

The Social Democrats lead in the polls for the Romanian parliamentary elections on 11th December next.

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Analysis

On 11th December 18,906,721 Romanians will be called to vote to renew the two chambers of Parliament. 8,889 people are registered to vote by post, which is a new way of fulfilling one's civic duty that is now open to the Romanian population. 417 polling stations, i.e. 123 more than in the previous parliamentary elections on 9th December 2012 have been opened in 190 countries.

During the presidential elections on 2nd and 16th November 2014 many expatriated Romanians were unable to vote in the first round because there were not enough polling stations (294 in all and only 160,000 voting slips for around 4 million voters), notably in France, UK, Germany and Belgium. Between rounds demonstrations were organised in Bucharest, Cluj, Timisoara, Sibiu, Brasov, Oradea and Constanta out of solidarity with the Romanians living abroad who had been unable to vote.

6,500 people are officially standing in the parliamentary elections this time. All of the parties are counting on the fact many candidates on their lists are political newcomers.

The leader of the National Liberal Party (PNL) Alina Gorghiu maintained that her party's lists comprises 60% new candidates from the business world, sport, culture etc. and that they have never been involved in any kind of scandal. The PNL has chosen, for example, brain surgeon Leon Danaila to lead its list of Senatorial candidates.

The Social Democratic Party (PSD) led by Liviu Dragnea has also said that 70% of those on its lists are new faces.

The electoral campaign started on 11th November and will end on 10th December. The government has allocated a total of 227.7 million lei (51 million €) to the organisation of this election.

According to the most recent poll by CIADO in October¹, the Social Democratic Party is due to come out ahead in the election with 44.6% of the vote. It is due to take the lead over the National Liberal Party, which is due to win 29.3% of the vote. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats, (ALDE), led by Calin Popescu Tariceanu and Daniel Constantin is due to win 6.5% of the vote; the Union for the Salvation of Romania (USR) led by Nicusor Dan, which claims to be neither

"on the left or the right" is due to win 5.7% of the vote and the Democratic Union of Hungarians of Romania (UDMR) led by Hunor Kelemen is due to win 5.2% of the vote.

One year of technocratic government

Romania has been governed for just over year by a government of technocrats. On 17th November 2015 President of the Republic Klaus Johannis appointed former Agriculture Minister (2007-2009) and former European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development (2010-2014) Dacian Ciolos as Prime Minister. The latter put together a government comprising independent experts only – a first in Romania. His appointment was the result of a dramatic fire that occurred in the discotheque, Colectiv, in Bucharest on 30th October 2015 which led to the death of 63 and 150 injured.

The authorities were directly accused in this tragedy (several breaches of security standards due to corruption and negligence on the part of the local authorities were brought to light by the police investigation), which caused a wave of indignation and protest, forcing the then Social Democratic Prime Minister Victor Ponta (PSD) to resign. Many Romanians still accuse the parties and politicians of not having learned from the fire.

¹. <https://huff.ro/alegeri-parlamentare/sondaj-alegeri-parlamentare-2016-cum-stau-partidele-la-intentia-de-vot-93828>

"I started this mandate a year ago and I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to explain and assess, quite simply, this year of 'government zero'. We have to say that we have been a government with zero corruption, zero populism and zero lies," declared outgoing Prime Minister Dacian Ciolos recently. *"As I said at the beginning of my mandate, we did not aim to revolutionise Romania in a year, but we have undertaken several reforms in vital areas (...)* Our objective was to maintain balance, to guarantee the conditions for continued economic growth and to initiate certain reforms. We have started a process to simplify the civil service. From an economic point of view we have been able to continue along the path of development because we have strengthened the business environment by making things simpler and clearer. We have established a policy in support of SMEs which is more transparent and fairer and the results of which we are now witnessing in the present increase in investments and jobs," the head of government stressed.

GDP growth indeed grew to 6% in Romania in the second quarter of this year. According to its economic forecasts the country is due to maintain figures over 3% until 2020.

For the past several months the fight to counter corruption has gathered pace in Romania. Many political leaders have been brought before the courts, including the former head of government (2012-2015) Victor Ponta (PSD) on 17 counts, including money laundering and tax avoidance. Several former Ministers are serving prison sentences on the count of corruption.

Former Home Affairs Minister Petre Toba (independent) resigned from office on 7th September last after having been accused of being involved in an embezzlement scandal. The Anti-Corruption Court² has accused him of refusing the courts access to supposedly "top secret documents" which included details of purchases totalling 11,70€ (houses for children with sandpits, playing cards, dart boards and an electric oven) made in 2014-2015 by the Inspectorate General of the National Police. Petre Toba was replaced by Dragos Tudorache (independent).

2. <http://www.pna.ro/index.xhtml>

The co-leader of the National Liberal Party Vasile Blaga, also resigned on 28th September last after having been accused by the courts in an affair of influence peddling in which he is said to have received 700,000€ between 2010-2011 from a mayor and a businessman in exchange for contracts with the State and jobs. Vasile Blaga denies these charges.

What does the future hold for Dacian Ciolos?

In the parliamentary elections on 11th December Prime Minister Ciolos is calling for a wide rally of political parties, civil society and business leaders to his project to reform the State, entitled the Romania 100 Platform. The outgoing head of government is also placing emphasis on education and the healthcare.

In line with the promise he made to the Romanians when he was appointed, he will not be standing for election however. *"The aim of the mandate that I started in November 2015 was to ensure the political and economic stability of Romania. Its aim was also to offer the political parties some necessary time to reform, the recover voter confidence and to open up more to society,"* Dacian Ciolos recently declared.

The candidature of the present occupant of the Victoria Palace (residence of the Romanian Prime Minister) for the post of head of government is however supported by the National Liberal Party), who set the goal of winning around 25% of the seat. The party's leader Alina Gorghiu also maintained that she would resign from her position as leader of the party if the latter was not part of the future parliamentary majority.

She has indicated that she would not govern with the People's Movement (PMP), a liberal party founded in 2013 and led by former president of the Republic (2004-2014) Traian Basescu. *"We would prefer to remain in the opposition than to sign a pact with the devil,"* stressed the leader of the National Liberal Party, who accuses the former head of State of having allied with the Social Democrats in many town councils after the local elections on 5th June last. Traian Basescu maintains that the National Liberal Party lost its majority in several towns because it refused to negotiate.

Dacian Ciolos' candidature for the post of Prime Minister also has the support of the Union for the Salvation of Romania (USR) that was founded following the successes of the Union for the Salvation of Bucharest (USB) in the local elections on 5th June. Led by Nicusor Dan, it claims to stand "neither on the left or the right". The party has also said that it would not take part in a government that included the National Liberal Party or the Social Democratic Party. "These parties are responsible for the present state of Romania that they have successively governed for the last 26 years," declared Nicusor Dan. The Union for the Salvation of Romania has set the goal of winning between 10 and 15% of the vote on 11th December next.

Finally the President of the Republic, Klaus Johannis warned that he would not appoint an independent as Prime Minister.

The Romanian Political Parties

"Romania does not need a Messias," declared the Social Democratic leader Liviu Dragnea on 7th November. He also maintained that he would quit as head of the party (a position he has occupied since 22nd July last), if it did not win the parliamentary elections. The Social Democratic Party is campaigning with the motto "Dare to believe in Romania" (*Indrazneste sa crezi in Romania*), and won in the local elections on 5th June last. The change in the voting methods used in the latter (two rounds instead of one) clearly played to the advantage of the Social Democratic Party, the biggest party in Romania. As it dominates the left of the political spectrum, it usually pulls ahead of a divided right in the first round of voting. The Social Democratic Party won 1,669 towns and took 16,556 town council seats, whilst the National Liberal Party won 1,059 towns and 13,802 council seats. Apart from its division the Romanian right is also suffering because it has no real leadership.

"I do not want to be Prime Minister again but I do want a government alliance between the Social Democratic Party and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats. Dacian Ciolos is a good employee. The heads of

government are not supposed however to be good employees but people who have vision and legitimacy and also enjoy popular support. In European societies it is inconceivable for someone who wants to become Prime Minister not to stand in the elections," stressed Victor Ponta. The parties on the left maintain that the appointment of Dacian Ciolos for a full term in office after the next parliamentary elections would be "anti-democratic".

The Social Democratic Party has not yet revealed the name of the person it would like to see as head of the government after the next election.

Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, co-chair of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats recently said that Romanians were not benefiting at all from the results of growth and that salaries and investments were not increasing. "Statistics show that growth has reached 6%. This level, if confirmed, would be the highest in the European Union and everyone is expecting to see its impact on salaries," he declared.

On 7th November the Romanian Parliament approved a 15% increase in teachers' and doctors' salaries. The Employment Minister Dragos Paslaru asked MPs to reject the proposal made by the Social Democratic Party however, stressing that these wage increases were going to cost Romania around 1.1 billion € per year.

Over the last few years the Romanian political landscape has seen the birth of several new political parties. The National Liberal Party (PNL) split and some of its members founded the Liberal Reformist Party (PLR) which then merged with the Conservative Party (PC) led by Daniel Constantin, who went on to create the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats.

The Democratic Liberal Party also split. Former President of the Republic Traian Basescu and several other members left the party to found the People's Movement (PMP) which has just suffered a major setback with the arrest of its leader Elena Udrea, who has been accused of being involved in the Microsoft scandal (members of the Romanian government are said to have accepted bribes so that they would not oppose the increase in license rights on Microsoft products).

In June 2015, the Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR), the Progressive Social Democratic Party (founded in March 2010 by members of the Social Democratic Party and the National Liberal Party, led by Gabriel Oprea), absorbed members of the People's Party (PP-DD), a nationalist, populist party that had been dissolved after the arrest of its leader Dan Diaconescu, who was sentenced to five and a half years in prison for blackmail. Last July the Union for the Progress of Romania joined Traian Basescu's People's Movement.

The Romanian Political System

The Romanian Parliament is bicameral: it comprises the Chamber of Deputies (*Camera deputatilor*) and the Senate (*Senatul*). The two assemblies are renewed every four years. The Romanian electoral law was modified on 20th July 2015. From now on the lower chamber comprises 308 members (one MP for 73,000 people and 122 less than the number elected four years ago in 2012) appointed by proportional vote within 43 constituencies: 41 represent Romania's counties with 279 seats, one represents the capital, which has 29 seats and finally the last represents Romanians abroad and it has four seats.

To enter the Chamber of Deputies all parties have to win at least 5% of the total votes cast nationally or 20% of all of the votes cast in at least four constituencies (8% for an alliance of two parties, 9% for an alliance of three parties and 10% for an alliance of four parties or more). A person who wins the support of at least 0.50% of the electorate in a constituency is allowed to stand alone for election.

Some seats in the Chamber of Deputies are reserved for the 19 national minorities in the country. A national minority has the right to a parliamentary seat if the citizens' organisation which represents it has a representative on the National Council of Minorities and if it wins at least 5% of the average number of votes cast to win an MPs seat.

All voters (potential candidates) must be aged at least 23 if they want to take part in the parliamentary elections.

The Romanian Senate has 134 members. According to a new electoral law dated 20th July 2015 there is one Senator per 168,000 inhabitants. Two Senators represent the Romanians abroad.

9 political parties are represented in the present Romanian parliament:

- the Social Democratic Party (PSD), led by Liviu Dragnea, has 132 MPs and 63 Senators;
- the National Liberal Party (PNL), led by Alina Gorghiu, has 113 seats MPs and 53 Senators;
- the People's Movement (PMP), led by former President of the Republic (2004-2014) Traian Basescu, has 37 MPs and 24 Senators;
- the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE), chaired by Calin Popescu Tariceanu and Daniel Constantin, has 23 seats in the Chamber of Deputies in and 14 in the Senate;
- the Democratic Union of Hungarians of Romania (UDMR), led by Hunor Kelemen, has 16 MPs and 7 Senators;
- the National Democratic Party (PND), led by Daniel Fenechiu, has 11 seat in the Chamber of Deputies;
- the National Party of Christian Democratic Farmers (PNTCD), led by Aurelian Pavelescu, has 1 MP and 1 Senator;
- the Green Party (PV), led by Remus Cernea, has 1 seat in the Chamber of Deputies and 1 in the Senate;
- the New Republic Party (NRP), led by Alin Bota, has one Senator.

Romania also elects its president by direct universal suffrage. The Head of State at present is Klaus Johannis, who was elected for a five year mandate on 16th November 2014 with 54.43% of the vote. He pulled ahead of the then Prime Minister Victor Ponta (PSD), who won 45.56% of the vote. Turnout totalled 64.1%.

Reminder of the Parliamentary Election results of 9th December 2012 in Romania

Chamber of Deputies, turnout: 41.76%

Political Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes won	Number of seats
Social Liberal Union (USL)	4 344 288	58,63	273
Alliance of the Romanian Right (ARD)	1 223 189	16,51	56
Peoples Party (PP-DD)	1 036 730	13,99	47
Democratic Union of Hungarians of Romania (UDMR)	380 656	5,14	18
Others	708 416	5,73	18

Source: Central Electoral Bureau <http://www.becparlamentare2012.ro/A-DOCUMENTE/rezultate%20finale/Anexa%208A.pdf>

Senate, turnout: 41.76%

Political Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes won	Number of seats
Social Liberal Union (USL)	4 457 526	60,10	122
Alliance of the Romanian Right (ARD)	1 239 318	16,71	24
Peoples Party (PP-DD)	1 086 822	14,65	21
Democratic Union of Hungarians of Romania (UDMR)	388 528	5,24	9
Others	243 574	3,29	0

Source: Central Electoral Bureau <http://www.becparlamentare2012.ro/A-DOCUMENTE/rezultate%20finale/Anexa%208B.pdf>

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