

2006

Romania

Jeffrey K. Hass

University of Richmond, jhass@richmond.eduFollow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/socanth-faculty-publications>Part of the [Political Science Commons](#), and the [Slavic Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hass, Jeffrey K. "Romania." In *World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties*, edited by Neil Schlager, Jayne Weisblatt, and Orlando J. Pérez, 1118-126. 4th ed. Vol. 3. New York: Facts On File, 2006.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology and Anthropology at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology and Anthropology Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

ROMANIA

(România)

By Jeffrey K. Hass, Ph.D.



Before 1989 Romania was among the most authoritarian regimes of those in the Socialist East Bloc. Nicolae Ceaușescu's secret police was among the most active, and the dictator ruled with impunity until the wave of popular revolutions that swept Eastern Europe in the autumn of 1989 reached Romania. An internal coup deposed Ceaușescu (whose body was shown on television after he was shot), but Romania did not move immediately to liberal politics as in Poland or Hungary. Democracy took time to develop, although success appears on the horizon after joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 2004 and possible inclusion in the European Union by 2007.

The System of Government

Romania is a parliamentary republic. The country's political system is split into three branches: the executive, legislature, and judiciary. The legislature is bicameral.

EXECUTIVE

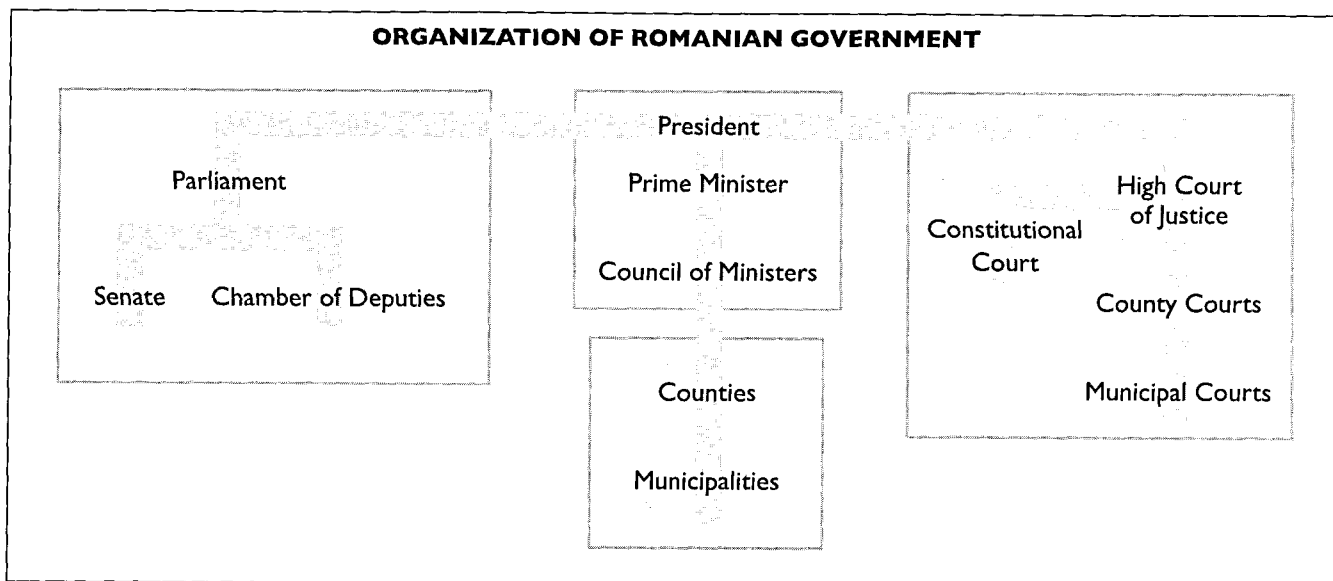
The executive branch is headed by two figures, the president and the prime minister. The president is chosen through a national election and serves for a five-year term. The prime minister is proposed by the president and approved by both chambers of parliament.

The president is supposed to be above politics, a national figure representing the nation in its entirety. Accordingly, the president is supposed to sever ties with political parties (e.g., give up chairmanship or position within a party) when entering the presidency. This has been followed in letter but not in spirit. When Ion Iliescu faced a threat to his hegemony in the National Salvation Front (FSN) from Petre Roman in 1992, he sat in on party meetings and organized resistance to Roman's attempt to steer the party in his own direction, even though Iliescu was supposed to avoid party activity.

The president is, institutionally, a weak political player. He must leave his party position and duties upon taking office, which denies him political security. The president has a weak veto: he can send legislation back to parliament for additional discussion, but if the bill is passed a second time, he cannot block its implementation. Presidential decrees require co-signing by the prime minister to be legally binding, unless the decrees concern appointment. The president also has the power to call a national referendum; however, legislation and the constitution are vague on the referendum process, and since no referendum has yet been called by the president, there is no political precedent for procedure.

The president selects the prime minister for parliamentary approval. If parliament does not approve a government within 60 days of the president's first nomination, then the president can dissolve parliament and call new elections. However, the president

ORGANIZATION OF ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT



can dissolve parliament only once per year; thus, if the same parliamentary delegates are voted back into power, the president has to come up with a candidate for prime minister whom parliament will approve.

The prime minister and the Council of Ministers are the heads of the state bureaucracy and thus are the real working heads of the executive branch. Ministers are responsible both for the operation of the state bureaucracy and for the initiation and implementation of policies in the spheres of economic development, social welfare, and foreign policy. Ministers answer for their conduct, competence, and shortcomings to parliament, which may remove the prime minister and the Council through a vote of no confidence. The ministers do have some autonomy from the president. The latter can chair meetings of the government only if such meetings are called to discuss matters of foreign policy and national security (where the prime minister and government are subordinate to the president). Also, the prime minister needs the president's approval (not that of parliament) in order to reshuffle the cabinet; on the other hand, only parliament (not the president) can remove the prime minister and government.

The president and prime minister, then, have their own separate spheres of power and autonomy; this means that there can be conflicts between the two, as was the case when Iliescu was president and Roman prime minister. In case of conflict the president cannot simply dismiss the prime minister, and the prime minister has no power over the president. However, either can form an alliance with parties in a particular parliament to bring about the dismissal of the government or

the impeachment of the president. Because impeachment is broadly worded—the president is accountable for “grave mistakes,” which can mean anything from serious crime and corruption in office to responsibility for results of policies—it can be used more frequently than elsewhere. However, the process for impeachment requires a sizable majority in parliament that is both organized and dedicated to such a mission.

LEGISLATURE

The Romanian legislature under the 1991 constitution resembles that which preceded it—a bicameral body made up of the House of Deputies (*Adunarea Deputatilor*) and the Senate (*Senat*). (Before 1991 the two houses together were called the Constituent Assembly. After 1991 the legislature—both houses together—is referred to as the Romanian Parliament [*Parlamentul Romaniei*].) The Chamber of Deputies is made up of 332 delegates, 314 elected from parties and 18 reserved for ethnically-based minority parties. The Senate is made up of 137 elected from parties; there are no reserved seats for ethnic minorities in this chamber. The number of seats depends on population, with the number able to rise or fall as the population rises or falls.

Parliament's primary role is passing legislation. Legislation may be introduced in either chamber by delegates or by the executive; to become law the bill has to be approved by a simple majority in both chambers. If both disagree over the wording or content of a bill (e.g., one house passes the bill and the other does not), then the bill would go before a joint session of both houses, where only a simple majority would be needed of the

combined votes. Further, parliament, rather than the courts, has the ultimate say over legislation. If the Constitutional Court rules that a law is unconstitutional, parliament can reconsider the law. If two-thirds of each chamber support the bill again, then the Constitutional Court's objections are dismissed and the law remains on the books. (Apparently this rule was included in the constitution in Article 145 out of fear that the Court's autonomy and position as final arbiter make it too tempting for the Court to enter the legislative sphere and to intrude on Parliament's prerogative.)

The three forms of legislation in Romania are constitutional, organic, and ordinary, and each has its own procedure for passing legislation. Constitutional legislation may be introduced by 500,000 or more citizens (with 20,000 signatures from each county), or by the president on behalf of the government, or by one-fourth of parliament (both houses). If both houses pass the legislation with a two-thirds majority, the legislation moves on to a nationwide referendum. If a dispute between the House of Delegates and the Senate arises and a mediation commission cannot produce a compromise, then the legislation appears before a joint meeting of both houses and requires a three-fourths majority to move on to the referendum stage.

The second form of legislation is organic legislation. These are laws that, according to Article 72 of the constitution, regulate processes concerning elections, political parties, referenda, governmental organization, state of emergency, criminal offenses, amnesty, functioning of upper courts, status of civil servants, property and inheritance rules, trade union and labor affairs, religion, education, local government, and economic zones. Deputies, senators, the government, and a group of 250,000 citizens can introduce organic legislation (although citizens cannot introduce organic legislation on taxation). Organic legislation is debated in the house where it was introduced and is sent to the other house; if the other house rejects it, it returns for further debate, and if the second house rejects it again, the bill is dead. If both houses approve an organic bill by absolute majority, it becomes law. If both houses adopt differently worded versions of the same legislation, then a mediation commission works out a compromise bill; if the commission fails, a joint session of both houses discusses the bill and a majority can approve it. Approval in any case requires an absolute majority—that is, a majority out of the total number of seats in parliament, rather than a majority of the number of votes cast by deputies present for the vote.

The third type of legislation is ordinary legislation, which includes all bills that are not constitutional

or organic. Ordinary legislation follows the same procedure as organic legislation except for two differences: the procedure for resolving conflicts between both houses is straightforward (the revision commission meets only once), and only a simple majority is required (i.e., a majority of votes of those delegates physically present).

Parliament has certain powers that act as checks over the executive. First, parliament can call for a vote of no confidence in the prime minister. One-fourth of the total number of parliamentary delegates are needed to raise a vote of censure and introduce a vote of no confidence; if a simple majority of both houses supports it, then the prime minister must resign and the president must present a new candidate for the post. (The president can present the same person again, although parliament is under no obligation to approve him.) If the no-confidence vote fails, then the same parliamentary faction cannot bring up a no-confidence vote in the same parliamentary session. However, if a total of one-third of all the deputies of both chambers requests an extension of the session, then this extension is considered a new session and the no-confidence vote can be raised again. (The opposition employed this tactic in working to obtain five no-confidence votes against Prime Minister Varacoiu in 1992 and 1993.)

Parliament also has ways of controlling the president. One method is through impeachment. If the president has committed "grave errors" (vaguely defined), then parliament can bring up a motion to suspend him and, through a national referendum, impeach him. Such a motion must be brought up by one-third of the total parliamentary membership (162 deputies) and approved by a majority; the suspension goes into effect, and within 30 days a national referendum is called to decide whether to impeach the president and call new elections. While the president is under suspension the chairman of the Senate acts as an interim president (and does not have the power to dissolve parliament).

This mechanism can counter potential presidential obstruction of the political process. For example, the president may dissolve parliament if it cannot approve a prime minister after 60 days; if the president tries to present the same candidate (whom parliament did not and would not approve) and thus creates political gridlock, then parliament may try to impeach the president. In 1993 there was a dual attempt to vote out the government of Nicolae Varacoiu and to suspend President Iliescu. The motion on presidential suspension and impeachment began when Iliescu implored local government not to give back land nationalized

under communism to previous owners. In doing so Iliescu was, so the opposition claimed, violating the constitution by calling for local authorities to ignore judicial decisions. However, the Constitutional Court claimed that the impeachment motion had no legal foundations, and because of disorganization within the opposition the motion was brought up but could not garner the necessary support to pass.

JUDICIARY

The judiciary is the third autonomous branch of the Romanian political system. Like other former Communist countries, Romania inherited a judicial branch that was subordinated to the state and to the Communist Party and whose job was to mete out justice according to Communist Party principles.

Romania's judiciary has undergone some reform, with the passing of a new constitution and new laws. Romania now follows a continental system of law. In this system the courts (except for the Constitutional Court) mediate legal disputes between citizens and mete out justice to criminals. In the Romanian system the courts decide whether a law should be implemented, and the courts do not have the power to expound interpretations of laws (unlike in the American system); such interpretation, in the tradition of civil bureaucracy, is left to the bureaucrats implementing the law or, in the case of questions of constitutionality, to the Constitutional Court. Also, in the continental system, judicial precedent does not play a role either in interpretation or in enforcement.

Local and district courts are the first levels for justice and dispute resolution. Appeals may be carried to higher levels, from local to district and on up the hierarchy. At the apex sits the High Court of Justice, which is the equivalent of the Supreme Court. The High Court is composed of 40 judges appointed for six-year terms by the president on the recommendation of the Superior Council of the Magistracy. The High Court does not rule on constitutional issues but, rather, is the highest level for appeal; decisions made on disputes or criminal decisions are considered final. Below the High Court are county and municipal courts.

Alongside the judicial hierarchy is the Constitutional Court, whose duties place it outside the normal judicial system. Unlike other courts, the Constitutional Court is concerned with overarching political decisions—mostly deciding on constitutionality of laws but also ruling on the application of constitutional rules to such disputes as legitimacy of political parties, electoral rules, and electoral outcomes. (Because these are

not disputes between parties but are political matters and concern constitutional order, they fall within the sphere of the Constitutional Court.) The Court consists of nine judges who hold nine-year terms; terms are staggered so that every three years three judges are up for reappointment or dismissal. Three judges are chosen by the Chamber of Deputies, three by the Senate, and three by the president.

REGIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

At the local level Romania is divided into 41 counties (*judete*) and one municipality (the capital, Bucharest). Politics at the local level are run by locally elected legislative councils and mayors.

The Electoral System

Elections to both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies are held every four years, at the same time, through proportional voting for parties rather than individuals. (Individuals may run, but they compete against parties, not other individuals, and must also cross the 3 percent threshold.) To qualify for obtaining seats, a party must overcome a 3 percent electoral barrier, that is, receive at least 3 percent of all votes cast. There are two exceptions. One is for minority parties. The top 15 ethnic parties are guaranteed one seat regardless of the percentage of vote that they gain. The other exception is for coalitions. A coalition's electoral barrier is greater than the average for single parties. (Coalitions in 2000 obtained more than 5 percent of votes, but this was ultimately too low, and so the coalitions did not receive seats.) Once a party crosses the threshold, the number of seats it receives is equal to its proportion of votes cast for all parties overcoming the electoral barrier. (As a result, the percentage of legislative seats a party receives will be greater than its percentage of the overall vote.) Voting and calculations for the Chamber of Deputies and Senate are done separately; thus, a party can receive enough votes to be represented in one body but not in the other.

The Party System

ORIGINS OF THE PARTIES

In the parliamentary elections of May 1990, the National Salvation Front (FSN), the party formed after

Ceaușescu's overthrow and the political vehicle of the post-Ceaușescu political elite, held an absolute majority in both houses of parliament; however, this did not guarantee political stability. In 1991 tension brewed between party elites Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman—who were president and prime minister, respectively, and thus in potential competition in the executive branch. Throughout 1991 Roman had been moving toward some cleansing of the FSN, with the idea of replacing old Communist-era elites (the supporters of Iliescu); further, while Roman was no proponent of shock therapy—he consistently claimed that the state needed to intervene in the economy and that rapid economic liberalization brought only pain elsewhere in Eastern Europe—he did call for increased reform. Iliescu, on the other hand, preferred gradual reform.

In September 1991 striking miners descended on Bucharest protesting economic hardships and low wages. While Roman wanted to reshuffle the cabinet at the time, Iliescu took advantage of proposed cabinet changes and concurrent social protest to proclaim that Roman had given up his mandate and that he either had resigned or was released. Roman protested that this was not his intention, but this did little good. The Roman-Iliescu feud continued into the March 1992 FSN party congress, where Roman's reformist wing (located in the party caucus) and Iliescu's older conservative wing (which held most of the parliamentary seats for the party) battled over the party platform. While Iliescu attempted to regain control of the party—an illegal action, since by the constitution he was allowed neither to be affiliated with any party nor to be involved in party activities—Roman's faction won the day. Iliescu's conservative supporters left the party and formed a new party, which would eventually become known as the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR). Meanwhile, Roman's faction eventually took the name Democratic Party (PD). In 2001 the PDSR incorporated the Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSDR), with the new entity known as the Social Democratic Party (PSD).

Economic policy has also provided a flashpoint for political contention, as has nationalism. Ethnicity was been a factor in 20th-century Romania, mostly because of the presence of a large number of Hungarians in rural sections of Transylvania (which belonged to Hungary before 1918). Fears of Hungarian aggression were muted by the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe from 1945 to 1989; however, ethnic rivalries and tensions have come to the fore again, as political parties and politicians have used the ethnic card to rally support or have used political tools to push their

own antiethnic strategies. For their part, Hungarians in Transylvania feel threatened by Romanian authorities, who were repressive under Ceaușescu and in some areas have remained so.

Political parties have used nationalism to increase popular appeal. By 2005 some of the parties in existence illustrated this concept: the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) was formed as a counter-balance to the presence of anti-Hungarian parties such as the Party of Romanian National Unity (PUNR) and the Greater Romanian Party (PRM). The strong role of ethnicity in the country is enhanced by the Romanian political system, which actively encourages ethnic identity. Unlike in neighboring Bulgaria, where straightforward ethnic-oriented parties are forbidden under the constitution, the Romanian political system not only allows but rewards political rhetoric of ethnicity by reserving 18 seats in the House of Delegates for ethnic parties. Hence, given the existence of a sizable Hungarian minority struggling to defend itself (and receiving some rhetorical support from the Hungarian government), the use of nationalism as a tool for receiving votes, and the existence of extremist ideology, ethnicity remains both a political issue and a political problem that can lead potentially to social flare-ups.

ELECTIONS

Since implementation of the 1991 constitution there have been several presidential elections. While Iliescu's popularity had dropped after the 1989 overthrow of communism, he managed to win the 1992 election in no small part because of mistakes by the opposition. Most candidates were unknowns with little political savvy or, in the case of Funar, individuals perceived as radical. The most prominent challenger was Emil Constantinescu, and he was only prominent because he was the candidate of the Democratic Convention, the largest opposition group. However, Constantinescu had been selected only a few weeks before the election, which gave him little time to make himself known, and the Democratic Convention's campaign centered on ideological differences rather than on concrete programs. Also, Iliescu managed to use misinformation to taint Constantinescu's image. Finally, the Democratic Convention had little organizational connection to grassroots and rural populations, making it more difficult to mobilize the population, which was suffering from economic shock.

However, by 1996 the lesson had been learned, and Constantinescu not only was able to run a more

effective campaign but also benefited from the fact that after four years neither Iliescu's presidency nor the PDSR-extreme nationalist coalition in parliament had produced strong economic gains or political peace.

Constantinescu's presidency and his party's power in parliament were hampered by internal divisions, best demonstrated by the short-lived tenures of prime ministers (no more than two years in power, maximum). This hurt the liberal/democratic camp's position in the 2000 presidential election; as well, different liberal and social democratic parties entered their own candidates, splitting that vote base. This allowed Iliescu to return to the presidency in 2000. This also opened the way for a worrying development, namely, the rise of Vadim Tudor's Greater Romanian Party (PRM), a right-wing nationalist party whose candidates employ rhetoric that approaches the xenophobic. In 2004, with Iliescu unable by law to run for another term as president, Traian Băsescu, the popular mayor Bucharest, won the presidency, defeating Prime Minister Adrian Nastase of the PSD. In the legislative elections, the coalition of the PSD and the Humanist Party of Romania (PUR) won 132 Chamber seats and 57 Senate seats, beating the coalition of the PD and the National Liberal Party (PNL), which tallied 113 Chamber seats and 49 Senate seats. However, the PSD was consigned to the opposition because it lacked an absolute majority, allowing the other parties to form a coalition government.

Romania has a plethora of political parties; however, only a relatively few possess the organization and support to be represented in parliament and thus exert any effect on Romanian politics.

Major Political Parties

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY

(Partidul Social Democrat; PSD)

The most important party in the post-1989 aftermath was the National Salvation Front (FSN). After 1989 this was the hegemonic party. Its members included conservative Communists who had supported the revolt against Ceaușescu and who were tied to the Romanian nomenklatura (Communist elite.) While the FSN supported economic reform in theory, such theory remained murky and in practice was rent with contradictions. Much of this confusion was linked to the two different wings in the party, which formed the basis for the 1991-92 feud between Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman and the 1992 split of the party into the

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, 2004

Party or Coalition	seats, Chamber of Deputies	seats, Senate
PSD/PUR	132	57
PNL/PD	113	49
PRM	47	21
UDMR	22	10
Ethnic minority parties	18	—
Total	132	137

FSN. One wing of the party, the conservatives in parliament supporting Iliescu, preferred gradual reform, retention of a large state role in the economy, and some form of economic and price regulation; this wing because the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (Partidul Democratiei Sociale din Romania; PDSR). A younger reformist wing supported Petre Roman and preferred more substantial reform, particularly on matters of liberalization, land reform, and some privatization, although they also preferred to retain a state role in the economy and support for a social safety net. The basis for this approach was the example of social pain and tension occurring because of shock therapy in other Eastern European countries. This party was named the Democratic Party (Partidul Democrat; PD) and joined with the Romanian Democratic Socialist Party (Partidul Socialist Democrat Român; PSR) in the 1996 parliamentary elections.

During the 1990s two factions emerged in the PDSR, namely, a more traditional hard-line Communist (and somewhat nationalist) wing, associated with president Ion Iliescu, and a more moderate grouping associated with Prime Minister Adrian Nastase. In 2001 the PDSR merged with the PSDR, and the combined party became known as the PSD. In the 2004 elections the PSD, in a coalition with the PUR, won a majority of seats in both houses of parliament but was forced into opposition when four other parties formed a coalition government. Nastase lost the 2004 presidential election to Traian Băsescu of the PD.

GREATER ROMANIAN PARTY

(Partidul Romania Mare; PRM)

Originally part of the ruling coalition with the Social Democratic Party and Romanian National Unity Party

in 1993, PRM emerged from PUNR's shadow to become Romania's dominant right-wing ultranationalist party. Like PUNR, PRM is primarily anti-Hungarian, but its claims and stance are more radical, constituting a peculiar combination of fascist and communist language and imagery. Its economic program is not much different from that of social democratic parties. The party also supports authoritarian rule (under its leadership, naturally). Support for PRM rose consistently through the 1990s, especially within some mining communities (where leader Vadim Tudor gained iconic status). PRM gained 15 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 6 in the Senate in 1992, 19 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 8 in the Senate in 1996, and improved to 84 seats in the Chamber and 37 in the Senate in 2000. However, it saw its support drop in 2004 to 47 Chamber seats and 21 Senate seats.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY

(Partidul Democrat; PD)

The Democratic Party emerged from the original Salvation Front as the faction supporting reformist prime minister (1990–91) Petre Roman. Roman and his followers left the National Salvation Front and joined the fledgling Democratic Party. Soon after, the merger was reversed—Roman and followers exited—and PD advocated more moderate economic changes. In 1996 the PD and PSDR joined forces, but tensions led to a reversal of this alliance. Other smaller social democratic parties and organizations have merged with it since 1996, and, on its own, the PD has gained minor representation in parliament. The PD continues to take a moderate social democratic line in advocating market reforms moderated by concerns for social well-being. In 2004, a PD-PNL coalition won 113 Chamber seats and 49 Senate seats. PD leader Traian Băsescu won the presidency, and the party formed a coalition government with several other parties. PNL leader Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu became prime minister.

NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY

(Partidul National Liberal; PNL)

Founded in 1990, PNL was the heir to the pre-1945 Liberal Party and its ideological traditions. In 1992 the party split temporarily between those who wanted to join the CDR for the parliamentary elections and those who preferred that the party stand alone. However, PNL was too weak to gain seats and rejoined the CDR in 1995. Before the 2000 elections PNL merged with the Alliance for Romania, Union of Right-Wing Forces,

and National Liberal Party–Campeanu. Fortified by the merger, the party was able to successfully overcome the election barrier. In 2004 the party allied with the PD and was able to form a minority coalition government, with PNL leader Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu becoming prime minister.

Minor Political Parties

PARTY OF ROMANIAN NATIONAL UNITY

(Partidul Unitatii Nationale Romane; PUNR)

Led by Gheorghe Funar, PUNR emerged as Romania's first major ultranationalist (anti-Hungarian) political party. PUNR emerged based on Funar's popularity and his victory in a mayoral election in Transylvania, where relations between ethnic Hungarians and Romanians have been problematic. This propelled PUNR to the national level. The nationalist rhetoric and image, however, are masked by PUNR's more moderate behavior in banal politics. Perhaps because of this, their support has eroded through the 1990s. In the Chamber of Deputies their numbers fell from 29 seats (1992 elections) to 18 (1996) to no seats in either house (2000) despite joining forces with another small nationalist party to form the National Alliance Party PUNR-PNR. In 2004 the party again failed to win seats in either house.

DEMOCRATIC UNION OF HUNGARIANS IN ROMANIA

(Uniunea Democrata a Maghiarilor din Romania; UDMR)

Given the tensions between Romanians and Hungarians, particularly in Transylvania, it is not surprising a Hungarian party would emerge—and UDMR filled that niche. UDMR serves as a counterbalance to the constant presence of anti-Hungarian nationalist parties in public life (e.g., PUNR and PRM). UDMR managed to gain 27 seats in the Chamber of Deputies in 1992 and 12 in the Senate, and this held fairly constant (25 and 11 seats in 1996, 27 and 12 in 2002, 22 and 10 in 2004). UDMR has positioned itself as the party in defense of Hungarians, although the tactics employed in this defense have led to tensions within the party between moderate and more radical factions. However, a goal shared by all is to secure some degree of Hungarian rights and autonomy in Romania. UDMR calls for

rapid and fundamental economic reform. After 2000 UDMR entered the ruling coalition with PSDR, and Hungarians gained ministerial positions.

Other Political Forces

ETHNICITY

The problems of ethnicity stem from four sources. The first source comprises ethnic nationalists who stoke the flames of ethnic resentment with their rhetoric. The second source is the need by some politicians to play an ethnic fear card in order to garner support: both Roman's PSDR and the democratic National Liberal Party turned to pro-Romanian (and thus anti-ethnic) rhetoric in order to shore up their nationalist support and portray themselves as defenders of Romanian unity. The third source of ethnic tension is the perception, on both sides, of threats from the other. Currently there is no real threat, except from small radical voices, of either ethnic separation from Romania by Hungarians or of ethnic cleansing by Romanian authorities. However, members of both sides perceive a threat, giving legitimacy and fuel to their own rhetoric. The Hungarian minority, for example, has its own ethnic party, which some radical nationalists view as a threat to Romanian unity. The Hungarian government's claim that its mission has been to defend Hungarians regardless of where they live was viewed as an intention to interfere in Romanian sovereignty and to give aid to Hungarian separatists (even though the Hungarian government has repeatedly denied any claims on Romanian territory). The fourth source is fear of suffering the fate of Yugoslavia and the USSR, which fell into either civil war (Yugoslavia) or national collapse (the USSR) because of ethnic tensions.

Rather than try to create national unity and concord, Romanian conservatives and nationalists, echoing the rhetoric of the Ceaușescu era, have turned to more vibrant nationalism in order to secure national unity. However, such attempts involve some degree of coercion rather than persuasion and as such have led to a response by the Hungarian minority to secure its own rights through political organization—which in turn raises the threat to Romanian nationalists of separatism.

Whether the situation will change soon remains to be seen. While some democratic parties have not eschewed using nationalist slogans to gain political support, the democratic (i.e., anti-Communist and anti-Iliescu) camp has been less inclined to play the

national card, preferring to use anti-Communism and economic reform as the basis for their political programs. Also, the population at large does not seem to be overtly ethnocentric or nationalistic; PUNR's support dropped in the 1996, 2000, and 2004 elections, and nationalism has not been seen as a cure (or rhetorical substitute) for economic problems. However, small radical nationalist groups remain on the political scene, and it bears recognizing that a society does not need to be polarized for politics (and thus political outcomes) to be polarized along ethnic lines.

National Prospects

To develop a stable economy and polity—and thus a stable society—Romania has to address two important issues: the political legacy of Communism and the reform of that legacy; and nationalism and ethnic politics.

The historical legacy of Communism is both political and economic. The political side concerns Ceaușescu's regime and those who inherited and retained power from that regime. While anti-Communism has not been as strong or volatile in Romania as in Bulgaria, it has played a role in creating social and political tensions. One important legacy is that of Ceaușescu's police state. The Securitate—the secret police—was all-intrusive, and many political and economic leaders have had links to it, making exposition of police documents—which would reveal illegal activity, favoritism, and who turned in whom—a potential political time bomb.

The second legacy of Communism is the nation's economic structure. Like other former Eastern bloc nations, Romania inherited a state-led economy, and reforming such an economy has been difficult. Conservatives in power have been loathe to restructure the economy, either because they support some form of Communist ideology and/or because their own interests are linked to continued state regulation and control of the economy. Further, Romania has had difficulty receiving economic aid for two reasons. First, Romania's economy has been in decline and has not been restructured, making the IMF and foreign investors wary. Second, Romanian politics have not shown a degree of democracy enough for outside institutional investors to feel comfortable (in front of their own investors or politicians) to invest the capital necessary to get Romania on its feet.

If Romania is to develop a stable polity, then both these issues must be addressed. The Communist legacy

appears to be the less important of the two. First, some form of "Communist cleansing" has occurred, as voters have rejected former Communists and the secret police has been reined in. Second, economic decline has diverted the population's attention from the Communist past to the present state of the wallet. Constantinescu and the Democratic Convention did not manage to improve the economy or fight corruption and nationalism seriously enough to return to power, and voters returned Iliescu and the PDSR instead. However, Constantinescu managed two important feats, namely, Romania is under consideration for European Union membership, perhaps as early as 2007, and it was able to join NATO in 2004. These steps toward integration with the rest of Europe and alliance with the Atlantic community could well improve Romania's economy and perhaps lead to an improvement in the country's ethnic relations and a lessening of the nationalist wave that, while still small,

casts a potentially disturbing shadow over Romanian politics and society.

Further Reading

- Gallagher, Tom. "Nationalism and Post-Communist Politics: The Party of Romanian National Unity, 1990-1996." In *Romania in Transition*. Ed. Stan Lavinia. Aldershot, England: Dartmouth, 1997.
- Linz, Juan, and Alfred Stepan. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Munck, Gerardo L., and Carol Sklanik Leff. "Modes of Transition and Democratization: South America and Eastern Europe in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 3 (1997): 343-62.
- Verheijen, Tony. *Constitutional Pillars for New Democracies: The Cases of Bulgaria and Romania*. Leiden, Netherlands: SWO Press, 1995.