

A stylized map of Romania composed of a grid of dots. The dots are mostly light gray, with several red dots highlighting specific regions or points of interest. The map is centered on the page, with the title 'Romania's Second Democratic Transition' overlaid on it.

Romania's Second Democratic Transition

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- Romania needs a second democratic transition. The first one has built new institutions but not a cohesive society; preferred enforcement and hierarchical institutions over the representative ones, and placed too much emphasis on international drivers for change.
- The debates on how to better develop the economy, how to distribute resources and responsibilities, how to develop the rural economy and society, how to integrate a territory with severe disparities have been silenced and turned into debates on administration and corruption. A return to the socio-economic agenda of the citizen is necessary.
- There are worrying signs that there is an authoritarian drift in society and the political system. If democracy is to last and be viable, Romania needs to rebuild its pluralistic and representative institutions.
- Will Romania join the nationalistic, conservative, and Eurosceptic Eastern bloc or will it be able to maintain its open, inclusive and pro-European perspective? The choice still goes to the second but it is increasingly contested. A rethinking of what »European« means is necessary in Romania and at EU level.



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I. Summary

The democratic transition in Romania has been notably difficult. The nature of the events in 1989, more violent than others in the region has left deep traces in the collective memory and the political structure of the country. The early transition was also tensioned and often violent. The relative pacification of our society came late, in the early 2000s when the prospect of joining the EU brought a reasonable level of consensus within the elites and in society. It was also because people were exhausted by the overlapping reforms, social and economic transformations and fierce political disputes. Accession to the EU seemed something that would bring some order and purpose. In more concrete terms it allowed the exit option for millions of Romanians who sought work and opportunities abroad.

After more than 25 years we need to ask what kind of political order, democracy and social structure have emerged from transition. Was it a successful transition or are there reasons to doubt the resilience and quality of the democratic gains in the region? Are the EEC countries, and specifically Romania, willing and capable of having a positive influence in terms of democracy and prosperity on the continent? These are fundamental questions which are not relevant only to the countries in question. In the end, democracy was the main import from the Western EU members to the Eastern ones. Its success in the region is also the success of the overarching historical process promoted by the Western political elites after 1989.

It is a difficult enterprise to assess all the dimensions of democratic performance. It is thus necessary to focus on the elements which are fundamental and also relevant for the country. Already early in the transition, despite sharing a common past, the EEC countries diverged in trajectory. In Romania's case, the democratic surface hides alarming signs of lurking anti-democratic sentiment and institutional arrangements. The Romanian society looks too tired to try catching up with Europe, too tired to overcome its historical under-development and marginality. This paper thus looks at the intertwining of social concerns, political opinions and the structure of the political process.

The authorities' general inability to use power and resources towards public ends has undermined the trust

of ordinary Romanian citizens in the democratic process and the capacity of the government and political parties to rule effectively. Disappointment with the government and what is perceived to be the »political class« have become entrenched. This also explains the current social and political cleavages that cause the modernizing technocracy to be pitted against the older party elites. This is only the latest cleavage to appear in society. It has morphed from previous ones which became dominant and eventually declined in transition. They have probably not disappeared but found a way to resurface when the conditions were favorable.

From a European perspective, the Romanian elites and society seem to be too inward-looking to be able to project any outward vision. The elites promote a mainstream Europeanism which is also weak when put to the test. The position of the government in the refugee crisis has shown that the Romanian political establishment failed to be part of a European solution mostly because the Romanian public opinion was quick to develop anti-refugee sentiments on the instigation of marginal political figures and media outlets. Against this background, some players want to portray Romanians as either victims or second-hand European citizens. Yet support for the EU is still strong.

II. A Survey of Agendas and Cleavages in Romania

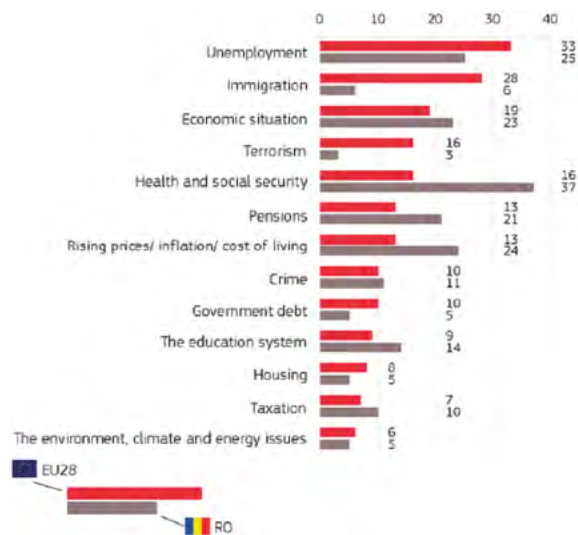
The Romanian transition can be seen as a continuous disenchantment with its democratic political regime. The revolutionary moment in 1989 was soon followed by difficult economic reforms and disappointment with the pluralistic democratic politics. Even though the citizen's agenda is dominated by economic and social issues, the political process apparently is not built to accommodate it. The political and electoral cleavages tend to feature a clash between those who are perceived as being closer to the communist past and are therefore more corrupt and those who claim to have broken off with that past and fight corruption. The patterns of institutional trust tend to reinforce these institutional cleavages. The institutions closely associated with pluralism and politics – Parliaments and parties – tend to be deeply mistrusted while the enforcement institutions like the police, army, intelligence and prosecuting agencies tend to be more trusted. Even though the citizen's agenda is decidedly

economic and social, the political structures seem organized around the issues of order, anti-corruption and efficiency. The EU integration is seen as a generally positive process. Romanians tend to trust the EU institutions more than their national ones and to associate integration with clear benefits such as the freedom of movement. But this support has shown signs of fatigue.

A Citizens' Agenda and Societal Cleavages

According to the latest Eurobarometer, the most pressing issues for the country are still of economic and social nature – *health and social security* (37%), *unemployment* (25%), *rising prices/inflation/cost of living* (24%), *economic situation* (23%) and *pensions* (21%).¹

Figure 1: The most important issues facing the country at the moment (%)



The most important hopes, fears and uncertainties seem to be related to the way the transition worked for most of the citizens. And the overarching sentiment is of economic and social insecurity. This is especially the case for a large part of the population which is experiencing economic hardships.

The existing levels of inequality and poverty are among the highest in the European Union, with almost 40 per cent of the population at risk of poverty or social exclu-

sion.² Romania has many citizens in a state of poverty or in a materially precarious situation, and their main concern is survival, not politics or community participation. The exit from poverty requires access to decent housing, to education and health services, decently paid jobs and basic social protection.³ Unfortunately their concerns and interests are not actively articulated and represented in the Romanian political process. For example the pensions for a large and vulnerable category of people are kept at a very low level. Almost 500,000 people in the country have a pension of 90 euros per month, mostly people who worked in agriculture. At the same time, people who were employees of the army, police, the former Communist Securitate, diplomats, judges and prosecutors, around 160.000 people have significantly higher pensions, so called »special«. The average pension for the ex-military is around 700 Euros, and 1400 Euros for the civilians (magistrates, diplomats). Not only are these deprived groups not represented but they are discriminated against. During election campaigns older citizens, the less educated, or the poorest, the people perceived as living of social benefit have routinely been the target of political attacks due to their voting choices. As most of the time poverty combines with race, as in the case of the Roma minority, there are perfect conditions for identifying an »other« who has to be excluded from society and political community.

Political and Electoral Cleavages

One would expect that the hierarchy of concerns and issues to be reflected in the political and electoral cleavages in the country. Surprisingly, Romanian party and electoral politics today seems an overlap between a declining *communist-anti-communist* cleavage and a *corruption-anti-corruption* cleavage, both detailed in the next section. These two cleavages structure the electoral campaigns and political positioning. They do have some social roots. According to a special Eurobarometer, 93 per cent of Romanians think that corruption is a widespread national problem.⁴ The views on the communist

1. Standard Eurobarometer 85, Spring 2016, Life in the European Union – Romania.

2. At-risk of poverty or social exclusion rate, 2013 and 2014, Eurostat, EU statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC).

3. For example Romania has the most unequal distribution of income among the EU members, Eurostat: 1995–2014, accessed in 15.9.2016; <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tsdsc260>.

4. Special Eurobarometer 397 on Corruption, February 2014, p. 19; http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_397_en.pdf

regime tend to be more positive than one would expect. In a survey from 2010, a majority of respondents said that communism was a good idea which was poorly implemented (47%) while 14 per cent said it was both a good idea and had a proper implementation.⁵ It is surprising how resilient these cleavages are even though no party openly defends the heritage of the communist regime and for sure no party rejects the anti-corruption drive as unnecessary.

However, the main post-communist cleavages that dominate the public and electoral agenda seem disconnected from the citizens' agenda. The debates on how to better develop the economy, how to distribute resources and responsibilities, how to develop the rural economy and society, on what the drivers of industry should be, on how to integrate a territory with severe disparities have been silenced and turned into debates on administration and corruption. The *communist vs anti-communist* cleavage holds a symbolic value but not a policy relevance. The *corruption-anti-corruption* cleavage is more relevant but ultimately marginal to the socio-economic development of the country. The continuous concern of citizens with jobs, wages, working conditions, social services and poverty must nevertheless be recognized and given a political voice.

Support for Democracy and Trust in Institutions

The gap between citizen concerns and political articulation is widened by a strong distrust in the political institutions, especially the representative and pluralistic ones – Parliament and political parties. The general support for democracy as a regime remained solid during transition (see Table 1). However, this support has declined in time, possibly by coupling the democratic regime with its economic performance which was constantly considered unsatisfactory.

The general support level nevertheless conceals a deep distrust in the representative institutions which is more relevant for the functioning of the democratic regime. The institutions that are mobilizing and representing the citizens – political parties, the place for consensus-build-

Table 1: Percentage of agreement to have a democratic political system, 1990–2014⁶

Wave	1994–1998	2005–2009	2010–2014
RO survey	1998	2005	2012
Italy	–	94 %	–
Sweden	96 %	98 %	96 %
Great Britain	–	91 %	–
Germany	96 %	95 %	95 %
Bulgaria	86 %	87 %	–
Hungary	91 %	92 %	–
Poland	–	84 %	83 %
Russia	58 %	79 %	80 %
Romania	91 %	95 %	87 %

ing and executive oversight, and Parliament, are by far the least trusted institutions. Table 2 shows the levels of confidence in institutions for a sample of young people and a national sample. The levels of confidence amongst young people are lower, which can be a worrying sign for the prospects of democratic consolidation in the country.

Table 2: Confidence in institutions: young people vs. national values (% much and very much confidence)⁷

	CURS Survey (Juli 2016)	CURS Survey (August 2016)
Political Parties	6 %	9 %
The Parliament	9 %	12 %
The Government	13 %	18 %
The Church	61 %	73 %
The Army	57 %	68 %
The EU	42 %	48 %

6. Voicu, B. / Telegyi, B. (2016): Dynamics of Social Values: 1990–2012, Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Social Analyses, 6(1): 7–30.

7. Cătălin Augustin Stoica (coord.); Daniel Sandu; Radu Umbreş, Youth in Romania: worries, values, attitudes and life style, FES Romania study, December 2014, p.146.

5. Attitudes and opinions on the Communist regime in Romania, Public opinion survey, CSOP, September 2010; http://www.arhivelenationale.ro/images/custom/image/serban/iicmer%20sondaj%20opinie%20raport_sondaj_opinie.pdf.

The Eurobarometer for spring 2016 also shows that the respondents in Romania who tend to trust Parliament are only 14% of the population as compared to the EU average which is 28%. The same survey shows that trust in the EU is higher in Romania as compared to the EU average (47% in Romania, 33% in the EU).⁸

Compared to other political institutions, many of them unelected – army, prosecutors, intelligence services, Parliament and the political parties are the main targets of criticism from society, criticism in which is increasingly difficult to distinguish between the *democratic and pluralistic* or *authoritarian and populist*. One explanation would be that the pluralistic and representative institutions are held accountable to a greater extent for the political and economic performance of the regime. This is a trend that has become stable in Romania. The institutions based on hierarchy and traditions seem much more popular. We could add here the institutions like the Anti-Corruption Directorate (DNA) - a special prosecutorial structure, and SRI, the home intelligence agency, which are perceived to be at the frontline of combatting corruption. The table below shows the comparative levels of trust in enforcement institutions, including the foreign intelligence agency – SIE and the Police.

Table 3: Trust in executive institutions (%)

Institution	December 2014	September 2015	March 2016
Army	76, 1	73,8	76, 3
Police	51,4	51,7	50,2
SRI	52,6	50,3	50,4
SIE	46, 8	48,0	52, 6
DNA	55,8	60,0	59,8

INSCOP Research, March 2016⁹

In the same poll trust in Parliament and the political parties is significantly lower (12,6 % and 8,3 %). The executive branch represented by the Presidency and the Government have higher trust than Parliament and the parties but also lower as compared to the enforcement institutions (Presidency – 42 %, Government – 22,6 %).

8. Standard Eurobarometer 85, Spring 2016, Life in the European Union – Romania.

9. Inscop Research, Trust in institutions Report, March 2016; <http://www.inscop.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/INSCOP-raport-martie-2016-INCREDERE-INSTITUTII.pdf>.

One explanation for the above situation arises from the failure of the leadership of parliamentary parties to build sustainable political organizations, to formulate and follow programmatic lines, to mobilize citizens and manage the administration of government. The generalized corruption and clientelism within their ranks have painted their catastrophic picture of today. Political parties are considered as primarily responsible for the current state of the country. The lack of trust in Parliament is partially an extension of the poor image parties have. Thus the institutions which are perceived as active in combatting corruption or those who are insulated from partisan influence tend to be more trusted.

Apart from corruption and clientelism, parties were also weakened by the economic crisis. The most recent form of erosion of multi-party system was the installation of a »technocratic« cabinet in the autumn of 2015. Evicting political parties from politics is not something new; the economic crisis in Europe offered in some situations a central role to neoliberal economists at the expense of parliaments, political parties and citizens. In Romania, the *technocrats* seem to be fully connected to the neoliberal vision on the economy and governance and bring an emphasis on transparency, efficiency and management.

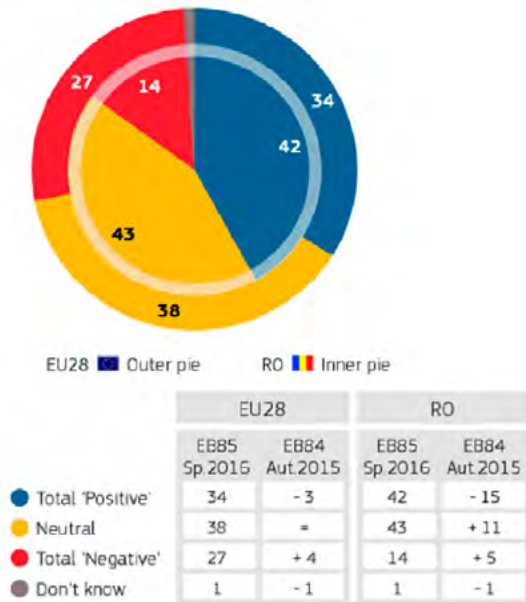
European Integration: Signs of Fatigue

Trust in the European Union has been constant in the Romanian public opinion. Support for it as well. EU integration was seen, during the transition, as an indispensable driver for reform, democracy and prosperity. Although the levels of support remained very high as compared to other countries, the positive view on the EU is falling.

In this spring's Eurobarometer, 42 per cent of Romanians held positive views of the EU, which is almost ten percent more than the EU average.¹⁰ What is more interesting is the big drop from the fall Eurobarometer of 2015, a record 15 per cent. The positive opinion turned into neutral and in some cases negative. It is very likely that this drop is the result of the handling of the migration and the refugee crisis which provided the perfect

10. Standard Eurobarometer 85, Spring 2016, Life in the European Union – Romania.

Figure 2: In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image? (%)



Source: Eurobarometer

opportunity for nationalistic and conservative platforms to target the EU. It remains to be seen if this trend will be maintained or the positive image of the EU will return to previous levels. This fast and consistent drop is difficult to explain only in terms of the activation of the anti-refugee discourse. In fact, the background for a more solid Euroscepticism in Romania was created during the past several years. In an opinion poll from April 2013 we find what are the most common associations with the EU.¹¹ As expected, the EU is associated with the unrestricted circulation of people (76,2 %), democracy and human rights (57,1 %), peace with the neighboring countries (55,6 %), economic development (47,3 %) and jobs (44,5 %). These associations have a robust positive meaning. In the survey were added concepts which can be considered as negative. The most common negative associations were not as expected, losing national identity (31 %) and religious identity (19,9 %), but intervention in the domestic politics of the country (53,9 %), subordination to Western countries (50,6 %), the spread of the economic crisis (49,8 %), losing control over the economy (43,7 %) and exploitation of natural resources (41,6 %). The answers

11. Inscop Research, The attitude of Romanians on the European Union Report, May 2013; <http://www.inscop.ro/mai-2013-atitudinea-romanilor-fata-de-uniunea-europeana/>.

show that the profile of Euroscepticism in Romania, at least before the migration and refugee crisis, was of a political and economic nature.¹² Respondents were more sensitive to the effects of the economic crisis and their limited control over decisions and policies rather than to the identity-based fears and reactions. This explains why there is a new turn in the economic discourse of the main parties in which they tend to favor national capital over international capital. This turn is in fact the rediscovery of the traditional cleavages which became active during the late modernization of Romania.

III. Explaining Cleavages: How to Modernize a Peripheral Country?

If one wants to explain the current persistence of socio-economic issues as top priorities for the citizens, and the authoritarian drifts especially associated with modernizing projects and the ambivalence toward integration and foreign driven reforms, a look at the past is necessary. The transition is, from this perspective, a big *déjà vu*.

In the paper I use both a »soft« and a more structured understanding of cleavages. The soft ones are various tensions and groupings in a society, defined in economic, cultural and political terms. The structured ones are major division lines in the organization of modern societies produced by significant and important events and processes.¹³

In some respects the cleavage lines in Romanian politics are remarkably stable even though there were successive regime changes in the last two centuries. Without descending in a geographical determinism it is safe to say that the cleavages are a result of location, territory, resources and population. Romania is a semi-peripheral

12. See Claudiu Craciun, Romanians – From Europhiles to reluctant Europeans, 2013, Heinrich Boll Foundation; https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2013/12/euroscepticism_in_romania.pdf.

13. Stein Rokkan and Seymour Martin Lipset developed a theory to explain voter behaviors and party dynamics in Western and Southern Europe mainly starting from key processes and events like the Reformation, national and industrial revolutions. All three produced divisions between state and church, central and local elites, rural and urban economy and workers and owners. The cleavages and alignments tend to be resilient and explain for example the structure of the party systems. See Lipset, S. M., & Rokkan, S. 1967. Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction. In S. M. Lipset & S. Rokkan (Eds.), Party Systems and Voter Alignments (pp. 1–64). New York/London: The Free Press-Collier-Macmillan.

country striving for unity and independence in an area which was dominated for centuries by despotic empires – Ottoman, Tsarist and Austro-Hungarian. Romania's statehood and modernity were always challenged, leaving deep traces in the collective memory and culture, let alone politics. In the 19th century it successfully gained independence from the Ottoman Empire, united two of the medieval provinces, Moldova and Wallachia, regained the right to be ruled by local/national nobility and created, with difficulty, towards the end of the century, the core of its democratic institutions. The Romanian elites were an avid importer of political ideas, institutions and customs especially from the West. The revolutionary ideas on 1848 found a dynamic historical agent in the young intellectual diaspora studying in Paris and parts of the local intelligentsia, administration, army and economic elite. Later on, the import of institutions took a more concrete turn by having a European royal family taking the throne of the country.

The society was still overwhelmingly rural while the cities were small and the merchant and the industrial class still very weak. The 19th century political structuring followed this division in broad lines, the Liberals promoted the national industry and businesses and the Conservatives protected the interests of the strong land-owning nobility. The majority of the population resided in the rural areas and was notably poor and aggressively repressed when voicing discontent. After the First World War, Romania had significant territorial gains, an overarching goal for the nation-builders and modernizers, incorporating Transylvania and some parts of the historical province of Moldova. Greater Romania, as it was called then, embarked on a massive process of state and nation-building which later on took a right-wing conservative turn in tune with the majority of the European countries.

Most of the enduring cleavages (*national vs. foreign, conservative vs. reformist, central vs. regional, agrarian vs. industrial, rural vs. urban*) find their root in the long 19th century and its interwar continuation. Romanians saw how the majority of political reforms, including unpopular ones, were imported from abroad (ex. freeing of Rroma from a medieval type of serfdom or granting citizen rights to the Jewish population). They acknowledged that the stability of the country was ultimately decided by the great European powers. They constantly struggled to unite the territory and the nation given the

long history of separate development of the provinces, most of the time at the expense of regional and different ethnic/national identities (mostly Catholic Hungarians and Jews). The rural world was always problematic: the peasants had to fight for their land and to make their rural living economically viable. The same rural part will be more socially conservative than the rest of the country and more vulnerable to patronage and clientelism. Romanians saw that the industrial development was also foreign-led and that there was a relative tension between the national and the foreign capital. The rights of the workers would be likely sacrificed for the greater good of faster economic development. Above all, they felt that the ruling elites are incapable, too selfish or too predatory to seek the development of the whole society.

In the aftermath of the Second World War massive changes were looming. The communists, many on them foreign nationals, strived to transform the country and make it a trusted part of the Soviet camp. The fact that many of the top officials were foreign is relevant as it is a continuation of the *national vs. foreign cleavage* in the Romanian politics, notwithstanding the very different nature of the regimes. The Romanian vs. Soviet chain of command was a strong political cleavage. Later on, the regime took a more clearly nationalistic turn in an attempt to become more independent from Moscow and build some alternative ideological tool to make up for the loss of internationalist/communist legitimacy. Nicolae Ceausescu was the champion of this nationalistic turn in communist politics and somehow, paradoxically, the bridge between the interwar fascist nationalism and the post-1989 conservative nationalism. The communist regime also brutally re-engineered the social and economic relations. There was a relentless purge of the old elites, including the party elites, military, clergy and administration. The communists nationalized all the industry and manufacturing facilities as well as a significant part of the private buildings. In the rural parts, especially in the plains, a forced process of collectivization started, stripping property from the peasants and administering the land through state collective farms. Agriculture was intensely mechanized and a class of agricultural engineers and managers began to emerge. The peasants were confined to a role of state employees, very far from their traditional role of quasi-independent producers.

With the growth of significant echelons of party officials and intelligence officers there was another cleavage in

the making. In the period of growth and stability, the 60s and the 70s, there was little room for discontent. The echoes of the postwar repression were dimming, the industrial and economic development was visible and one could see signs of modernization everywhere – new apartment buildings were erected, schools and hospitals were built. Resistance to the regime was low. At the end of the 70s the international economic conditions changed and so did the nature of the regime. In order to protect the economy from external shocks, Nicolae Ceausescu imposed an economic regime based on austerity and exports. Soon the ordinary citizen began experiencing the results – food, electricity and heat shortages, worsening work conditions and decline in public services. The regime responded with a sharp increase in repression. The home intelligence services, the infamous Securitate, became the backbone of the regime and even superseded the party nomenklatura. The lucky ones from the Party and Securitate never had to queue for food when everyone else did. This created the conditions for the revolution in 1989, in which the privileged oligarchy of the regime and its enforcement institutions were set against the majority of the people, including the army.

The post-1989 Democratic Transformation: Expectations and Perceptions

The popular revolt in 1989 was a genuine expression of discontent and swept the regime away, or at least its highest echelons, including Nicolae Ceausescu. The ones who quickly moved to take control in the chaotic days of the revolt were not opponents and dissidents of the regime. They were too few and poorly organized, so the reformed communists took charge, notably Ion Iliescu, a former party official fallen from grace. The very fact that the revolution didn't bring new faces but only older ones opened a strong cleavage between »*communists*« and »*anti-communists*«. The first ones were ex-nomenklatura or part of the communist managerial and administrative class, the ones who managed the economy and the state before 1989. The partly-reformed enforcement institutions sided with them, being naturally inclined to support order and stability. The group also gained popular support. The working-class and mid-urban people supported them for their role in the revolution and because they were already advocating a mild and slow transition.

The »anti-communists« were a jigsaw puzzle of groups of very different natures and dispositions. They were the few people who resisted in communism, the more educated and open urban groups, the older people who could still remember the interwar period and institutions and students, especially in Bucharest. The asymmetry of power was evident. The social forces involved in the revolution and its aftermath quickly became institutionalized. The party of Ion Iliescu became social-democrat, the advocate of stability, order and moderate reforms while the historical Liberal and Peasant parties became the parties of reform, modernization and change. Even though there were many transformations, mergers and splits, this cleavage still endures. The current party system in Romania is still largely bipartisan, the Social Democrats and the Liberals gaining together around 70–80 per cent of the votes. The structure is not fully bipartisan due to the resilience of the party representing the Hungarian minority and some other parties who play the role of junior political and governmental partners to the two main parties.

The original division in transition closely resembles Daniel Luis Seiler model in which he indicates that the changes in 1989 produced two cleavages: a political cleavage between state and civil society and an economic cleavage between fast reformers and slow reformers.¹⁴ The cleavage proved to be a long-term event though later in transition its meaning was more symbolic than policy orientated. Until 1996 the party of Ion Iliescu was dominant in all areas of politics and administration. The development of the opposition parties and movements was severely affected by political violence in the year 1990, when the police forces and coal-miners from Jiu Valley repressed the pro-democracy and anti-communist protests in Piata Universitatii (University Square). The new regime was thus born under the sign of violence and repression and, as a result of it, became a relatively isolated presence in Europe. The memories of those violent days stay strong even today and contribute to the maintaining of the divide. In the socio-economic policy the first six years meant the decay of the industrial infrastructure and various experiments in privatization. The disappearance of the communist external market doubled by lack of investment and physical degradation brought the fall of the massive industrial sector. This had serious conse-

14. Daniel Luis Seiler, *Partidele politice in Europa*, Iasi: Institutul European, pp. 134–147.

quences. In communism the regime carefully engineered the industrial boom and spread it to less developed areas especially in small and medium cities. Once the factories started closing down those localities were doomed. Poverty and exclusion became the rule and the reservoirs for future economic migrants were in the making. In agriculture, the government flatly failed in maintaining a collective formula, state- or private-owned. During communism the peasants developed a deep distrust in government and they simply wanted their land back, leaving aside any concerns for economic viability.

The opposition parties were quick to tap into the ever larger discontent, promoting a fast industrial recovery trough (successful) privatization and a program to give back to the owners exactly what they had owned before nationalization (*restitutio in integrum principle*). In 1996, the opposition parties won the elections; the transfer of power was peaceful and immediately went on to operate the proposed reforms. The governance process was notably disorderly, the parties in power lacked administrative and political experience. But the privatizations went on and so did the land and property restitution. Unfortunately the privatization process did not go well at all. With few exceptions, the industry and manufacturing were privatized to party clientele or inexperienced investors who wanted to extract quick money from selling the equipment as scrap metal or the land for real estate development. That also meant that more and more people lost their jobs. In the rural areas, the restitution process took years to complete, proved very complicated and resulted in a very fragmented property layout.

The Light at the End of the Tunnel: The European Union

In 2000 the opposition parties lost elections and the social democrats took charge of the government. Already then the EU accession became a political issue. For all the parties, including the social democrats, joining the EU was a perfect framework to advance their political agenda. Following a decade of tensions and sacrifices most of the people thought the same. Being part of the EU meant prosperity, stability and democracy. So the EU was not met with opposition from either elites or citizens. On the contrary it was something of a safe haven that would bring order, efficiency and integrity in the otherwise messy and corrupt political process.

Not even the nationalistic forces, quite strong in that period, opposed the EU integration. Using the EU accession as overarching goal, the social democrats acted as modernizing (and Europeanizing) authoritarians. They brought the administration under a strong political command but also silenced opposition and unfriendly media outlets.

The government was not efficient enough to bring Romania to the first group of accession countries, it only joined together with Bulgaria in 2007. Accession did not only mean completion of the privatization process but also the start of the long-overdue reform of the administrative system. The EU accession process brought the social democrats very close to their liberal/democratic opponents, at least in macroeconomic policy. The influence of that period remains strong even today. The social democrats are still not capable to articulate a social and redistributive vision on the economy even though the social effects of the transition required one.

In 2004 the social-democrats lost the elections. The administrative and political performance of the government in organizing the EU accession was overshadowed by the corruption and clientelism of the government, the way it treated the mass-media and civil society and the slow pace of economic recovery. The following right-wing government initiated a strong attack on the social democrats. They were easy targets because they had been the strongest party of the transition and had a uniform and strong presence in all branches of government. It also meant that they could be portrayed as more corrupt and naturally inclined to abuse power. Romania's problem with corruption became obvious when the European Commission accepted its EU membership but created a mechanism of evaluation and oversight of judicial and police reform.

This is the source of another relevant cleavage in Romanian politics, *corruption* and *anti-corruption*. The EU accession did not produce a cleavage per se but it did generate a strong one as a side-effect. To this day this cleavage remains as probably the most important one. It operates on two levels. The first level is the level of inter-party political competition. The right-wing parties portray themselves as much less corrupt than the social-democrats. In turn the social-democrats and their junior partners argue the anti-corruption is a political move intended to stop them from gaining power and

governing. This implies that the institutions fighting corruption, mostly the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA), act selectively and unprofessionally. The cleavage operates somewhat differently at the public level. The civil society and a part of the mass-media point out that corruption is spread evenly within the major parties, branches and levels of government and that the anti-corruption drive should be devised accordingly. And secondly, a part of the civil society and mass media call for a balanced and proportional increase in power and resources for the anti-corruption institution, DNA, and its main institutional partner, the home intelligence service, SRI. Even though it appears as the main political cleavage, it is not clear how relevant it is from an electoral perspective. The social-democrats who are perceived as more corrupt manage to gain very good scores, being the largest Romanian party, while the Liberals, the second-largest party and top accuser, have inconsistent electoral scores.

As indicated in the previous section the EU is still a very relevant player. It has been the driver of key reforms in the second part of the transition period. It is still considered the central player in the development of the economy, social development and judicial reforms. It is also the »home« of around three million Romanians living and working abroad, especially in Italy and Spain. In this respect, and also as regards the influence of European politics in the domestic processes, Romania is a very »Europeanized« country. The drop in positive views on the EU shown in the previous section can become stable but only if more agendas and interests are projected against the EU position. When the refugee issues will become less present and salient, there will be room for new types of Eurosceptic arguments, probably in the economic sphere.

IV. Conclusions

The case for a second democratic transition has to be made in Romania and Central and Eastern Europe. The first step is acknowledgement of the problems' existence. The fact that the countries are members of NATO and the EU does not ensure the quality of the democratic processes. Most importantly, key players in the civil society, parties, state bureaucracies and, above all, citizens, need to be convinced that a renewed democratic project is necessary. A transnational effort is probably needed.

No agent of democratization will be able to succeed by itself and in a national framework only. There are three dimensions for this effort.

Return to the Citizen Agenda

In the case of Romania this agenda is clearly economic and social. The aim of partisan politics is to make sure that the concerns and interests of all the citizens are properly articulated. Thus it marks a return to the debates on the economic model, taxation, social services, unemployment, poverty. This turn is instrumental in decreasing inequality and improving access to key social services. Special attention should be devoted to the most vulnerable people in the society, those who have little reason to feel part of a larger political community. If the main scope of the »first« democratic transition was the institutional construction – constitutions, rights and liberties, parties, elections, checks and balances, the second one has to move toward the socio-economic basis of democracy. A democracy is possible only where there is a certain level of socio-economic cohesion.

Rebuilding Pluralistic and Representative Institutions

The quasi-authoritarian drift is a result of a troubled transition. Citizens associate corruption, clientelism, instability and divisiveness with the key democratic institutions – political parties and Parliament. In turn, hierarchical, traditional and enforcement institutions tend to be better trusted. Existing political parties need serious internal reform and opening up to the suppliers of ideas and energy, civil society organizations, activists, researchers, local communities. New parties could be established to freely experiment with various participation and representations instruments. Very importantly, the old and new parties have to be able to regain their legitimacy and policy capacity. They have to resist being evicted from politics and having the decision on economic policies taken out of their hands, as well the form of politics which is turning the enforcement institutions (police, intelligence services) into the core of the executive power. Finally, Parliament has to become again a forum for democratic debate and the instrument for a renewed democratic control over decisions and policies.

Rethinking what it Means to Be »European«

The historical experience of the country was always dependent on international influences and ambivalent towards it. The key question is how to stay open, active and responsible within the European Union? And how to avoid marginality or disengagement while asserting a position which is not rooted in identity? There are increasingly relevant players who want to portray Romanians as either »victims« or »second-hand Europeans«. Ignoring their powerful narrative would be a mistake. But their weakness is that they imply that the power is residing in Brussels or other places, ignoring the vast resources that the society has for its development. And here the message can be equally constructive and optimistic. It is clear that we are not living in an ideal society and that EU is not in its best shape. But we are lucky enough to have everything we need to overcome obstacles together.



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