

## SAR POLICY BRIEF No. 28

Domestic Parties and the  
European Affairs

# ROMANIAN PARTIES FACING EUROPE

Romanians vote this weekend for the first time to send 35 MEPs to the European Parliament. The public awareness of European issues is low, while political scandals have dominated the campaign and overshadowed any substantial debate. SAR maps for the first time the positions of Romanian parties on European issues. Earlier this year we sent a questionnaire to all party leaders; the answers are summarized in the brief below. The full positions of parties (in Romanian) are available at [www.sar.org.ro](http://www.sar.org.ro)



The best prepared party was UDMR (Democratic Union of the Hungarians in Romania), which had obviously debated these topics already, and thus was able to present a coherent position. For the other parties it took months and months to fill in the questionnaire, and it still is not clear if this action was done through the regular channels, i.e. internal debates, followed by a decision made by the party structures in charge.

A party position is more than an expert's opinion. One may object that Romanian parties do not need such positions, as they may simply adopt that of the political group they are affiliated to. But this is not a normal situation. The European Parliament political group position is made up of the individual positions of member parties, filtered through the sieve of national interest and ideological interpretation, based on the traits of each culture. Many of the positions expressed by Romanian parties are not fully digested, with only minimal efforts to adjust

them to the popular or socialist line. There are also exceptions and they are the beginning.

European integration has two sides. The first more general one regards the direction and future of the overall European project, beyond the common market and generally accepted common regulations in areas such as environmental issues or telecommunications. European here divide in those who want to continue political integration until Europe becomes a federal entity who sometimes invoke the two-speed Europe approach and those who believe integration cannot deepen more except perhaps for more coordination in areas like migration or foreign policy. The second perspective is a national one and concerns Romania's further integration. Romania's accession must be followed by genuine integration and convergence and parties should also have positions on this.

Romanian parties support European integration and unanimously believe that it is fully beneficial for Romania. The positions are quite similar regarding the integration process on both perspectives. Apart from UDMR, which believes that integration must advance towards federalisation, the other parties support the current form, namely stopping the process at this stage. Regarding the Constitution, all parties agree with the Lisbon consensual outcome namely adopting the Constitution without major amendments.

The questionnaire also included an item about the European Parliament, which received some surprising answers. Although all parties, with the exception of UDMR, are in favour of maintaining the current status, they argue for increased powers for the European Parliament. UDMR, on the other hand, is the only supporter of federalism but opts for the current formula noticing that a change in the balance of power would create other dysfunctions.

#### • Social and economic positions

Regarding the common market, all Romanian political parties are in favour of the maximum position, which is a classical liberal position with the Commission acting as regulator. Therefore they don't support the positions that national structures should have an increased control over the European ones such as Central Bank, as Nicholas Sarkozy proposed.

But only the liberal-democrats are fully liberal to the end, in that they support the Anglo-Saxon development model, promoted by Tony Blair and supported by a number of liberal parties in Europe, as the Danish one. The Social Democratic Party (PSD) believes that Europe should strengthen the European Social Model throughout the continent, in the form of extended social protection model which Germany started to dismantle, although unconvincingly, at the end of the Schroeder era. The Democratic Party (PD) is also rather in favour of the European social model, as are the Christian-Democrats in the Popular group. PNL (National Liberal Party) does not believe in European wide social model, but each country should follow whatever model it chooses. PLD (Liberal Democratic Party) is the only party against the Globalisation Adjustment Fund, a modest but ambitious plan of distributing aid from EU level to those who are to lose because of globalisation. All parties believe that taxes should be rather set at the national level, therefore in Bucharest and not in Brussels.

#### • European funds

With no exception, the parties support the current model of the structural funds, as Romania has only to gain from this arrangement. As for the agriculture funds, the Democratic Party is the only one in favour of maintaining the current model at least until 2013 with the same argument of better benefits for Romania. The Democratic Party pinpointed that its Euro-observers have already opposed the attempts of changing policies on go, promoted by some deputies in the EP commissions. The other

parties are rather more in favour of the British position supporting CAP reform, and against the French position of blocking any modification.

• **International topics**

All Romanian parties are in favour of a common migration policy, without any reserves regarding, for instance the need for a separate migration policy for the Moldovan citizens. When the topic of Moldova arises, however, PSD, PNL and PLD all request a special status for the Republic of Moldova, considering that the current EU neighbourhood policy does not provide clear perspectives for Moldova's accession. The Democratic Party has a more ambiguous position in this respect. UDMR considers that the neighbourhood policy is adequate to solve Moldova's problems.

PNL, PSD and UDMR are in favour of a common foreign and security policy, an important goal but not fulfilled so far. PLD is strongly in favour of a national policy, a position which resembles the European conservatory parties' opinion. PD is again ambiguous, in that it supports some common policies and underlines the need for each country to have its own diplomatic corps. Party differences vanish when discussions about the United States arise. All parties are in favour of a midway position, Europe as an equal and critical partner of the US, not as an unconditioned ally or global counterweight, the other two possible options.

• **Regionalism**

There was in the questionnaire a special item about the local administration structure in Romania. This is not an accession prerequisite, nor is there a common European model. However, a frequent effect of Europe has been regionalisation, because of the fund distribution methods. As each country has its own particularity, SAR chose three issues:

*Table 1. Parties' position towards regionalisation*

1. Maintaining the current organisation	PD
2. Administrative reorganisation with stronger regions, regional parliaments, but based on the current development regions (8).	PNL PSD
3. Administrative reorganisation using historical regions (Transylvania, Banat, Moldavia, Wallachia, Dobrogea)	UDMR PLD

The PD position was rather more nuanced. They argue that the territorial organization should take into account the performance in the absorption of structural funds. Therefore, their option for the current system is only temporary arguing for an assessment of the absorption capacity. Another formula should be used only if the performances are not satisfactory. On the other hand, PSD makes a very convincing argument that, if the meaning of these funds is to mitigate development gaps, then the current regions are the most suitable for the purpose. UDMR does not like the current regions (it has repeatedly asked for a mostly Hungarian region to be created), but would also be in favour of a more autonomous and larger region of Transylvania.

Generally at the European level, analysts believe there are two lines of separation with regard to political party positions. One is the traditional left wing/right wing dichotomy, where the right wing is more in favour of moderate regulations of the market by the state. The second is the national-cultural dimension, thoroughly used by the analysts to predict the position on European issues starting from the national ideology of a party. Ecologists and libertarians place themselves on one end of this continuum, while traditionalists and nationalists on the other end. Both extremes are Euro-sceptical, and the centre is pro-European. In other words, extreme left and extreme right parties alike are rather Euro-sceptical. However, over the past years,

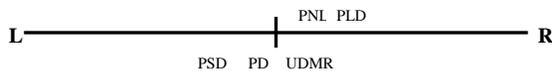
parties which weren't too enthusiastic drew nearer the centre position, starting with ecologists and ending with socialists.

After this brief overview of doctrines, the profile of Romanian parties looks as follows:

1. PNL – a neoliberal party.
2. PLD- a conservatory liberal party.
3. PSD- a social-democratic party.
4. PD – a neoliberal party, but with a slightly unclear profile in some respects.
5. UDMR – a neoliberal, Euro federalist party.

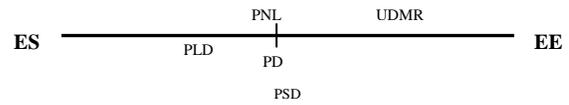
The conclusion of this brief review is that the centre and centre-right tiers of Romanian politics are very crowded, with little ideological differences among the parties. The alliance of PNL (which also included PLD at the time), PD and UDMR in 2004 was a rational one, from a doctrine point of view. But on European issues not even PSD is not very far from these parties, As for the democrats many doctrine doors are left ajar, it is not impossible to make the programs of these two parties more compatible.

*Figure 1. Left to right axis placement of the parties in terms of European affairs*



No matter what the reasons for breaking the PNL-PD alliance, they do not seem to have been ideological. Except for UDMR, our parties may join the same European Parliament group, with minimal ideological adjustments. There are two topics of debate still unsolved: regionalisation and political position towards the republic of Moldova. In these cases there is a lack of internal debate and deep understanding of the issues, which must be solved in the future.

*Figure 2. Euro-scepticism to Euro-enthusiasm placement of the parties*



In conclusion, all Romanian parties are euro-enthusiastic. PLD, a small party, is the most liberal party in Romania, and the most Euro-sceptical. UDMR is the most Euro-enthusiastic, PD is the most pragmatic and on its toes when national interests are involved. The most elaborated and complete answers were provided by UDMR and PNL. There are no significant differences with regard to foreign policy. Those who read these results cannot help but wonder why there is so much discontent in a political system where everybody circumvolute the centre. It is clear, therefore, that political fights have no ideological basis. The stakes are placed elsewhere.

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