



ORIGINAL PAPER

The Difficult Road of Transition: the Romanian Elections from 1990 and 1992 and their Political Consequences

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Abstract

The most desirable goal of any transition process is democratization, in both political and economic fields, but the road to a consolidated democracy is often filled with uncertainties and unpredicted problems. That is why, in most cases, the periods of transition are defined by a state of generalized unrest and disorder, which often comes in contrast with the apparent order of the non-democratic regimes. There are many theoretical interpretations of the fundamental – and historic – process of transition from an authoritarian regime, regardless its form, to a democratic one, but all of them acknowledge the importance of free and fair elections for the good course of this process. This paper aims to analyse the first years of post-communist Romania, with a special emphasis on the electoral process, which we consider to be one of the most important aspects of the transition process at that time. We base our analysis on a working hypothesis that the transition was especially hard and continued for a long time in Romania mainly because the beginning of this process was defined by some significant problems that resulted from the government's failure to solve some of the social and political tensions that appeared in the early '90s. Both of the Romanian electoral processes from 1990 and 1992 were defined by major anomalies that had a significant effect on the parliamentary majorities and the quality of the political representation. During those first years of transition, the Romanian political system was a "confused" one that was just partially opened to political pluralism and used the elections and their results more for the consolidation of the government's legitimacy than for the development of the political culture and the conformation to the principle of the pluralism of choice.

Keywords: *transition, Romania, elections, political representation, pluralism*

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As Francis Fukuyama said, politics is a phenomenon which generates social order, especially through the special abilities of political leaders (Fukuyama, 2002: 9). In societies where there no longer is a correlation between the “supply” and “demand” for social capital, there are destabilizations and undemocratic or at least alarming upheavals of the situations on the political scene. Seen as a social phenomenon, voting exists on several levels, not only the political one, the election of the representatives (in various situations) being “a central value instilled into the population” (Bulai, 1999: 76). The political vote is central to socialist democracies. Here, elections are preceded by very well organized propaganda campaigns, and competition, although it doesn’t really exist, has a certain importance, if we think about, for example, at the fact that the lists for Grand National Assembly always proposed (from the Front of Socialist Unity and Democracy) more candidates than the total number of mandates, which means that, in several cases, the electorate had to actually chose between these candidates. According to Alfred Bulai, the most important aspects of this type of electoral system, working in a totalitarian regime, are not those regarding the “undemocratic qualities” or the “obvious dysfunctions of the system”, but those related to the “field of values and cultural models it promotes within the population” (Bulai, 1999: 76). Thus, after 1989, the Romanian population tried to adopt these models, which had only been promoted, but never put into practice during communism. The manner in which these models were assumed, especially in regard to voting, has been mistaken, also specific to socialist democracy (Bulai, 1999: 77).

1990 – confusion, new political actors and the first democratic elections after the fall of the communist regime

After the street events in December 1989, the first thing seen as the beginning of the transition from the undemocratic communist regime to the democratic system was the emergence of a large number of political parties. The stated purpose of many of these political formations was to lay the foundation of a stable democracy in Romania, following the Western model, but, as stated by some authors such as Constantin Sava and Constantin Monac, in many cases, these parties only provide the citizens with replicated names of foreign parties, lacking any doctrinal consistency: “in many cases, lacking a doctrine, a team and a leader, these formations were content with reviving pre-war visions and models, or to translate into Romanian the names of foreign parties” (Sava and Monac, 1999: 220).

The first political force who dominated the confused political scene in late December 1989 was the National Salvation Front (FSN), which, once publicized and legitimized by the statements of the central figures of that time, started to create territorial branches. In the early days of 1990, the first official political parties began to emerge, including both historical parties and also several political formations directly related to the revolutions, especially in Bucharest and Timișoara (Bulai, 1999: 78). The most visible historical parties at that time were the Christian-Democratic National Peasants’ Party (PNT-CD), the National Liberal Party (PNL) and the Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSDR). In February 1990, a new legislative political formation emerges, the Provisional Council of National Unity, which was composed of 50% FSN members and 50% representatives of the new political parties, representatives of the minorities, as well as representatives of associations (such as the Association of Former Political Prisoners).

The most important provision of the Law on Political Parties no. 14/2003 was that, in order to be registered, a political party needed to submit a list comprising “at least

25.000 founding members, residing in at least 18 Romanian counties and Bucharest municipality, but no less than 700 persons for each of these counties and Bucharest municipality” (Law no. 14/2003: art.19). The first post-communist piece of legislation regulating political parties was the Law Decree no. 8 of December 31st 1989, which required a considerably lower number of members for the creation of a political party: 251 members, 100 times fewer than the legislation passed 13 years later. According to George Voicu, the general feature of the emerging multiparty system in Romania after 1989 is improvisation (Voicu, 1998: 212). At the time when the Law Decree no. 8 was passed, the Romanian society was atomized, and it did not have, like Czechoslovakia or Hungary, civic structures which “could evolve and become political formations” (Voicu, 1998: 212). Consequently, the first party to (re)appear on the political scene was a historical one, the Christian-Democratic National Peasants’ Party, because it already had an active framework, as it had been accepted into the Christian Democratic International in 1987.

Romanian political parties were legitimized at a rapid pace after 1990. Thereby, before the May 1990 elections, 80 parties were registered in Romania, of which 71 submitted lists of candidates for the parliamentary elections. The process of creating new parties continued after that, to a similarly fast pace, to such an extent that on October 1st 161 political parties were registered with the Bucharest Tribunal. The high number of political parties on the Romanian political scene in mid-90’s indicates both that the quality was not the most important thing, and especially that an ideological identity was missing. Analyzing the political system in post-communist Romania, Alexandru Radu, Gheorghe Radu and Ioana Porumb believed that in 1995, the recently created multi-party system resembled rather more an “ideological congestion, under the pressure of the political system’s natural tendency to rebalance, but also of the fear of extremes, especially of the far-left. [Thus – a.n.], all parties were self-defined as centre (-) parties” (Radu, Radu and Porumb, 1995: 53). The first parliamentary and presidential elections after the collapse of communism were held on May 20th 1990. The parliamentary elections had no less than 72 political formations and independent candidates, but only candidates entered the race for presidency, representatives of the three largest political forces at the time: the Front of National Salvation, the National Liberal Party and the Christian-Democratic National Peasants’ Party.

Although the quality of the political offer was rather questionable, the May 20th 1990 elections, which were held according to the electoral system of proportional representation (restored based on the model used in the interwar period, but without the electoral premium), witnessed a 86.18% voter turnout: of the 17 200 722 voters on the electoral rolls, 14 825 017 came out to vote, which proved “a real desire to change the single-party system” (Voicu, 1998: 214-215). Romanian sociologist Alfred Bulai warns that voter turnout in such a large number for the 1990 elections must under no circumstances be seen as a sign of maturity of the Romanian electorate (Bulai, 1999: 74). In fact, in most countries with democratic tradition, voter turnout varies between 60 and 75%, or even less, showing that even in these states, a considerable share of the population doesn’t vote. Hence, it is perfectly normal that in every state there is a part of the population that considers that voting is a not so important issue, or even that it is totally inefficient.

The number of valid votes was 13 707 159 for the Chamber of Deputies (representing the votes of 92.45% of the total number of voter turnout) and 13 956 180 for the Senate (representing the votes of 94.13% of the voter turnout) (Preda and Soare, 2008: 92), and the number of political formations who obtained at least one seat in the Romanian

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Parliament was, due/because of the fact that there was no electoral threshold, 27. The National Salvation Front (FSN) gained 66.31% of the votes and a large parliamentary majority (263 mandates), followed by the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), with 7.23% of the votes and 29 mandates and the National Liberal Party (PNL), with 6.41% of the votes and 29 mandates (Preda and Soare, 2008: 92; Bulai, 1999: 80). The other 24 political actors obtained less than 3% of the votes and, except the Romanian Ecologist Movement (MER) and the Christian-Democratic National Peasants' Party (PNT-CD), less than 10 mandates each.

Under these conditions, the opposition was basically inexistent, and the elections seemed to have made the transition between the political system of the single party to the political system of the predominant party, achieving what Jean Blondel called the "one and a half party system" (Voicu, 1998: 215). In the presidential elections held the same day, of the total number of 14 825 017 Romanian citizens eligible to vote who came out to vote, the number of validly expressed votes was 14 378 693 (representing the votes of 96.97% of the total number of voter turnout) (Preda and Soare, 2008: 92). The three candidates were Ion Iliescu (FSN), Radu Cîmpeanu (PNL) and Ion Rațiu (PNT-CD). The winner of the elections and the President of Romania until 1992, when the following elections were held (after a new Constitution, elaborated in 1991, and a new Electoral Law), was, from the first ballot, Ion Iliescu, who obtained 85.07% of the votes and registered the biggest distance from the other competitors that was ever registered between the candidates in the presidential elections in Romania (Radu Cîmpeanu gained 10.64% of the votes and Ion Rațiu – 4.29%) (Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 2015).

In the attempt of analyzing electoral behavior in the May 20th 1990 elections, Romanian sociologist Alfred Bulai considers that the Romanian electorate had a relatively simplistic view of the political scene and identifies three types of voters (Bulai, 1999: 84). First, there are the *content voters*, who supported the current leadership, being satisfied by it. Second, there are the *discontent reagents*, who wanted a change in leadership, being dissatisfied by its performance. The third category according to Bulai, are the voters who were not strongly involved in the political battle and who cast their votes for new parties, mostly unknown. The Romanian sociologist qualifies the vote of the latter voters as rather reactive, a normal situation, according to him, given that the campaign held by the opposition had also been reactive, based mostly on two directions: the attack against the current leadership and the promises to achieve certain things the Romanians "were pretty sure they already had" (the so-called "real democracy") (Bulai, 1999: 84).

Ever since this first democratic exercise in 1990, we can see an increasingly stronger emergence of a new category of voters, those who do not wish to be involved in the political battle between parties and who are, in general, dissatisfied with all political formations. Also, this analysis must not omit the ethnic parties, of which the most important one is the party representing the interests of the Hungarians, who, after the events in December 1989, created their own political formation, the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania. At the other extreme, in 1990, was also created the Alliance for Romanian Unity (AUR), formation later renamed Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR). Both political formations had a strong voice, especially in Transylvania, where they won votes in both the opposition and the FSN. Another thing that was noticed in the May 1990 elections was that some political parties (especially the historical ones) obtained a relatively high number of votes, especially in the urban areas, being defeated in the rural areas, which determined some political commentators to state that in these first post-1989 elections "the people legitimized the remains of the former regime" (Bulai, 1999: 84).

This vote allocation is not that surprising if we consider the fact that in the rural areas many former representatives of the Communist Party had maintained the positions held before 1989, some of them even becoming irreplaceable. However, we have to specify that it is clear that these mayors in the rural areas were re-elected rather more for their good managerial qualities than for their political affiliation, as it is very well known that in small communities the mayor's political affiliation is less important in the voters' eyes than his ability to efficiently manage their locality.

Although the 1990 elections in Romania were formally considered free and fair, attributes essential to all democracies, either consolidated or incipient, as the one in Romania, the political context was, however, unstable. The words used by professor Ioan Drăgan to describe the relations between the political actors (parties, candidates, voters) at that time were "mistrust, aggressiveness, exclusion, elimination" (Drăgan, 1998: 312), which placed the Romanian society far away from the triad "acceptance – rivalry – adversity" (Drăgan, 1998: 312) which should have manifested at all levels. Traian Brătianu, a journalist from Constanța, follows along the same line of reasoning, emphasizing the fact that the 1990 elections did not generate, as expected, a "political, social and economic reshaping of the Romanian society" (Brătianu, 2009: 213) and, despite the spectacular voter turnout, which showed the people's desire to actively participate in the political life and the decision making process, no immediate improvement of the quality of the political act or governance were observed.

After 1990, the main trends manifested in the Romanian society were, beside the decrease in voter turnout (which followed a solid line all subsequent ballots), vote concentration (naturally followed by the decrease in the number of parliamentary parties, from 18 to 4, after the last elections in November 2008), the emergence and consolidation of a nationalist and populist pole and "consolidation of the reformist movement" (Ghebre, 2007: 257).

1992 – a new Constitution, new electoral laws, new elections

An IRSOP survey conducted in April 1991 showed that 63% of respondents believed that "it is not possible for the communist regime to remain in power" (Brătianu, 2009: 213) and believed in the possibility of the new democracy to stabilize and evolve.

On the eve of the 1992 local elections, the social and political climate was quite unstable. The two Minerriads, in June and September 1990, had created rifts within the FSN, and under the same instability, the three historical parties united with UDMR and a series of less important political formations and created the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR), which emerged as a real opposition force, whose main advantage in the eyes of the voters was that it provided an image of stability and unity.

The collapse of the FSN and the open conflict between Petre Roman (the former prime-minister) and Ion Iliescu generated a rift within FSN voters. In this regard, the option of most of the FSN youth and intellectuals to join Petre Roman was going to be a process with a series of unfavorable consequences for the future Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR). In this context, a large part of the FSN electorate became "incidental voters" (Bulai, 1999: 88), who preferred to revolve around Ion Iliescu's personality, but renounced any express political commitment. Thus, Alfred Bulai distinguishes between two types of voting, depending on how they manifested sympathy or attachment to a political party or candidate. On the one hand, he identifies the *public vote*, "the one where voters publicly support their opinions, eventually participate in the

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political rallies of the respective parties and openly express their preferences” (Bulai, 1999: 89). The *private vote*, which derives from the so-called “ballot box” sympathy, is the vote “which is not publicly expressed, especially in hostile environments, but only in front of the ballot box” (Bulai, 1999: 89). However, a party cannot maintain its political leading position and cannot only exist through this type of private voters, because if they don’t constantly reconfirm their attachment and options, the strengths of the support will decrease.

In 1992 the parliamentary elections were held under Law no. 68/1992 for the election of the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, and for the presidential elections, under Law no. 69/1992 for the election of the President. In the September 27th 1992 parliamentary elections, of the 16 380 663 citizens registered on the electoral rolls, voter turnout was 12 496 430, representing 76.28%, a slightly lower percentage than two years before, but higher than the average in Western democracies, which, according to George Voicu, showed that “the people’s political appetite stayed alive” (Voicu, 1998: 223). However, we must take note of the fact that in practice, the real turnout was lower, if we take into account the fact that about 1 500 000 votes were null (which would limit the voter turnout to approximately 67%). If we also subtract the “lost” votes, namely the votes cast for parties who did not meet the 3% electoral threshold (approximately 2 million votes), than political participation drops even more drastically, to 53.60%, which means, in George Voicu’s opinion, that the level of political participation in the 1992 was “little over the critical limit of political legitimacy” (Voicu, 1998: 223).

The total number of votes validly cast in the elections for the Chamber of Deputies was 10 880 252 (representing 87.06% of the voter turnout), and 10 964 818 for the Senate (representing 87.74% of the voter turnout) (Preda and Soare, 2008: 92). The total number of invalid votes was 1 591 071 for the Chamber of Deputies and 1 507 623 for the Senate (according to the official data, provided by the Romanian Central Electoral Bureau and the Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority). A particularly interesting issue is the fact that, in accordance to the official data published by the Central Electoral Bureau and the Permanent Electoral Authority, the sum of the invalid votes and the ones validly cast is not equal to the number of voter turnout (situation which is mentioned in all elections, from 1992 to present day, the 1990 elections being the only ones when, according to official data, this difference was not found).

Of the 79 electoral lists which submitted candidacies in the 1992 elections (lists including members of 92 political formations) (Preda and Soare, 2008: 85), only 7 managed to win seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 8 in the Senate. Besides them, 13 Chamber of Deputies seats were granted to civic organizations belonging to national minorities (article 4 of Law no. 68 of July 15th 1992, published in “Monitorul Oficial al României” no. 164, of July 16th 1992, mentions the fact that organizations of citizens belonging to national minorities, legally established, which failed to obtain in the elections at least one deputy or senator seat, have the right, according to art. 59 par. (2) of the Constitution, to a deputy seat, if they obtained at least 5% of the average number of votes validly cast throughout the country for the election of a deputy”).

The Democratic National Salvation Front gained 28% of the votes and obtained majority in the Parliament after the redistribution of the votes won by the parties who failed to reach the 3% threshold provided by the new electoral law (Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority, 1992a: 1-5). In the first round of presidential elections, held on September 27th 1992, of the total 12 496 430 participant voters, 11 898 856 cast as valid votes (representing 95.91% of voter turnout) (Preda and Soare, 2008: 92). This time, 6

candidates ran for the Romanian presidency, and the first two who obtained most of the votes and got into the second round were Ion Iliescu (FDSN, 47.34% of the votes) and Emil Constantinescu (CDR, 31.24% of the votes) (Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority, 1992b: 1-3). In the second round, held on October 11th 1992, of the 16 380 663 Romanian citizens with voting rights, voter turnout was 12 153 810 persons, indicating a slightly lower turnout than in the first round, namely 74.19%. 12 034 636 votes were validly cast (99.01% of voter turnout) (Preda and Soare, 2008: 91-92). The FDSN candidate, Ion Iliescu, won the elections, by obtaining 61.43% of the votes and became once more the President of Romania (Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority, 1992c: 1-3).

According to a report on Romania's process of transition in the early 90's, elaborated by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the quality of the 1992 elections was compromised by two serious issues which could be noticed during the electoral process: the suspiciously high number of null votes and the extremely high number of voters on additional electoral rolls. 4.74% of the votes for the election of the president, 12.44% of the votes for the Senate and 13.18% of the votes for the Chamber of Deputies were declared null, compared to the 1990 elections, when only 3.12% of the votes for the election of the president, 5.8% of the votes for the Senate and 8.16% of the votes for the Chamber of Deputies were declared null (Report on Romania's Democratic Transition, 2015: 4).

It is difficult to imagine a plausible explanation for this unusually large number of null votes registered in the 1992 elections, compared to the 1990 elections. If in the latter such situation could be more easily accepted, being the first democratic vote after a long period when Romania had lost the exercise of free and fair elections, it becomes hard to explain how the percentage of null votes was higher in the 1992 election, when, in theory, the Romanians were becoming used to the "exercise" of voting. This situation fuelled the arguments of the – rather numerous – people who contested the correctness of the electoral process and claimed electoral fraud. However, despite these difficult to explain phenomena (the large number of null votes and of people who voted on additional electoral rolls), no clear evident of any attempt of election fraud was found.

As sociologist Alfred Bulai stated, the 1992 elections radically simplified the political scene, where four categories of political forces remained (Bulai, 1999: 98). The central axis was composed of the main political formations at that time, namely the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR) and the Social Democratic Party (PDSR). Another rather powerful force was the ethnic axis, also including two political parties, the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) and the Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR). The third axis comprised the so-called extremist parties, of socialist orientation, such as Greater Romania Party (PRM) and the Socialist Labour Party (PSM). The final axis comprised a "mid-ranking" political formation, which didn't have reasons to fear not exceeding the electoral threshold, but wasn't strong enough to win the elections by itself, but only through alliances (which was not possible in 1992). This latter political formation was the Front of National Salvation (FSN), the future Democratic Party (PD).

On the eve of the 1992 elections, the Romanian political scene was far from stable. Besides the FSN (which represented the power) and the opposition (represented by the historical parties), the Romanian political scene witnessed the emergence of a new wave of political formation, which, having very similar names and logos, increased the confusion of the voters, making it impossible to clearly distinguish between them. Some

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of these new parties were the Traditional Social Democratic Party (PSDT), the Independent Social Democratic Party (PSDI), the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the New Liberal Party (NPL), the Ecologist Party of Romania (PER), the Romanian Ecological Federation (FER), etc. In the 1992 parliamentary elections, of the 144 political formations existing throughout the country, 88 political formations submitted candidate lists in the elections for the Chamber of Deputies and 74 in the elections for the Senate. In contrast to the previous elections, we can notice a decrease of the number of parties present in both chambers of the Parliament (the composition of the two chambers comprised 4 parties less than 1990), as well as a decrease in the share held by ecologists and liberals and an increase in social-democrats.

The main types of dividing lines manifesting in Romania in 1992 were *ideological, between the left and the right* (which manifested rather more like a rupture between the ones who had won and the ones who had lost as a result of the political change), *ethnic* (visible especially in Transylvania, due to the strong antagonism between PUNR and UDMR), *regional* (which differentiated between Moldova and Muntenia, who had voted for FDSN and Bucharest and Transylvania, where CDR had won) and *rural – urban* (Ion Iliescu had won 54% of the votes in the rural areas and only 36% in the large cities, while Emil Constantinescu was the favorite in the large cities, where he had obtained 42% of the votes, in contrast to the 24% gained in the rural area) (Ghebrea, 2007: 260).

In a paper published in 1998, sociologist Ioan Drăgan draws attention on the fact that the analysis performed on the 1990 and 1992 are mostly based on generalized or partial information, as well as a few surveys from the spring of 1990 (Drăgan, 1998: 301-302). Despite the precarious information, the Romanian sociologist believes that, for the first years of transition, we can distinguish between 4 models explaining the electoral behavior of the Romanian voters (Drăgan, 1998: 313): the *affectionate* (or emotional) *model*, where the motivation of the vote is exclusively emotional; the *legitimist model*, where the motivation of the vote is the restoration of order and stability, or the achievement of continuity; the *model of identity - community*, where the vote is determined by the group of affiliation, and voting irregularities can be noticed based on criteria such as ethnicity, religion, rural or urban environment; and the *usual model* (or *de habitus* behavior), generated by the existence of a “culture of dependency” to the authorities in the conscience of the population.

Conclusions

Since the beginning of the transition period and up to the early 2000s, when the law still in force was passed, the number of political parties has significantly dropped in Romania. Thus, if during the first post-communist parliamentary elections in Romania, 80 political parties were registered with the tribunal, this number almost doubled until 1992, reaching 155. After the 1992 elections, the number of registered political parties constantly dropped, to 75 in 1996, 73 in 2000, 30 in 2004, 34 in 2008 and 28 in the latest parliamentary elections in 2012 (Preda, 2013: 28). The 1990-1992 period is one that stands out in this context, with a record number of political formations registered with the tribunal and which participated in the elections. This was the period when pluralism and the freedom to create new parties generated a high number of such organizations, the smallest ones, however, remaining almost unknown and basically having no role in the transition process in the first years after the fall of the communist regime. Also, in their great

majority they failed to get seats in the Parliament, the maximum number of political formations represented in the Parliament being 27, after the 1990 elections (situation also generated by the absence of an electoral threshold), and others did not even propose candidates for the elections.

Furthermore, the lack of importance of some of these political formations on the Romanian political scene was also emphasized by the very brief existence of some of them, which did not manage to pass an important test – the test of durability for this type of organizations – and disappeared less than a decade from their creation. With the passing of time, the number of political parties submitting candidacies in the parliamentary elections constantly dropped. However, as noted by political scientist Cristian Preda, this drop was not necessarily an effect of the introduction of the electoral threshold starting with 1992, or of the obligation of having a large number of founding members (starting with 1996 – 10.000 and 25.000 after 2003), but rather more of a strategy conceived by the political formations representing national minorities (Preda, 2013: 34). After the 1990 and 1992 elections, they noticed that it was very difficult for them to win senator seats and gradually gave up on submitting lists of candidates for the upper chamber of Parliament. One of the paradoxes which characterized the beginning of the transition period in Romania was that the 1990 and 1992 elections were the only elections after 1989 which were won by a single political party: FSN in 1990 and FDSN in 1992. As Cristian Preda also shows, all the other elections have been won by political or electoral alliances: the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR) in 1996, the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR) in 2000, the National Union PSD+PUR in 2004, the Political Alliance PSD+PC in 2008, the Social-Liberal Union (USL) in 2012 (Preda, 2013: 36).

The first post-communist elections in 1990 were only a first step toward Romania's political development. The conclusions of a report on Romania's process of transition in the early 90's, elaborated by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), reveal that, under the conditions of that period (early 1990 – a time of increased social, political and economic instability), the elections were a laudable effort from the state institutions, even if the government was more concerned with the daily crisis than the attempt to implement a concrete program to reform the political system (***Report on Romania's Democratic Transition, 2015: 1-3). Moreover, the government saw in these elections rather an opportunity to consolidate its legitimacy in the eyes of the population, than a public exercise of freedom of choice and only provided a small degree of openness of the political process, enough to grant them Western approval. After the first post-communist elections in 1990, the political system in Romania was characterized, as Cristian Preda notes, by the "quasi-absolute dominance of one party. After the 1992 elections, there was a transition to a multiparty system without a dominant party, and then, 4 years later, the main element of political change brought by the 1996 elections (held under the 1992 Electoral Law, which provided for the electoral system of proportional representation and a 3% electoral threshold), being the alternation in governance. The effect of simplifying the political scene (by reducing the number of parties in the Parliament), which the introduction of the 3% electoral threshold should have produced, never really existed in fact. In this regard, Alexandru Radu, Gheorghe Radu and Ioana Porumb believed that the political system configured in Romania after the 1992 elections (in fact, like the one resulted after the 1990 elections) was characterized by a "hypertrophied multiparty system" (Radu et al., 1995: 157).

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George Voicu believes that there could be arguments to consider the system of parties resulted after the 1992 elections, and which was maintained after the 1996 elections, as a “pure multi-party system”, which is an indicator of stability and which “strengthens a horizon of expectation” (Voicu, 1998: 231). One of those is the fact that none of the parties managed to obtain absolute majority of votes, as well as the fact that the first two political formations each obtained over 20% of the votes (fulfilling the requirement pure multipartism imposed by French political scientist Jean Blondel) (Voicu, 1998: 225-226). On the other hand, the two political formation taken into account in this situation are two coalitions, in the case of one of them (CDR) the composing parties opting for their own parliamentary groups. Consequently, Jean Blondel’s conditions is not fulfilled, because, in the configuration of the Parliament resulted after the 1992, there was, in fact one single party who held more than 20% of the votes, namely the FDSN (or the PDSR).

After the 2000 elections, Romania returned to a system with one dominant party, situation changed with the 2004 and 2008 elections, but which was repeated after the 2012 parliamentary elections. The latter generated an exceptional situation, where, as political scientist Cristian Preda notes, “the dominance of the USL block made the effective number of parties [in Romania – a.n.] to drop under 2, increasing the impression that the system is returning to its state before 1990” (Preda, 2013: 50). In other words, the political instability which was specific to the first years after 1989 and which generated an atomized system of political parties does not belong in the past, but is an extremely current political reality in Romania. Therefore, although the transition to a democratic political regime has been finalized, the stability and efficiency of the Romanian political system are far from being completed and continue to require much attention and responsibility, especially from the Romanian political class, the one in continuous reformation, rejuvenation, change, accountability, but which does not yet provide certain guarantees regarding the success of all these efforts.

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