

Prime Minister Victor Ponta wins the Romanian parliamentary elections

Corinne Deloy

Translated by helen Levy

Results

The Social Liberal Union (USL), the mixed coalition (left-right) led by outgoing Prime Minister Victor Ponta, which rallies the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the National Liberal Party (PNL) led by Crin Antonescu, the Conservative Party (PC) led by Daniel Constantin and the Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR) led by Marian Sarbu easily won the parliamentary elections that took place on 9th December in Romania. The coalition won 58.60% of the vote in the general election and 60% of the vote in the senatorial election. This is the highest score ever won by a political coalition since the collapse of communism in 1989. The Romanian Right Alliance (ARD), led by former Prime Minister Mihai Razvan Ungureanu and which rallies the main opposition forces – the Democratic Liberal Party (PD-L), the National Party of Christian Democratic Farmers (NP-CDP) led by Aurelian Pavelescu, the New Republic Party (NRP) led by Mihail Neamtu, the Christian Democratic Party (FCD) led by Adrian Papahagi and the Civic Strength Party (PFC) of former Prime Minister (February 2012-May 2012) Mihai Razvan Ungureanu - won 16.70% in the Chamber of Representatives and 16.95% in the Senate. The nationalist, populist People's Party (PP-DD), led by Dan Diaconescu, came third with 13.8%. The Democratic Union of the Hungarians of Romania (UDMR) led by Hunor Kelemen, just managed to rise above the 5% threshold which is vital if seats are to be held in Parliament. Turnout was low but slightly higher than that recorded in the previous parliamentary elections on 30th November 2008: 41.60%.

"It is a clear victory with an absolute majority. As I promised the Romanians during the electoral campaign I assume the responsibility of continuing to govern with the Social Liberal Union. We are going to negotiate with the Democratic Union of the Hungarians of Romania to achieve a constitutional majority (2/3 of parliament). We shall focus on the creation of jobs, and on the country's fiscal stability (...) The orientation of the government I shall lead will only be pro-European and pro-Atlantic. We are members of the EU and of NATO and our future is within the European family," declared Victor Ponta, who has on several occasions been accused of challenging European values since he took office in May last. The Prime Minister called on all of the political community to *"understand that Romania needs peace and a period of reconstruction."* *"We have to rise above the political combat, hatred and vengeance. We have an enormous advantage. As of tomorrow we can discuss the projects for the next four years because we have peace and stability,"* he stressed.

The only real issue at stake in the parliamentary elections on 9th December lay in the extent of the Social Liberal Union's victory: would the coalition win the absolute majority in parliament? (a 2/3 majority enables it to modify the Constitution).

Although the outgoing Prime Minister has won his wager it is however up to the President of the Republic Traian Basescu to appoint the future head of government. On several occasions before the election the former indicated that he would not reappoint Victor Ponta as Prime Minister. *"Pro-European and pro-Atlantic, loyal to the national interests, respectful of the Constitution and the rule of law and with a CV free of shady areas: this is the profile of the future Prime Minister,"* declared the President on 7th December, without concealing the fact that he thought Victor Ponta had none of these qualities. *"He has already appointed me before and he will do so after the elections,"* said Victor Ponta. The Social Liberal Union has already threatened the President of the Republic with another impeachment pro-

cedure if he refuses to re-appoint the outgoing Prime Minister. *"Traian Basescu would be committing a serious abuse of power. No civilised country in the world would understand an interpretation of democracy of this nature,"* wrote editorialist Dan Tapalaga on the information site <http://www.hotnews.ro>.

Aged 40, Victor Ponta originates from Baia de Fier (south). A graduate in law from the University of Bucharest he started his career as a Prosecutor before joining the anti-corruption, penal and criminal prosecutions department at the Supreme Court of Justice. He entered the government of Adrian Nastase (PSD) in 2004 as Delegate Minister for International Financing and Community Acquis. Elected as an MP for the first time in 2004 in the constituency of Targu Jiu (south west), he was re-elected four years later. In 2010 Victor Ponta became the Chairman of the Social Democratic Party beating its outgoing leader, former Foreign Minister (2000-2004) and President of the Senate (2008-2011), Mircea Geoana

On 5th February 2011 he created the Social Liberal Union (USL) with the National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party in view of bringing down President of the Republic Traian Basescu. On 7th May he was appointed Prime Minister after the collapse of the government led by Mihai Razvan Ungureanu. Cohabitation between the Presidency and the government has proven difficult, if not impossible however. The Prime Minister has made repeated shows of constitutional strength (reductions in the powers of the Constitutional court, attacks against certain judges, the dismissal of many high ranking executives who were close to the Head of State and the replacement of the ombudsman) to achieve his goal i.e. the impeachment of Traian Basescu. The European Union, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjorn Jagland, the Amba-

sador of the USA in Romania, Mark Gitenstein and a number of NGO's criticised Victor Ponta's behaviour.

The next Romanian government will have the difficult task of reviving growth, which is due to reach only 0.7% this year, to implement further structural reforms, notably in terms of healthcare, to reduce the public sector and to boost privatisations. Erik de Vrijer, the head of the IMF mission announced mid-November that he would give his verdict of the Romanian economic policy after the formation of the new government. According to many analysts Bucharest will have to turn to the IMF again (Romania did so in 2009 and 2011) to sign an agreement that will reassure investors who are concerned about possible budgetary excesses. The country has to repay a 4 billion euro tranche of the 20 billion euro loan granted to it in 2009 by the IMF, the World Bank and the European Union. *"At base it not the Prime Minister's name which is the most important but rather that of the Finance Minister because Romania's main problem is economic and not political,"* maintains political expert Andrei Taranu.

Bucharest will also have to put to good use the 20 billion euros of European funds which have been made available to it until 2014. Paradoxically, to date, Romania, which is facing a serious socio-economic crisis, has only managed to absorb 10% of this sum.

"For the last seven months the government has not been interested in the country's management at all but in the means to impeach Traian Basescu, and in the meantime all of the economic indicators are pointing to decline," declared Cristian Preda, a professor in Political Science at the University of Bucharest.

One thing is certain: a worsening in the political crisis is the last thing that Romania, the second poorest country in the EU, needs.

You can read all of our publications on our site:
www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.