

# ROMANIA

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## I. GENERAL INFORMATION

From a formal point of view, Romania is a parliamentary democracy. The members of the Chamber of Deputies and of the Senat (the senate) are elected by universal, equal, direct, secret and free suffrage (article 62[1] of the constitution). *Political system*

The government is approved through a vote of confidence by the two chambers of Romania's parliament. Its role is to ensure the implementation of the country's domestic and foreign policy and to exercise the general management of the public administration (article 102[1]).<sup>1</sup> The government shares the right to initiate laws with parliament, as well as with any group of 100,000 citizens (article 74[1]). This prerogative – used excessively in the past 20 years – has provided the government with major leverage over the country's political direction and reduced parliament to a reactive role. The government is still politically accountable solely to parliament however, whose members can ask questions to ministers, express their opinions on specific policies through motions and withdraw their confidence in the government by passing a motion of censure.

However, this institutional arrangement – characteristic of a parliamentary system – is complicated by the role and power of the president. First, he is elected for a five-year term (with two terms possible in total) in a two-round runoff election process as “the warrant of national independence and territorial integrity of the country” (article 80[1]). The president designates the candidate for prime minister, but only as a result of his consultation with whichever party has obtained an absolute majority in parliament, or, if there is no such party, after consultation with the parties represented in the parliament (article 103[1]). Once established, the president cannot remove the prime minister from office however. The president can dissolve parliament, but only under very restrictive conditions, namely, if it has not granted its vote of confidence to the government after 60 days from the first solicitation and only after a rejection of two such solicitations. Irrespective of this institutional arrangement, the president is a key actor in the Romanian political system, exercising core executive attributions in fields such as foreign policy and national defence. In practice, the split of executive power between the prime minister and the president has led, on numerous occasions, to conflicts and blockades between the two institutions.

In light of this, we can agree with the assessment that “seen from the perspective of its functioning, the Romanian regime appears as a semi-presidential one, with parliamentary intermittences” (Preda 2008).

The current Romanian constitution was introduced in 1991 and revised in 2003. In its second chapter, the constitution establishes a series of fundamental rights and freedoms. A first category of rights are guaranteed by the constitution: the right to life and to the physical and mental integrity of the individual (article 22[1]); the right to defence (article 24[1]); the right to freedom of movement (article 25[1]); freedom of conscience (article 29[2]); access to culture (article *Constitution*

33[1]); the right to the protection of one's health (article 34[1]); the right to property in general (article 44[1]) and to private property in particular (article 44[2]); access to economic activity and free enterprise (article 45) and; the right of inheritance (article 46).

The rights in a second category are inviolable: individual freedom and personal security (article 23[1]); the inviolability of the domicile and of the residence (article 27[1]); secrecy of correspondence (article 28) and; freedom of expression (article 30[1]).

The constitution also includes other fundamental rights: the protection of a person's intimate, family and private life, as well as one's right to freely dispose of oneself (article 26); the right to information of public interest (article 31[1]); the right to education (article 32[1]); the right to a healthy environment (article 35[1]); the right to vote (article 36) and to be elected (article 37); the right to elect and to be elected to the European Parliament (EP) (article 38); freedom of assembly (article 39); the right of association (article 40[1]); the right to work (which cannot be restricted) and to social protection (article 41); the prohibition of forced labour (article 42); the right to strike (article 43); the right to different forms of social security (article 47[2]); the protection of children and young people (article 49); the protection of disabled persons (article 50); the right of petition (article 51) and; the right of a person aggrieved by a public authority to an acknowledgement of their claimed right or legitimate interest, the annulment of the act and reparations for any damage (article 52[1]).

These rights are generally respected in Romania, being protected in practice by a system of law and justice of Roman and French tradition. However, two limits in this regard are worth mentioning. First, particular cases of infringement are occasionally brought to public attention. Unfortunately, some remain without due repair by justice, which diminishes their actual effectiveness and overall respect for rights and the law. Second, the constitution allows rather vaguely defined exceptions to the exercise of these rights to be brought by subsequent legislative and regulatory acts. Therefore, the actual invocation of constitutional rights is in practice sometimes problematic because their substance is intermediated and specified by further legislation.

The first article of the constitution defines Romania as a state where political pluralism represents one of the supreme values of the people (article 1[3]). Article 8[1] reinforces this idea, stating that "pluralism in the Romanian society is a condition and guarantee of constitutional democracy". Under these circumstances, political parties "contribute to the definition and expression of the political will of the citizens, while observing national sovereignty, territorial integrity, the legal order and the principles of democracy" (article 8[2]). This is rather an understatement; although media and other channels contribute to the expression of the public's will and transform it into policy, political parties' impact is the decisive one. No other functions are assigned to political parties by the Romanian constitution; their activities are regulated by specific laws.

*State of democracy* The Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy 2008 (EIUID) placed Romania in the "flawed democracies" type of regime, with an overall score of 7.06 out of 10, ranking 50<sup>th</sup> out of 167 states analyzed. EIUID is aggregating five categories: 1) electoral process and pluralism; 2) civil liberties; 3) the functioning of government; 4) political participation and; 5) political culture. Romania scored the highest in electoral process and pluralism, with 9.58 points, and the lowest in political culture, with 5.00 points, and political participation, with 6.11 points.

Romania is a consolidated democracy in which fundamental freedoms are respected however. Among the vast majority of the Romanian population, liberal democratic values are deeply internalized and cherished. These values and expectations belie the current performance of the country's democratic institutions, which are often hampered by inefficiency and corruption.

Over the last few years there have been no major changes regarding the state of democracy in Romania. This is confirmed by Freedom House's "Freedom in the World" report, which assessed the country's score for political rights and civil liberties to be steady at 2 points for the period

2003–2009 (on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 being the most free). The apparent steadiness of this score notwithstanding, liberal democracy as both a right and a widely shared ideal actually consolidated over this period, reflected in an increase in civil society and media activity in the domains of monitoring central and local government, defending rights and providing remedies.

Executive power is divided between the government and the president. While the government's role is to ensure the implementation of the country's domestic and foreign policy and to exercise the general management of the public administration, the president guards the observance of the constitution and the proper functioning of the public authorities (article 80[2]). The president also exercises power in matters of foreign policy (article 91) and defence (article 92), as well as honorary powers such as conferring decorations or making appointments to public offices (article 94). Therefore, as noted, the relationship between the president and the prime minister has been, for most of the post-communist period, one of conflict.

*Separation  
of powers*

Legislative authority consists of the two chambers of parliament, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senat (the senate). Before the constitutional revision of 2003, their powers were identical. Each and every law was to be passed by both chambers, before being promulgated by the president. However, from 2003 these powers were split to improve the system, such that for most laws only one of the two chambers is now required to make a decision. The relationship between the executive and legislative branches is complex and often competitive.

The constitution grants the president and parliament equal power. While the president can dissolve parliament, as described in the first section of this report, parliament can suspend the president from his office or impeach him (articles 95 and 96). In post-communist Romania the president has been suspended from office once, in April 2007, but the referendum following the decision of the united chambers of parliament (which is mandatory when seeking to remove a president from office) invalidated the decision.

However, in spite of the fact that the institutional architecture of Romania's political system gives priority to parliament, the executive has gained a *de facto* pre-eminence (Preda 2008). To begin with, almost 90 per cent of the laws adopted after 1989 had the government as their initiator. Furthermore, the number of emergency ordinances has continuously increased in the post-communist period.<sup>2</sup>

Romania's judicial power is formally independent and designed in the Roman and French traditions of justice. Its overall poor quality and corruption have continued to be the most problematic issues in Romania's relationship to the European Union. Despite the improvements achieved over the last five years, the system remains unreliable. The background to the problem is an unclear legislative framework, which grants considerable opportunity for arbitrariness and corruption. Initiatives to improve the quality of law-making have so far been unsuccessful. The second and more tangible problem is the lack of functioning checks within the judicial system. Its centralized structure emphasises selection and promotion. A third problem is the high degree of immunity granted to particular public officials and politicians (including members of the government and parliament), something which is frequently used to counter attempted prosecutions for alleged acts of corruption.

With regard to the vertical division of power, Romania is a unitary state with a fairly high level of centralization. Its territory is divided into 48 counties, including the six sectors of its capital Bucharest. The relationship between the central administration and the county and local levels is based upon decentralization as an administrative proxy to ensure subsidiarity. Owing to two interconnected causes, decentralization is currently not fully functional. First, voting on closed party lists for local councils only provides for limited political accountability. Second, the fiscal system's weight is based upon centrally collected taxation (VAT, profit and income taxes). Local taxes are not sufficient to fully support local governments, resulting in a game of redistribution from the central budget to the counties and subsequently to local budgets, with plenty of different political influences involved at each stage. The net effect is to further increase the concentration of political power at

the national and top-county levels, with the main local political resource being control over the county–national relation. This leaves Romania’s vertical division of power as neither clear nor functional.

This institutional arrangement and the balance of powers are overseen by the Curtea Constituțională a României, the country’s constitutional court. It is defined as the “guarantor of the supremacy of the Constitution” (article 142[1]). The main powers of the court are defined in article 146 and consist mainly of adjudicating the constitutionality of laws and treaties, solving legal disputes of a constitutional nature between public authorities or guarding the observance of different procedures.

*National assembly* The national Parliament of Romania is the supreme representative body of the Romanian people and the sole legislative authority of the country. It passes constitutional, organic and ordinary laws. Each of its chambers has its own standing bureau and standing order. Members of Parliament (MPs) carry out their activities in specialized standing committees and are affiliated to parliamentary groups organized along party membership.

The current parliament comprises 471 members (334 for the Chamber of Deputies and 137 for the Senat). The seats are distributed among four political entities: the Democratic-Liberal Party (PD-L), the alliance between the Social Democratic Party and the Conservative Party (PSD-PC), the National Liberal Party (PNL) and the Hungarian Democratic Union in Romania (UDMR) (prior to 2008 another party, the Great Romania Party [PRM], won seats in parliament). Eighteen seats in the Chamber of Deputies are attributed to organizations of ethnic minorities, other than the Hungarian one. The government is formed by the two major Romanian parties, the PD-L and the PSD, who are partners with equal rights in the coalition government, with the prime minister belonging to the PD-L.

**Table 1 | DISTRIBUTION OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS<sup>(1)</sup>**

Party	Latest election (2008)	Present status	Previous election (2004)
PD-L	166	PP, PPM/GS	–
PSD-PC	163	GJ	189
PNL	93	O	–
UDMR	31	O (GJ prior to 2008)	32
DA (Dreptate și Adevăr – Truth and Justice and Alliance, established in 2003 and ended in 2007 following the PNL’s separation from the PD)	–	– (PP, PPM/GS until 2007)	161
PRM	–	NR	69

<sup>1</sup>In the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senat; number of seats out of a total of 469 seats in 2004 and 471 seats in 2008.

Abbreviations: PP = party of the president | PPM/GS = party of the prime minister and senior partner of a coalition government | GJ = party is junior partner in the government | O = party is in opposition  
NR = no parliamentary representation.

Despite its shortcomings – the barriers to entry faced by new parties and independent candidates, the biased selection of MPs, an oversized and redundant bicameral structure – parliament has managed to operate as an agora which has so far avoided taking wildly false or dangerous decisions. In other words, its greatest merit over this period of transition has been that of providing a democratic check on decisions taken, resulting in overall political stability.

## II. PARTIES AND THE PARTY SYSTEM

### II.1 Party System

As part of the conditions of political pluralism, different political parties are permitted within Romanian society. Law 14/2003 on Political Parties only forbids parties that, through their activities and their programmes, violate constitutional interdictions concerning the defamation of the country and the nation, and the instigation of a war of aggression, as well as activities based on national, racial, class or religious hatred, incitement to discrimination, territorial separatism or public violence (article 3[2]). Political parties or organizations which, by their aims or activities, militate against political pluralism, the principles of a state governed by the rule of law or against the sovereignty, integrity or independence of Romania, are also forbidden. Lastly, secret associations are also prohibited through article 3(2).

*Legal regulation*

Law 14/2003 on Political Parties defines political parties and regulates their activities with regard to their membership, their organization, their registration, association and reorganization, along with the cessation of their activities. This piece of legislation is the third such law regulating political parties' activities in the post-communist period (the first two were passed in 1989 and 1996 respectively).

The legislation regulating political parties' activities, as well as their participation in elections, was rather labile in the post-communist period. Between 1989 and 2009, three acts regulating the organization of parties were passed (in 1989, 1996 and 2003) and four electoral laws (1990, 1992, 2004 and 2008).

These regulations were increasingly constraining for new entrants. For example, there was the 1996 law stipulating that the establishment of a party required at least 10,000 founding members, residing in at least 15 counties (of the existing 42 plus Bucharest), with no fewer than 300 in each county. Moreover, a party faced the threat of being dissolved unless it had candidates in at least 10 constituencies for 2 consecutive parliamentary elections, and a party was also obliged to hold a general meeting once every 5 years. The 2003 law raised the number of founding members to 25,000, residing in 18 counties (with at least 700 founding members in each county). Each party, under the threat of dissolution, now has to designate candidates in at least 18 counties for legislative elections and achieve at least 50,000 votes in two consecutive elections.

The electoral threshold for parliamentary elections has also seen a significant increase. While at the first post-communist elections in 1990 no such threshold existed, a 3 per cent threshold was in place for the 1992 and 1996 elections. Beginning in 2000, this threshold was raised to 5 per cent for political parties and to 8–10 per cent for coalitions (depending on the number of associated parties).

The new electoral system, introduced in May 2008, provides for the election of MPs in single-member constituencies for a four-year term by combining elements of majoritarian rule with proportional representation. Candidates who win at least 50 per cent plus 1 of the expressed votes in their constituencies obtain their mandate. The remaining mandates are redistributed proportionally according to a party list whose order is decided by each party. This method produces a paradox: a candidate who came in first place in his constituency but won less than 50 per cent of the votes may lose the mandate to a second or even third runner who is well-placed on the party list. It is one of several reasons for which the new electoral system has been severely criticized.

Some of these regulations are barriers to entry against new parties and independent politicians and, by consequence, they restrict and bias the span of political options, concentrating political power within established parties and distorting the overall selection of politicians and political ideas.

*Party financing* Party financing is regulated by Law 334/2006 regarding financing for parties' activities and electoral campaigns and was revised through an emergency ordinance (OUG 98/2008). Political parties can be financed exclusively through the following sources: membership fees, donations, inheritances, revenues from party activities (with the proviso that parties cannot develop commercial activities) and subsidies from the state budget.

Romanian legislation imposes limits on donations, with a distinction made between electoral and non-electoral years. The total donations received by a party cannot exceed 0.025 per cent from the revenues of the annual budget, though this amount is double for electoral years. The law also establishes thresholds for the maximum amounts received from a private or legal person, as well as maximum amounts of expenses for each candidate in electoral campaigns. Political parties have an obligation to publish the list of donors whose cumulative annual donation exceeds a certain threshold (10 times the gross minimum wage). When it comes to subsidies from the state budget, these are granted according to the number of votes received in parliamentary or local elections.

The institution in charge of supervising the observance of party financing rules is the Permanent Electoral Authority. However, party financing is not always transparent, especially during electoral campaigns. Accusations of illegal financing regularly appear in the press.

*Relevant parties* Five political organizations won seats in the Romanian parliament in 2008:

- The Democratic-Liberal Party (PD-L), a centre-right political party affiliated to the European People's Party. The current name and organization of the PD-L dates from 2007, when the former Democratic Party (PD) absorbed the Liberal-Democratic Party (PLD), a faction of the National Liberal Party created at the beginning of 2007. Prior to 2005, the PD was a left-wing party and a member of Socialist International, having previously split (in 1991) from what is now the Social Democratic Party (PSD). In June 2005, the PD decided upon an ideological realignment and became a people's party. The PD-L's main objective is the development of a democratic Romanian society through the promotion of the values and principles of freedom, responsibility and solidarity within a capitalist economy. It brings together popular, Christian-democrat, liberal and conservative ideas and values. The PD-L is now a major partner in the governing coalition, together with the PSD.
- The Social Democratic Party (PSD) is the main left-wing political party in Romania. It is member of Socialist International and is affiliated to the Party of European Socialists (PES). Its declared values are a social market economy, social justice and equality, an extended social security system and progressive taxation.
- The descendant of the inter-war National Liberal Party, the National Liberal Party (PNL) is a right-wing, liberal party. In the post-communist period the liberal party was dominated for a long time by factions and often even personal conflicts. Although the party has been reunited since 1997, high factionalization is one of its main characteristics.
- The Hungarian Democratic Union in Romania (UDMR) is the only organization based on ethnic principles that has successfully passed all the post-communist electoral tests, consistently winning around 7 per cent of the votes in national elections. UDMR is a member of the European People's Party.
- The Conservative Party (PC) is member of the governing coalition as a consequence of its pre-electoral agreement with the PSD. A minor party, the PC only won seats in parliament during the last three electoral cycles thanks to its pre-electoral alliances with the PSD.

For the first time since 1992, the Great Romania Party (PRM) did not pass the electoral threshold at the 2008 elections. Founded around the personality of Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the PRM is a nationalist party, often taking extremist (e.g. anti-Semitic, xenophobic) positions. The peak of its political success was the period 2000–2004 when it had around 20 per cent of the seats in parliament, with Tudor reaching the second presidential runoff in 2000 (in the end being defeated by Ion Iliescu). Until its position as a non-parliamentary party is confirmed by a second election, the PRM should continue to be considered a relevant party on the Romanian political scene.

Another important party, albeit one which has been out of parliament since the year 2000, is the National Peasant's Christian Democrat Party (PNTCD). Before, during and after the period in which it led the government (1996–2000), its activities and personalities have thoroughly influenced, inspired and strengthened its democratic centre-right camp. Its remaining networks are still active, the nucleus being constituted of some of the most dedicated conservatives and Christian-democrats in the country.

The number of political parties dropped continuously during the transition period. For example, while in 1990 there were 71 parties competing for seats in the Chamber of Deputies, in the 2008 elections only 29 of these parties registered candidates, and 18 of these parties were ethnic minorities' organizations (Preda 2009). The explanations for this concentration of parties are mergers and pre-electoral alliance-building and greater regulatory constraints, as discussed above.

The identification of Romanian political parties with party families has occurred progressively, though not always in a consistent manner. On the one hand, in the past two decades the Romanian political scene has undergone important restructuring, with unifications, splits and mergers on both the left and the right. While most political dynamics were the result of strategic considerations, there are two main cleavages differentiating parties and political actors that can be identified. First, there is the attitude towards reform – nowadays a rather soft differentiation between left and centre-right policies, it arises from the early 1990s debate between shock therapy and gradual transition, and, second, the anti-communist versus post-communist attitudes – rooted in the protests from Piața Universității (from June 1990) against the (then) new president Iliescu. Following integration into the EU, an additional political identity has also been developed around groups associated with the European Parliament. *Party families*

**Table 2 | IDEOLOGICAL COMPOSITION OF THE PARTY SYSTEM**

	<b>Name and founding year</b>	<b>Present situation</b>	<b>Situation prior to present (2004–2008)</b>
Rural party	National Peasant's Christian Democrat Party (PNTCD), 1990	NR	NR
Labour party Post-communist, social democratic	Social Democratic Party (PSD), founded in 1990 under the name of National Salvation Front (FSN), renamed the Romanian Party for Social Democracy (PDSR) in 1991 and rebranded with the current name in 2001	GJ	O
Conservative	Conservative Party (PC), founded in 1992 under the name of Humanist Party in Romania (PUR), rebranded and renamed in 2005	GJ	O
Liberal	National Liberal Party (PNL), 1990	O	PPM/GA (in the period 2007–2008)
Extremists/ nationalist parties	Great Romania Party (PRM), 1991	NR	O
People's parties	Democratic-Liberal Party (PD-L), founded in 1992 under the name of Democratic Party (PD) and renamed the PD-L in 2007	PP; PPM/GS	O (in the period 2007–2008)
Ethnic minorities' parties	Hungarian Democratic Union in Romania (UDMR), 1990	O	GJ

*Abbreviations: PP = party of the president | PPM/GS = party of the prime minister and senior partner of a coalition government | GJ = party is junior partner in the government | O = party is in opposition NR = no parliamentary representation.*



*Origins of parties* The formation of the post-communist left party (now the PSD) was the result of a patronage relationship and the efforts of the old communist elites to maintain their privileged position. The same will to maintain a privileged position can be identified with the Conservative Party and the Great Romania Party, whose leaders have important ties with the old communist party structure.

Until 2003, party fragmentation was common for the centre-right forces (which included both historic and new-born parties). The only exception was these parties' victory in 1996 while allying as the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR), when democratic parties temporarily united around the National Peasant's Christian Democrat Party (PNTCD), the most important party to champion anti-communism from 1990 until its electoral loss in 2000. Subsequent efforts to unite the centre-right led to the formation of the DA Alliance in 2003, while its dissolution in 2007 led to the formation of the PD-L in December of that year.

The UDMR, the single important ethnic political organization in Romania, escaped the pattern of opposition from post-communist leaders to its formation, although fragmentation and patronage relationships have been a feature of its development.

*General significance of parties* Political parties have the most important active role in democracy. Operating within democratic rules, parties should on the one hand safeguard rights and liberties and, on the other, aggregate individual preferences and transform them into collective action through public policies. However, as actors, parties are large groups of (theoretically like-minded) persons competing for the right to govern, meaning that they constitute the central channel for the selection of candidates and policy-oriented ideas to be put into practice. The party or parties in power have a decisive influence over the performance of national government, but their actual control is shared with that of the public administration and other national stakeholders.

Laws regarding local elections and the statute of elected local officials put political parties in a position to control the vote of local councillors as well as local administrations and their related opportunities and resources, something which greatly increases parties' influence at the local level.

*Voter-party relations* The percentage of voters for whom ideology is the primary concern when deciding whom to vote for is about 25 per cent (Mungiu-Pippidi 2002). The country's Hungarian minority votes along ethnic lines (around 6–7 per cent of voters), as do other minority groups, whose percentages are smaller. The most important factor in determining people's vote is seemingly candidates' profiles and those of party leaders.

Most parties command consistent votes from core supporters, with electoral competition essentially focused on winning undecided voters (around 40 per cent).

## **II.2 Individual Parties**

*Party membership* Until the 2003 law requiring all political parties to re-register, the number of members of each party had been kept secret by party leaders (Preda 2008). Nevertheless, up-to-date information about each party's membership is still not regularly published; the latest data available (from 2007) can be found on the website of the register of Romanian political parties.



**Table 3 | MEMBERSHIP FIGURES <sup>(1)</sup>**

Party	2003	2007
PD-L	148,000 (this figure reflects the membership of the PD)	86,461 (this figure reflects the membership of the PD prior to the formation of the PD-L)
PSD	300,000	290,116
PNL	120,115	116,134
PC	95,314	90,663
UDMR	Not available	Not available
PRM	201,827	103,548

<sup>(1)</sup> For 2003, figures are presented in Preda 2008. For 2007, figures are available on the webpage of the register of Romanian political parties (<http://www.tmb.ro> [last accessed on 29/06/09]).

Apart from the PRM, which has registered a steady overall decrease since its heyday in 2002/2003, the figures for these parties are relatively consistent. Parties' membership is in any case rather uniform, with the distribution of social groups within the parties being similar. No ethnicity or gender is biased towards any of the parties, with the only clear exception being the Hungarian minority's UDMR party, whose membership is defined along ethnic lines. Other variations could be put down to differences in targeted audiences; membership varies according to age, education and income. In general, the left tends to appeal to lower-income, lower-education and rural groups, while voters in urban areas tend towards the right. These overall tendencies are, however, variable depending upon specific local contexts.

Romanian political parties are currently redefining the social groups with which they are associated. Until recently, the PNL had been strongly connected to the middle class of professionals and entrepreneurs, but having adopted several social policy measures (such as supporting pensions increases and allocating consistent funding for rural infrastructure development) since its period in government in 2005–2008, it has seen its connection to the aging and rural population become stronger. As a consequence, the PSD has lost some of its support among these two groups, though it continues to maintain the support of both the urban working class and social groups privileged under communism. The PD-L has a strong electoral base among the urban population and attracts middle class voters and entrepreneurs disenchanted with the PNL's policies. The PC has consistently run its electoral campaigns in alliance with the PSD (with its candidates on the same lists) and does not have a strong connection to a particular social group, mainly because of its weak electoral support (it is consistently credited with support of less than 3 per cent in opinion polls). Lastly, the UDMR is strongly connected to the Hungarian minority.

Each of the parties has a public statute adopted in a democratic manner in national conferences with delegates from all local party branches. *Party organization*

Romanian parties are organized at the national, county, municipal, town and commune levels, reflecting the administrative organization of the counties. Most of the parties do not have local branches in each and every commune across the country (the PSD has the largest network of local branches), though each party seeks to extend its nationwide representation as much as possible. In the big cities, municipal party branches tend to extend their organizational reach down to the level of neighbourhood and street representatives. These local organizations are especially active

during electoral campaigns. However, a considerable number of them are permanently active in developing their electoral networks and organizing public events, as for example on the occasion of national and local holidays and festivals.

Each of the major parties has a youth and a women's organization. The PNL and the PD-L also have a students' organization. Additionally, the PD-L and the PSD also have pensioners' organizations. These student, youth and pensioners' organizations are moderately active in policymaking and programme debates, their intensive activism being limited by their lack of influence. The PSD is the only party where a women's organization has actively participated in promoting equal opportunities for men and women in their party programme and has the best representation of women on the national, European and local lists of candidates. The PD-L's women's organization has registered a considerable increase in its activities and is probably the most active and influential example compared with other parties.

*Societal entrenchment* The PSD is strongly connected to unions, with some union leaders even being nominated as candidates by the party. The PD-L has developed strong relations with civil society organizations, promoting some of their leaders as ministers in the government (2005–2007) or as candidates in the European elections. As an opposition party, the PNL is becoming more open towards civil society organizations as a strategy for greater resistance to government policies. When it comes to specific policy issues, civil society organizations prefer direct collaboration with the government, with some parties being more open to collaboration than others depending on the policy topics and their own stake in them. The UDMR is closely linked with ethnic Hungarians' voluntary organizations.

*Internal decision-making* According to basic principles and to the rules around decision-making in each of the parties, the main decision-making body is the party convention. In reality however, every convention is more or less influenced by party leaders.

Most candidates running for parliamentary seats are nominated either by their county branches, by a vote expressed by the organization's board or by a larger delegation of the organization. This system notwithstanding, national leaders will often exert their influence by adjusting these lists and including important supporters such as public intellectuals, public figures or close collaborators who do not enjoy the explicit support of a certain local branch of the party. The PSD and the PL-D frequently point to using quotas around women's participation, but they rarely observe these quotas when actually nominating their candidates. The PNL disapproves of quotas for women's representation and has very few women as members of its national leadership (only two in total) and in parliament, though progress was made when it nominated women for the first four positions on the European elections lists. The PC has a woman as its leader and has a record of consistently promoting female candidates. Indeed, in the 2004 local elections its nominations for candidates for the city halls of Bucharest's districts were exclusively women. The UDMR has no women leaders or candidates.

Parties' internal relations are primarily characterized by patronage style decision-making and communication. Inner groups are frequently in conflict, and often this internal competition detracts from the attention and importance given to competition among political parties. Each inner group tries to consolidate its power and position and will only encourage and support the participation of its own adherents and close collaborators. When a certain consensus is reached, or when a group is very powerful and lacks strong opposition, relationships are hierarchical.

*Stability of party ideology/programmes* Parties' names reflect their adherence to particular doctrines. Romanian political parties have generally changed their names after fusing with other parties, as was the case with the Democratic Liberal Party, which acquired its name in 2007 after the newly formed Liberal Democratic Party joined the Democratic Party. Frequent changes in names occurred during the 1990s when the political scene was very fragmented and party splits were common.

Voters are usually mobilized around the image of party leaders, be they national or local, and less around parties' programmes. Very few social groups have made their voting decision based on policy issues, as most voters are disenchanted with politicians' unfulfilled promises. Party programmes are drafted and decided by each party's national decision-making body. Each party has departments and committees specializing in particular policy areas, but their members either lack the expertise or the influence to integrate their proposals into the party programme.

Parties primarily communicate with their voters during electoral campaigns. They use both an approach involving direct contact (e.g. through rallies, concerts, sampling, door-to-door exchanges, short message service (SMS, or text messages, phone calls, letters, etc.) and through mediation using local and national mass media. Professional agencies or consultancy firms are contracted only during electoral campaigns. More recently, prime ministers have used consulting services to professionalize their public communication. It is very difficult to estimate the percentage of party budgets allocated to communication and advertising services because party financing is not completely transparent and much of the alleged illegal financing is directed towards communication.

*Communication*

The National Audiovisual Council imposes a certain time allocation for each party to appear on television. There are no other legal constraints on political communication. However, at the national level and, even more conspicuously, at the local level, the mass media is politicized and each party indirectly finances television and newspapers to ensure its access to the media. Party activists are usually young people who are not well-trained to deliver specialized political messages or to engage in policy debates with the electorate. Despite the rise in the number of consultancy firms, their expertise remains quite poor.

The constitution forbids an "imperative mandate" on the part of parties' leaders or figures of influence. MPs' votes are, however, generally coordinated by their parties and they may risk informal sanctions for disobeying their party's line.

*Relationship  
between parties  
and parliamentary  
groups*

### **III. GENERAL ASSESSMENT**

Romania's system of multiparty democracy is functional, but there is plenty of room for improvement. Political parties provide the organizational infrastructure needed to integrate their supporters, as well as the capacity needed to govern. Particularly in light of the decreasing importance of nationalist parties, politics is increasingly representative of the people.

In developing into a major party, the PD-L has increased both its membership and its organizational complexity. Its substance and coherence has improved in the last two years due largely to its efforts at fundamentally altering its programmes and policies, along with the establishment in 2008 of its think-tank, the Institute for Popular Studies.

In reuniting surviving networks of the former communist regime, the PSD gained not only a strong organizational structure (for years, it had been the only party covering rural areas) but also an advantage in terms of the quality of its officials, bringing together as it did the only individuals with any real political and public management experience at the time. This proved instrumental for many years. Over time, and faced with a centre-right intellectualism reacting strongly to the country's communist past, its social-democrat doctrine lost its former clout, despite repeated efforts to revitalise it. The PNL started with a weak organizational structure but benefited from the brand name of an historical party dissolved by the communist regime, as well as from the liberal doctrinarian tradition. Therefore, despite its organizational weakness, it managed to attract intellectuals and intellectually-oriented youth as well as other urban votes. However, as a consequence of its capture by economic interests after 2004, its split in 2007 and the general erosion of its appeal while in power (2005–2008), it lost much of its original support. The UDMR's consistent support is based on its strong connection to a particular audience and set of interests.

As previously explained, the selection of party candidates is biased by voting on closed electoral lists. Not only does this concentrate power at the centre of the party, but it also presents voters with a pre-determined set of choices and greatly decreases political accountability. Usually parties place "image-locomotives" (highly visible, attractive and clean candidates) at the top of the list and fill the rest with less desirable candidates.

On average, the organizational strength of Romanian parties is rather balanced. While some parties (the PD-L, the PSD) benefit from widespread electoral networks reaching down to the level of the neighbourhood or street, other parties boast, among other advantages, a better structured and more active centre. However, the level of resources which one of the big parties (the PD-L, the PSD) can mobilize is surely higher.

The same assessment is valid with regard to parties' social make-up and ability to engage with voters. This similarity is due, on the one hand, to the fact that these features largely depend upon more general institutional conditions and, on the other, to the fact that they tend towards an equilibrium as a result of political competition.

The average life span of the parties is short compared with those in most established Western democracies. This is due to the selection process initiated in 1990 between the hundreds of parties established soon after the country's democratic transition. The initial decrease in the number of parties up to the year 2000 was of a more quantitative sort (i.e. many parties disappeared because of a lack of resources), while subsequent developments thereafter were of a deeper character, related to both value and strategic positioning (Stoica 2008).

Prior to 2004, parties' activity was determined solely by the electoral schedule. The changes outlined by the 2003 constitutional review stipulated that the parliamentary and presidential elections would occur every four and five years respectively however. This had a positive effect in stimulating continuous political activity and greater continuity in party-voter relations.

Beginning in 2004 there has been a noticeable increase in the depth of programme founding, which has largely been the result of the establishing of several think-tanks professionalizing this kind of work. The performance in government and opposition is mixed and curious: A rather widely-accepted idea used to be that the centre-right is strong in opposition but weak in power, and that the left is the exact opposite. While there was some truth to this given the experiences of these two political forces in the past, the centre-right's efforts from 2004 onwards to improve of its capacity while in government have witnessed its increasing professionalization.

Therefore, in general terms, multiparty democracy in Romania is currently much healthier than when facing the serious problems jeopardizing the country in the 1990s and up to 2004. There is still room for improvement, especially in the areas of the parties' organizational capacity, their programmatic basics and their performance in government. A potential danger lies in the lack of legitimacy common to most public and political organizations, manifest in low levels of public trust. The barriers against newcomers' and independents' entrance into the national political scene might have institutionalized the country's politics prematurely – freezing a political environment yet to fully develop – and might in future cause further shortcomings in the political and institutional system.

The most significant difficulties do not seem to lie in the institutionalization of multiparty democracy per se, but rather in the quality of its overall performance, or at least in the quality of certain features or of its surrounding institutional environment. Three problems, already mentioned, should be resumed here.

First, public trust in political parties, as well as trust in the rest of the country's political and public institutions (elections, parliament and government), is low. This signals a broad, systematic absence of legitimacy, meaning that the state and its institutions (including political parties) are not providing the public goods and services for which they are responsible. Specifically, the system fails to provide:

(1) the right mix of public goods and services (in other words, it is unresponsive to needs); (2) these goods in sufficient quantities and; (3) these goods at an adequate level of quality. When it comes to national politics, this is due to deficiencies in performance and parties' oligarchic nature and also, indirectly, to the barriers to entry faced by new actors on the political scene.

Second, there is a more technical and party-related challenge. Parties generally do provide fairly well-shaped political alternatives and programmes, and their technical infrastructure for the development and actual implementation of these ideas is improving. The problem however is that so far these ideas have been without noticeable practical results. To give just one example, since 1990 Romania has only managed to build 152 kilometres of a rather modest highway, despite the country's need of hundreds of kilometres of such infrastructure.

Third, due to overregulation and an oversized public system, the levels of available funds and incidences of "rent-seeking" behaviour have become especially high. In combination with the fragile rule of law over the past 20 years, this situation has made parties the most visible tool of redistribution from the public sector to political clientele and business interests, something which has significantly lowered the credibility of the country's multiparty democracy.

In conclusion, multiparty democracy is functional and well-established in Romania. Developments around shared social values, ideas and democratic preferences have all combined to give democracy a strong grounding, and indeed have been much stronger than changes in actual political and governmental performance. These shortcomings – resulting in lack of legitimacy around political and government organizations – can only be ameliorated by core systematic reforms. In order to assure the public that the centre of the system is clean of the difficulties found elsewhere in the public system, this in effect will mean a constitutional reform is needed to clarify key institutional relations between government branches. This constitutional reform needs to be followed by a revision of the laws pertaining to party organization and the electoral system, along with a reform of public administration. The increasing quality of human resources and organizations involved in politics, combined with rising public standards and expectations around government performance, would support such improvements.

- 1| *If not otherwise indicated, all article quotations are from the Romanian constitution, adopted in 1991 and modified in 2003.*
- 2| *Emergency ordinances are those with immediate enforcement passed by the government and later subjected to parliamentary approval.*

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