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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ROMANIA –
A STABLE LEFT-LEANING MAJORITY,
AND A DIVIDED OPPOSITION

Abstract: In Romania, parliamentary elections were held on December 11, 2016. The elections were organized in a proportional system with county-level party lists, mostly reflecting the pre-2008 election system of the country. The elections, – for the most part because of the low turnout of the electorate of the PNL, – resulted in a left-leaning coalition consisting of the PSD and the ALDE. The elected government seems to be stable; however, the Romanian party system is rather unpredictable and tends to change surprisingly often. Concerning the results of the Hungarian party it can be said that the negative tendency ended at the 2016 election, and the ratio of votes cast for the RMDSZ reached the results of 2004 and 2008 again.¹

In Romania, parliamentary elections were held on December 11, 2016. The elections were organized in a proportional system with county-level party lists, mostly reflecting the pre-2008 election system of the country.² Political parties set two lists in each electoral district: a parliamentary and a senate electoral list. Besides the 41 counties, the capital represented a separate electoral district, and a separate electoral district was assigned to the Romanian citizens living abroad as well. MP candidates were listed on the county lists in the order decided by their political party, and they gained parliamentary seats based on the votes cast for the electoral lists in the first place, and secondly, based on the national-level redistribution of leftover votes. The number of MPs dropped significantly compared to the previous legislation (when the number of MPs were 588): the total number of MPs are now 463, out of which 134 are senators and 329 are representatives.

1 Manuscript finalized: January 30, 2017.

2 In 2008 and 2012, the Romanian parliamentary elections were held in a system of single-member electoral districts. Even though on the level of electoral districts it followed the logic of majoritarian systems, that system was basically proportional because it compensated political parties based on the national results. The compensation happened via granting extra mandates, which in 2012 resulted in 120 more MPs in the parliament than the normal number of MPs. Eventually, since the system's shortcomings were heavily criticized, and because of the political parties strategies concerning individual candidates, the pre-2008 electoral system was restored. See: Gergő István Székely, "Egyéni választókerületes többségi rendszer arányos kimenetellel? Románia új választási rendszere" [Majority electoral system with electoral district leading to proportional outcome? Romania's new electoral system], *Pro Minoritate*, 2009 Tavasz.

The parliamentary threshold is 5%, but it is higher for party alliances,³ and there is an alternative threshold for parties that do not reach 5% nationally but receive 20% of the valid votes in at least 4 counties. Parties that achieve the alternative threshold delegate MPs to the parliament with the same mechanism as parties achieving the normal 5% threshold. In practice, the alternative threshold provides granted parliamentary seats only for the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (in Hungarian: Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség – RMDSZ), as for the time being, none of the mainstream, national Romanian parties have a territorially concentrated electorate that could secure 20% of the votes in at least 4 counties, that is, to realize the alternative threshold.

For the first time, voting through the postal system was available at the 2016 elections for Romanian citizens living permanently or temporarily abroad. To be able to cast a vote via mail, citizens had to register themselves in the electoral register by September 14, 2016. Very few, only 8,889 people registered for this opportunity, and eventually only 4,561 postal votes were cast. Therefore, the newly introduced opportunity to vote by mail did not have a significant impact on the election results.

Antecedents, political context⁴

The parliamentary elections were held six months after the local elections⁵ had already taken place in Romania. For a year, the country was led by a technocratic expert administration, thus none of the major political parties were in power.

For a year, the country was led by a technocratic government. This came into being after 30th October 2015, when a Bucharest-based club caught on fire, and the accident caused the death of 64 young people and left more than 100 people injured. The catastrophe generated huge protests against the government, leading to the resignation of Prime Minister Victor Ponta. As the major opposition party, the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal – PNL) could not form a government, the governing Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat – PSD) agreed to be replaced by a technocratic government. The new government was led by Dacian Cioloș, former Minister for Agriculture and former Commissioner for Agriculture in the EU. Although Cioloș was not a member of the

3 For an alliance consisting of two parties the threshold is 8%, for three parties it is 9%, for four or more parties it is 10%.

4 Corinne Deloy, “The Social Democrats lead in the polls for the Romanian parliamentary elections on 11th December next” (European Elections Monitor, Fondation Robert Schuman) <http://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/oeo/oeo-1678-en.pdf>

5 Gergely Illyés, “Helyhatósági választások Romániában – Mire elég a baloldal győzelme?” [Local elections in Romania – For what is the victory of the left enough?], *Kisebbségi Szemle* 1, no. 2 (2016): 77–103.

party, he was backed by the PNL. The Deputy Prime Minister of the technocratic government was Vasile Dîncu, one of the PSD's most important politicians. As a consequence, the major parties (both the PSD and the PNL) had important positions in the technocratic government, but the government could not be linked to either of them explicitly.

This situation was comfortable for the PSD, as it could offend, blame, and accuse of incompetence the governing cabinet led by Dacian Cioloș. Surveys showed good results for the Liviu Dragnea-led PSD. Dragnea became president of the PSD after Victor Ponta resigned. He had been considered a strong member of the party; he had been in charge of the local organizations of the PSD, as well as with the campaigns of the party. Although he was sentenced to a two-year suspended imprisonment for electoral fraud, and thus could not be considered impeccable, in 2016 nobody questioned or challenged his leading position in the PSD.

Moreover, the PSD proposed highly popular initiatives before the elections, such as wage increase and the abolition of fee 102 (see later). Since the then-reigning prime minister, Cioloș, contested the PSD's initiative on wage increase at the Constitutional Court, his popularity dropped significantly in the electorate. The government argued that wage increase in the public sector would be extremely harmful for the country, as it would mean an extra 9 billion lei (2 billion Euros) expense in the budget, which would jeopardize the delicate budgetary balance that had been reached with great difficulty. President Johannis agreed with the prime minister, and accused parliament with "buying votes" just a couple of weeks before the elections through the adoption of the law on the wage increase. The abolition of fee 102 would have meant the abolition of a bunch of charges and taxes with a single regulation. The package of charges to be abolished included the radio- and television tax (which was one of the financial foundations of the Romanian public media), as well as the environmental fee paid after registering a car fit for traffic. The package was passed in the parliament (approved by all political parties), however, the president sent the act to the Constitutional Court in order to prevent it from entering into force. With this move, president Klaus Johannis, who had been considered the patron of the National Liberal Party (PNL)⁶, became the actor who closed the door on tax reduction, while the PSD was working hard to realize the reduction before the elections. This was a clear message to the voters. Moreover, the PNL and its candidate running for prime minister, Dacian Cioloș could not avoid to side with the president, which further weakened their chances in the elections. Also, besides the wage increase and the abolition of fee 102, the PSD promised in their election program further tax reduction measures.

6 The central-right PNL was formed with the fusion of the former National Liberal Party and the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL). At the last presidential election, the PNL supported Klaus Johannis, and, as a big surprise, they won that election. Even though lately the PNL has been positioning itself as the major opposition of the Socialists (PSD), in 2012, the then-PNL was allied with the PSD under the name USL and won both the local and the parliamentary elections.

The National Liberal Party (PNL) opted for a different strategy. The party lacked popular politicians: co-president of the party Vasile Blaga stepped down because of corruption charges, and the other president, Alina Gorghiu had not been able to improve her popularity index for a very long time. Therefore, the PNL's campaign was led by prime minister Cioloș. As Cioloș is a relatively respected politician among the highly unpopular Romanian political elite, the PNL expected that he would help the party to achieve good results in the elections. Dacian Cioloș was not only the PNL's candidate for prime minister, but also the candidate of the "Save Romania!" (Uniunea Salvați România –USR) party, led by Nicușor Dan, and the two political parties were willing to form a government coalition. However, the high level of compatibility of the two parties meant a challenge for the PNL, since the electorate of the party was the main target group for the newly established USR. Therefore, it seemed like a realist scenario that the USR would siphon a part of the PNL's electorate, as it had happened in the 2016 local elections in the capital. Therefore, criticism for the technocratic government and PM Dacian Cioloș meant the biggest vulnerability for both parties. Cioloș was hesitant during the campaign: first he insisted that – in accordance with his previous statements – he would not enter the political sphere, but in the last moment, after Klaus Johannis's clear call, he agreed to run as PM candidate.

Cioloș issued a program statement called 'Romania 100' containing the priorities and principles of the next governmental term, and called upon the political parties to sign the document if they were willing to support his candidacy. The name 'Romania 100' refers to the upcoming anniversary of the Great Union of 1918. In the program statement Cioloș visions a corruption-free Romania, and propagates principles such as trustworthy governance, responsible politics, the honor of work, the eradication of poverty, and the importance of competitiveness. According to the document, Cioloș wants Romania to be "the country of all Romanians", the country of the people who work and live there, "regardless of ethnicity and faith", and he encourages the expat citizens to return to Romania. The document lists a range of projects that should be continued or started, such as the reform of public administration, or the reduction of bureaucracy. Cioloș summarized the one-year performance of his government with the motto "zero corruption, zero populism, zero lies", and he distanced himself from previous Romanian political practices.

It was not only the PSD that built their campaign on criticizing the technocratic government, but also the People's Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară – PMP) led by Traian Băsescu.⁷ The PMP was hoping to divide the right-leaning electorate. In the campaign,

7 Traian Băsescu was the President of Romania between 2004 and 2014 (two mandates). First he was the leader of the Democratic Party (PD), then he was associated with the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL). After the PDL merged with the PNL, the relationship between Băsescu and the PDL deteriorated. Some of members of the PDL who were loyal to Băsescu established the People's Movement Party (PMP), which Băsescu joined after his presidency came to an end.

Bănescu was emphasizing his political experience, and he was expecting to win the votes of those who were seeking a more charismatic candidate. The PMP faced important changes between the local elections and the national parliamentary elections in 2016; it merged with the National Union for the Progress of Romania (Uniunea Națională pentru Progresul României – UNPR), a party that had a quasi-alliance with the Social Democrats at the local elections earlier in 2016. After the union with the UNPR, the party's name remained Popular Movement Party, and former President Traian Bănescu kept his position as party leader. The merger seemed a logical step, since, according to the polls, both parties were around the parliamentary threshold, and their popularity was complementary in the local elections: where one of them had good results, the other had weak results, and vice versa. Despite that, the two parties' union was perceived as a shock, as the UNPR had been considered the satellite party of the Social Democrats for years. Moreover, at that time the UNPR's president was Gabriel Oprea, a former general, who had been Minister of Domestic Affairs in all kinds of governments beforehand, claiming that he was acting in the country's national interest. However, as several criminal proceedings had been launched against Oprea, and he had stepped down from the party president position, and finally, even quit the party, the UNPR eventually became unappealing for the Social Democrats, – even though they cooperated at the local elections and their joint candidate was elected as mayor of Bucharest. Valeriu Steriu, who as temporary president of the UNPR managed the fusion with PMP, used to be Traian Bănescu's advisor at the Presidential Office, and therefore they managed to discuss the details of the merger easily. In a nutshell, the deal was based on the mutual assumption that the UNPR's time was over, its leaders will be incorporated into the leadership of the PMP, and parliamentary seats will be allocated to them after successful election results.

The prompt fusion was not welcomed by everybody. Several UNPR politicians rather changed sides and joined the Social Democrats before and after the fusion was announced. Traian Bănescu probably thought that people would forget by December that the UNPR ever existed (especially given that Oprea was not a member of it anymore), and that the UNPR's organizational network – something the PMP lacked to a large extent – would be an important asset at the elections. While the ex-president's party had good organizational embeddedness only in larger cities, the UNPR had its people in smaller towns and in villages as well.

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților – ALDE), led by ex-prime minister Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, targeted the electorate that was disappointed in the PNL, and that were nostalgic for Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu's term as prime minister. However, the ALDE was obviously preparing for a left-leaning government coalition with the PSD, as the Social Democrats' majority in the parliament was expected to be dependent on the ALDE's parliamentary mandates. Therefore, ALDE was hoping for a stronger position after the elections.

The Hungarian political parties formed a partial cooperation for the elections. The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ) and the Hungarian Civic Party (Magyar Polgári Párt – MPP) were campaigning together for the votes of ethnic Hungarians. Although the Transylvanian Hungarian People's Party (Erdélyi Magyar Néppárt – EMNP) did not take part in this cooperation, it also did not have its own electoral lists or run individual candidates. The MPP was granted two parliamentary seats on the RMDSZ's list. Thus two candidates of the party, from Mureş and Covasna county respectively, among them the president of MPP, Zsolt Biró, got into the parliament. Even though the alternative parliamentary threshold ensured that the RMDSZ would make it into the parliament even if it does not reach 5%, but actually not reaching the 5% benchmark would have brought about certain political consequences for the party. It would have meant a serious loss in the party's political weight in its relations with the Romanian parties, but within the Hungarian community as well. Moreover, the alternative parliamentary threshold is a regulation that was inserted into the electoral law, therefore, it can be removed anytime, which further decreases the weight of a party that gets into the parliament with the help of the alternative threshold.

The Romanian parties did not count on the help of the RMDSZ. The PSD declared before the elections that it would not want to cooperate with the Hungarian party. The ALDE and the PNL were more cautious and remained open to a possible coalition with the RMDSZ. The Hungarian party could have been part of the government if its votes would have been needed to secure the majority of one of the mainstream parties in the parliament; however, the Hungarian community traditionally prefers to ally with the PNL rather than with the PSD.

Before we continue with the 2016 elections, a few remarks are in place about the Hungarian political scene in Romania. The major political organization of the 1,230,000-strong Hungarian minority in Romania is the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ). The RMDSZ was established right after the Romanian revolution of 1989, and its aim was to politically represent the Hungarian community in the country. The RMDSZ entered the Romanian government for the first time in 1996. Since then it has been a part of many governing coalitions, or has cooperated as an external partner with governments. During already the 1990s, internal factions started to appear in the organization. At first these led to an intraparty opposition organized against the leadership of RMDSZ, but later on discontent went beyond the organizational frameworks. Some of those discontented Hungarian politicians established in 2003 the Transylvanian Hungarian National Council (Erdélyi Magyar Nemzeti Tanács – EMNT), a civil organization, and in 2008 the Hungarian Civic Party (MPP). By 2011, conflicts appeared in the opposition forces as well, and thus in 2011, some quit the MPP and established the Transylvanian Hungarian People's

Party (Erdélyi Magyar Néppárt – EMNP). Therefore, there are three Hungarian political organizations that contest for the votes of ethnic Hungarians in Romania.⁸

The RMDSZ received a lot of attention in the public discourse after the party started its billboard campaign in major Transylvanian cities. The message of those billboards was: “We’ll save Oradea/Cluj from Bucharest. Our taxes should contribute to Transylvania, not to the capital!” The second part of the message, which suggests financial decentralization in Romania, was written with smaller letters than the first part, therefore the billboards were interpreted as a call for separatism by the national television as well as by the online and print media. Romanian experts accused the RMDSZ with the intention of separating Transylvania from Romania. The president called the Hungarian party ‘provincial’, and Prime Minister Cioloş said that instead of encouraging discontent, the RMDSZ should focus on creating unity and linking the regions of the country together.

It should be noted as background information to the billboard scandal, that the new campaign regulation forbids the presence of large billboards in the 30 days before elections in Romania. For this reason, parties wanted to secure their visual presence before the official campaign time kicked off. The RMDSZ followed this logic too when it published its billboards, and expected to mobilize the Hungarian electorate with the unusually strong regional message.

The electoral program of the RMDSZ was based on the introduction of reforms for failed public policies, on the restructuring of education and health care, it proposed tax reduction, and it also addressed issues that are important for the Hungarian community, such as the introduction of Hungarian as an official language in Székely Land (in Hungarian: Székelyföld, the region of Transylvania where Hungarians constitute a solid majority). The latter was the most sensitive issue above all the others. Obviously, it was not realistic to expect that the Romanian parties would support the goals propagated by the Hungarian party. Moreover, addressing the regional differences of Romania had been considered a taboo in the Romanian politics before. Therefore, the campaign message of the RMDSZ should not be interpreted only as a tool for election success. It also tested whether the Hungarian party was able to raise issues such as decentralization, the relationship of historical regions, and bad governance, within Romanian public discourse.

8 Gergely Illyés and Zoltán Kántor, “România 1989 után” [Romania After 1989], *Külföldi Szemle* 4 (2012): 79–98.

Electoral turnout

Electoral turnout was low, only 39.97% of eligible citizens cast a vote. However, this proportion is not extremely low compared to previous election turnouts in Romania; since 2008, when presidential and parliamentary elections began to be held at different times, roughly the same percent of eligible citizens participated in the parliamentary elections.

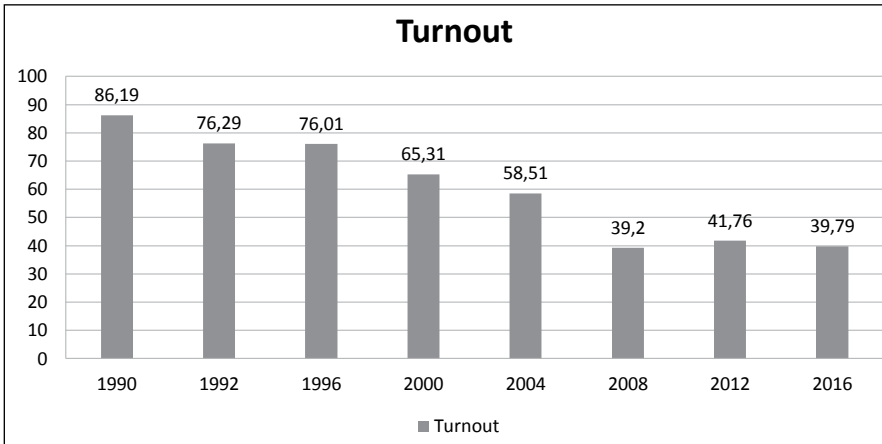


Figure 1: Parliamentary elections in Romania, 1996–2016, official turnout data (%)

In some counties of Transylvania, such as Bihor, Cluj, or Sălaj, turnout was higher than at the 2012 elections, while in Harghita it was roughly the same as four years ago.

The turnout ratio of Hungarians voting for the RMDSZ was higher than the participation of ethnic Romanians,⁹ which is a surprising development compared to previous elections. The good election result of the Hungarian party was due to the fact that the turnout of ethnic Hungarians was higher than the national average. The reason for the successful Hungarian mobilization was manifold: the cooperation between the RMDSZ and MPP; the scandals that outraged the Hungarian community in the weeks before the elections¹⁰;

9 "Választási kerekasztal: minek köszönhető a jó magyar részvétel?" [Electoral round-table: What explains the high Hungarian turnout?], <http://itthon.transindex.ro/?cikk=26365>, accessed 23 March, 2017.

10 The Hungarian community was outraged when the office of the public prosecutor accused the highly popular Hungarian deputy mayor of Cluj, Anna Horváth, of corruption. Many interpreted the case as an attack against the Hungarian community. Another scandal that insulted the Hungarian community was when the Ministry of Culture did not support the appeal at the UNESCO committee that petitioned for the granting of UNESCO World Heritage status for Csíksomlyó, an important pilgrimage site of the Hungarian community.

and probably most importantly, the Hungarian government's representatives' – and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's personal – messages through the Hungarian media aiming to mobilize the Hungarian voters in Romania. As the Romanian regulations of campaigning are quite strict, and a campaign ban was on during the election weekend, the impact of the Hungarian public media reporting on the Romanian elections must have been a significant factor in mobilizing the ethnic Hungarian community in Romania.

National results

Considering the national results, the Social Democrats (PSD) won the election, and with the cooperation of ALDE they have a definite and convenient majority in the parliament. The PNL failed to mobilize its electorate and received only 20% of the votes cast, while the new party, the USR, finished at 9%. The Hungarian party, RMDSZ received more than 6% of the votes, thus it finished with better results than expected. Finally, Traian Băsescu's party, the PMP also passed the 5% parliamentary threshold.

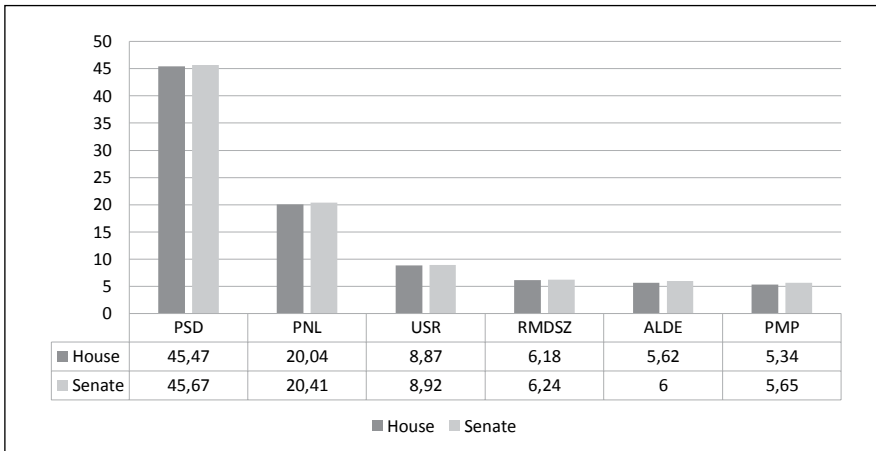


Figure 2: Results of the political parties in the 2016 parliamentary elections, House and Senate (%)

The parliamentary mandates are distributed as follows:

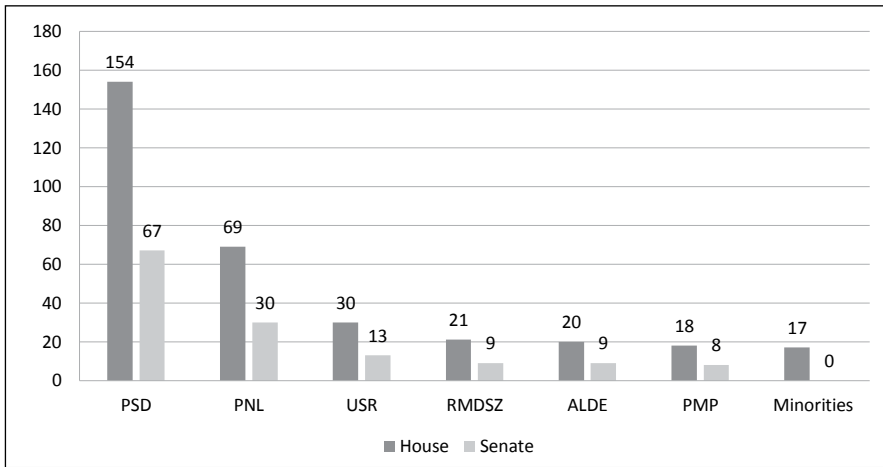


Figure 3: Mandates gained by the political parties in the House and Senate in the 2016 parliamentary elections (number of mandates)

The coalition of PSD and ALDE has 174 seats in the House, which is 52.88% of the mandates. In the Senate they have 76 seats, which equal 56.71% of the senators. If we add the 17 representatives of national minorities to the governing coalition, their majority in the House increases to 58.05%. Therefore, although Liviu Dragnea, president of the PSD did not exclude the possibility to ally with the RMDSZ, the governing coalition in fact does not need the support of the Hungarian party. For this reason, the governing party and the RMDSZ agreed to work together in the parliament, but the RMDSZ did not become part of the government. Interestingly, adding the RMDSZ mandates to the governing parties' mandates would mean 64.14% of the mandates, which approaches a two-thirds majority in the parliament that would be necessary to amend the Constitution.

As the parties running in the 2016 elections were not the same actors that were running in the 2012 elections, one cannot compare the two elections directly. In 2012, the PSD, together with the PNL and the Conservative Party (PC) were running under the name 'Social Liberal Union' (USL). However, the then PNL merged with the Democrat-Liberal Party (PDL), and ran as PNL in 2016, while the PC merged with the ALDE. In 2012 the PDL, the Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party (PNTCD) and the Civic Force (FC) together formed the Right Romania Alliance (ARD), which later dissolved and partly merged with the PNL. The Dan Diaconescu People's Party (PP-DD), that had good results in 2012, dissolved in the meantime, and its members joined other parties.

For this reason, the 2016 parliamentary elections can be compared only with the 2016 local elections, where the actors were the same. The first important difference between the two elections was the turnout: while at the local elections (June 2016) 48.17% of eligible citizens cast a vote, at the parliamentary elections (December 2016) the turnout was 39.79%, thus participation in December was only 82.6% of the participation in June. In absolute numbers: in June 8,893,672 people, in December 7,323,368 people cast a vote, the difference of which is 1,570,304. The following chart includes the proportion of votes cast at the local elections for the county lists and the proportion of the votes cast at the parliamentary elections for the parliamentary lists.

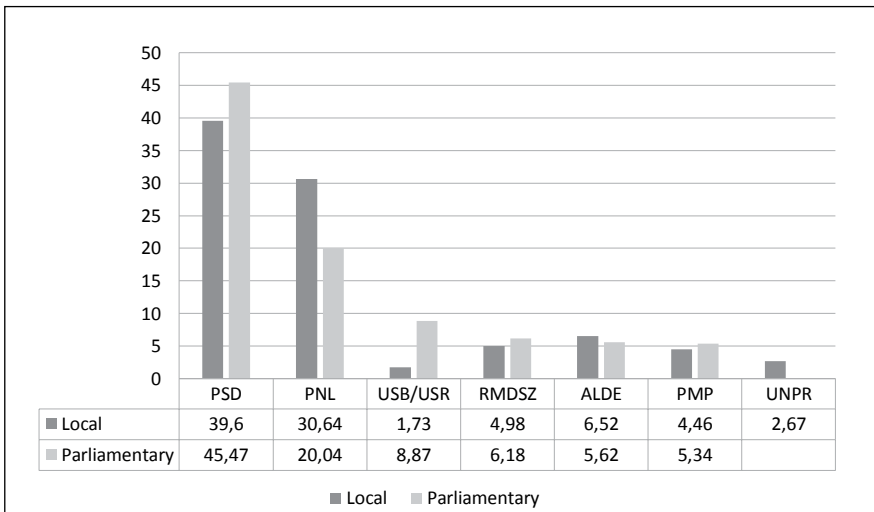


Figure 4: Results of the political parties in the 2016 local and parliamentary elections (%)

It is important to note that the above local election results of the PSD incorporates the party's results in the capital, which was achieved with the joint list of PSD-UNPR. However, the UNPR's results with its separate list are not incorporated in the PSD's results. Besides the obvious growth in the PSD's results, the PNL's decrease is clear too. The USB as a new party achieved great results at the parliamentary elections, which can partly be explained with the failure of the PNL. The fusion of PMP and UNPR worked out well as it helped Bănescu's party to pass the 5% threshold.

The following chart contains the number of votes cast at the two elections:

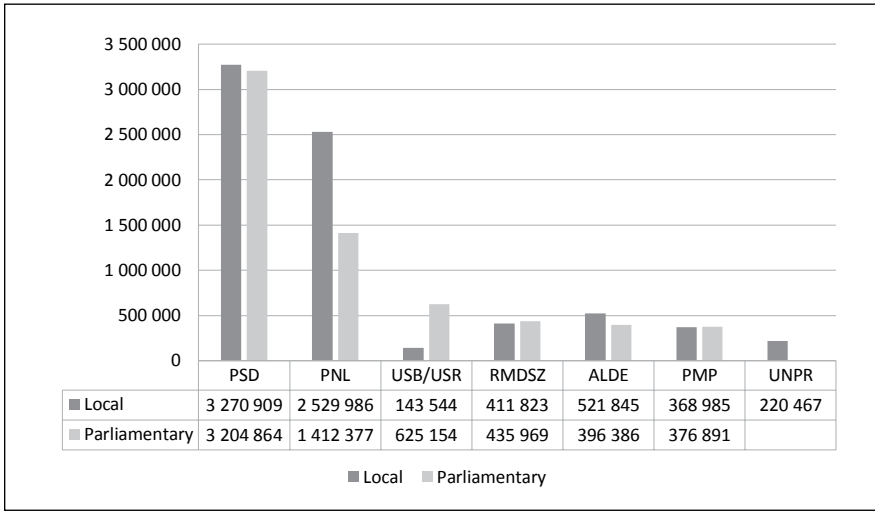


Figure 5: Results of the political parties in the 2016 local and parliamentary elections (number of votes)

The data shows that the results of the PSD did not change much in absolute numbers; however, the PNL lost more than 1 million votes by the December election. Since the loss of PNL is more than the votes cast for the USR, it seems reasonable to argue that the low electoral turnout can mostly be explained with the absence of the PNL’s electorate in the parliamentary elections. Decrease in the ALDE’s result follows the decrease in turnout, and the votes cast for PMP did not change significantly between the two elections. For which party the UNPR’s electorate cast their vote at the parliamentary elections remains an open question, but it can be presumed that most of them voted for the PSD and not for the PMP.

Hungarian results

The number of votes cast for the RMDSZ list (on which two seats were granted for the MPP) was 435,989 in the House and 440,409 in the Senate, which make up 6.18% and 6.28% respectively, of all votes. This result makes the RMDSZ the fourth biggest party in the parliament, with 21 MPs and 9 senators. In the previous term, the RMDSZ had 18 MPs and 9 senators. The 2016 result of the Hungarian party breaks a negative tendency, and returns to the level of RMDSZ’s results of 2004 and 2008.

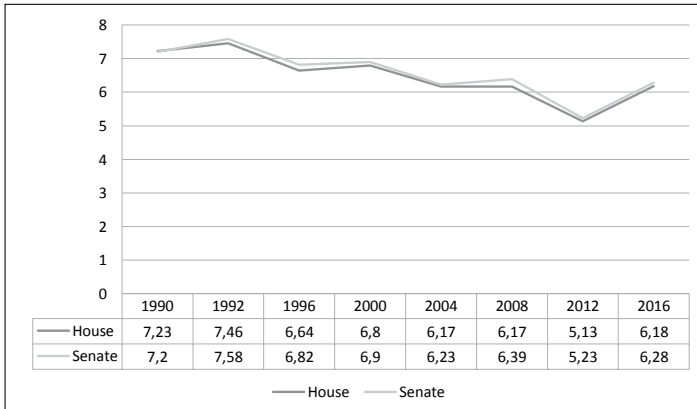


Figure 6: Results of the RMDSZ in the parliamentary elections, 1990-2016, House and Senate (%)

It is interesting to observe the previous election results of the RMDSZ completed with the EMNP’s (Transylvanian Hungarian People’s Party) results of 2012:

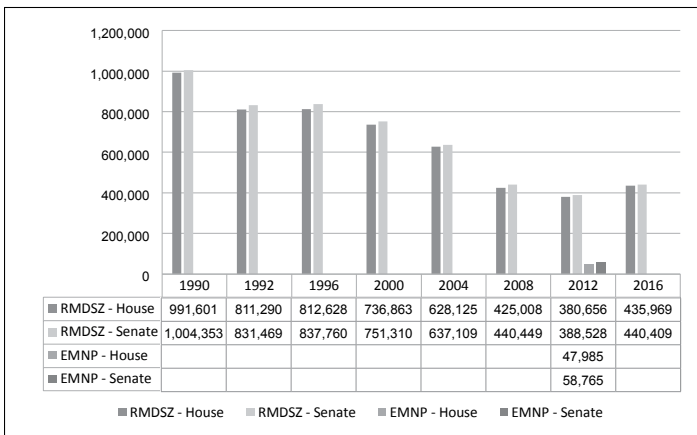


Figure 7: Results of the RMDSZ and EMNP in the parliamentary elections, 1990-2016, House and Senate (number of votes)

The number of votes cast for the RMDSZ continuously decreased until 2012, but in 2016 they went back again to the level of 2008.

Comparing the votes cast for Hungarian parties between 2012 and 2016 shows that the 2016 results are significantly behind the 2012 local election results (when three Hungarian organizations were competing for the ethnic votes), but are also significantly higher than the results of the European parliamentary and presidential elections.

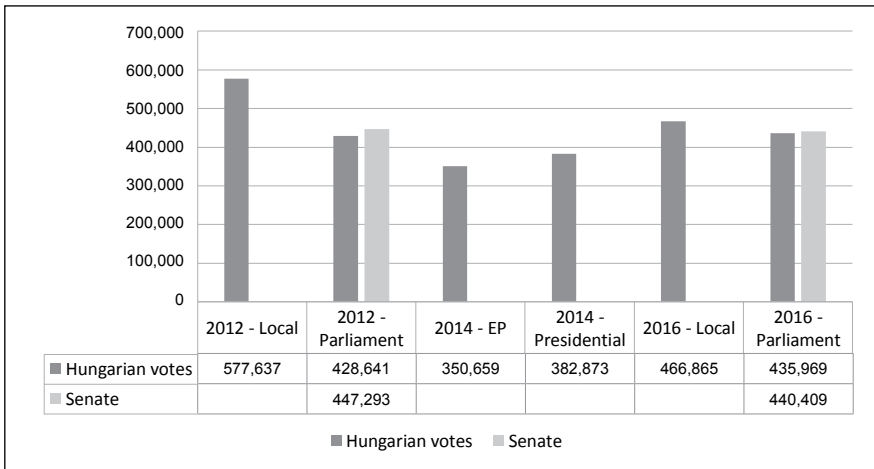


Figure 8: Votes cast for Hungarian parties or Hungarian candidates, 2012-2016, in local, parliamentary, European Parliamentary, and presidential elections

The following map shows the 2016 parliamentary election results of the RMDSZ in the Transylvanian counties compared with the proportion of Hungarians living in the respective counties according to the 2011 census. Obviously, the proportion of Hungarians since 2011 changed, probably decreased, moreover, a comparison with the proportion of the Hungarian adult population would be more precise.

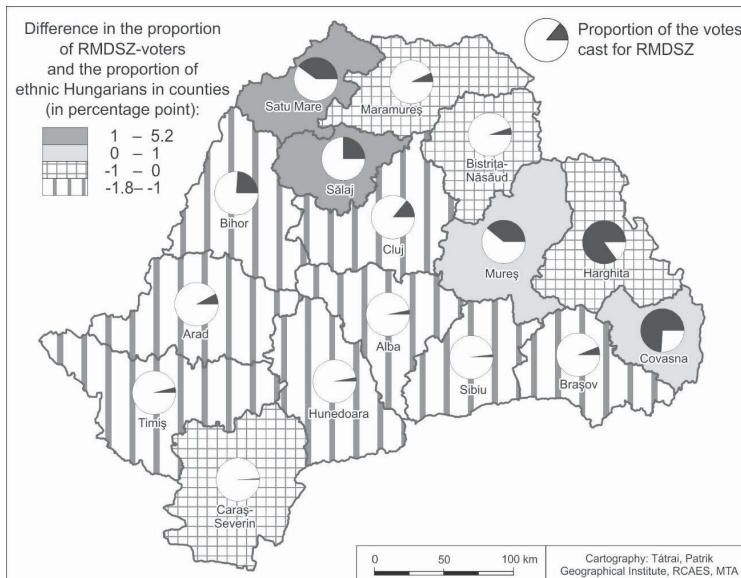


Figure 9: Proportion of the votes cast for the RMDSZ in the 2016 parliamentary elections, compared to the ratio of Hungarians at the 2011 census, within Transylvanian counties

What we can see is that the RMDSZ achieved remarkable results in Satu Mare, where the party's votes surpassed the ethnic Hungarian ratio. In this respect, Mureş, Maramureş, and Sălaj counties show great results for the RMDSZ too. In the two counties with ethnic Hungarian majority, Harghita and Covasna, as well as Bihor and Cluj, votes for the RMDSZ were barely under the proportion of ethnic Hungarians. In terms of regions, votes cast for the RMDSZ in Partium were above, in Székely Land they were barely under, and in Central Transylvania and in other regions with scattered Hungarian communities they were well under the ethnic ratio.

The sum of the RMDSZ and EMNP results from 2012 roughly equals the 2016 parliamentary results of the RMDSZ.

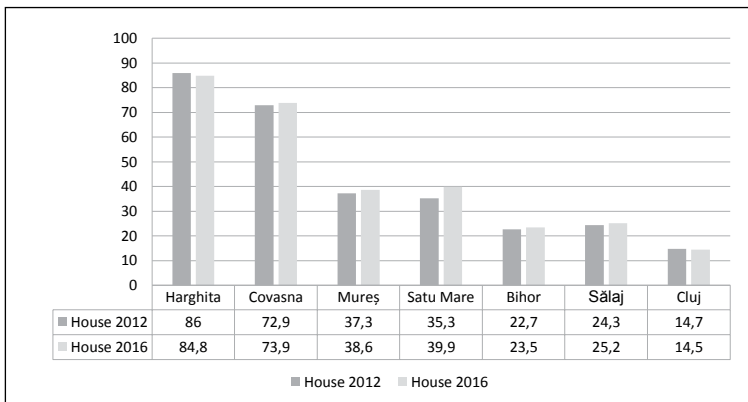


Figure 10: Proportion of votes cast for the RMDSZ in the 2012 local and 2016 parliamentary elections in the Transylvanian counties / 1. (%)

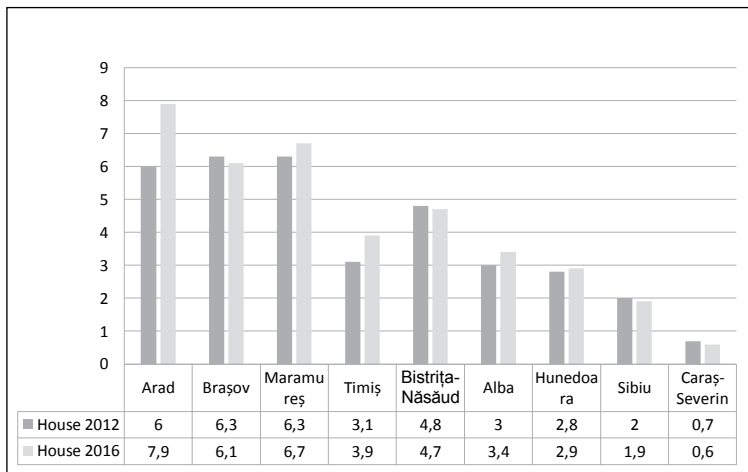


Figure 11: Proportion of votes cast for the RMDSZ in the 2012 local and 2016 parliamentary elections in the Transylvanian counties / 2. (%)

The change in the number of votes from 2012 to 2016 for Hungarian parties shows a definite increase in Cluj and counties in Partium (Bihor, Sălaj, Satu Mare), but a decrease in the counties with Hungarian majority populations. In counties with scattered Hungarian communities, the tendency is not obvious; the number of votes increased in Arad, Timiș, Alba, and Hunedoara, but decreased elsewhere.

County	2012, House	2016, House	Difference,%
Harghita	82,814+17,069=99,883	99,375	-0.5
Covasna	40,352+10,812=51,164	50,135	-2
Mureș	66,447+5,610=72,057	68,564	-4.8
Sate Mare	37,883+2,636=40,519	42,957	+6
Bihor	40,408+6,507=46,915	50,403	+7.4
Sălaj	18,498+1,603=20,101	21,189	+5.4
Cluj	27,650+35,87=31,237	34,634	+10.9
Arad	8,319	10,869	+30.7
Brașov	13,048	11,825	-9.4
Maramureș	8,682	8,780	+1.1
Timiș	5,943	8,316	+39.9
Bistrița-Năsăud	4,699	4,376	-6.9
Alba	3,664+131=3,795	4,135	+12.9
Hunedoara	4,674	4,714	+0.9
Sibiu	2,714	2,559	-5.7
Caraș-Severin	729	618	-15.2

Table 1: Difference of the votes cast for the RMDSZ (%), based on the number of votes received in the 2012 local and 2016 parliamentary elections, (counties where the number of votes cast for RMDSZ in 2016 were higher than in 2012 are in bold)

Conclusions

The parliamentary elections in 2016 in Romania, – for the most part because of the low turnout of the electorate of the PNL, – resulted in a left-leaning coalition consisting of the PSD and the ALDE. The elected government seems to be stable; however, the Romanian party system is rather unpredictable and tends to change surprisingly often. The opposition parties seek explanations for their defeat: both Dacian Cioloş' technocratic government, as well as the PNL's leadership face a lot of accusations for losing one million voters since the local elections in 2016. Nevertheless, the newly established USR and its remarkable results played a crucial role in the opposition's defeat, as it appealed to the electorate of PNL with its anti-corruption campaign and the rejection of the Romanian political mainstream. Similarly, the electorate of former president Bănescu's party, the PMP, had anti-PSD sentiments, therefore some of the right-wing votes were cast for PMP. Consequently, while left-leaning parties successfully concentrated and mobilized their – traditionally very disciplined – electorate, right-wing parties were divided, and even those that had cooperated in the campaign only weakened each other's positions during the elections.

It is possible that even the winning party, the PSD, and its president, Liviu Dragnea were surprised by the unexpectedly good results. The winning coalition could secure their majority without incorporating the Hungarian party in the government. Thus, the parliamentary majority seems more stable than usual, and there will probably be less migration among the political parties as there was in the previous term; MPs are only likely to migrate towards the governing parties in the future.

At the moment, the major conflict on the political landscape in Romania stands between the governing parties (led by Liviu Dragnea) and the opposition (led by Klaus Johannis). It can be expected that the PSD, besides the popular redistributive measures, will try to change the course and intensity of the anti-corruption fight, and to diminish the roles of the strong institutions in the process: the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) and the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI). These are the issues that are at stake for Dragnea and the PSD; if the court decided that Dragnea is guilty in the anticorruption case launched against him and sentenced him for imprisonment, that would overwrite the great election results and would force the most powerful Romanian politician to quit politics. It is a well-known fact that the Romanian Intelligence Service has a powerful role in Romanian politics. Therefore, Dragnea will probably try to extend his influence on the Services and the anticorruption agencies so he can keep his leading position. As it is a presidential competence to monitor these institutions, it would weaken Johannis' position if the PSD-ALDE coalition could acquire some partial control over them.

The new Romanian government does not have any elections ahead for two years. This enables the government to address – besides the elements of their election program – some of the unpopular issues, such as the law on amnesty, which would actually mean a relief for the corrupt politicians. The opposition parties in the parliament are preoccupied with their own issues, which might be a threat for president Johannis, because in case he wants to run for the presidency in 2019 again, he will need a strong party which will support his candidacy.

Concerning the results of the Hungarian party it can be said that the negative tendency ended at the 2016 election, and the ratio of votes cast for the RMDSZ reached the results of 2004 and 2008 again. Although the number of votes cast for the RMDSZ in 2016 approached the number of votes gained in 2008, they clearly fell back compared to the 2012 local elections. Even though the RMDSZ achieved remarkable results, its political weight is rather small because the governing parties have a stable majority in the parliament. The governing coalition is open to the Hungarian party's approach, and they agreed to cooperate in the parliament; the results of this agreement can become visible during 2017. As the opposition parties are divided and are in conflict, and they are dealing with their own issues and not with organizing an anti-government alliance, there seems to be no other alternative for the RMDSZ but to cooperate with the governing parties. This situation might change with the prospect of the 2019 presidential election; parties will concentrate their efforts to get the presidential position, which might considerably change the power structures in the parliament.