

## The Romanian Academic Society (SAR) warns

### ROMANIANS ARE LOOKING FOR A POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE

- 72% of the Romanian voters want a political change in 2004, but only 42% see a real alternative to the current government
- Almost 66% consider that corruption has actually increased since the anti-corruption legal "package" was adopted one year ago
- 45% of those who would vote today for the current ruling party (Social Democrats, PSD) prefer a change in the 2004 elections
- 80% of Romanian voters oppose the political migration and demand tougher regulations to stop it

The data presented in this Crisis Paper were generated through a survey conducted between March 3-10, 2004, by the Bucharest-based institute Center of Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS). The pre-standardized questionnaire was designed by the SAR on a probabilistic, bi-stadium sample stratified in the first phase and random in the second. The size of the sample was 1098 persons having the right to vote. The margin of error is +/- 2.95% with a probability of error of 5%. The interviews were conducted at the subjects' residences.

#### PARTY ALIGNMENTS ARE STABLE... AND YET ROMANIANS WANT A CHANGE

Voting options are important, but even more important are the last year's trends, when so many governmental reshuffles took place, laws against corruption were promoted, Romania became a *de facto* a member of NATO and was about to close the process of negotiation with the EU. Unlike in 2002, when the majority of Romanians refused to believe that Romania would be invited to join NATO, in 2004 the majority (63%) strongly believes that Romania will join the European Union in 2007. However, this majority continues to think that the country is heading in a wrong direction (46%, compared to 41%), and that the current government is not capable of ruling it properly (54.3%, compared to 33.9%).

In spite of the general impression created by the recent surveys, most Romanians (72%) want a political change in 2004. Those who believe that an alternative really exists form a majority (42% YES against 39% NO), being slightly more numerous than those who doubt the existence of an

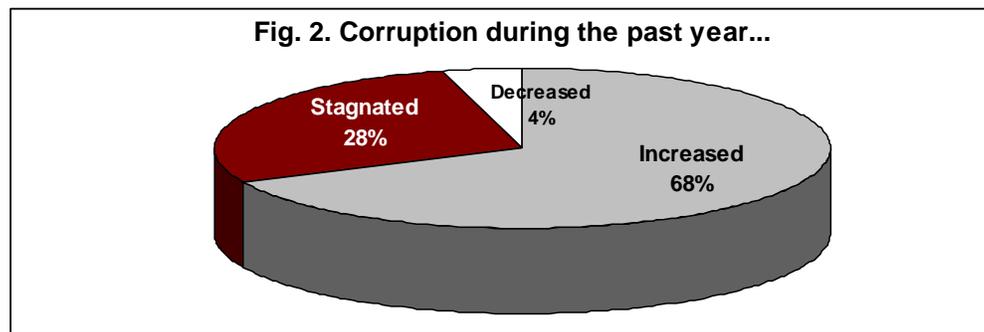
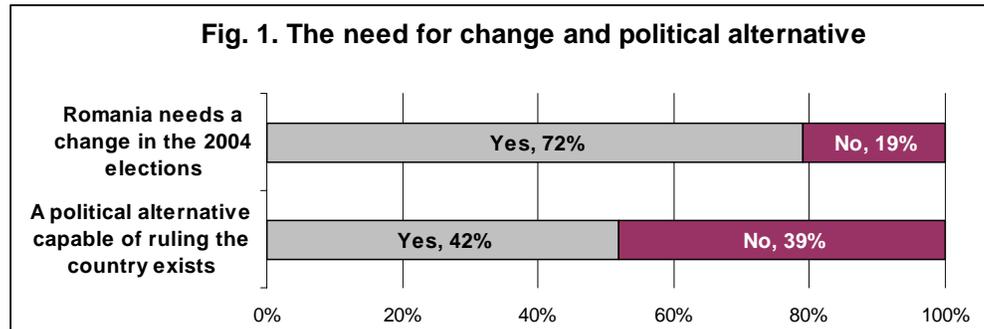
alternative. There is a discrepancy here between the drive for change, which characterizes two thirds of the electorate, and the lower level of trust in the availability of a viable political alternative to the current government (42%).

There are also other signs that confirm that the need for change and that the long-term trend goes against the current government. **Almost two thirds of Romanians consider that, starting with last year when the anti-corruption legislation**

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*Other reports on governance by SAR, public policy and opinion studies, and the political science quarterly PolSci are available from [www.sar.org.ro](http://www.sar.org.ro)*

was adopted, the corruption increased instead of going down, while a quarter believe that the level of corruption stagnated. Hence, nobody really trusts the fight against corruption or that the ruling party is really going to tackle the problem. By contrast in Bulgaria, where SAR conducted last year a series of surveys, 52% of the public say that real progress has been made and the government's honesty improved. Briefly, the public always recognizes real progress when there is one!



But who wants the change? The voters of the opposition parties, both those of the *DA Alliance* between the Liberals (PNL) and the Democrats (PD) and of the *Greater Romania Party* (PRM, whose electorate is very radical although in Parliament its MPs often vote alongside PSD). **45% of the people who would vote today for PSD prefer a change in the 2004 elections** and a quarter of the total number of PSD voters believe that there is a viable political alternative to the governmental party. This electorate will probably move to other parties during the electoral campaign, either to DA or PRM. The need for change is acute especially in cities with over 200,000 inhabitants, where the preferred option is the Alliance between the Liberals and the Democrats. In smaller towns, appeared as the result of forced urbanization under Ceausescu, the preferred path for change is the extreme-right PRM. This party has the most uneducated and uninformed voters, with an average income below that of PSD voters. The DA Alliance remains strictly confined to urban and suburban zones with a superior education and income. Fringe alternatives (the party of the football club owner Gigi Becali; or the Romanian-American Lia Roberts) can also recruit voters inclined towards change with low education and information. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that they will attract many of Theodor Stolojan's and Alliance's voters, as it was suggested: these are the most educated and stable of the whole pool.

The problem of the Alliance is that so far, apart from this urban electorate faithful to the center-right ideas, it has not succeeded in convincing anybody else. Out of the electorate who brought the 1996 victory of the Democratic Convention of Romania, the Alliance has now only 54%, while 11%

defected to PRM, 20% to PSD and the rest to very small center-right parties like the People's Action (Acțiunea Populară) and the Humanist Party of Romania. In conclusion, although there is a great potential for change, the breakthrough has not yet occurred. Both the Alliance and PRM remain for now within the boundaries of their old electorate. This is not surprising as long as none of them had any important public initiative in the last months. The only significant advertising event of the Alliance was its creation, but even this was surrounded by so much caution, controversy and technical details that the advertising effect was very low. Moreover, it can also be noted that so far parties have had no chance if they were not built around leaders with name recognition. The People's Action (Actiunea Populara - AP), in spite of the mobilization of the governmental party and the media against it, finds itself in a better position than the Union for the Reconstruction of Romania (URR) which has no outstanding public figure.

**Fig. 3. Voting intentions in March 2004**

	Preferences in local elections (%)		Preferences in national elections (%)	
	Out of the total sample	Out of the declared preferences	Out of the total sample	Out of the declared preferences
DA Alliance PNL-PD			21.1	30.2
<i>National Liberal Party (PNL)*</i>	13.1	19.8		
<i>Democrat Party (PD)*</i>	6.4	9.7		
Greater Romania Party (PRM)	9.5	14.4	10.7	15.3
Social Democratic Party (PSD)	27.4	41.4	29.1	41.5
Humanist Party of Romania (PUR)	3.2	4.9	2.9	4.2
Democratic Union of the Hungarians in Romania (UDMR)	3.8	5.8	3.9	5.5
Other	2.7	4	2.3	3.3
I would not vote	33.9	-	30	-

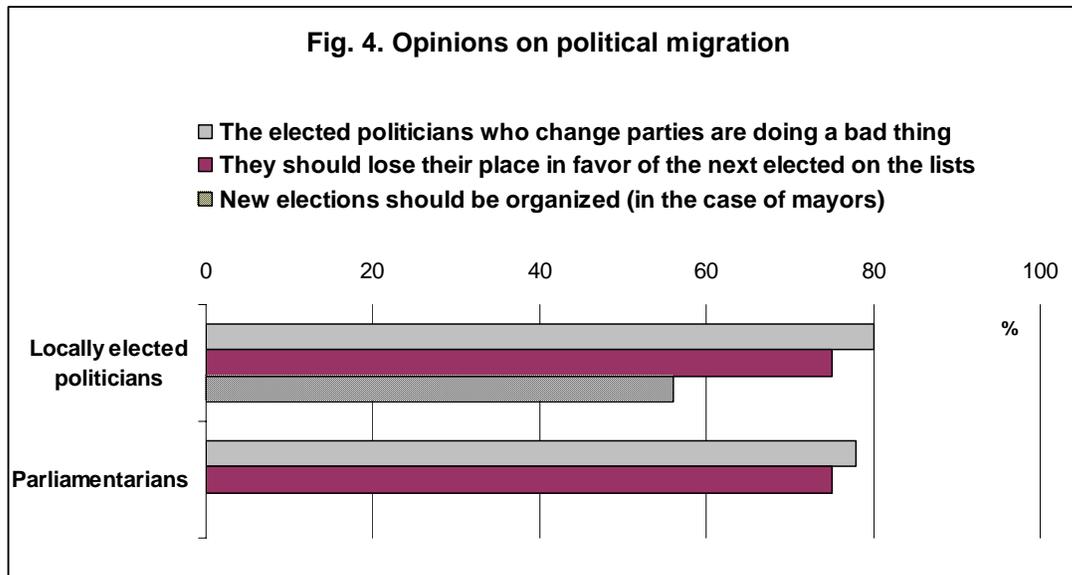
\* Run together in national elections and separately in local elections

### **POLITICS: MORE COMMON SENSE AND LESS IDEOLOGY**

The indicators of political attitudes remain consistent with the previous surveys of SAR. With the exception of the right-center electorate, which is limited to the voters of the Alliance, of the National Peasants' Christian Democratic Party (PNTCD) and of the People's Action, there is no significant interest in ideology. Most of the voters consider that ideology does not count at all (60%). Instead it is the personality which matters when they vote for a politician, as well as the character and the belief that he/she would really do something for them. The Romanians speak out angrily against political migration (switching parties) which they regard as a form of prostitution. When this happens they would like that the respective officials lose their mandate and be replaced by the next on the party list. An absolute majority, but smaller than the former, supports the idea of organizing new elections in the case of those who are directly elected, such as mayors.

If most Romanians are squarely against political migration, which is assimilated with corruption, why cannot proper regulations be adopted as long as the electoral legislation is still to be passed in the Parliament? There are no legal obstacles for adopting various forms of regulation – including "blank

resignations" demanded by each party from their representatives – which do not imply big changes in legislation. What is needed in fact is political will, especially from the governmental party, which is the main beneficiary of this phenomenon. Of course, this kind of regulations will not solve all of the problems associated with politics in Romania. As long as there are resources for corruption (disproportionate power of a single party) and a weak consciousness of those who are to be corrupted, there will be always ways of perverting the normal. The ruling party has not only attracted individuals, but also entire parties that, consequently, fooled their voters. However, norms applicable to individuals may be clearer, easier to design and endorsed by the public. Without them, it will be hard for Romania to join the European Union with a class of free-floating politicians.



Finally, Romanians hold very clear opinions on two other issues that have been recently debated. 88% are against the involvement of the priests in politics and their candidature on party lists; and 48% want to see more women in the public life. Regarding this latter idea, 27% oppose and 22% say that it is not important. Significantly, more women (57%) than men (34%) consider that an increased presence of the women in the Parliament would have a favorable influence on the Romanian political life. The group who oppose this idea is predominantly male.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The immediate adoption of regulations aimed at restricting political migration, applicable both at the local and national.
2. More interest for the women voters and their needs. Especially parties with urban support should pay attention to the feminine public which is a significant, but neglected source of specialists and votes.
3. A more consistent policy against corruption based on implementation and not only on adoption of laws. Like baroness Nicholson (the EU Parliament's rapporteur for Romania), our domestic public believes too that under PSD corruption has increased instead of decreasing. This favors neither the ruling party nor the country, since the resulting effect is distrust in politics, undermining a still young and fragile democracy. Solutions exist: e.g. solving problem one would help solving problem three. The public sees clearly the connection between them – only those who take advantage of the migration refuse to see it.