

**Romanian EU elections in 2019**  
**or the bittersweet taste of the Opposition's victory**

**Sabin Drăgulin**

**Silvia Rotaru**

**Resume:** *The authors intend to continue through this short study their series of published analyses on the elections. As a succinct approach, we have brought into discussion all the relevant opposition political actors, in relation with the governing parties. For methodological reasons, we preferred to write more about the election winner, namely: PNL – the National Liberal Party – or what we consider to be a two-edged sword, a bitter victory, the beginning of ascension or an apogee not only for it, but also for the Opposition as a whole.*

**Keywords:** *elections, European elections, referendum, political parties, opposition.*

## **Introduction**

The results of the Central Electoral Bureau (BEC) show that the National Liberal Party (PNL), the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Save Romania (USR) – Liberal Unity and Solidarity Party (PLUS) alliance were the main political players of these elections.<sup>1</sup> As space does not allow us to offer an exhaustive analysis of all the elements that have built the electoral campaign, we will focus on the Romanian Right and on its main party, PNL. It should be remembered from the outset that both the precampaign and the campaign itself were bland, without notable messages, with no conflicts, no controversy, no important topics, no sparkling speeches, no debates.

As could be expected, the rapid erosion of the PSD-ALDE Government would become the main target of the campaign for the EU elections. On the one hand, the Power sought to invalidate theories according to which it was about to disintegrate; the Opposition, through successive attacks on the government, targeted its validation in the preferences of the Romanians.

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<sup>1</sup> Biroul Electoral Central, <http://europarlamentare2019.bec.ro> (accessed 21.06.2019).

After the resounding success of December 2016, when the PSD won the Parliamentary elections with 45.57%, the same party appeared weaker in front of the electorate two years later, hoping that it would not fall below 30% and it would stay in pole position in the voters' preferences.

### **Social and Political Context**

In terms of the social and political context, we note that the whole campaign has been hard hit by the failures of the PSD governance: three governments with three different Prime Ministers in a year-and-a-half; the failed attempt of the first Executive Board to put into application Government Ordinance 13/2017 for the modification and completion of Law no. 286/2009 regarding the Criminal Code and Law 135/2010 concerning the Criminal Procedure Code (the Law on amnesty and pardon); the mass protests; the notorious blunders of Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă and the rest of the Ministers (Petre Daea, Eugen Teodorovici, Olguța Vasilescu, Dănuț Andrușcă etc.); the insistence on amending the Justice laws without accepting the views of the judiciary, the Opposition or EU institutions; the created sensation that its only purpose was the exoneration of Liviu Dragnea from the possibility of a deprivation of liberty; the non-fulfilment of promises in the governance programme (regional hospitals, infrastructure, sustained investments or professional help in key areas for Romania – for health, agriculture and absorption of EU funds etc.); the continuing struggle of PSD with the so-called “parallel state”; the promotion of professionally unfit persons to top official positions; the continued controversy with the President; the meaningful concern for changing the management of Law Courts (DNA – the National Anticorruption Agency, the Office of the Attorney General).

After two governments punished by the PSD leader with the ultimate penalty, that is, the withdrawal of political support, the European Parliament elections were organized by the third Executive, which is also the most controversial, headed by a Social Democratic former member of the European Parliament, the first woman Prime Minister, Viorica Dăncilă. Under the sign of continuous political, diplomatic and governmental blunders, and under public opprobrium for the failure of a significant part of the governing programme, the Cabinet was already outdated, eroded, blamed and placed on a powder keg, ready to explode. Basically, this was a good subject for debate in an electoral campaign without subjects and without charismatic leaders. Obviously, for the entire public scene it was clear that Liviu Dragnea, the PSD president, was the *de facto* Prime Minister. It was not only predictable but also logical, since in a party of this magnitude an

inside crisis of leadership is always expected, as power balances between the Party leader and the Prime Minister. That is why, for the sake of governmental stability, it is advisable that the Party chairman occupies the highest position available at a given point in the institutional architecture. Liviu Dragnea could not take up this position because he could not have been a member of the Supreme Council of Defence of the country, since he was convicted for penal offenses. So, with or without his will, the main opponent identified by the Opposition was Liviu Dragnea himself. On the one hand, the Social Democrats hastened to gather ranks around the leader and government; on the other, the Opposition had done its best to fight the “evil” embodied in the person of the PSD leader. The Social Democrats choose for the European Parliamentary campaign mostly silence and Government measures meant to stir up the sympathy of the Romanians. The PSD learned from past failures and did not apply the recipe used in the Presidential election in 2014, choosing instead to secure its votes and not to incite the Right-wing electorate to vote, because it might express an opinion contrary to its political interests. Had they chosen an active campaign in the media, responding to themes launched by the Opposition, the PSD would have risked increasing voting presence by stirring the citizens' desire to express themselves against the PSD-ALDE government. Thus, Liviu Dragnea understood that the best option in this case was to take a side step during the campaign and let government measures and other political leaders do the talking for the PSD.

## **Political actors and Parties**

### ***PNL – the National Liberal Party***

After the Parliamentary elections of December 11, 2016, which the PNL drastically lost<sup>2</sup>, there followed Raluca Turcan's six-month interim period<sup>3</sup>, from December 21, 2016 to the Congress of 17th June 2017. The purpose of the interim leadership was to hold elections stating the closure of a fusion between PNL and PD-L, and to legitimize a President and a single political office.

Obviously, as in any electoral competition, many leaders presented their intention to run for the highest position in the Party, most of them coming from the historical PNL: Ilie Bolojan,

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<sup>2</sup> At the Parliamentary elections on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016 PNL obtained 20.22% and PSD – 45.57%, according to the final results provided by the Central Electoral Bureau.

<sup>3</sup> Raluca Turcan was at that time the president of PNL Sibiu, the organization which obtained the best score in the Parliamentary elections, 39%.

Ludovic Orban, Cristian Buşoi, Cătălin Predoiu and Viorel Cataramă<sup>4</sup>. After a series of speculations specific to this type of election, in which potential candidates verify the support they can have, only Ludovic Orban and Cristian Buşoi finally participated.

Is interesting the case of Ilie Bolojan, former Party General Secretary, Mayor of Oradea and President of the Bihor branch, who, despite having benefited from broad support, especially from the Transylvanian and Banat leaders, did not implement his intention to run in the elections. An explanation for this hesitation would be that Ilie Bolojan wanted to have the support of the majority of the Party's affiliates, otherwise he was not willing to risk the image capital he had gained, and face a potential personal political defeat.<sup>5</sup>

Cătălin Predoiu also announced his intention, and the former leaders of the Democratic-Liberal party supported the idea; but in the end he was pulled out of the race, most likely due to the fact that his old party colleagues did not believe in his ability to win. His candidacy was questioned by the possible participation of Ilie Bolojan which, if clearly stated, would have been firmly supported by the former PD-L president, Vasile Blaga, still influential, and by many leaders in the North and West of the country.<sup>6</sup>

After the decision of the Mayor of Oradea not to submit any motion for the Party Congress, Transylvania and Banat leaders regrouped behind Ludovic Orban, who already had solid support from branches in the extra-Carpathian space.

Cristian Buşoi was another candidate who was very well connected to the life of the Party. Once the subsidiaries in Transylvania declared their support for Ludovic Orban, he was only voted by a few subsidiaries: Bucharest (where he was president), Timiș, Caraș-Severin, Neamț, Ilfov. Following a previous estimate of the support the two contestants enjoyed, the result became predictable: 3,518 votes in favour of Ludovic Orban.

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<sup>4</sup> Viorel Cataramă's candidacy was invalidated because he did not meet the eligibility conditions, namely the support of at least ten subsidiaries.

<sup>5</sup> Iulia Roșca, SURSE Ilie Bolojan, primarul municipiului Oradea, ar putea candida la sefia PNL, in *Hotnews.ro*, March 14th, 2017, <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-politic-21661012-ilie-bolojan-primarul-municipiului-oradea-putea-candida-sefia-pnl.htm> (accessed 03.06.2019).

<sup>6</sup> “Dear friends, I informed a few minutes ago PNL BPN members that we have decided not to submit a motion at the PNL Congress on 17th June (...). I understand at the same time that what I am offering for the position of President of the PNL does not coincide with the views of the leaders of the organizations. Unfortunately, many have set their options by signing in white, without the text of any motion being drafted yet. A political man must be realistic, with his feet on the ground. Politics is the art of the possible in a given context. As for the project I proposed for the head of the PNL, now is not the time!“, in *Ziare.com*, May 9, 2017, <http://m.ziare.com/predoiu/predoiu-se-retrage-din-cursa-pentru-sefia-pnl-dupa-ce-n-a-gasit-cine-sa-il-sustina-1464927-font3> (accessed 7.06.2019).

After the election of Ludovic Orban as PNL Chairman with 78% of votes<sup>7</sup>, the expectations of members, leaders and citizens were very high. This was mainly due to the massive confidence given to the new leader after a heavy fusion between the old PNL and the PD-L, and the loss of the 2016 Parliamentary elections with a score below expectations. Moreover, he had always been perceived both by the members of the old PNL and by the general public as a charismatic leader, due to his constant opposition to Crin Antonescu's leadership and to the fundamental decisions the Party had taken (the alliance with PSD, for example)<sup>8</sup>. Beyond these aspects, Ludovic Orban's positioning until the time of the Liberal presidency was increasingly sparkling, to the delight of the press. Hence, the myth of his charisma, which paradoxically, as we shall see during this analysis, did not attain its apogee after assuming the leadership of the Party; quite the contrary.

In the early months following the election these expectations were not met, given that the PNL leader remained constantly on the fringes of a political score that placed him below that of the Party, and the fulminating rise of the Liberals in the polls was delayed. In a survey conducted by INSCOP between January and February 2019, about 16% of respondents had a lot of trust in the PNL leader, a two-percent increase over November 2018.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, there had been no significant positive change in the exercise of Party leadership, communication with the electoral base, or strengthening internal democracy.

On the contrary, there were some decisions that did not benefit from wide consultation (changes of branch presidents, communication decisions<sup>10</sup>, positions on important topics). An eloquent example is linked to the PNL position, as expressed by Ludovic Orban, on supporting the Referendum for the Family initiated by PSD. It debated the issue of same-sex marriage for the first time in Romania and prohibited this type of union by amending the Constitution. It was disqualified by failing to meet the attendance criterion, with only 21% of the voters present at the vote, the threshold being 30% of the total number of citizens enrolled in the permanent electoral

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<sup>7</sup> Iulia Roșca, "Ludovic Orban, ales președinte PNL cu 78% din voturi", in *Hotnews.ro*, June 17th 2017, <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-politic-21825370-ludovic-orban-ales-presedinte-pnl-78-din-voturi.htm> (accessed 06.05.2019).

<sup>8</sup> Luminița Pîrveu, "Schimb de replici între Ludovic Orban și Crin Antonescu, la ședința PNL, in *Hotnews.ro*, September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012 <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-politic-13171162-schimb-replici-intre-ludovic-orban-crin-antonescu-sedinta-pnl-vrei-rupem-usl-surse.htm> (accessed 03.06.2019).

<sup>9</sup> Report of a national survey published by INSCOP during the period between January to February 2019, <https://www.inscop.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Incredere-in-Personalitati.pdf> (accessed 03.06.2019).

<sup>10</sup> In October 2017, the leadership of the PNL made the decision that no PNL representative would participate in television debates without the Party's consent, and approved a list of approved communicators.

rolls. The position clearly and publicly expressed by Ludovic Orban<sup>11</sup> in favour of regulating the ban on same-sex marriage sparked the reaction of several Liberal MPs including: Alina Gorghiu, Adriana Săftoiu, Cătălin Predoiu, Cezar Preda, Mara Calista, Ovidiu Raetchi, Iulia Scânteii, Mihai Voicu who simultaneously published on the Facebook social network the same text against the decision-making process in the party.<sup>12</sup> Also, there were some moments of misunderstanding in the Parliamentary groups, which resulted in the departure of some senators (Vergil Chițac, Ion Popa, Marius Nicoară, Siminica Mirea, Daniel Zamfir) and some deputies (Eusebiu Popa-Pistru, Daniel Oltean, Doru Opriscan). Another unfavourable moment for the PNL president was the change of the PNL group leader in the Senate. In such situations, the change of leader in a Parliamentary group is based on internal negotiations, whereby deputies or senators express their support for one of the candidates. Ludovic Orban supported Iulian Dumitrescu. He won 14 votes and his opponent, Alina Gorghiu, won 13 votes. This position was mainly demonstrated by two things: the first is that, despite other decision-making modalities, there is a spirit of internal democracy in the PNL; and the second, that Ludovic Orban received a clear message from senators about to coagulate into an insider critical group.

A critical moment took place in August 2018, when an important group of leaders from local organizations initiated a petition to replace Ludovic Orban. It took a major effort on the part of the Liberal Party President to persuade territorial leaders, but also the intervention of Klaus Iohannis, to address the crisis.<sup>13</sup>

Another important event in the Party's life – the elections for the European Parliament. The list of candidates was finalized following internal negotiations without being debated or voted at each subsidiary. In the statute of the Party, according to Article 86, letter h, the National Political Bureau (BPN) validates candidates in Parliamentary and European elections following proposals from the County Coordination Councils (CCJ), but these had not been organized.

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<sup>11</sup> “The Referendum is the most powerful institution of democracy, through which every citizen can express himself directly about the decisions a society takes. The subject of today's Referendum is in my view an extremely important topic because it is about the structure of the basic cell of society, the family; namely the initiative is to define it in the Constitution the way it is defined in the legislation, the way in which marriage is carried out, namely between a man and a woman“, said Ludovic Orban about the vote on the Family Referendum (6-7 October 2018).

<sup>12</sup> “The PNL leadership threw the Party into a new adventure and a new political failure that alienated us from 70% of the liberal electorate. The leadership of the PNL does not unite, but divides. It does not modernize, but proposes a retrograde policy. #ajunge – enough”, was the message posted by Alina Gorghiu, Adriana Săftoiu, Cătălin Predoiu, Cezar Preda, Mara Calista, Ovidiu Raetchi, Iulia Scânteii and Mihai Voicu on 7 October 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Anca Andrei, “Exclusiv! Planul din Umbră și rolul lui Klaus Iohannis (surse). Cine dorește cu adevărat Debarcarea lui Ludovic Orban și când ar urma să se întâmple acest lucru”, in *Evenimentul Zilei*, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, <https://evz.ro/exclusiv-cine-doreste-cu-adevarat-debarcarea-lui-ludovic-orban-s.html> (accessed 7.06.2019).

Another occasion of tension, which reverberated in the media, was Crin Antonescu's desire to return to the forefront of politics through a candidacy for the European Parliament elections. This would be a real problem for the PNL leader, given that the former President still enjoys the sympathy of a significant part of the historical wing, including some weighty politicians. Also, in the internal poll conducted by PNL for elections to the European Parliament, Crin Antonescu had a confidence level of about 33%. A survey conducted by the Sociological Research Bureau showed Crin Antonescu in the top preferences, being the option of 32.4% of respondents to the question “Who do you think deserves to be among the top three MEPs over the next few years?”<sup>14</sup> Finally, this revival did not materialize, and the possible place Antonescu would occupy on the Liberal list was offered to his wife, Adina Vălean. This move provided Orban with calm waters on two fronts: eliminating a well-placed competitor, and ensuring a female presence among eligible places.

The theme of gender balance might have become recurring and quite disturbing were it not for at least one woman in those eligible places, especially since the main candidate list was opened by a woman, and gender balance is a demand of the European People's Party. In fact, Manfred Weber, leader of the EPP group, addressed during a visit to Bucharest the European Popular decision that candidate lists should contain an equal number of women and men.<sup>15</sup>

Another leader who filed his candidacy for the European Parliament was former Party Chairman Alina Gorghiu who, according to the PNL internal survey, had a 27% confidence share, while the party's score was at the same level and the current leader, we recall, was below these odds.<sup>16</sup>

In view of the high confidence that former Presidents enjoyed, as well as their intention to run for the European elections, but also the lower percentage at which Ludovic Orban was situated, a significant leadership problem arose. How could the Antonescu-Gorghiu equation be solved, given the trust they enjoyed among citizens, but also the gender dimension? The solution was, without doubt, Adina Vălean, explanations being easy to understand. On the one hand, it

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<sup>14</sup> The survey was released at the end of the month of January, 2019. See “SONDAJ BCS. Cine se află în topul preferințelor la europarlamentare” in *Realitatea.net*, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019, [https://www.realitatea.net/sondaj\\_2179096.html](https://www.realitatea.net/sondaj_2179096.html) (accessed 05.06.2019).

<sup>15</sup> “Manfred Weber, despre singura femeie pe lista PNL la alegerile europarlamentare: Pe termen lung trebuie să existe egalitatea de gen”, in *Hotnews.ro*, March 16<sup>th</sup> 2019, <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-politic-23032968-manfred-weber-despre-singura-femeie-lista-pnl-europarlamentare-termen-lung-trebuie-existe-egalitatea-gen.html> (accessed 01.06.2019)

<sup>16</sup> “Sondaj intern al PNL. Date surprinzătoare”, in *Antena3.ro*, January 27, 2019, <https://www.antena3.ro/politica/sondaj-intern-al-pnl-date-surprinzatoare-505321.html> (accessed 01.06.2019).

was clear that just one member of the Antonescu-Vălean couple could be an eligible candidate. On the other hand, it was very difficult to explain in public that although there were no women on the list, and Alina Gorghiu had applied with an important share of trust, Orban did not nominate her.

Although at the beginning of debates about candidates for the European Parliament elections Ludovic Orban's intention was to be at the head of the list<sup>17</sup>, after the internal poll was completed it did not materialize, because it was clear that he was not the *locomotive* that the Liberals needed. Moreover, a common sense question was how a large party like the PNL could have been led from a distance, and only on weekends. As we can see, the issue of the European Parliament elections has become more and more complicated, with many implications and meanings.

First of all, these elections are meant to give a fairly clear picture of the population's support for the Party, because the stakes are small for the electorate and as a result the ones who participate are mainly the citizens of the Party's captive basin. Moreover, they give the signal for successive ones, namely the Presidential elections. A low score would equate with a handicap right at the start of the campaign for the November elections. It would certainly have been a good hobby-horse for the PSD, who would have insisted on the weakness that electoral percentages showed.

Secondly, the new leadership of the PNL which, we repeat, came in on a very high wave of expectations, needed a serious confirmation as the premise of the possibility of giving important support to its candidate in the Presidential election. Moreover, a significant failure would mean the invalidation of discourse for the main opposition Party, a discourse it had maintained for nearly two years and without which it would have gone into turmoil at a time when it could not afford to do so. Therefore, obtaining a very good score was the PNL target for the European Parliament elections under these terms.

## **Campaign**

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<sup>17</sup> Iulia Roșca, “Consiliul Național al PNL va avea loc pe 4 august: se decid criteriile pentru europarlamentare. Plus: posibilă schimbare de statut privind demiterea șefilor de filiale”, in *Hotnews.ro*, July, 9<sup>th</sup> 2018, <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-politic-22558028-consiliul-ional-pnl-avea-loc-4-august-decid-criteriile-procedura-pentru-europarlamentare-plus-posibil-schimbare-statut-privind-schimbarea-efilor-filiale.htm> (accessed 01.06.2019).



The surprise of the campaign was bringing journalist Rareș Bogdan to the fore of politics. After multiple sociological research studies, PNL had understood it needed a person able to pull up the entire list. For reasons we mentioned earlier, Ludovic Orban was unable to assume this role. Co-opting Rareș Bogdan turned out to be a mouthful of oxygen for the PNL, as he brought with him a significant number of sympathizers who were not entirely Liberal; from the deeply anti-PSD area of USR-PLUS, from the nationalist, traditionalist, conservative areas and from reminiscences of interwar Romanian Liberal doctrine, if one is to take into account his discursive accents<sup>18</sup>. According to the internal survey, the *Realitatea TV* moderator had a voting intention placed around 30 percent. Co-opting a journalist who in the past had been the leader of the PNL youth branch in Cluj could not create polemics, nor could it generate anyone's antipathy. Even if did not achieve a *plus* for the Liberals, he certainly didn't bring a *minus*. This is generally the case when a personality who has built an image outside of politics is taking a step towards candidacy. It is a recipe that has been applied successfully in other situations, the most eloquent example being that of the 2014 European Parliament elections, through the independent candidacy of Mircea Diaconu. Then the PNL suffered, because of the large number of votes he had drawn from their electoral basin.

Rareș Bogdan, by the nature of his image and his constant opposition to the PSD, became the main pillar of the Liberals' campaign, being brought to the Party as the one who was to save an unsavoury list of candidates who did not benefit from the presence of any stars and had to hide some small image problems. Thus, the PNL list of eligible seats was composed of: Rareș Bogdan (*Realitatea TV* journalist), Mircea Hava (Mayor of Alba Iulia), Siegfried Mureșan (MEP, EPP spokesperson), Vasile Blaga (former PNL president), Adina Vălean (MEP), Daniel Buda (MEP), Dan Motreanu (former Minister of Agriculture), Gheorghe Falcă (Mayor of Arad), Cristian Bușoi (MEP), Marian Jean Marinescu (MEP).

### ***Alliance 2020: USR-PLUS***

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<sup>18</sup> “We at *Realitatea TV* and especially at *Jocuri de putere* have assumed the mission to fight for a beautiful Romania, for a free Romania and especially for an honest Romania. We fight for a non-kneeling Romania where people do not receive state contracts based on Party membership, we fight for those who do not want to change the geography of the country”, stated Rareș Bogdan on November 26, 2018. “Hello dear Romanians who love Romania every day and who understand the stake of these choices. I make a sincere appeal to all those who love this country and who understand that Romania should not be a paradise for penal offenders, to vote on May 26” were the words of Rareș Bogdan at the time of submitting the list of PNL candidates to the Central Electoral Bureau.

Another significant element in the political area was the establishment of the USR-PLUS Alliance with Dacian Cioloş at the head of the list. This political construct created an important electoral pool on the Right side of the political board. It broke from the PNL with the Parliamentary elections and came to have its own public, very pretentious and sensitive to any deviation from its original principles.

We consider it necessary to introduce a small bracket within this analysis, allowing us to show why the political man Dacian Cioloş turned from an *electoral motor* – as the opinion polls showed – into a *subdued product* orbiting at around 18 percent<sup>19</sup> in the level of confidence and 9 percent<sup>20</sup> in the vote for the Presidential election (in competition with Klaus Iohannis). In our opinion, this was precisely because of the inconsistencies and logical fractures of his speeches and messages that, paradoxically, did not affect the *Alliance 2020*, but reflected directly on his own image. On the one hand, he argued that the Right must be united in order to fight against a monolith such as the PSD; on the other hand, instead of accepting the option to join one of the existing parties with his team, he chose to let them create their own formations (Romania Together Movement, Romania 100 Platform, the Liberty, Unity, Solidarity Party – PLUS). This is the first logical fracture between message and action. Then, the role of Presidential candidate was not a very good choice, since studies clearly showed that the overwhelming majority of the Right-wing public had only one option, namely, Klaus Iohannis<sup>21</sup>. It would be totally inappropriate to submit your own voters to the torture of having to choose between two leaders they believe in, and in whose ideas they can find themselves. In fact, Dacian Cioloş's speech took over the political principles of Klaus Iohannis: the fight against corruption, a new political class, European values. And in this case, we witnessed a serious inconsistency between message and action. Dacian Cioloş was the Prime Minister exclusively supported by Klaus Iohannis in 2016, and imposed upon the PNL as an optimal alternative in opposition to Victor Ponta and PSD, which was settled in the 2016 elections by the Liberals themselves. Almost three years after the elections, during the Rally organized on 12 May 2019 in Timisoara, Cioloş declared: “A *malicious Parliament and a President without solutions put the state in a precarious balance*

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<sup>19</sup> See the survey published by the Bureau for Social Research (BCS), between 9th-16th of February, 2019, [https://www.dcnnews.ro/sondaj-dur-pentru-ciolos-tehnocratul-prabusit\\_639232.html](https://www.dcnnews.ro/sondaj-dur-pentru-ciolos-tehnocratul-prabusit_639232.html) (accessed 07.06.2019).

<sup>20</sup> See the survey of the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS) in March 2019, <https://curs.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/omnibus-martie-national-2019-site.pdf> (accessed 07.06.2019).

<sup>21</sup> In all polls published since 2015, Klaus Iohannis was the first in the Presidential election, with increased favour and more than 40% of the votes.

*that uses both sides, but citizens are missing from the equation. The President and the Government must work together, but for this to happen the President of the country has to make decisions. If you nominate all the puppets of a penal offender such as Dragnea, you, as President, must assume the responsibility for the nominations”.* This positioning raises some common sense questions: did Dacian Cioloș not go through the same procedure? What legitimacy did he have to serve as Prime Minister? Was not the President the one who guided the imposition of Cioloș as Prime Minister in the Victoria Palace?

Later, Dacian Cioloș returned to what he had said, explaining that he was referring to the need of amending the Constitution, and denying that it was a political attack against the President in office. However, despite the subsequent explanation, we cannot deny the evidence of a direct political attack on Klaus Iohannis, and any analysis in this case would be redundant. The reasons for which Dacian Cioloș chose to express himself thus are linked to his desire to position himself in relation to the only candidate already announced for the Presidential election, due to end his term at the end of this year; and this only served the prospects of a candidacy. Moreover, the alliance he belongs to has repeatedly announced, from 2017 until now, that it will have its own candidate.

As we can see, the electoral campaign for the European Parliament elections, which was to clarify the positions for the Presidential ones, was held in this tense context.

### ***Pro-Romania***

Dissecting the political scene, we are surprised to see that Pro-Romania, the party led by Victor Ponta, managed to reposition a significant number of coalition MPs<sup>22</sup>, to break an important part of the PSD electorate and even to bring to its side former USL and post-PD-L nostalgics, won over by the re-integration of wages after the 2009-2011 crisis. For this new party, it was essential to pass the electoral threshold in order to be confirmed as an alternative to the PSD, both in the views of voters and in those of Social-Democrat members. Moreover, Pro Romania represented for many a Left-wing alternative seen as more acceptable by the electorate, rather than a PSD that was losing ground on a day-to-day basis due to failures of government and concentrating the public agenda on the fight with the so-called “parallel state”, a concept invented by Liviu Dragnea to define the supreme enemy and to justify his political struggle.

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<sup>22</sup> At present, the Pro-Europa (Pro-Romania) parliamentary group in the Chamber of Deputies has 21 members, former members of the PSD or ALDE.

## ***PMP***

PMP, the party led by former President Traian Băsescu<sup>23</sup>, the headline list for these elections, was for the first time in danger of not reaching the 5% electoral threshold, in which case the likelihood of dissolution was imminent; more so since it had lost significantly in Parliament, the Senate Parliamentary group dissolving because of the departure of some MPs to the PSD. Practically the PMP played its last card, having again Traian Băsescu as a spearhead.

### **Figures and sociological calculations before the European Parliamentary elections**

Sociological research in pre-election times prefigured a steadily decreasing PSD and an increase for Opposition Parties, PNL and USR-PLUS, all estimated at a 30-35% turnout for the average of similar previous experiences. The more electoral presence increased, the more PSD suffered.

The internal survey of the PNL, held in January 2019, placed it at 27%, PSD being the first with 30.2%. At the same time, the Sociological Research Bureau placed the parties as follows: PNL 23.7%, PSD 23%, Pro Romania 10.7%, PMP 9.3%, USR 6.5%, PMP 3.2%.<sup>24</sup>

The IMAS survey conducted in February 2019 showed that PSD would get 22.7%, PNL 22.6%, USR-PLUS 12.9%, ALDE 9%, Pro Romania 9.7%, PMP 4.4%.<sup>25</sup>

The INSCOP survey published in March 2019 showed that PSD would have 26.9%, PNL 26.3%, USR-PLUS 15.3%, ALDE 9.3%, Pro-Romania 9.1%, PMP 4.4%. It was calculated at a 58.1% turnout, while at 38.7% turnout the PSD percentage increased by 3, the PNL by about 1, and the USR-PLUS by 2.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The PMP official president is Eugen Tomac, and Traian Băsescu is Honorary President. However, at the level of public perception, the former Head of State was the de facto leader.

<sup>24</sup> "SONDAJ BCS. Cine se află în topul preferințelor la europarlamentare. Pe cine trimit românii în PE", in *Realitatea.net*, January 2019 [https://www.realitatea.net/sondaj\\_2179096.html](https://www.realitatea.net/sondaj_2179096.html) (accessed 05.06.2019).

<sup>25</sup> IMAS Survey: With 17.9%, the 2020 Alliance becomes the third political force, 5 percent behind PSD and PNL, February 2019, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/sondaj-imas-cu-17-9-alian%C8%9Ba-2020-devine-a-treia-for%C8%9B%C4%83-politic%C4%83-la-5-procente-%C3%AEn-spatele-psd-%C8%99i-pnl/29796568.html> (accessed 02.06.2019).

<sup>26</sup> INSCOP survey: PSD and PNL are breathing down each other's neck, the USR-PLUS Alliance gets 15.3%. Low presence, joy for PSD, March 2019, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/sondaj-inscop-psd-și-pnl-își-suflă-în-ceafă-alianța-usr-plus-are-15-3-prezența-mică-bucuria-psd/29834149.html> (accessed 02.06.2019).

The research published by CURS in March 2019 showed PSD at 31% – a significant difference compared to other studies, PNL at 23%, USR-PLUS at 13%, ALDE at 10%, Pro-Romania at 8%, PMP at 6%.<sup>27</sup>

The IRES survey of March 2019 put PNL in the first place with 25.2%, PSD second with 21.5%, USR-PLUS in the third place with 17.7%, ALDE fourth with 12.7% and finally Pro-Romania with 11.2%.<sup>28</sup>

CURS also showed in April a 1% increase for PSD, from 31 to 32, with 2% for PNL from 23 to 25, 2% for ALDE from 10 to 12 and 1% for Pro-Romania, from 8 to 9; PMP had a 6% share.<sup>29</sup>

An analysis by the Politico European publication in April 2019 showed that with a 32.44% electoral presence PNL would rank first with 25.89%, followed by PSD with 22.68%, USR-PLUS with 15.99%, ALDE with 11.74% and Pro-Romania with 10.99%.<sup>30</sup>

The IMAS Barometer of April 2019 said that PNL would win the elections by 25.6%, the second being PSD with 21.7%, followed by USR-PLUS with 16.4%, ALDE with 12.2%, Pro-Romania with 11.7% and PMP with 5.6%.<sup>31</sup>

A KANTAR survey for the entire European Union put PNL in the first place, with 25.2%, followed by PSD with 21.5%, USR-PLUS with 17.7% Pro-Romania with 11.7%, and PMP with 4.7%.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See the national level survey of the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS) in March 2019, <https://curs.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/omnibus-martie-national-2019-site.pdf> (accessed 07.06.2019).

<sup>28</sup> IMAS Survey: PNL moves to first position. Strong drop for PSD, in *Digi24.ro*, April, 2019, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/sondaj-imas-pnl-trece-pe-primul-loc-scadere-puternica-pentru-psd-1109088> (accessed 02.06.2019).

<sup>29</sup> Andrei George Cristescu, “SONDAJ CURS pe luna aprilie: PSD este preferat de 32% din cei care au indicat o opțiune de vot pentru europarlamentare. Ce scor au PNL și Alianța 2020 USR PLUS”, in *Adevărul.ro*, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2019, [https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/sondaj-curs-luna-aprilie-psd-preferat-32-cei-indicat-optiune-vot-europarlamentare-scor-pnl-alianta-2020-usr-plus-1\\_5ccdb0ec445219c57e3f1b02/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/sondaj-curs-luna-aprilie-psd-preferat-32-cei-indicat-optiune-vot-europarlamentare-scor-pnl-alianta-2020-usr-plus-1_5ccdb0ec445219c57e3f1b02/index.html) (accessed 01.06.2019).

<sup>30</sup> Iulian Bîrzo, Sondaj Politico: PPE pe primul loc la europarlamentare. În România, PSD sub PNL”, in *Adevărul.ro*, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019, [https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/sondaj-politico-ppe-loc-europarlamentare--In-romania-psd-pnl-1\\_5ccd5a5a445219c57e3cd0c0/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/sondaj-politico-ppe-loc-europarlamentare--In-romania-psd-pnl-1_5ccd5a5a445219c57e3cd0c0/index.html) (accessed 01.06.2019).

<sup>31</sup> “Sondaj IMAS: PNL ar câștiga alegerile europarlamentare cu 25,6%. Iohannis, victorie fără emoții la prezidențiale” in *Hotnews.ro*, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-23116415-sondaj-imas-pnl-castiga-alegerile-europarlamentare-25-6-iohannis-victorie-fara-emotiile-prezidentiale.htm> (accessed 01.02.2019).

<sup>32</sup> “Sondaj al Parlamentului European: PNL conduce cursa la europarlamentare cu 25,2%, urmat de PSD cu 21,5% și Alianța USR PLUS cu 17,7%”, in *G4media.ro*, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://www.g4media.ro/sondaj-al-parlamentului-european-pnl-conduce-cursa-la-europarlamentare-cu-252-urmat-de-psd-cu-215-si-alianta-usr-plus-cu-177.html> (accessed 01.02.2019).

The IMAS survey released in May also saw PNL rank first with 28.5%, PSD second with 21.1%, USR-PLUS on the third position with 19.6%, Pro-Romania 9.9% on the same level as ALDE, and PMP with 6.2%.<sup>33</sup>

**Tabel no 1**<sup>34</sup>

Poll	January						Februaray						March						April						May					
	PNL	PSD	2020	A	PMP	PR	PNL	PSD	2020	A	PMP	PR	PNL	PSD	2020	A	PMP	PR	PNL	PSD	2020	A	PMP	PR	PNL	PSD	2020	A	PMP	PR
BCS	27,7	23	6,5	9,3	3,2	10,7																								
IMAS							22,6	22,7	12,9	9	4,4	9,7							25,6	21,7	16,4	12,2	5,6	11,7	28,5	21,1	19,6	6,2	6,2	9,9
INSCOP													26,3	26,9	15,3	9,3		9,1												
CURS													23	31	13	10	8	6	25	32		12	6	9						
IRES													25,2	21,5	17,7	12,7		11,2												
Politico																			25,89	22,68	15,99	11,74		10,99						
Kantar																			25,2	21,5	17,7		4,7	11,7						
Exit Poll																									25,7	25,7	23,9	4,7	5,2	5,7
Results																									27	22,5	22,36	4,1	5,66	6,55

So, a PSD failure and an unexpected victory for the PNL, after a complicated merger, the penal investigation of co-President Vasile Blaga, the loss of the Parliamentary elections, the resignation of Alina Gorghiu, the Raluca Turcan interim and the controversial leadership of Ludovic Orban. The Social Democrats relied on low turnout in the margin of previous polls, based on general disinterest among the population over the European Parliament elections. The PSD's capital mistake was the exploitation of a supposed Euroscepticism pushed to the extreme<sup>35</sup> that did not exist in a significant proportion in Romania.<sup>36</sup> It was an incomprehensible approach

<sup>33</sup> IMAS survey, May 2019, the last survey before the elections for the European Parliament: “PSD pierde teren față de PNL și se apropie de pragul de 20%,” May 22, 2019, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/ultimul-sondaj-inainte-de-alegerile-europarlamentare-psd-pierde-teren-fata-de-pnl-si-se-apropie-de-pragul-de-20-1135805>.

<sup>34</sup> Tabel explanation : PNL – National Liberal Party, PSD – Social Democratic Party, 2020 – The Alliance USR-PLUS, A – ALDE, PMP – The Popular Movement Party, PR – Pro Romania Party

<sup>35</sup> In a trip to Slobozia on March 19, 2019, Liviu Dragnea declared: “I am a convinced pro-European and a much more convinced pro-American. We wanted to enter the European Union for a better life, for more freedom, not for a return to fear and terror. We wanted to enter the EU to have access to development and have a minimum of respect. We ask for no more respect than we give, than we offer. We've been good, and we're good still. We only ask for the right to be heard and to put our arguments on the table. We cannot accept that everything we do and say is criticized, struck, blocked; and everything others say, which means a whole list of lies, is taken for good without a minimum of verification. Is it too much to ask, is it too much if we want to have our little corner of the world?”

<sup>36</sup> 71% of Romanians consider their country to have benefited from EU membership. 59% think that Romania's EU membership is a good thing, according to the Eurobarometer conducted by the European Parliament in May 2018. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20180430IPR02837/eurobarometru-pe-sprijin-fata-de-ue-la-un-nivel-record> (accessed June 1st, 2019).

to any electoral calculation without its authors becoming aware of it, arguing on a topic that was non-negotiable for Romanians: the European destiny of the country. Moreover, the anti-European speech gave President Klaus Iohannis the opportunity to respond through a pro-European campaign, a theme that fits him like a glove.

### **Klaus Iohannis – Opposition leader**

Unlike past campaigns in which the President chose not to be actively involved, the Euro-Parliamentary elections of 2019 meant bringing Klaus Iohannis back into the middle of the political scene. Without exaggerating, we can say that Klaus Iohannis was the main Opposition player this time, because he decided to activate his most powerful political instrument: calling for a consultative Referendum. The approach was not new, and it was successfully used by former President Traian Băsescu during the Presidential election in 2009.

The idea of popular consultation on the subject of justice was brought up a long time ago, long enough for it to take shape and give birth to expectations. This occurred with the mass protests of January 2017 against OUG 13/2017 aimed at pardoning and amnestying penal offences, and it was then that the procedure under the law was started.

With all Parliamentary procedures fulfilled, the Presidential administration announced the call for the Referendum, together with the European Parliament elections, on May 26. Thus the President could, without being accused on a legal basis, campaign for and defend his own ideas: prohibiting amnesty and pardon for corruption offenses, banning the issuance of emergency ordinances to amend penal legislation and extending the right to refer to the Constitutional Court, in the case of Government Emergency Ordinances. It was the theme that brought him to the highest position in the State and his promise to all Romanian citizens: guaranteeing the rule of law. Additionally, just before the start of the campaign, Klaus Iohannis launched his third volume: “*EU.RO – An Open Dialogue for Europe*”, an instrument that he had used successfully in the Presidential election of 2014, when he released the volume “*Step by Step*”. Having as tools a Referendum on Justice and a new volume which was a plea for Europe and the importance of Romania's role in the European Union, Klaus Iohannis had the perfect reasons to get involved in the campaign with those who were on his side, namely the PNL. Thus, the Referendum allowed the President to emphasize his discourse for European justice and values, in opposition to PSD and Liviu Dragnea, and thus to remain firmly opposed to any slippage from the European path

widely supported by Romanians. Also, without being challenged, he could repeatedly urge massive participation in the ballot box without any political partisanship. The volume “*EU.RO – An Open Dialogue for Europe*” gave him the opportunity to travel to the major cities of the country to present it to the public, and get closer to people, even in the middle of them.<sup>37</sup>

The President needed the PNL to get a good score in the European Parliament elections, so as not to leave with a handicap in the Presidential ones. A weak result would have considerably demotivated the Party's militants and would be equated with an invalidation of the two-year messages passed by the governing coalition. These two aspects would have produced a major dysfunction of image and power that would have hindered victory in the Presidential race. Paradoxically, the only party that had registered with the Permanent Electoral Authority (AEP) to campaign for the Referendum was the PNL. USR, PMP, UDMR publicly announced that they support the Referendum, but in fact there was no real involvement from them except at the declarative level.

Moreover, the small parties might have been disadvantaged by massive attendance to the ballot boxes, because they ran the risk of not reaching the minimum percentage for admission in the European Parliament, namely 5 per cent. This is explained by the fact that in the case of PMP and UDMR the number of votes could not be changed consistently, since everything they could have aspired to in the electoral zone had already been used, with well-known leaders with low growth potential and niche messages. PMP was all about Traian Băsescu's captive electorate and, in the case of UDMR, it was all about Romanian citizens of Hungarian ethnicity.<sup>38</sup> In short, the larger the number of valid votes, the lower the percentage for small parties. However, the Referendum on Justice could not be a renegade topic at the discursive level for any player besides the PSD, as it would have been proof of political inconsistency and alienate an important proportion of the voters, being perceived as “joining the other bank of the river”, those who were perceived as destroyers of the rule of law.

Until the elections day, there was great uncertainty about the validation of the Referendum, as there were two mandatory thresholds: the presence should be at least 30% and the votes for the “YES” option should reach 25% of the total number of voters on the permanent

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<sup>37</sup> Events for launching the volume “*EU.RO – An open dialogue for Europe*” took place in Bucharest, Craiova, Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Ploiești.

<sup>38</sup> An INSCOP survey conducted between January and February 2019 revealed that Traian Băsescu had a degree of notoriety of about 96% and a favourability of 11% and Kelemen Hunor about 88% with a confidence of around 7.5%. See the “Report of a national survey conducted by *INSCOP*, January to February 2019, <https://www.inscop.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Incredere-in-Personalitati-1.pdf> (accessed 03.06.2019).



electoral rolls. It was a quite sensitive situation, given that at the European elections in 2014 the polling presence was 32.4%, and from then until May 26, 2019, voter rolls remained unchanged, although it was clear that a large number of citizens had emigrated.

Invalidation of the Referendum would have been a major loss for the President, since with its fall the whole message of the struggle for justice and against corruption would be dropped, giving the PSD a chance to increase the pace in the already established direction; and at the same time it would be a handicap for the start of the Presidential elections at the end of the year. However, Klaus Iohannis chose to take this risk, with the obvious purpose of boosting his vote presence, aware that this was the only way to decimate PSD. The President of Romania was not just a player in these elections, but an obvious supporter of PNL.<sup>39</sup> It is worth recalling that although the PSD waved the issue of suspending the President for a considerable period of time, it did not materialize because he had important popular support (about 40 percent), being the first political leader in the top of “trust in political personalities and intent of voting for them in the Presidential elections”, in all sociological research studies. Such a manoeuvre would have given him the chance to reconfirm and revalidate his position by popular vote, which did not suit PSD. This was also the reason why the subject disappeared before the pre-election period.

### **PNL – the “no strategy” strategy**

Above all, it must be remembered that PNL gained an important image boost with the amendment to the State Budget Law proposed by the Bistrița deputy and General Secretary of the formation, Robert Sighiartau, for doubling children's allowances (14 February 2019). From an omission of the PSD<sup>40</sup>, it was voted and subsequently entered into force starting with May, by Government Ordinance 9/2019. It was a good start for an electoral year.

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<sup>39</sup> Fragments for supporting PNL in Klaus Iohannis' speeches: “Tonight convinced me that we do not have to worry for the future of PNL. I am very proud of you and I would like to congratulate first of all those who have received awards” (TNB Awards Gala, Bucharest – March 23, 2019); “And to be well represented in Europe, we need this strong team that will win the Euro-parliamentary elections” (PNL Rally – Bucharest, May 18, 2019); “A very good team has been presented here today. I was so pleased that they invited me to come.” (PNL Rally – Iași, May 11, 2019); “Happy birthday for the PNL at the venerable age of 144 years! The oldest, and if I may say so, the best party in Romania!” (PNL anniversary – Bucharest, May 24, 2019).

<sup>40</sup> At the time of voting on the amendment for doubling children’s allowances, there were not enough PSD Parliamentarians in the Plenary Hall to opt for rejection. Later, the PSD called for a resumption of the vote, but without success.

Regarding the campaign for the European elections, paradoxically, the general impression was that the only strategies on which the PNL relied were the full potential of the image boost infused by Rareş Bogdan and the support given by the President. The main messages referred to familiar and verified recurrent themes: the fight against corruption, PNL – a party with an important voice in Europe, PNL – the strongest Right-wing party, European values, criticism of the PSD-ALDE government and the demonization of leader Liviu Dragnea.

The slogan for the PNL precampaign was “*The time of Romania*” and the one for the campaign – “*Romania first!*”. These appealed to the national pride of the Romanians<sup>41</sup> and their desire that the interests of the country be put first.

The main ten points of the electoral program were: regional hospitals, transport infrastructure, higher subsidies for farmers, thermal rehabilitation of buildings by European funds, increase of scholarships for students, investment in education, joining the Schengen area, guaranteeing the independence of justice, supporting Romanian companies, local modernization. Basically, in terms of electoral promises, PNL did not innovate, but reiterated older ideas and emphasized what had been missed by the Government. Now, as in other instances, it bet on an anti-PSD vote and not on the consistency of programmatic or doctrinal ideas, as it had thought it did on other occasions. It is worth noting that Liberal President Ludovic Orban chose not to be at the forefront of the campaign, giving this place to Rareş Bogdan; the right decision, if we consider his low confidence rate, below the party's average.

From our point of view, for the PNL this campaign was largely a precampaign for the Presidential elections, since the agenda was imposed by themes brought into discussion by Klaus Iohannis, which the Liberals promoted on all channels at their disposal and in all spaces vacated by the Social Democrats who wanted to avoid any provocations.

### **The day of the vote – Westernized Romanians**

The European Parliament election day, May 26, 2019, provided a surprisingly massive participation in the polls, far beyond the expectations of all involved or interested stakeholders. It is worth mentioning that the history of the huge queues in polling stations abroad that marked the Presidential elections five years ago was also repeated this time, being doubled by smaller lines

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<sup>41</sup> An Avangarde survey from November 2018 revealed that 85% of those interviewed were proud to be Romanians.

in local polling stations. Abroad, 441 polling stations were set up for Romanian citizens, most of them concentrated in large communities (17 in France, 25 in Germany, 75 in Italy, 36 in the Republic of Moldova, 29 in the UK, 50 in Spain, 31 in the USA). It is estimated that at present there are about six million Romanians living in the diaspora; we do not have a very clear situation revealing the number of those who have the right to vote. If we considered that 5,000,000 would be over 18 years of age and in full exercise capacity, it would result that over 11,000 Romanians would have to vote in each polling station. If we take the case of Italy, where 1,300,000 Romanians are estimated to live, then more than 17,000 should vote in one polling station. In order for the electoral process to proceed at a normal pace, about 2,000 voters should be included in the electoral rolls of one station, which would mean, for example, that in the case of Italy 650 polling stations would be needed, more than in the whole world. It is clear that from this point of view an impossible situation has been reached. Until the electronic and correspondence vote can be successfully applied, the right of the Romanian diaspora to vote will be, at best, random.

Now as in 2014, social networks and the media have been overwhelmed by images and videos of queues that seemed endless, with ad-hoc protests generated by the dissatisfaction of people unable to exercise a fundamental right. The truth is that in 2014 it was concluded there was ill-will in regard to the conduct of elections; in 2019 we are most likely discussing the Government's inability to predict the participation rate of the diaspora, coupled with the desire not to boost turnout at the polls.

With regard to the 26 May election results, unlike in 2014 when the presence was 32.4%, in 2019 it rose by 16.62%, reaching the 49.02% score (8,954,959 citizens). For comparison, in the first round of the Presidential elections in 2014 the participation was 53.17% (9,723,232 citizens); in the 2016 local elections, the presence was 48.43% (8,893,672 citizens), and in the Parliamentary elections in 2016 participation was 39.45% (7,258,939 citizens).

Returning to the results of this year, the exit-poll in the European Parliament elections, published by CURS-Avangarde at 21:00 hours (the only one accredited by BEC) revealed the following ranking:

- PSD: 25,7%
- PNL: 25,7%
- USR-PLUS: 23,9%

- UDMR: 5,4%
- PMP: 5,2%
- Pro-Romania: 5,7%
- ALDE: 4,7%.

Unlike previous experiences, the final count confirmed the expectations created by opinion polls. PNL won 27% (2,448,355 votes) and PSD ranked second with 22.51% (2,040,682 votes). The surprise came from USR-PLUS, which was third, exceeding the 20% threshold, reaching 22.36% (2,027,032 votes). The next ranked was the newly formed party of former PSD Presidential Candidate Victor Ponta. Thus, Pro Romania gained 6.55%, passing the electoral threshold. PMP also managed to gain 5.6% of the votes for the European Parliament, surprisingly given the high level of attendance. The last party that managed to exceed the electoral threshold was UDMR with 5.44 percent. Another surprise came from ALDE, which failed to meet the minimum percentage threshold, gaining only 4.1%.

As far as the results from the diaspora are concerned, there were a total of 376,925 valid votes and 4,196 invalid votes. There, USR-PLUS was the undisputed winner of the election with 43.88%, and next in rank was PNL with 31.93%. PMP ranked third with 7.92%. PSD managed to get only 5th place with 2.41% of the votes, following independent candidate George Simion (3.25%).

At the local level, as compared to 2014, PNL won from PSD the following counties: Vâlcea, Dâmbovița, Tulcea, Constanța, Sibiu, Bistrița-Năsăud, Maramureș, Suceava, Arad, Caraș-Severin and Ilfov. USR-PLUS won the counties of Timiș, Iași, Cluj, Sălaj, Brașov and Bucharest and was predominantly voted by major cities and adjacent areas. USR-PLUS ranked first in Cluj-Napoca (42.27%), Timișoara (40.5%), Bucharest (40%), Brașov (37.66%), Iași (37,24%), Constanța (33,75%), Baia Mare (33,62%), Bacău (30,49%), Ploiești (30,19%), Craiova (29,08%), Galați (28,45%), Vaslui (26,96%), Tulcea (25,87%), Buzău (24,09%), Râmnicu Vâlcea (25,78%), Târgoviște (25,56%), Piatra Neamț (23,76%), Pitești (22,94%). If we note that the cities of Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Ploiești and Piatra Neamț<sup>42</sup> have PNL mayors, then we could say that USR won these cities from the Liberals. Moreover, we can also add Brasov and Râmnicu Vâlcea, where the mayors belonged to the PNL until they ran for office in

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<sup>42</sup> The Mayor of Piatra Neamț Municipality, Dragoș Chitic announced on 29 March 2019 that he resigns from his position in the municipal branch.

2016 with ongoing penal and criminal investigations and no longer conformed to the Party's integrity criteria.

As far as the Referendum is concerned, it should be noted that it was treated as a separate electoral procedure, having its own electoral lists and a separate bulletin for each of the two questions. As such, it offered the possibility for a voter to express his will for the European Parliament elections without opting for the Referendum. This resulted in different participation. The Referendum turnout was 41.28% (6,484,086 citizens) and the average of favourability for both questions was 80.6 percentile points; the 30% threshold was reached around 17: 00, four hours before the polling stations were closed.

The PSD did not use the opportunity to urge voters to vote “NO” to both questions. It would have been a safe way to work by invalidating the second validation condition, which would require a quarter of the citizens enrolled in the permanent electoral lists to opt for the “YES” response. They most likely opted for this approach after an electoral calculation, namely not polarizing society because they were risking the opposite effect.

## **Voter Profile**

A study by IRES<sup>43</sup> after the European Parliament elections speaks clearly about the voters' profile for the first three parties.

PNL voters are women (54%), employed in the private environment (33%), mature (30%), using the internet (72%), using Facebook (62%), living in rural areas (56%), secondary education (46%) or elementary studies (42%), concentrated in the Southern area of the country, in Transylvania and in Banat, with incomes of less than 1500 lei / month.

In the case of PSD, its electorate has the following characteristics: women (53%), retirees (58%), over 65 (42%), internet users (44%), Facebook users (35% (53%)), elementary studies (55%), concentrated in the Southern area of the country (50%), with incomes of less than 1500 lei / month.

The USR-PLUS voters are personalized as follows: men (57%), aged 18-35 (50%), using the internet (93%), using Facebook (83%), from urban areas (78%), concentrated in the Southern

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<sup>43</sup> IRES Study, “Who are the voters in the May 26, 2019 elections”, [http://www.ires.com.ro/uploads/articole/ires\\_profiling-politic\\_cine-sunt-votantii-partidelor-la-alegerile-europarlamentare.pdf](http://www.ires.com.ro/uploads/articole/ires_profiling-politic_cine-sunt-votantii-partidelor-la-alegerile-europarlamentare.pdf) (accessed 04.06.2019).

area of the country (45%), with incomes between 1500 and 4000 lei (47%). Almost 8 out of 10 live in urban areas and over 40% live in large cities.

As a result of this study, we can say that the PNL lost its traditional Right-wing, elitist electorate concentrated in urban areas. The PSD did not mobilize voters as it did in the past, and USR-PLUS managed to bring to the polls a category of voters who, until recently, did not vote at all.

### **Instead of conclusions**

In the first part of our partial conclusions, we will stop to make some reflections on ALDE, a Parliamentary party allied with the ruling PSD, and which broke from PNL in 2015.

ALDE is headed by the President of the Senate and second man in the State, Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu. Excluded or self-excluded from ALDE Europe because of its unconditional support for changing the laws of Justice and the leadership of local Prosecutor Offices, it played its stakes in the hope that PSD would not rise above the psychological threshold of 30%. A lower Social Democrat score would increase ALDE electoral rate by electoral transfer on the Left. The same logic applied to Victor Ponta's formation. The condition, however, was that ballot box presence remained in the margins of the previous European elections. That is, somewhere around 30%. ALDE also had a well-defined goal – Călin Popescu-Tariceanu as candidate for the Presidential elections – and this was only a means of reaching it.<sup>44</sup> In the middle of these electoral calculations there still existed an important issue for ALDE, that of the judiciary, which would be mirrored directly in the result of the election. Tudorel Toader's presence as Minister of Justice in all three PSD Governments would tip the scales, since he was known as a close friend of Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu. Although known as a renowned Law professor, former Judge of the Constitutional Court and Rector of the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University in Iași, Toader did not act in favour of the magistrate or judiciary guild as a whole, but rather pushed the pedal towards PSD and Liviu Dragnea's aspirations: replacing the DNA (National Anticorruption Direction) Chief Prosecutor, replacing the General Prosecutor, changing the laws of Justice. However, he stopped at the amendment of the Penal Codes by Emergency Ordinance, and this resistance

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<sup>44</sup> See “Vosgianian: Tăriceanu va candida la alegerile prezidențiale”, in *Antena3.ro*, January 2019, <https://www.antena3.ro/politica/vosgianian-tariceanu-va-candida-la-alegerile-prezidentiale-502001.html> (accessed 01.06.2019).

ended his ministerial mandate through a resignation generated by the withdrawal of the Coalition's support. Even his old supporter, the ALDE, did not oppose this reshuffle at a public level. The reason for this is not known, but there is a strong possibility that it may have been related to a possible candidacy of Prime Minister Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu in the Presidential election, with the support of the PSD. Another issue was related to the penal criminal case filed against the President of the Senate for corruption offenses, and which the Coalition refused to submit to the Parliamentary procedure (the Juridical Commission Report and the Plenary vote) although it came to the attention of the Superior Chamber. This has given rise to speculation that the introduction of this case in Parliamentary procedure was a tool of political blackmail. Subsequently, immediately after the European Parliament elections, the Senate Jurisdiction Committee issued a report favourable to the penal criminal investigation, but the Parliamentary majority voted against lifting the parliamentary immunity of the ALDE president.

In the second part of the conclusions, given the outcome of the elections, we can say that the Romanians gave a clear pro-European vote against populism, personal interest politics, behind-the-cameras hidden games, lack of professionalism and demagoguery. Traditional parties need to adapt their rhetoric, strategy and actions, given the fact that in these elections we could see that the difference between a party with over 1200 mayors (PNL) and one without mayors (USR-PLUS) is only 4.64%, both actors claiming the same area of the political game board. The fact that PNL managed to draw votes, especially from small and medium-sized cities and rural areas, shows that the mayors were vectors in the electoral campaign, which translates into good organization. On the other hand, the loss of the loyal voter base of citizens living in large cities at the expense of USR-PLUS shows that there is a need to calibrate different messages for this type of voters, and to change local representatives.

The national score of USR-PLUS has dismantled a myth: there is no need for a very good organization of local structures, it's enough to conquer voters in major cities. You do not win the election, but you get a result that puts you in the top and that can bring you into the government through some form of alliance.

Paradoxically, at present PNL is struggling on the same territory as PSD. Given that most of those who voted for the Social Democrats are over 65 years old, it is clear that in the long run continuity can only be ensured by attracting a similar electoral profile, but with a younger generation – that is, precisely the segment of today's PNL.

We believe that if USR-PLUS places a candidate for the Presidential election, it will lose a considerable part of the endorsement received on May 26th. It is the right of every political party to impose a candidate, but it is also possible that the candidate is unable to rise to the challenge and bring plus-value to the image of the party.

President Klaus Iohannis continues to benefit from a high percentage of confidence and voter turnout. His electorate, as revealed by the previous study, includes PNL and USR-PLUS. It is very difficult for a USR supporter to choose between the proposed candidate and the President in office, especially since he does not believe that change should take place at that level, but rather at the level of the Government, the Parliament and the local administration. Moreover, the Presidential elections will trigger a split-Right phenomenon, which will affect the second round. Two important candidates with a similar program and fighting for the same voters will benefit the monolith on the Left, helping it to continue the electoral battle for the second round and cancelling the public image of previous success.

According to the figures, the European Parliament elections should be treated comparatively to local ones, but such an analysis would not be relevant since it is difficult to relate a national-type poll to a local one. In the local elections, besides the political vote, there is a manifestation of options related to persons, in this case candidates for mayoral positions and proposals for County Councils. Theoretically, the party's score is added to the added value of each competitor. Moreover, the result is also analysed in terms of the total involvement of all local forces that are directly targeted (mayors, local councillors, County Councils, etc.), and this is less likely to happen in the case of national elections. A comparison with similar elections of five years ago would be a mistake, since at that time the data was quite different.

However, choosing a working blueprint, we can compare the 2019 European Parliament elections to the 2014 Presidential run-off, in which the data was similar and where we did not deal with Klaus Iohannis's strong imprint, felt today on the political scene. Thus, PNL obtained 2,881,406 votes then and 2,448,355 votes now, the difference being 433,051, and the presence being 4.15 percent higher.

If we take into account the arithmetic mean of voters registered in the permanent electoral lists and try to estimate what this difference would mean in votes received by PNL, on average, we would notice that it is 2.4%. As such, the surplus in the Presidential election is only reflected in about 50% in the 4.15% presence gap recorded in 2014. Following this logic, we can see that PNL did not win the number of votes obtained in this poll. However, it scored its first



independent victory in the elections; but the joy of victory was not so great considering USR-PLUS's unexpectedly good score. It is clear that the Liberals are now longing for their voters, whom they can hardly get. For this, it is necessary to understand that when the electorate conveys a message, it would be appropriate to comply, no matter how many arguments one could bring for another direction. There is a need for a mentality change in Romanian politics, but this will happen only when the political class realizes that mandates last as long as you have legitimacy, as long as the citizens wish; because its role is to serve the citizens, and not the other way around.

It is necessary to mention one more aspect. The myth created around USR-PLUS will not disappear, at least until the alliance reaches power, even in a coalition. We consider that any attempt to decimate them until that time will be at the expense of the initiator and will help the recipients to consolidate their image of new, unspoiled product.

In marketing, the more active and aggressive you are, the stronger and more important you become. Attacks from the opponents' side betray their fear.

On the other hand, any USR-PLUS attempt to ally themselves with politicians seen as unfriendly by the electorate who voted for them will disappoint and we can anticipate that, given the characteristics of this type of electorate, the party will not get more chances to demonstrate its capabilities. If USR-PLUS is at some point in a position to disappoint and thwart expectations, the political society will enter a difficult period of anticipation, a moment that could mean a dramatic drop in participation, a considerable number of void votes or political rebranding attempts. It will be very difficult for the political class to do anything when the people no longer have confidence in anyone. Therefore, the responsibility of the USR-PLUS is very high.

Finally, instead of a final conclusion, we bring to the readers' attention a question which at the moment remains unanswered: *how did sociologists manage to estimate the result of the elections so close to the truth calculating, in the margin of similar previous experiences, a rate of participation between 30 and 35%?*

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