

Toma Burean, Horia Lupu, Gabriel Bădescu

The 2014 European Elections in Romania

Preferencje Polityczne : postawy, identyfikacje, zachowania 9, 57-76

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Toma Burean, Horia Lupu, Gabriel Bădescu
Babes-Bolyai University, Romania

THE 2014 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS IN ROMANIA

Abstract:

The 2014 European elections in Romania represented a test for the political parties preparing for the presidential elections at the end of the same year. Firstly, we analyze the political context in which the European elections took place. Since 2012 the changing governing coalitions have created an unstable party system with many politicians shifting party allegiances. Several high ranking party officials were considered suspicious for corruption acts and this affected the nomination of candidates. Secondly, we show that although the ideological allegiance of citizens and political parties increased since 2012, the match between policy preferences of political party and their supporters continues to be remarkably low. Finally we discuss several effects of the European elections, including difficulties in appointing candidates and creating electoral coalitions for the presidential elections encountered by the center right wing parties.

Key words:

EP election 2014, party system, Romania, political competition, European Parliament

Introduction

Romanian politicians and analysts viewed the 2014 European Election as an important test before the presidential elections at the end of the same year. One important consequence was that the main political parties postponed the nomination of a presidential candidate until after the European elections. Another outcome was that many of the policy issues that filled the European agenda, such as debates on Euro skepticism, on European integration, freedom of movement, and imposing economic sanctions on Russia, were much less visible than topics linked to internal politics. The left wing political parties were

concerned to obtain sufficient support to win presidential elections in the first round after the liberals decided to leave the governing coalition. Right wing political parties were confronted with the creation of a new political party, a splinter of the main opposition party, an organization that is supported by president Basescu, the main opposition figure of the government. This article presents several key aspects of the party system and political situation Romania that shaped the electoral campaign and influenced the results of the 2014 European Elections. It will describe the main political parties and electoral alliances, funding resources and strategies of the political actors, with a focus on ideological stances of the parties and of their voters. We will evaluate the extent that certain policy preferences differentiated between party attachments during the campaign of the 2014 European elections by using data collected by a EU-wide voting advice application (VAA). The final section discusses the main outcomes of these elections on the Romanian politics.

Party Mappings in Romania

Romania had a continuous decrease in the number of successful political competitors in Parliamentary elections: 16 in 1990, 7 in 1992, 6 in 1996, 5 in 2000, 4 in 2004, 4 in 2008, and 4 in 2012. At the same time, the number of entries in the Romanian party system was very small.

The main Romanian political parties are the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL), the National Liberal Party (PNL), the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) and the Greater Romania Party (PRM). A short description of each will follow below.

The Social Democratic Party (PSD) is the largest Romanian party in the post-communist period. It is one of the two successors of the Romanian Communist Party and the direct continuator of the Iliescu-wing of the National Salvation Front (FSN). After the 1992 National Convention of FSN, when P. Roman became its new president, the supporters of the country's President, Ion Iliescu, left FSN to form a new party, FDSN (later called PDSR and PSD).

The Democratic Liberal Party, PDL (formerly called 'Democratic Party' – PD until late 2007) is the other direct successor of the National Salvation Front (FSN). After a decade-long affiliation with the Socialist International, PD/PDL has become a member of the European People's Party in 2006.

The National Liberal Party (PNL) is the only historical party reestablished in 1990 that managed to survive as a parliamentary party until the current legislature.

The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) is an ethnic party which reunites different organizations representing approximately 1.4 million

ethnic Hungarians in Romania. UDMR has been present in all the post-communist parliaments and in all governments formed since 1996, except for one year between 2008 and 2009 and for two years between April 2012 and February 2014.

The Greater Romania Party (PRM) is run by V. Tudor since its beginning and reached a peak of popular support at the 2000 elections, when it received the second largest share of votes. However, in 2008 and 2012 the party failed to gain parliamentary representation.

The main electoral coalitions in Romania were CDR, USD, DA, USD and ARD. CDR was formed in 1992 and consisted in several political parties: PNȚCD, PNL, PSDR, PER, PAC, UDMR, PNLCD, PNL-AT, FER, and civic organizations Partidul Unității Democratice, Uniunea Democrat-Creștină, Alianța Civică, Asociația Foștilor Deținuți Politici din România, Solidaritatea Universitară, Asociația 21 Decembrie, Mișcarea România Viitoare, Sindicatul Politic „Fraternitatea”, Uniunea Mondială a Românilor Liberi. In 1996, CDR had a slightly different structure: a group of parties--PNȚCD, PNL, PSDR, PER, PAC, UDMR, PNLCD, PNL-AT, FER--, and one of civic organizations--Partidul Unității Democratice, Uniunea Democrat-Creștină, Alianța Civică, Asociația Foștilor Deținuți Politici din România, Solidaritatea Universitară, Asociația 21 Decembrie, Mișcarea România Viitoare, Sindicatul Politic „Fraternitatea”, Uniunea Mondială a Românilor Liberi.

USD was established in 1995 and was formed by two political parties: PD and PSDR. DA, formed in 2004, was an alliance between PNL and PD. USL, established in 2012, was the alliance between PSD, PNL and PC. ARD (Just Romania Alliance) was an electoral alliance formed between the Democratic Liberal Party, the National Peasant Christian-Democratic Party, the Civic Force and supported by the Centre-Right Civic Initiative and other NGOs.

Funding resources and strategies

Parties in Central and Eastern Europe have traditionally been short of financial resources, which many of them tried to compensate by semi-legal and illegal funding practices, including the capture of the state and the media [Gherghina, Chiru, Bertoa 2011]. Most of the post-communist political parties rely on state subventions for their funding [Ikstens et al. 2002; van Biezen 2003; Lewis 2008]. In the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, and Slovenia parties are highly subsidized by the state [Smilov, Toplak 2007], whereas in Romania it amounts to considerably less [Gherghina, Chiru, Bertoa 2011]. The Romanian parties have developed tools to obtain state resources for electoral purposes. These practices include: partisan tailored transfers of money from the government to own constituencies prior to elections; relying on large-scale patronage to

reward party sponsors and activists; as well as making state agencies contribute indirectly to campaign funds under the guise of workshops [Gherghina, Chiru, Bertoa 2011]. Party financing in Romania gradually evolved from very general provisions valid for the first post-communist elections from 1990 to very specific regulations applicable in the 2008 parliamentary elections.

Migration of legislators

Since 1990, elected legislators moving from one party to another was significant and has had a gradual increase. Party switching by individual representatives altered the party system and the internal life and logic of party functioning. In several occasions, party defectors created new parties and made others disappear, or helped forming of new political majorities. In the 1990-1992 legislature, party switching in both in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate was a minor phenomenon and primarily affected the dominant party, FSN/National Salvation Front, which lost eighteen deputies and twelve senators by the end of the legislature. The following legislatures were more noteworthy in this respect, especially in the case of the Chamber of Deputies, during the 1996-2000 legislature, when 91 members (out of 332) switch parties [Marian 2013]. One reason that favored migration of party members is the weak ideological basis of the parties, which prevented most of those who moved along the left-right axis to be significantly penalized by the voters.

The importance of left-right placement

The left-right cleavage has proven highly salient among the voters of long-standing democracies. More than 80 percent of Western European voters can position themselves along a left-right scale [Fuchs, Klingemann 1990], and most also can position the parties. The prevailing assertion [Downs 1957] is that voters tend to vote the political party that resides the least ideological distance from their own identified location. The empirical evidence generally supports this claim, revealing that ideological congruence between individuals and parties is a strong predictor of the vote [Klingemann 1995]. Despite changes in voter preferences and party structures over time, the simple continuum of left-and-right continues to provide an efficient vehicle of communication in the long-standing democracies, linking political parties and their prospective voters [Sum, Bădescu 2008].

The newly democratized nations of Eastern Europe do not share the same historical development of political parties. Traditional social cleavages and organizational networks were destroyed under communism. In most, political parties were not prominent during the 1989 revolution or during the period

of constitutional construction that followed immediately after. As they emerged out of an unstructured political space, Eastern European parties tended to be centralized institutionally and state-dependent, with weak social bases and low linkage to the populace [Lewis 2000; Kopecky 2008; Saarts 2011]. Yet the number of effective parties gradually stabilized and ideological stances solidified. Personalized parties lost prominence relative to more value-driven ones. Parties positioned themselves in spatially, associated with ideological blocs in the European Parliament, and competed with increasing strategic skill. Studies appear to confirm the relevance of left-right discourse for the new democracies of Eastern Europe. It is reflected in the appeals of the main political parties, the ideological self-positioning of voters, and the party preferences expressed through votes cast. Although the degree of attachment is less than in Western Europe, alignment along the left-right axis serves as “an important simplifier of partisan alignments in post-communist party competition” [Kitschelt et al. 1995: 203; Badescu, Sum 2005; Sum, Badescu 2008]. Romania has one of the lowest proportions of people who place themselves on a left-right scale (Table 1), and also one of the weakest correlations between ideological distance to parties and party preferences [Sum, Badescu 2008].

Table 1. Percentage Who Do Not Place Themselves on a LR Scale

Taiwan (2004)	0.56
Kyrgyzstan (2005)	0.51
Romania (2004)	0.44
Slovenia (2004)	0.40
Italy (2006)	0.37
Russia (2004)	0.34
Mexico (2003)	0.28
Great Britain (2005)	0.27
Brazil (2002)	0.25
Hong Kong (2004)	0.24
New Zealand (2002)	0.24
Poland (2001)	0.23
Ireland (2002)	0.22
Australia (2004)	0.18
Peru (2006)	0.17
Korea (2004)	0.17
Portugal (2005)	0.16
United States (2004)	0.14
Spain (2004)	0.12
Chile (2005)	0.12
Canada (2004)	0.11
Iceland (2003)	0.10
Belgium (2003)	0.10
Finland (2003)	0.10
Hungary (2002)	0.09

Bulgaria (2001)	0.09
Czech Republic (2002)	0.08
Germany (2002 Mail-Back)	0.08
Albania (2005)	0.06
Philippines (2004)	0.06
Germany (2002 Telephone)	0.06
Israel (2003)	0.05
Norway (2001)	0.05
Switzerland (2003)	0.05
Sweden (2002)	0.04
Denmark (2001)	0.04
France (2002)	0.04
Netherlands (2002)	0.02

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Studies Surveys.

When measures of individual left-right self-placement in Romania are compared across time, they show no systematic change between 1991 and 2011, and then, a sudden increase of the proportion of those placing themselves on the scale (Table 2).

Table 2. Individual Left-Right Self-Placement
(Lower Numbers = Further Left; Higher Numbers = Further Right)

	Left											Right
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	DK/NA
1991	-	1.0%	2.2%	5.0%	10.1%	21.0%	11.9%	7.7%	4.3%	2.5%	1.3%	33.0%
1996	3.4%	0.8%	1.4%	2.4%	2.9%	20.3%	5.8%	6.4%	7.1%	2.1%	10.6%	36.7%
2003	-	2.0%	2.0%	4.6%	8.2%	5.0%	2.9%	3.4%	-	-	-	71.9%
2004	0.6%	1.5%	2.3%	5.7%	4.8%	13.4%	6.7%	7.4%	6.3%	3.9%	3.3%	44.2%
2006	-	3.3%	2.1%	5.5%	4.1%	13.2%	11.5%	5.5%	6.5%	3.2%	5.9%	39.2%
2007a	-	3.1%	2.1%	2.9%	3.5%	15.5%	6.6%	4.1%	6.3%	2.5%	3.7%	49.8%
2007b	-	4.2%	2.2%	5.1%	5.2%	14.7%	10.2%	5.1%	6.2%	2.0%	3.8%	41.4%
2009	3.9%	3.6%	2.3%	3.2%	2.9%	16.9%	4.9%	4.9%	5.7%	3.5%	5.4%	42.9%
2011	-	4.8%	3.2%	5.1%	4.4%	16.5%	4.9%	4.2%	3.8%	1.8%	4.6%	46.6%
2012	3.2%	4.0%	5.2%	6.3%	5.5%	24.5%	6.5%	6.4%	4.8%	2.7%	5.5%	25.5% ¹

Source:

1991 – United States Information Agency survey, Romania Module, October. (1-10)

1996 – Comparative Study of Electoral Systems/CSES, Romania Module. (0-10)

2003 – Public Opinion Barometer, Romania, October. Soros Foundation Romania. (1-7)

2004 – Comparative Study of Electoral Systems/CSES, November. Romania Module. (0-10)

2006 – Public Opinion Barometer, Romania, October. Soros Foundation Romania. (1-10)

2007a – Public Opinion Barometer, Romania, May. Soros Foundation Romania. (1-10)

2007b – Public Opinion Barometer, Romania, October. Soros Foundation Romania. (1-10)

2009 – Romanian Electoral Surveys, Presidential Elections Set. Soros Foundation Romania. (0-10)

2011 – Romanian Electoral Surveys, Soros Foundation Romania. (1-10)

2012 -- Ce-Re & CSD Survey. (0-10)

¹ A survey conducted in October 2012 by IRESCOP found an even lower proportion of those who do not place themselves, 22%.

The European elections in Romania

The electoral system is based on proportional representation having the entire country as one electoral district. There is an electoral threshold of 5%. First a national electoral coefficient is computed, which is the division between the valid votes and the number of European parliament seats allocated for Romania. To win a seat, independent candidates have to achieve that specific quota of votes. Secondly, the d'Hondt method is used for the transformation of votes into seats.

Table 3. European elections in Romanian - elections results

	2007	2009	2014
PSD-UNPR-PC	23.11%	31.07%	37.60%
PNL	13.44%	14.52%	15.00%
PDL	28.81%	29.71%	12.23%
UDMR	5.58%	8.92%	6.30%
PMP	-	-	6.21%
LászlóTőkés	3.44%	-	-
Elena Basescu	-	4.22%	-
Mircea Diaconu	-	-	6.81%

Source: Romanian electoral data [<http://www.polito.ubbcluj.ro/romanianelectoraldata>].

Parties participating in the 2014 EP elections

The international membership of the Romanian parties preceded the country integration in the EU in 2007. In 1996 the Democratic Party (PD), the successor of the National Salvation Front (FSN) and predecessor of the Democrat Liberal Party (PDL), became member of the Socialist International. In 2005 the party joined the European People's Party group. In 2007 UDMR/RMDSZ (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania) joined the same European parliamentary group. PNL (National Liberal Party) adhered to the International Liberal in 1999 and to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrat for Europe (ALDE) after Romania joined the EU. PSD (Social Democratic Party) became fully affiliated to the Socialist International and to the Party of European Socialists (as an observer) in 2005. Next, we present brief descriptions of the Romanian political parties programs for the 2014 EP elections.

PSD (Partidul Social Democrat – Social Democratic Party). The party emphasizes the importance of a mixed economy, protecting the workers, consumers and the small entrepreneurs, an extensive and complex social protection network, progressive taxation, public education and healthcare systems, minimal

wages and social rights for the workers. In terms of public policies, the USL government, having PSD as a major coalition partner and a PSD prime-minister, Victor Ponta, restored the wages cut by the previous PDL government, adjusted the pensions with a percentage in accordance with the inflation rate, re-opened 17 hospitals and began the process of employment for 4.000 positions in the healthcare system, reversing the budgetary cuts imposed on medical care by the former government; it also reinstated a system of subventions for the agriculture. These measures strained the national budget. In accordance to the IMF, the government promised to cover half of the bank credit installments of the insolvent borrowers with lower incomes in order to encourage the consumption (a decision criticized for being rather in the favor of the bank instead of the debtors) and to support with credits the companies which create at least 20 new jobs.

On the political agenda, PSD emphasized that the agriculture was a priority. Although 2012 and 2013 were years with good agricultural crops the acquisition prices for raw products from the farmers remained prohibitively low compared to their expenses, and the situation was not reflected positively on the food market. The VAT for bread was reduced from 24% to 9%. Another assumed priority, the energy market, who's independence from the external suppliers was to be obtained, remained a long-term objective, pending upon natural gas and oil extraction technologies (from the resources recently discovered on the continental platform of the Black Sea) not yet available to Romania. Other macro-economic measures regarded the continuation of the privatization of the state-owned companies (CFR – the national railways system, Poșta Română – the national postal service). The PSD-led government aimed at improving the transport infrastructure that lacks motorways.

PNL (Partidul Național Liberal – National Liberal Party). This party focuses in its official documents on need to strengthen the rule of law, the separation of powers, the individual freedom and rights, to promote dialogue and tolerance, pluralism, diversity. In addition, it emphasizes on the individual, the economic freedom and the importance of the middle class, the free initiative and the entrepreneurship for the economy and for the society proper. The stipulated non-interventionism and anti-centralism does not point nevertheless towards a minimal state, but rather towards a functional state: “The liberalism does not reject neither the social responsibility of the state, nor its responsibility to provide qualitative public services [for the citizens] as a consequence of the ‘social contract’ between the state and the citizens”.

In the preamble of PNL manifesto, “The liberal state – the second modernization of Romania”, the accent is placed on the need of transforming the state from an assistential and clientelistic one to a liberal state. The state

structures, which are inherited from the totalitarian communist period, keep the society and the citizenry captive and need to be rebuilt from the ground in order to recreate a new functional, modern and competitive state, centered upon the citizen. Even it is labeled as “minimal”, it maintains enough attributes which entitles a skeptical reception of that label.

PNL’s vision is that the state becomes efficient, with a workable and flexible public administration, using the criteria of the free market in order to judge its efficiency.

In terms of economic policies, the manifesto advocated for a new and flexible industrialization of the country (including the agriculture), promoting the development, a friendly fiscal system (with a further lowering of the flat income tax to 11%) and a strategy for developing the public-private management for the public capital investments. In the field of social policies the liberals called for a consolidation of the private component of the retirement funds and for switching the accent of social protection from the individual to the family.

As a minor coalition partner, PNL shared the PSD concern for development, at least at the declarative level. The USL coalition created a new ministry, label by the media as “The big projects ministry”, and the liberals controlled the Ministry of Finance. Although they went along with the PSD-inspired measures to restore the incomes and to adjust the pensions (see above), their biggest achievement in terms of right-wing economic measures was to impose the flat income tax of 16%, even if PSD agenda clearly stipulated the progressive taxation. As recent as the beginning of this year they promoted a new scheme of “gradual taxation”, moving downward from 16% to another two lower thresholds, 12% and 8%. The dissolution of USL and the withdrawal of PNL from government in mid-2014 prevented them to make any further steps in that direction.

PDL (Partidul Democrat Liberal – Democratic Liberal Party). “PDL vision for Romania” party program links the elements of the party agenda with the previous measures taken by the PDL and Dreptate și Adevăr (DA) coalition government. The vision is synthesized, in general terms, in a perfectly acceptable national conservatism slogan [Gallagher, Laver, Mair 2002: 217-218; Ware 1996: 32]: “PDL wishes for Romania to be a country in which its citizens want to live, a modern, powerful and competitive country. A country in which the law is respected, in which the hard work and the performance is encouraged, a country in which each can develop through his/her own forces.” There are several major themes of this vision. First, a modern state is viewed as a small state. In several speeches the incumbent president, a former PDL president, used the formula “fat/obese man” as a metaphor for the burden the public sector

represented for the private sector and for the entire society. The decentralization and modernization of the public administration is seen as a needed step to make the state institutions more flexible and responsive to the society.

Another central theme is the support for economic growth by attracting investments and new jobs. In this context the party program supports facilities for small and medium enterprises. The party considers that macroeconomic stability is achieved (if needed) by fiscal austerity.

PDL emphasizes the need to reform education, by encouraging merit and by connecting it with the requirements of the economy. After the perceived failure of the radical projects for restructuring the healthcare (while also curtailing the expenditures in the field) during the party's previous governments, "PDL vision for Romania" insists on the need for a gradual reform in the field of medical services. The themes of European integration and Romania's European future, although present in the agendas of all the major Romanian political parties, were more accentuated in the public speeches by the representatives of PDL, especially after the attempt dismissal of the Romanian president T. Băsescu by the USL in the summer of 2012 – attempt considered by PDL as being a coup. In terms of public policies supported by PDL – as major opposition party starting from 2012 – they continued to underline that the budgetary cuts from 2010 (25% of the salaries of the public employees), in a moment when the economic crises peaked in Romania, were the only viable solution and created the conditions for the recovery of the economy. As such, the party spokespersons emphasized the need to conserve the fiscal rectitude and criticized the government for not having found any means for a real increase of the economic parameters.

UDMR/RMDSZ (Uniunea Democrată Maghiara din România/Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség – Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania). The Union (Uniunea Democrata Maghiara din Romania) claims to be the political representative of the Hungarian minority from Romania, which, according to the official data of the last census (2011) counts over 1.250.000 people (over 6,5% from the total population of Romania), making it one of the most important ethnic minority in Europe. UDMR is the only political organization in Romania which systematically uses the internal elections (US-inspired "primaries") for designating, in an open manner its candidates for public office. It also reunites various social, cultural and even scientific groups and organizations. In spite of its affiliation to the European People's Party, another particularity of UDMR is that the Union as a structure presides over different ideological platforms – social-democrat, liberal and Christian-democrat. This offered the party enough flexibility to repeatedly participate,

and sometimes to be a pivotal minor coalition partner, in various right or left leaning governments, starting with 1996. In the field of ethnic and cultural rights UDMR was concerned in guaranteeing, for the Hungarian minority, the full range of rights (the use of mother tongue in education at all levels, administration, justice, the protection of the own cultural and religious traditions). Since all these were secured, since mid-to late 1990 the union identified two concrete major objectives, which should improve the symbolical status and representation of the Hungarian community from Romania: a state-funded Hungarian-language university (“Bolyai University”, which should reunite, under a common autonomous management, the already existing Hungarian lines of studies from the mixed faculties and colleges) and a larger ethnic-based autonomy for the so-called Szekler Land (Székelyföld/Ținutul secuiesc), a region in Central Romania including two counties (Covasna and Harghita) and the Eastern part of a third one (Mureș), inhabited in majority by the Hungarian-speaking Szeklers/Szekelys. The general, non-ethnic related issues on UDMR’s agenda indicate a social-conservative stance, emphasizing the role of the family, the community, the decentralization but also the importance of the free economical market, the democratization of the society and the country’s integration in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures (NATO, EU) – a process in which the Union claims to have performed an important role by enhancing Romania’s internal stability and external credibility through its participation in government.

PMP (Partidul Mișcarea Populară – Popular Movement Party). The latest newcomer in the Romanian party politics, PMP (Partidul Mișcarea Populară) is a recent (January 2014) splinter from PDL, based on a foundation created at the initiative of the Romanian president in office, T. Băsescu, and led by the controversial E. Udrea, a former member of the presidential administration and head of the Ministry of development in the PDL government, seen by the media as the protégée of the president, and the only woman to act as a head of a party in nowadays Romania.

The party describes itself as a modern, “different type of party, not a new party”, placed on the center-right of the left-right continuum and representing the middle class. The political agenda is quite similar to that of PDL (individual freedom and autonomy, free economical competition and fiscal rectitude, a reformed, “slender” state and public administration, one-chamber Parliament with a reduced number of seats, European and Euro-Atlantic affiliation, etc). Some specific tones are given by programmatic stipulations such as the modernization of the infrastructure in the rural areas and the introduction of the vote by mail, but the main distinctiveness of PMP resides in its claim to represent a non-mainstream political organization.

Apart from these themes, specific for each party, and according to which we can label them as being more or less typical members of their party family [von Beyme 1996: 21-24], there were several common themes that were shared by the parties' discourse during, and around, the period of the European elections. The two most important of these were the Constitutional reform and the independence of justice. The debate about the Constitutional reform, with older roots in the Romanian public space, started in a more structured way as an organized debate in 2013, but faded away by 2014 because of the lack of consensus. While USL (PSD and PLN) initially wanted a weaker president and more clearly stipulated and separated attributions for each of the two main figures of the executive, the prime-minister and the president, PDL insisted on the need to maintain the effective of a president possessing popular legitimacy and to legislate the result of the 2009 referendum, in which people voted for a one-chamber parliament and for a reduced number of legislators. Another issue at stake, connected to the Constitutional reform, was that of regionalization. UDMR/RMDS understanding of the principle of regional autonomy as having ethnic/cultural meaning was contested by the other (Romanian) political parties, and considered as incompatible with the national, unitary and indivisible character of the state as stipulated by the Constitution.

While all the major parties openly condemned corruption and were trying to capitalize on that, the disputations over the independence of justice opposed mainly PSD to PDL (and latter also to PMP). PSD accused DNA (The National Anticorruption Department, a structure created for combating the grand fraud and criminality) and some of the prosecutors of being dependent to, and at the service of, president Bădescu (which, by his past decisions, has made them subservient), and constituting a part of his "regime", while PDL and PMP maintained that DNA and the justice per se were on a path of consolidating their independence precisely due to the politics in the field adopted by Bădescu and by the PDL government.

The 2014 European election campaign

The campaign was categorized as uneventful [Mixich 2014; Parvu et al. 2014] and influenced by the split up of the governing coalition. 15 parties and coalitions and eight independent candidates participated in the elections. Six parties and one independent candidate passed the electoral threshold. The elections were organized just after the governing coalition just split up. The Social Liberal Union (USL) was formed in 2011 out of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and The National Liberal Party (PNL) and two small parties: The Conservative Party (PC) and The Union for the Progress of

Romania (UNPR). At the 2012 parliamentary elections they secured 58,61% for the Chamber of Deputies and 60,07% in the Senate. In February 2014 the National Liberal Party decided to quit the coalition.

There were several irregularities during the electoral campaign. First the center left governing coalition PSD-UNPR-PC used the former coalition name and messages such “USL is alive” without the former coalition partner, the National Liberal Party’s agreement. The messages were removed following a court order. Secondly the messages of the PSD-UNPR-PC “Proud to be Romanians” was contested in court as discriminatory since it suggests that only voting with the governing coalition could one be proud to be Romanian. Thirdly, President Băsescu was an active supporter of the new political party the Popular Movement Party (PMP), which according to the Constitution is violating the principle of political neutrality of the president.

The electoral messages focused more on defending the national interest in the European Union than on European issues and some messages were confusing. For example the governing coalitions’ main messages were “Proud to be Romanians” and “Romania Strong in Europe”. The National Liberal Party’s first candidate on the party list, N. Nicolai, had the message “with dignity in Europe” and the political parties’ main messages “Euro-champions to deeds”. The Democratic Liberal Party (PDL), the main opposition party until USL split up confused their voters with “Europe in every Home”. The Popular Movement Party, a splinter from PDL had the message “We raise Romania”. The populist People’s Party Dan Diaconescu (PPDD) invited voters to “Vote PPDD with a Romanian soul”. The Hungarian Democratic Union from Romania messages were “Hungarian Solidarity” and “Transylvania in Europe”. The extremist Great Romania Party used a word play “The only salvation: Vote the Greater Romania Party”. Some opinion leaders called for a boycott for the European elections and invited citizens not to participate to the elections for several reasons and confirm the apathy and lack of interest in these elections by both political parties and citizens.

Besides the overall view of the European parliament elections as second order, the electoral process in Romania was vitiated by selection of candidates that political parties placed on eligible party lists. Parties seem to use the eligible seats as a tool to offer selective benefits to their family and political clientele. In 2009 and in 2014, the wife of the now-in-office Prime Minister Ponta obtained eligible places on the social democratic party list. The former president of the National Liberal Party and former interim president C. Antonescu obtained in 2009 and in 2014 eligible places on the National Liberal Party. In 2009, the daughter of the incumbent president Basescu won a seat as an independent candidate benefiting from the support of the Democratic Liberal Party.

M. Diaconu, the independent candidate that won an office in the European parliament claimed not to have been doing any electoral campaigning. He managed to run for office despite allegations that claimed that the parliamentarian and actor was in a conflict of interest. His success might be explained by the extensive coverage he received on the most popular news TV station in Romania.

According to the Romanian Electoral Office (2014) political parties spent approximately 4.7 million euro for the electoral campaign. The two former coalition partners stand out in terms of debts and expenses, with both PSD and PNL spending each 1.5 million euro. The Election Day ran without significant events. However there were some complaints about the high number of citizens who were voting on supplementary lists. At the European elections, Romanian citizens are allowed to vote in any voting station regardless of their domicile as in presidential elections. This is not possible at the parliamentary elections where citizens are allowed to vote only the candidates that run for office in districts where the citizens reside. Election polls were issued at 9 pm and pointed that the incumbent political alliance won with more than 40% of the votes yet the next the final results showed that surveys errors that were larger than 5 percent for some of the exit polls. The next section will detail on the implication of the electoral results.

Table 4 provides a more precise image of the policy preferences among the supporters of each of the main party during the electoral campaign of the 2014 EP elections. Data were collected by EuVox (www.euvox.eu), a EU-wide voting advice application (VAA) for the 2014 elections to the European Parliament, conducted in Romania by a team from the Center for the Study of Democracy at Babeş-Bolyai University that included the authors of this article.

Table 4. Relationships between policy preferences and party preferences in a Voting Application Advice (VAA) study conducted in Romania during the electoral campaign of the 2014 EP elections.

Cells represent mean values [1 - strong agreement, ..., 5 - disagreement] among those who choose the party represented on the column as the one with highest chance to be voted.

	PSD	PDL	PNL	UDMR	PPDD	Total
Romania should never adopt the Euro	3.45	3.89	3.63	3.88	3.40	3.57
A single member state should be able to block a treaty change, even if all the other members states agree to it	3.16	3.35	3.24	3.43	3.13	3.21
The right of EU citizens to work in Romania should be restricted	4.14	4.43	4.35	4.42	4.05	4.26
There should be a common EU foreign policy even if this limits the capacity of Romania to act independently	2.61	2.21	2.39	2.01	2.81	2.45
The EU should redistribute resources from richer to poorer EU regions	2.07	2.54	2.47	2.39	2.19	2.38
Overall, EU membership has been a bad thing for Romania	3.65	4.31	4.02	4.02	3.52	3.90

The 2014 European Elections in Romania

	PSD	PDL	PNL	UDMR	PPDD	Total
EU treaties should be decided by the national parliament rather than by citizens in a referendum	3.36	3.79	3.58	3.50	3.88	3.65
The EU should impose economic sanctions on Russia, even if this jeopardizes gas supplies to EU countries	2.63	2.13	2.27	2.63	2.74	2.39
International partners have the right to interfere in the internal affairs of Romania when they feel there is a threat to democracy	3.35	2.37	2.81	2.51	2.84	2.77
Free market competition makes the health care system function better	2.68	2.23	2.36	2.67	2.67	2.48
The number of public sector employees should be reduced	2.90	2.06	2.36	2.39	2.81	2.44
The state should intervene as little as possible in the economy	3.09	2.32	2.39	2.57	2.98	2.59
Wealth should be redistributed from the richest people to the poorest	2.63	3.34	3.29	2.85	2.64	3.06
Cutting government spending is a good way to solve the economic crisis	2.53	2.26	2.46	2.59	2.14	2.40
It should be easy for companies to fire people	3.76	3.24	3.36	3.48	3.64	3.47
External loans from institutions such as the IMF are a good solution to crisis situations.	3.54	3.18	3.51	3.62	3.76	3.48
The Romanian state should allow the Canadian company Gabriel Resources to continue its operation at Rosia Montana	3.73	3.90	4.09	4.18	4.19	4.00
The poorest citizens should pay a lower rate of income tax	1.88	2.65	2.50	2.15	2.01	2.30
A petrol price increase is acceptable if the money collected is invested in the construction of new highways	2.25	3.05	2.80	2.86	2.99	2.81
Immigrants must adapt to the values and culture of Romania	2.00	2.11	2.09	2.61	1.98	2.12
Restrictions on citizen privacy are acceptable in order to combat crime	3.43	3.53	3.65	3.57	3.22	3.48
To maintain public order, governments should be able to restrict demonstrations	3.93	4.17	4.24	4.33	3.99	4.13
Less serious crimes should be punished with community service, not imprisonment	1.86	1.98	1.90	2.01	1.89	1.97
Same sex couples should enjoy the same rights as heterosexual couples to marry	3.09	2.61	2.81	2.54	3.27	2.84
Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion	1.95	1.84	1.83	1.86	2.05	1.92
The recreational use of cannabis should be legal	3.58	2.93	3.17	2.92	3.39	3.26
Downloading copyright protected material from the internet should be allowed for private use	2.85	2.70	2.75	2.42	2.71	2.76
A territorial reform should include the creation of an autonomous Hungarian region	4.45	4.18	4.37	2.16	4.44	4.18
Minorities should have the right to education only in the mother tongue, including in the university system	3.72	3.50	3.67	1.82	3.74	3.51
The constitution should diminish the role of the president in the political system	2.10	3.51	2.75	2.55	3.20	2.88

Election results

Politicians and analysts viewed the European Election as an important test before the presidential elections. The main political parties postponed the nomination of a presidential candidate until after the European elections, as a test for the popularity of political parties. The socialists were hoping for enough votes to make them be optimistic about winning the presidential office in the first round. The Liberals, their former coalition partners, hoped for 25% electoral support that would make them the largest opposition party. PMP (Popular Movement Party), the party that supports president Basescu, wanted to gain more votes than the party from which they split.

The results did not offer satisfaction to any of the hopes party officials had. The incumbent alliance PSD-UNPR-PC won the highest number of votes and a relative majority. They gained less than they expected. Most exit polls credited them with 41 to 43 percent (Table 5).

Table 5. The comparison between election polls and final results

European parliament	IRES	CURS	CSCI	CCSB	Results	
PSD-UNPR-PC	42.4%	41%	41.01%	43%	42.4%	37.60%
PNL	13.3%	14%	14.92%	14%	13.3%	15.00%
PDL	11.5%	10%	11.82%	12%	11.5%	12.23%
PMP	6.5%	6%	6.7%	7%	6.3%	6.21%
UDMR	6.2%	7%	7.1%	6%	6.2%	6.30%
Mircea Diaconu	4.3%	5%	5.91%	4%	4.3%	6.81%

Source: www.ziare.com

The discrepancy between the election results and the exit polls was widely debated in press. One of the main reasons for the errors was asserted to be the increased refusal rate that peaked to 20% and the surprisingly high rate on annulled votes (5.83%) [Stoica 2014].

The number of parties competing for offices has increased due to the fragmentation of the right wing political parties. In 2014, 15 parties entered the electoral competition, compared to only 7 parties in 2009, and 8 parties in 2007.

Table 6. Results of the 2014 EP elections in Romania

	Results	Seats	European Party Family
PSD-UNPR-PC	37.60%	16	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)
PNL	15.00%	6	European Peoples' Party (EPP)
PDL	12.23%	5	European Peoples' Party (EPP)
Mircea Diaconu	6.81%	1	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)
UDMR	6.30%	2	European Peoples' Party (EPP)
PMP	6.21%	2	European Peoples' Party (EPP)
Turnout 32.44%			

Source: Romanian Electoral Authority.

In 2014, the turnout was higher than in 2007 (29.46%) and 2009 (27.67%) and below the European average (42.54%). The number female candidates that won a seat (31%) is below the European average (37%) more than Poland (24%), Hungary (19%) or Bulgaria (29%) and slightly more than in 2007 (29%) [European Parliament 2014].

The Social Democratic Party and the two smaller parties that allied with the social democrats won the elections with a plurality of votes. Compared to the 2009 elections, the socialist gained five seats and the liberals, the former coalition partners, gained one seat. On the other hand, PDL lost five seats and the extremist-populist PRM (Great Romania Party) and PP-DD (People's Party Dan Diaconescu) failed to pass the 5% electoral threshold. UDMR (The Hungarian Democratic Alliance from Romania) lost one seat. One new party (PMP) entered the European Parliament and the independent M. Diaconu won his first mandate with more votes than the Hungarian Party and the president supported new Popular Movement party. This lack of success indicates that PDL, the party that directly supported the president managed to gain electoral success despite the fact that important political officials left the party to create a presidential political movement [Tapalaga 2014]. PSD won in almost all counties with the exception of Harghita, Covasna and Alba. PDL, lost in all the counties, except one, in which they won in 2009. UDMR preserved its majority in four counties and lost Bihor county to PSD. PNL won for the first time the majority in Calarasi county.

Romanian political parties belong to the two largest European party families: the European Socialist and the European Popular group. Most mandates went to the socialist European group followed by the European Populars. The Liberal group received only one mandate from independent M. Diaconu (formerly a member of PNL), after PNL (National Liberal Party) changed its affiliation to the Popular party group immediately after the elections. Once PRM and PP-DD lost their electoral support, the nationalist Eurosceptic group did

not receive any mandates from Romania. Laszlo Tokes who was an MEP that won independently a mandate in 2007 decided to run on the mandates allocated for Hungary.

The wider impact of the 2014 European elections

One major aspect of the European elections in Romania was the quasi-absence in the public discourse and public policy area of the themes related to the new politics [Rohrschneider 1994] during the campaign. Some of them were present in the official manifestos of the parties, but were largely absent from their discourse (the protection of the environment), some others are present only in one party manifesto (PSD: multiculturalism, pacifism, open policies towards migration, a foreign policy promoting democracy and democratization) but absent from the discourse, and some are absent from the manifestos and the public discourse altogether (LGBT rights, homosexual marriages, euthanasia) – while they were major themes of debate in several, if not in most, EU countries. Nevertheless, some of them were exported from the civil society to the parties. Thus, the series of protests and rallies organized in Bucharest and other major cities starting with January 2012, besides particular subjects as the cyanide mining or the exploitation of shale gas through hydraulic fracturing, echoed more general themes as the protection of the environment, the replenishment of the political and social elite, the participative democracy and the quality of education. However, few of these (if any) were treated by the political parties in a coherent or non-contradictory manner. The national issues take precedence over European issues when the European elections take place. Another notable aspect was that the nomination of candidates was very often subjected to clientelistic exchanges or for the benefit of the families of the party leaders.

An important outcome of the 2014 European elections in Romania was that they generated the reshuffling of alliances within the party system. The socialists realized that they will not win the presidential office in one round in the upcoming presidential elections, so they made an offer to the former coalition partners the National Liberal Party and the Hungarian UDMR. The former declined the recreation of USL (Social Liberal Union), an alliance that achieved 65% of the votes in the 2012 parliamentary elections. The latter joined the governing coalition. Following the disappointing election results, the president of the National Liberal Party, and at that time the likely presidential candidate of that party, resigned. The new president of PNL, Klaus Werner Iohannis, an ethnic German who is the mayor of Sibiu, forged a coalition with PDL (the Democratic Liberals) named the Liberal Christian Alliance (ACL). ACL decided to support Klaus Iohannis's bid to become the president

of Romania. The initiative was aimed to gather support of all right wing parties. However, The Popular Movement Party refused and proposed its' own candidate, E. Udrea, the president of the party and a close ally of president Basescu.

Finally, the low turnout suggests that the European elections are still perceived to have very limited importance, and that a better communication of how European policies impact the lives of ordinary citizens would be needed.

References:

- European Parliament (2014) European elections 2014, www.elections2014.eu/en (1.10.2014).
- Badescu G., Sum P. (2005), *Mapping Political Preferences: The Emergence of Citizen Left-Right Orientations in New Democracies*, Paper presented at the International Conference on "Elections and Democratic Governance", Organized by the Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica (IPSAS), Taipei, April 10-11.
- Downs A. (1957), *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Fuchs D., Klingemann H. D. (1990), *The Left-Right Schema*, [in:] M. K. Jennings, J. van Deth, et al., *Continuities in Political Action: A Longitudinal Study of Political Orientations in Three Western Democracies*, Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Gallagher T., Laver M., Mair P., (2002), *Representative Government in Modern Europe*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Gherghina S., Chiru M., Bertoa F.C., (2011). *State resources and pocket money: shortcuts for party funding in Romania*, CEU Discussion Working Paper 13.
- Klingemann H. D. (1995), *Party Positions and Voter Orientations*, [in:] H. D. Klingemann, D. Fuchs (eds.), *Citizens and the State: Beliefs in Government Series*, Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Marian C. (2013), *Romanian Parliamentary Elections 1990-2012. Stability and Stir*, Peter Lang.
- Mixich V. (2014), *Romania: Portretul unor alegeri europarlamentare*, http://ec.europa.eu/romania/news/articole_si_dialoguri/15072014_romania_portretul_unor_alegeri_europarlamentare_ro.htm, (1.09.2014).
- Parvu S., Krause M., Marza C. (2014), *Procesele electorale in Romania, intre improvizatie si bune practice*, <http://expertforum.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Raport-alegeri-EFOR-2014.pdf>, (2.09.2014).
- Partidul Democrat Liberal. *Viziunea PDL pentru Romania (PDL's vision for Romania)*, <http://www.pdl.org.ro/viziunea-pdl-pentru-romania>, (30.09.2014).
- Partidul Miscarea Populara. *Despre noi (About us)*, <http://pmponline.ro/despre-noi/>, (30.09.2014).
- Partidul National Liberal. *Principii si valori liberale (Principles and liberal values)*, <http://www.pnl.ro/pagina/principii-si-valori-liberale-1321007462>, (29.09.2014).
- Partidul Social Democrat. *In ce credem (What we believe in)*, <http://www.psd.ro/despre/in-ce-credem/>, (30.09.2014).
- Rohrschneider R. (1994), *How Iron is the Iron Law of Oligarchy? Robert Michels and National Party Delegates in Eleven West European Democracies*, „European Journal of Political Research”, vol. 25(2).
- Romanian Electoral Office (2014), *Raport detaliat al veniturilor si cheltuielilor electorale (Detailed report of electoral income and expenses)*, http://www.roaep.ro/finantare/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/RVC-publicare-MO_introducere.pdf, (25.09.2014).
-

- Smilov D., Toplak J. (2007), *Political Finance and Corruption in Eastern Europe*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.
- Stoica A. (2014), *Exit pollurile: Intre fictiune si realitate* (Exit Polls: Between Fiction and Reality), <http://augustinstoica.blogspot.ro/2014/05/exit-poll-urile-intre-fictiune-si.html>, (29.09.2014).
- Tapalagă D. (2014), *Cateva observatii despre Victoria PSD si infrangerea dreptei* (Some observations about the victory of PSD and the defeat of the Right), <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-opinii-17359195-cateva-observatii-despre-victoria-psd-infrangerea-dreptei.htm>, (29.09.2014).
- Tapalagă D. (2014), *Alegeri europarlamentare. La vremuri noi, tot ei*, <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-politic-16863924-alegeri-europarlamentare-vremuri-noi-tot.htm>, (29.09.2014).
- Uniunea Democrata Maghiara din Romania. Despre noi (About us), <http://udmr.ro/page/despre-noi>, (30.09.2014).
- Uniunea Social Liberala. Agricultura-Prioritate Nationala (Agriculture-A National Priority), <http://uslonline.ro/bilantul-guvernarii/sustinem-productia-agricola-interna/>, (29.09.2014).
- Ware A. (1996), *Political Parties and Party Systems*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.