the area of so-called Pontic Marshes South of Rome. Certainly, the communists made much more changes of geographical names. Already five days after the death of Lenin Piotrograd (former Petersburg), the second largest city in Russia, changed its name into Leningrad (Sebestyen, 2018, p. 588). This procedure of changing some geographical names had been largely developed during the rule of Stalin. Only one year after the death of Lenin, in 1925 the name of Tsaritsyn had been changed on Stalingrad (modern Volgograd). This town was very important for Stalin himself because he fought there during the Civil War in early 1920s. Undoubtedly, the terrible fight even in the center of Stalingrad (in autumn and winter of

1942) resulted in German disaster that formed the turning point in the second world war was connected not only with some strategic position of this town (as a gateway to Caucasus) but also (or perhaps first of all) with some symbolic importance of Stalingrad. Besides, Stalingrad was a great industrial town. It is interesting that exactly such the industrial towns (with heavy industry and military sector) changed its names – not only in Soviet Union but also in some European socialist countries (after the second world war, of course). For instance in communist Poland Silesian town of Katowice changed its name on Stalinogród [the town of Stalin]. The similar situation occurred in Romania where on August 23, 1950 the name Braşov had been changed on Oraşul Stalin [the town of Stalin] (Aman, 1992, p. 41). On the other hand, Stalin personally refused the idea of renaming Moscow in his favor – as Stalinodar [The gift of Stalin]. Nowadays, in “Berlin-Treptov cemetery [...] tombstones bearing quotations from Stalin, one of the largest surviving monuments to the Stalin cult anywhere in Europe” (*Leader Cult*, 2004, p. 18).

## ***2. Some methods used in the cult's propaganda***

Perhaps the most important method used both in the process of preserving the dictatorial (or even totalitarian) power and in the process of creating the cult of personality was almost total control over all means of mass communication – and so, the control over information.

Certainly, it was Mussolini who as the first totalitarian dictator intensively used some new media – mainly radio and cinema. “He was the first politician of the twentieth century to make use of modern communication techniques” (Merriman, 2010, p. 1008). Most probably the main reason for the intensive using of new media in propaganda of personality cult was the personal and specially professional experience of Mussolini himself. “As a journalist and propagandist, Mussolini was quick to see the potential of radio and cinema, and the 1930s saw his regime make increasing use of the mass media” (Neville, 2015, p. 113). First of all, he ordered the construction of the greatest film studios at the world – the famous “City of Film” (*Cinecittá*), situated on the Southern outskirts of Rome. In quite a similar way Mussolini planned and ordered to construct the “City of Sport” (*Foro Mussolini*, modern *Foro Italico*) and the “City of Civilization” (EUR). “Radio and film became increasingly important vehicles of the cult during the 1930s” (Duggan, 2008, p. 478). Nevertheless, already starting with 1925 Italian radio had to transmit Mussolini's speeches live. Moreover, starting with 1926 in Italy the newsreels before every film presented in the cinema became obligatory. Of course, every newsreel presented and propagated mainly some visits, trips and achievements of Mussolini. And so, some newsreels very often “showed him addressing large crowds of enthusiastic supporters and that was always filmed from below, to hide his lack of height” (Todd, 2002, p. 127). As the matter of fact, also Hitler and Stalin had to be filmed from below and exactly from the same reason as Mussolini.

Of course, propagandists in all three European totalitarian states used not only some modern media to propagate the person and position of their leader and dictator. Similar to Hitler and Stalin also Mussolini used a whole array of media to promote his

cult of personality. “An enormous variety of media were used to propagate the cult of the Duce. Newspapers were obliged to give extensive coverage to his daily activities and report his speeches in glowing terms” (Duggan, 2008, p. 478). As show many newsreels and other documentary films, it was extremely difficult to walk through Italian towns (and perhaps also some villages) during the fascist era without an almost constant visual presence of many images of *Duce*. “Mussolini subsidized several films about his accomplishments, his rambling speeches, voluminous tomes, an autobiography, and several authorized biographies were sold in glossy editions” (Merriman, 2010, p. 1008).

Although both Mussolini and Hitler had their own “cult ministers” (Starace and Goebbels respectively), they also took an active position toward the process of creation of their cult of personality. “Mussolini himself took a very close interest in the cult, monitoring carefully what was written about him” (Duggan, 2008, p. 477). For instance, Mussolini “established a press office to ensure that photographs and newspaper articles projected a positive image of him and his activities” (Todd, 2002, p. 126). Similarly, Stalin and Hitler took great care of photographs. Hitler had his own personal photographer (as I wrote already in this article) and Stalin, for his part, “always made sure to have his photograph taken with groups of delegates” (Service, 2009, p. 198). At the same time, Stalin’s control over the media was even more developed because he (except the position of *Agitprop*) had no “cult minister.” Undoubtedly, Stalin perfectly understood that his position in communist party had to be strengthened by growing control over the mass media. “By the late 1920s Stalin gained control over the party media and centrally orchestrated his personality cult [...] The early Stalin cult was a semantic rather than visual phenomenon and took the form of loyalty pledges from party and army leaders as well as congratulatory addresses published by representatives from all walks of life” (Leese, 2014, p. 344).

In all three cases of totalitarian dictators media created the picture of the omnipresent political leader. It was simply not possible to avoid the picture (or any other visual presentation) of Mussolini, Hitler or Stalin. Undoubtedly, all the media used in the process of creation and development of the cult of personality centered on Mussolini and first of all the frequency and density of his presentation in Italian public space (and sometimes even in the private space as well) created the impression of *Duce*’s omnipresence. “Besides omnipotence and immortality, Mussolini’s divine character was conveyed by his omnipresence, his continuous visibility” (Falasca-Zamponi, 1997, p. 78). Similar to the cult of personality centered on other totalitarian dictators analyzed in this book (Hitler, Stalin), also the cult of Mussolini gradually achieved superhuman dimensions or perhaps even the divine character. “Regime’s propagandists spread an extreme and in retrospect ludicrous personality cult in which Mussolini was elevated into an all-seeing and all-knowing god, a Man who Italians were assured, radiated a divine light and possessed an omniscient intuition” (Bosworth, 2005, p. 3). And so, nothing strange that in all the media some “allusions to the Duce’s messianic status were frequent” (Duggan, 2008, p. 478). Not only in the newspapers but also in books there was mandatory to write *Duce* and He starting with the big letter – just like with God. “By the early 1930s, Italian journalists were required to capitalize He, Him, and His when referring to Duce, as they did when mentioning God or Jesus Christ. All Ital-

ians at age eighteen had to take an oath to obey Mussolini. Italian press agents worked to enhance his image abroad” (Merriman, 2010, p. 1008). Already in 1926 the young Italian fascist journalist Leo Longanes (in the book conceived as the vademecum of the perfect fascist) invented the famous slogan “The Duce is always right” [*Duce ha sempre ragione*]. Nevertheless, the formal deification of Mussolini took place in 1929 when “La Tribuna” (of 25.07.1929) published the changed *credo*: „I believe in the high Duce – maker of the Blackshirts – And in Jesus Christ his only protector” (etc.) (Falasca-Zamponi, 1997, p. 64).

The method of presenting the omnipresence (or even deification) of all three totalitarian political leaders was not the only way of propaganda and presenting their dominant political and social position. It is interesting that Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin had been portrayed as the lonely leaders whose only reason and motive of live was to take care of their nation. Stalin even “turned his remoteness into an attribute of the cult” (Volkogonov, 2000, p. XXI). Similar to position acquired by Hitler or Stalin, also an Italian propaganda presented the image of lonely Mussolini who almost like god greatly rose above all the population. Undoubtedly, this presumed (in spite of his many lovers) loneliness of *Duce* additionally strengthened his superhuman character. “Mussolini’s personality cult had by now transformed him into an almost godlike figure imbued with superhuman qualities. A lonely dominance characterized the Duce’s life, separating him from the Italian people” (Neville, 2015, p. 113). At the same time, however, both Mussolini himself and the whole propaganda machine presented the second quite different image. It was the image of popular leader, politician who descended from the lower strata of Italian society and so had to be familiar with many life difficulties and problems of the so-called “ordinary” Italian. “Mussolini’s simple origins were also an important element in the cult [...] The Duce’s blacksmith father became the carpenter Joseph while his patient and long-suffering mother, the schoolteacher Rosa, took the part of Mary” (Duggan, 2008, p. 479). And so, not only the presumed loneliness of the almighty *Duce* but also his real humble origins had been used in the process of development of his cult of personality. The process that achieved even the level of quasi-religious adoration of Mussolini. The tiny family house of Predappio (in the province of *Emilia-Romagna*), the crypt with sarcophagi of Mussolini’s parents (and from 1931 also of his brother Arnaldo) became the places of mass tourism or perhaps rather places of pilgrimage. “Visitors were invited to see themselves as pilgrims and behave with reverence” (Duggan, 2008, p. 479). At the same time *Duce* had been presented and propagated in Italian propaganda as the ideal of a man. Even Mussolini’s insistence on physical strength, sexual virility, his fear of ageing (he did not celebrated his birthdays and successfully avoided any questions about his health) also had some religious connotations. The image of still young *Duce* not only presented in media but also propagated during mass meetings and other public appearances had to underline his presumed immortality. “Mussolini insisted that this image of the young Duce persist during the regime” (Falasca-Zamponi, 1997, p. 64).

Nevertheless, the picture of a healthy leader, propagated by an Italian propaganda created sometimes some real and rather unexpected problems. For instance, quite similar to Hitler also Mussolini had the great aversion for glasses and so his speeches (and special notes for speeches) were typed on a special typewriter with large characters.



Of course, the similar typewriting machine had been used for Hitler's speeches. Both Hitler and Mussolini (in sharp contrast to Stalin) travelled a lot across the country – certainly in order to keep the close contact with social masses and at the same time to present themselves as really popular leaders. Mussolini travelled a lot and had many meetings with Italians all over the country. This form of political activity was especially important just after the so-called “march on Rome.” In the period of just one year – from November 1922 to October 1923 Mussolini not only travelled all over Italy but visited (and had many meetings) at about 3/4 Italian regions. Certainly, Mussolini was the first Italian politician to conduct such the intensive political campaign. In most regions and places the population never saw any chief of Italian government at all. Hitler also travelled across the Germany (for instance in his famous “Flights over Germany”) mainly before he acquired the supreme power in German politics and society.

There is also one important element in the cult of personality centered on Mussolini. Whole the propaganda machine underlined his great skill in work and presented *Duce* as very hard-working statesman who in practice 24 hours a day took care of every Italian. “Mussolini did his best to cultivate an image of omnipotence as Italy's leader. He took on far too many jobs [...] The image of Duce as a hard-working leader was central to Fascist mythology” (Neville, 2015, p. 101). The Italian propaganda proclaimed that *Duce* worked even 18 hours a day (and “only” 14 hours on Sundays). Although Mussolini took many ministerial portfolio himself (even 8 out of 12) but it was mainly just for show. He simply left the bulk of administrative work to his secretaries and undersecretaries. Similar to Mussolini, also Hitler successfully avoided the “dull” administrative work. In the sharp contrast to both Mussolini and Hitler, Stalin was a really workaholic but he did not exploit his administrative activity in the propaganda and in the process of creation the cult of personality.

### 3. Some functions of the cult of personality

Undoubtedly, all three European totalitarian political systems (analyzed in this article) can be presented in the form of so-called “revolutionary power.” Whereas, so-called “naked power” aims only to preserve the power as long as it is only possible, the “revolutionary power” tries at the same time to “make a difference” – i.e. to conduct (more or less) complex program of political and social change. Certainly, any program of change or transformation is favorable for some social groups (or elites) but simultaneously such the program results with the lowering (or diminishing) the position of other social groups (or former elites). And so, after the “revolution” it is important to lower the level of social tensions (or even conflicts) in order to unite whole the nation (or at least most of it) around the position of the new ruling elite or new political leader. And so, the cult of personality centered on the person of such the new leader has also many social (and not only political) functions. For instance, such was the situation in the Soviet Union during the rule of Lenin or Stalin. Although in the center of communist ideology had been placed such the abstract (for the most of Soviet population) notions like social classes or class struggle – the cult of personality centered on Stalin certainly had the social dimension as well. “The cult was to provide the populace with

a personalized image of communism, a brand symbol” (Leese, 2014, p. 344). Starting with the position of tsarist Russia in most periods of Russian (or Soviet) history the strong, authoritative power structure formed the most frequent phenomenon. And so, the cult of personality was not only the personal feature but also (or perhaps first of all) had many social and political functions to fulfill. “Egomania was not the sole factor. The cult of Stalin was also a response to the underlying requirements of the regime [...] the tsar-like image of Stalin was useful in affirming that the state possessed a strong, determined leader” (Service, 2009, p. 198).

Similar to the situation in the Soviet Union, also the personality cult centered on the person of Mussolini served such the unification of the Italian nation. Moreover, in the case of Italy the Fascist Party (PNF) was not so unite and stable structure as the communist party in the period of Stalin. “The cult of the Duce was in many respects the principal unifying force in the fascist regime” (Duggan, 2008, p. 479). Undoubtedly, the cult of personality centered on Mussolini fulfilled many functions and had been important not only for the position of *Duce* himself but also for the situation in whole the fascist regime. Certainly, the cult of Mussolini saved both the fascist movement and the Fascist Party from disintegration. Moreover, the cult of Mussolini strengthened the stability of the government and whole the political system in general. “The admiration for Mussolini as representative of ‘new men’ reinforced his power position in the government of Italy” (Falasca-Zamponi, 1997, pp. 55–56). Mainly during the second world war the cult of *Duce* protected the fascist regime from complete collapse. And so, just after the unfavorable for Mussolini voting on the meeting of the fascist grand council (25.07.1943) and his arrest, whole the fascist system in Italy disintegrated almost at once. Before the total collapse of the power structure, very important function of the personality cult was the mobilization of an Italian society – especially during the second world war. „Its main political purpose was as a tool for the mobilization of those for whom ideology was of little relevance” (Duggan, 2012, p. 103). Christopher Duggan, who read and analyzed many letters and diaries written by some Italian citizens, concluded that “one powerful theme running through what people wrote in diaries (and elsewhere) about fascism is the crucial importance of the figure of Mussolini to emotional and political engagement with the regime” (Duggan, 2012, p. XVII).

Similar to the situation in Italy, also the cult of personality centered on Hitler had to unify – first to unify and integrate some different groups within the Nazi movement and afterwards to unify whole the German nation around the person and position of the leader (*Führer*). “The conscious build-up of the ‘Führer myth’ in the years following the re-foundation of the Party had the clear function of compensating the lack of ideological unity and clarity within the different factions of the Nazi Movement. The Führer figure provided the element binding together the following of ordinary Party members and subordinate Party leaders – establishing point of unity” (Kershaw, 2001, p. 26). And so, the “Hitler Myth” fulfilled at the same time many functions important for the preservation of the Nazi regime in Germany. Undoubtedly, thanks to the “Hitler Myth” the great masses of the German society not only actively supported the Nazi regime (at least up to the disaster at Stalingrad) but also could overcome in their social consciousness quite the many defects and problems connected with the Nazi Party and with not specially high quality of many party functionaries – both on the central or regional and

mainly on the local level. Moreover, “propaganda succeeded in isolating Hitler from the growing unpopularity of the Nazi Party itself” (Kershaw, 2001a, p. 49). Certainly, the “Hitler Myth” diverted the social attention from quite the many problems of daily life faced by the German society (especially during the second world war) and so it strengthened the Nazi regime. “Standing above and beyond the day-to-day realities of the regime, Hitler remained disassociated from unpopular decisions [...] Hitler was popular as a leader among all social groups and was personally exempted from criticism of the regime. Any blame was always directed at other Nazi leaders or officials” (Pine, 2007, p. 25). It is interesting that in case of all three (analyzed in this article) totalitarian dictators their political and social position situated them much higher than the “simple” struggles for power and at the same time they were situated above all the problems and sufferings of the “ordinary” citizens.

#### *4. Some attitudes of totalitarian political leaders toward the cult of personality*

Undoubtedly, the question of some attitudes toward cult of personality represented by all three totalitarian dictators is very difficult to analyze. There are only few pieces of information that can testify such the attitudes. For instance, Lenin (as it seems) had no positive attitudes toward the growing cult of personality gradually centered on his position. “Lenin did hate to hear himself lauded in odes and speeches, disliked being the recipient of flattery and extravagant gifts, and avoided photographers, painters and sycophants [...] He was supremely self-confident and had no need of such vanities. What he sought throughout his life was the means to impose his will on a populace” (Tumarkin, 1997, pp. 24–25). I have already presented in this article some facts connected with the celebrations of Lenin’s fiftieth birthday in 1920. The leader of the October revolution certainly deliberately entered the meeting (organized by Moscow Party Committee) after some initial speeches only – „and suggesting that in future the party should find more appropriate ways to mark anniversaries” (Davies, Harris, 2014, p. 137] Although Stalin celebrated every 10 years his birthdays (starting with the fiftieth) his attitude toward some huge celebrations was not so clear. On that occasion, Simon Sebag Montefiore reminds the very interesting story connected with Stalin’s cult. “In early 1939, the Moscow Arts Theatre commissioned the brilliant but underemployed writer Mikhail Bulgakov to write a romantic play about young Stalin in Batumi to celebrate the dictator’s sixtieth birthday that December. Stalin must have signed off on the commission” (Montefiore, 2008, p. 100 note).

Mussolini had (as it seems) more positive than Lenin or Stalin attitude toward the cult of personality centered on him. Perhaps very significant is the example of one “Bologna housewife who wrote 848 letters to Mussolini between 1937 and 1943” (Duggan, 2012, p. 216). In general, every totalitarian dictator received a lot of letters, petitions or even complaints. “In the Fascist year 1936–7 alone, Mussolini received 220,000 letters. On average he received 30–40,000 letters a month” (Farrell, 2004, p. 226). Similar to other totalitarian dictators analyzed in this article, it is also an uneasy task to present the real attitude of Hitler toward his own cult of personality. “Despite the forceful egocentric intolerance towards any form of criticism or oppos-

ing opinions, which was a consistent factor of Hitler's character, he appears at least in the first years of power to have retained some distance from the personality cult built up around him" (Kershaw, 2001, p. 81). Very interesting situation took place in 1927 when – "a massive oil-portrait of Hitler, intended to form the backcloth to the delegates congress hall, was removed, almost certainly on Hitler's express orders before the beginning of the Party Rally at Nuremberg" (Kershaw, 2001, p. 28 n. 56). In sharp contrast with Mussolini, Hitler (and Stalin) in general avoided any "empty" titles and honors. "Hitler never asked or ordered anyone to call him the *führer*, much as Stalin played down being called the *vozhd'*, but both took pleasure in the honors" (Gellately, 2008, 23) In contrast with the situation in Stalinist Soviet Union where many towns changed its names in favor of some communist party leaders, such the situation was hardly possible in Nazi Germany (or in Fascist Italy). "During the war, he [Hitler] persistently refused to sanction the name 'Hermann-Goering Stadt' [...] Until the end of the war the new town was known administratively as the 'area around Salzgitter'" (Overy, 1984, p. 233).

## VI. Some concluding remarks

It is nothing strange that both three European totalitarian systems and the cults of personality centered on their leaders appeared after the first world war. Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe in his detailed biography of Stiepan Bandera (famous Ukrainian nationalist leader) underlines that the leader usually appears in times of the great crisis (Rossoliński-Liebe, 2018, p. 29). Certainly, the given society has to be willing to accept both the strong (and sometimes even charismatic) leader and the cult of personality centered on him. Undoubtedly, there is constant and important interaction between the leader (and his cult of personality) and the mass of his followers. Certainly, there is no strong leader without his (more or less) faithful followers. But on the other hand a lot of people (even some quite good educated) simply wants such the leader. Many persons try to avoid any "dirty" politics and so they want someone else to take some political decisions. Certainly, even in the realm of democratic policy in the beginning of 21th century some strong leaders can be named and enumerated. Perhaps only more differentiated character of modern mass media (mainly the internet) would make some difficulties in the creation of cults of personality. But You never know...

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### Summary

The aim of this article is an attempt of comparative approach to the personality cult phenomenon, which formed the distinctive feature of three totalitarian political systems developed in Europe after the first world war, namely Italy during the rule of Benito Mussolini, Nazi Third Reich and the Stalinist Soviet Union. And so, after some general presentation of personality cults centered on three leaders of these totalitarian political systems, four general questions had been analyzed. These were as follows: some so-called "cult products", some methods used in the cult's propaganda, some functions of the cult of personality and finally some attitudes of totalitarian political leaders toward the cult of personality.

**Key words:** totalitarian political system, propaganda, personality cult

### Europejskie źródła zjawiska kultu jednostki

#### Streszczenie

Zadaniem niniejszego artykułu jest próba podejścia porównawczego do zjawiska kultu jednostki, które stanowiło cechę charakterystyczną trzech systemów politycznych o charakterze totalitarnym, które rozwinęły się w Europie po pierwszej wojnie światowej, a mianowicie Włochy pod rządami Benito Mussoliniego, nazistowska Trzecia Rzesza oraz stalinowski Związek Radziecki. Stąd też po ogólnej prezentacji zjawiska kultu jednostki w tych trzech systemach politycznych o charakterze totalitarnym, dokonano analizy czterech kwestii. A mianowicie: tak zwane „produkty kultu”, metody używane w propagandzie kultu jednostki, funkcje kultu jednostki oraz postawy samych totalitarnych przywódców w stosunku do kultu jednostki skoncentrowanego na ich osobach.

**Słowa kluczowe:** totalitarny system polityczny, propaganda, kult jednostki

