
ROMANIA IN LIGHT OF EU ACCESSION 2007

THE DELAYED TRANSITION

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More than 15 years after the collapse of the communist system of Nicolae Ceausescu, which was seen as one of the cruellest dictatorships in Eastern Europe, Romania currently faces accession to the European Union.

Regarding economic growth Romania has made some progress in the last few years. However, its backwardness compared to the European Union member states is considerable. Statistically Romania would need approximately 45 years to reach the current GDP-average of the EU-member countries, supposing that the current growth rate remains constant.¹ While standard of living parity does not represent a criterion for entry into the European Union, the fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria is considered the most important condition for the EU integration of the country. According to the last report of the European Commission, Romania has fulfilled both the political and economic criteria of accession into the European Union² and successfully completed negotiations with the European Union on December 2004. On 25th April 2005 the treaty of accession was signed in Luxembourg.

Widespread corruption in numerous institutions of the country is a special challenge from the viewpoint of its integration into the European Union.³ The Romanian government has ambitiously been trying to implement reforms in the fields of judiciary and police, in order to avoid a delay in the EU-accession. The results still are not satisfying and it is not realistic to suppose that the problem of corruption can be solved in a foreseeable time. The reasons can be traced back particularly to the communist past not yet fully clarified and to difficulties in the development of an emancipated civil society. These are usually mentality-related⁴ and belong to the legacy of the authoritarian system in the Ceausescu era.

¹ Schlesak, D. (40/2004) Hammer, sickle and mercedes star, Die Zeit.

² Progress Report of the European Commission on Romania, (May 2006).

³ Franziska Annerl und Wolfgang Böhm: Romania/Bulgaria: Difficult Enlargement, Die Presse, (25.01.2005); See also: Corrupt state with old cadre, MDR-Manuscript, (27.06.2004)

⁴ Annual progress report on Romania's EU-integration process, COM 2004, 657 final, 22.

In contrast with the former communist states of Eastern Europe the change of regime in Romania took place violently, via a revolution, which was initiated, controlled and led not by the citizens, but by the political elite of the old Communist-camp.⁵ The partly puzzling events that took place around the fall and execution of the Ceausescu and the unclear role of Securitate, the Romanian secret service still rest heavily over Romania. Neither the political elite nor the main parties have been able to find a consensus about the evaluation of the upheaval in the year 1989. The fact that coming to terms with the past is still to come and that the change of elite has taken place only quite recently is a serious obstacle to the consolidation of democracy in Romania.

Referring to Wolfgang Merkel's⁶ concept of transition research, this paper deals with the changes in the political system of Romania after the 'revolution' of 1989 and with the country's integration into the European Union. According to Merkel the consolidation of democracy in a transition country depends on a complex cause, which leads to the fall of an autocratic regime and is followed by an institutionalisation and democratisation phase. In this context special attention should be paid to the question whether the execution of dictator Ceausescu has led to the democratisation of the country. Additionally, the role of the political elite in the transformation process should also be highlighted before the analysis of the present consolidation and the basic conditions for EU-accession.

THE UPHEAVAL OF 1989

In the late 1980s Romania was seized by a serious economic crisis.⁷ Nicolae Ceausescu, who followed the deceased Georghe Gheorgiu Dej in 1964 as head of the government, built a Stalinist-type empire during his 'reign', similar to the one established by Enver Hoxhas in Albania.⁸

Minorities were systematically discriminated against, national feelings were mobilised, dissidents were persecuted and eliminated. Securitate⁹, the Romanian secret service which comprised around 40.000 officials and several hundred

⁵ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: Special case Romania – Corruption, shortfalls of the party system, authoritarianism, Link: www.kas.de, download 28.08.2006, 12.

⁶ Merkel names three main phases of system-transformation: End of the autocrat regime, institutionalization of democracy and consolidation of democracy. See: Merkel, Wolfgang: System transformation – An introduction to the theory and empiricism of the transformation sciences, Opladen, (1999), 136.

⁷ Rados, A. (1990), The complot of Securitate – Romania's betrayed revolution, Hamburg, 53.

⁸ Ibid. 44.

⁹ Official name: Securitatea statului; English: safety of the state.

thousand unofficial members, served as the most important means for the persecution of the so called 'betrayers of the socialist model'. Ceausescu also used Securitate against potential competitors within the party in order to strengthen his influence and power.

The development of an extreme clientelism led to a situation when fewer and fewer people believed in the national institutions and to mistrust of many communist and military functionaries towards the Ceausescu clique. The fall of the of Berlin wall, the collapse of communism in Prague, the increasing resentment of the population because of extreme poverty, prompted Ceausescu to further strengthen his power, in order to prevent a possible internal coup.

Meanwhile, a network consisting of dissatisfied and disappointed CP-functionaries and Securitate-members was formed and eagerly worked on a revolution plan in the background. This network, whose membership also included the CP-member Ion Iliescu and Securitate-member Virgil Măgureanu, intensified its activities striving to take over power.

At the end of December 1989, more and more young people, students and opponents of the regime gathered outside the palace and demanded the resignation of Ceausescu and an end to the dictatorship. In the course of the demonstration about a hundred civilians were killed and hundreds of people were injured. While the crowd tried to attack the palace-building of the Central Committee, Stănculescu, the minister of defence managed to convince Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife to escape in a military helicopter, by assuring them that the flight was necessary for their security.

Meanwhile, the conspirators within the CP and the Securitate tried to monopolise power. Iliescu, who was significantly involved in the downfall, distinguished himself as a 'leader of the revolution'. With the participation of several generals and other high-ranking persons, such as Virgil Măgureanu and Victor Stănculescu, he tried to establish a provisional committee excluding dissidents and conservative groups.

After consultations on 22nd December 1989 Iliescu announced on the state television that the recently founded 'Front for the National Rescue' would soon organise free elections and that the claim to leadership of a single political party is hereby finished. In the two following days chaos prevailed in Bucharest. While people continued to protest, as they did not trust the new leadership, Securitate

members spread the message that armed Arab groups of terrorists¹⁰ and Ceausescu supporters would try to take over the power. The following two days were characterised by demonstrations and shootings—the number of victims amounted to over one thousand.¹¹

At Christmas 1989 the Ceausescus were sentenced to death after a fast procedure. Victor Stănculescu and Virgil Măgureanu (who was appointed head of the SRI¹², successor of the Securitate) were present at the trial. When the execution of the Ceausescus was disclosed in the media and the state-controlled television showed some shots of the ‘trial’, the first reaction was enthusiasm, whereas those, who were critical of the manner of the trial, considered his execution as a lost chance to clarify important aspects of the uprising.¹³

The procure against Ceausescu and the seizure of power by the FSN, which could win the parliamentary elections in May 2000, did not lead to the displacement of the old regime for Romania, but rather to a continuity¹⁴ of the political elite, which won its ‘democratic legitimacy’ by the execution of the Ceausescus.¹⁵

In the first few years the new ruling powers governed with similar authoritarian methods as Ceausescu and proceeded with brutality against their political competitors.¹⁶ The state and security apparatus continued to be controlled by them. In contrast with most former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the uprising in Romania was led and controlled by the elite of the old regime.

The re-election of the post-communists in 1991 and 1992 was considered by a minority of intellectuals as a lost chance and an unfinished revolution.

¹⁰ Ibid, 163; See also: Heinen, A., (2003) The dictator’s death and the presence of the past: Romania 1989-2003, in: *Leviathan. Magazine for social sciences*, book 2, 174.

¹¹ Heinen, A., (2003) The dictator’s death and the presence of the past: Romania 1989-2003, in: *Leviathan. Magazine for social sciences*, book 2; see also: Details in Timisoara Homepage: www.timisoara.com, in: *Seitenblicke* 3 (2004), Nr. 1, Abs. 16; or: enigmatic revolution, DPA, 22.12.2004; or Romania: delayed and violent revolution, bpb, from politics and contemporary history B 41-42/2004.

¹² SRI: Serviciul Român de Informație – engl. Romanian information service.

¹³ Heinen, A., (2003) The dictator’s death and the presence of the past: Romania 1989-2003, in: *Leviathan. Magazine for social sciences*, book 2, 174.

¹⁴ Lißke, M., (2001) Shortfalls of the civil society and political education in Romania, in *BpB – Bundeszentrale der politischen Bildung, Veranstaltungsdokumentation*, 10.2001, 2; See also: Heinen, A. (2001): The dictator’s death and the presence of the past: Romania 1989-2003, in: *Leviathan. Magazine for social sciences*, book 2177.

¹⁵ Merkel, W. (1999): *System transformation – An introduction to the theory and empiricism of the transformation sciences*, Opladen.

¹⁶ Ibid. 407.

The negative consequences caused by the failure to replace the old political elite¹⁷ and the so-called 'stolen'¹⁸ or 'unfinished'¹⁹ revolution had its impact on Romania's development and democratisation process for a very long time.

CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY

With the fall of the dictator and the adoption of a new constitution establishing Romania as a semi-presidential system, the democratisation phase was far from completed. Both the first phase of the systemic transformation (replacement of the old regime) and the phase of institutionalisation were characterised by deficiencies and therefore failed to create favourable conditions for the consolidation phase.

The new and, at the same time, old ruling powers promised the population efficient reforms leading to a free market in order to improve the disastrous economic situation. Nevertheless, the socio-economic situation worsened increasingly. As a consequence of a dispute between Petre Roman and Ion Iliescu in 1992, new parliamentary elections were held. Iliescu could assert himself and won the elections again. The urgently needed replacement of the political elite failed to materialise again. Despite the introduction of some radical free market reforms the ex-communists did not succeed in reducing poverty and modernising the country.

The state apparatus and the media continued to be controlled by the CP-successors and had a negative impact on the development of a critical civil society. Clientelism and nepotism were still on the agenda. The strongly fragmented party system in Romania led to a polarization of the political debates and, at the same time, to a lasting political instability²⁰: There were three cabinet reshuffles within one legislative period leading to the replacement of not only the Ministers but the Prime Minister as well. At the parliamentary elections of 2000 the post-communists (PDSR – later PSD) under the leadership of Ion Iliescu came off as winners. Adrian Nastase, PDSR politician, whose government was tolerated by the Liberals (PNL) and the 'Hungarian Party' (UDMR), became prime minister. The new parliament was dominated by parties, with a 'dubious character'²¹ as far as democracy was concerned.

¹⁷ Lißke, M., 3.

¹⁸ Heinen, A., 168; See also. Lißke, M., 3.

¹⁹ Romania – The delayed and violent revolution, bpb, from: Politik und Zeitgeschichte B 41-42/2004

²⁰ Lißke, M., 6.

²¹ Merkel, W. (1999): System transformation – An introduction to the theory and empiricism of the transformation sciences, Opladen.

With regard to foreign affairs the Nastase-government could achieve some successes. The EU-integration process of the country deepened between 2000 to 2004.²²

Domestically the balance of this government was not necessarily favourable.²³ Although the macro-economic indicators showed a constant economic growth in Romania, the country was not able to benefit from the foreign portfolio investments.²⁴ In this connection wide-spread corruption, red tape and the still common culture of clientelism²⁵ are considerable obstacles. Many attempts at clarifying the role of Securitate in the upheaval of 1989 and clarifying the past failed.²⁶

The network of the members of the former Securitate, which torpedoed the political, social and economic development of Romania for a long period of time,²⁷ was a considerable obstacle to the establishment and consolidation of democracy and of a constitutional state. At the presidential elections in November 2004 Traian Basescu, head of the Democratic Party succeeded in coming off as winner.

Although the leftist alliance between PSD and PUR (Humanistic Party of Romania) had the majority of the votes, the new president entrusted the liberal Calin Popescu-Triceanu and not the Socialists, with forming the government. The new government aims at combating corruption effectively and at launching programs against poverty. Additionally, it has successfully striven for the EU-accession of Romania in 2007.

CONCLUSION

With the return of the democratic forces in the government, Romania was given the opportunity to combat corruption and organised crime as well as to tackle the political past. The main challenges the country has to face are the break-up of the crusted mafia structures and the creation of a critical civil society with a culture of constructive scepticism and criticism.²⁸

²² Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: Special case Romania – Corruption, shortfalls of the party system, authoritarianism, Link: www.kas.de, Download (28.08.2006), 2.

²³ Romania: difficult search for a new government in Bucharest, Die Presse, (30.11.2004).

²⁴ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: Special case Romania – Corruption, shortfalls of the party system, authoritarianism, Link: www.kas.de, Download (28.08.2006), 3.

²⁵ Lißke, M., 9.

²⁶ Forty kilometres state-security dossiers waiting to be opened in Romania, Siebenbürgische Zeitung (02.10.2000).

²⁷ Corrupt state with old cadre, MDR-Manuscript, (27.06.2004); see also: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: 12-13.

²⁸ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 11.

Only a determined commitment against the old, corrupt nomenclature, which has established a kind of 'autocracy'²⁹ during the 15 years of the transformation process in Romania, could enhance a positive development in the democratic consolidation of the country.

Furthermore, there is a need for a reform in the structure of the political parties because currently they are oriented towards individual persons and ideology rather than towards concrete social and economic programs and plans. As Merkel correctly states, the consolidation of a civil society is a long process, which 'can take decades and can be sealed through a change of generation'.³⁰ As a result of the 'lost revolution' and the ensuing years of 'defective democracy'³¹ Romania has lost several years in the consolidation process.

However, the prospect of the EU-entry has proved to be beneficial particularly for the institutionalisation of democracy in the country. During the last years a basically critical media has emerged, which—despite a certain lack of professionalism—is an important instrument of controlling the political leadership and has a positive impact on the formation of the civil society.

On 26th September 2006 the European Commission (EC) recommended to the European Parliament and to the European Council the accession of the two candidate countries Romania and Bulgaria in the year 2007. Since certain deficiencies in the field of judiciary and administration have not been dispelled, the EC recommends the inclusion of provisional clauses particularly as regards the internal market and the joint domestic and legislation policy. In its report the EC criticises that '*... a fully consistent interpretation and application of the law in all courts has not yet been ensured; some elected CSM members continue to face potential conflicts of interest in inspection matters and individual ethical issues that affect the CSM's reputation*'.³²

Romania has attested further progress in the combat against corruption, especially through efficient, neutral ascertainment against high-ranking office holders. Nonetheless '*...there needs to be a clear political will to demonstrate the sustainability and irreversibility of the recent positive progress in fighting corruption*'.³³

²⁹ Schlesak, D., (40/2004): Hammer, sickle and Mercedes star, Die Zeit.

³⁰ Lißke, M., 10.

³¹ Merkel, W. (1999): System transformation – An introduction to the theory and empiricism of the transformation sciences, Opladen, 408.

³² EU-Homepage, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2006/sept/report_bg_ro_2006_en.pdf, Download (07.10.2006).

³³ Ibid, 7.

Neither EU-politicians nor Romanian politicians or experts³⁴ assume that the EU accession of Romania would solve all problems, such as corruption, organised crime and clientelism, which are rooted mainly in the Ceausescu-era,³⁵ overnight. The transformation process will not be finished automatically, whereby the chance of success and the duration of the process will depend on the speed of reforms and the will of the Romanian government to introduce reforms. The main challenges for the government are, on one hand, the reduction of poverty and, on the other, the efficient and determined fight against corruption, which paralyses the development of the country.

Dealing with the communist past and condemning all individuals, who have proved to be corrupt or to have had abused their authority, as well as bringing about a positive change in the political elite are important steps toward the consolidation of democracy and a successful integration into the European Union.

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³⁴ Romania could not change over night: Interview with the foreign minister of Romania: Mihai Razvan Ungureanu, ZEIT.de, 25.04.2006; see also: Schlesak, D. (40/2004): Hammer, sickle and and mercedes star, Die Zeit.

³⁵ Ibid 2; see also: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: *Special case Romania – Corruption, shortfalls of the party system, authoritarianism*, Link: www.kas.de, Download (28.08.2006), 8.

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