



"Ovidiu Șincai" European School

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Report regarding the Third Seminar of the "Ovidiu Șincai" European School 2008-2009 Edition Danube Delta, 11-14 June 2009

The third seminar of the "Ovidiu Șincai" European School – 2008-2009 edition has taken place in the period 11-14 June 2009, at *Mila 35* Complex, in the Danube Delta under the title *A Radiography of the Elections for the European Parliament: Romanian Trends, European trends*. The lectures were delivered by:

- **Vladimir Pasti**, Professor, State University for Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest – "The results of the 7 June European elections. Causes for absenteeism";
- **Anne Jugănar**, Political analyst, Director of the "Ovidiu Șincai" European School – "The 7 June 2009 elections: candidates, results, consequences";
- **Adrian Severin**, MEP, Head of the Romanian Social Democratic Delegation in the European Parliament, former Minister of Foreign Affairs (1996-1997) – "Political tendencies within the European Union";
- **Cristian Pârvolescu**, Dean of the Political Science Faculty, State University for Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest – "The unfolding of the elections for the European Parliament in Romania. European perspectives";
- **Alexandru Radu**, Professor, Political Science Faculty, "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University, Bucharest – "The impact of the Romanian electoral system over the political system".

Following the lectures and the debates which took place, a number of ideas emerged:

1. Vladimir Pasti – "The results of the 7 June European elections. Causes for absenteeism"

The first part of the lecture was dedicated to certain elements of interest regarding the final results of the elections and the causes for these results. Romania has had a low turnout at the elections for the European Parliament because, generally, the population of new member states does not perceive this parliament as being a "real" one, just as the European Commission is not a "real" Government, and the future President of the European Union will not be a real head of state.

It was to be expected that these elections for the European Parliament were not going to be of interest to the electorate because of the general tendency of the voters to

ask themselves what they can gain from this act. The domestic politics problems do not coincide with those debated before elections for the European Parliament. Voters could have been motivated specifically by the transformation of the European Parliament's issues into issues of domestic politics. In order to have a higher voter turnout, parties should use strategies to motivate the electorate.

Politics is, mostly, about two things: (1) which fundamental rules we must follow within society; (2) how the resources of society are divided. When politics means the competition between two or more teams proposing fundamentally different rules (for example we either do or don't accept immigrants, we either do or don't discriminate according to wealth, sex, race, education, position etc.) or proposing different divisions of resources, that is when political decision significantly affects people's lives, they participate in the debate and they come to vote, they are involved,



giving of their personal resources, time, money, energy and ideas.

However, the EP is not one of the institutions which are able to make type (1) or (2) decisions.

This situation is much more

valid for the new member states (which entered the EU in 2004 and 2007), rather than for the E-15, because the agenda of the European Commission and that of the EP is a genuine copy of the problems highlighted by EU-15 countries much more than it is, for instance, a picture of problems in South East Europe.

The population behaves in a natural, democratic and rational manner in all of the EU countries. In fact, it proves to have a large share of generosity, especially the voters of the "new" Europe, recently integrated into the EU, for whom the main problems discussed in the EP, CE and even the European Council is completely uninteresting. The Romanian voters' priority is not lower prices for roaming. If the EP would have the power to decide on the price for bread, or natural gas, then the electorate, including Romanians, could be massively mobilised to vote because it would have to choose between politicians who want to lower the price and others who want to increase it.

Absenteeism, in the EU-15 and the EU-27, indicates that the electorate wishes to send a message to political parties regarding the domestic policies of Member States. The higher the turnout, the greater the conviction of the electorate that politicians are listening to its message. The Netherlands' case, where a racist and almost anti-Romanian party was close to winning the elections, is not representative, as is, for example, Great Britain, where the conservatives have won comfortably by discussing the country's role within the European Union. David Cameron wants to become prime-minister and is determined to achieve this even at the cost of burying the EU Constitution.

For the second part of the lecture, participants were able to express their views on the results of the elections in different European countries. The conclusion was that it would be a political error to judge the "Europeanism" of nations according to the turnout in the elections for the European Parliament. The EU exists, it is real and useful: it produces welfare in the West as well as the East, proportionally, but it does so nonetheless. There is a European market which is in full development. There is knowledge which tends to become standardised and it is developing. There is a space for communication, travel, developing relations, which has the tendency to extend. There is a culture which is extending and has the tendency to standardise. Under this shape, of the economic, social, cultural, communicational realities, the EU is appreciated by the majority of Europeans. They won't renounce these realities under any circumstances.

2. Anne Jugănaru – "The 7 June 2009 elections: candidates, results, consequences"

During the first part some information was provided concerning the European elections. For the beginning, some data were recalled from the last opinion barometer, in which Romanian citizens considered that the most corrupt institutions are the parliament (33%) and political parties (17%). This can explain the low electoral turnout of Romanians during the last elections. The decrease has been constant during the last national elections. It is also true that citizens' moods in European countries are very different. This has led to the formation of conjunctural coalitions in some countries.

For the social democrats, the European elections have been an event which raised multiple challenges. Mainly, the 7 June elections were considered a test for the relationship between social democrats and their followers, a relationship which was strained by the party's participation in a Government lead de facto by president Traian Băsescu. Achieving a positive result in the elections was regarded as the opportunity to consolidate PSD's position within the European left. PSD has build a political offer inspired by the 2009 Manifesto of the Party of European Socialists, which included only projects within the competence of the European Parliament. Next to this offer, which was more technical and harder to explain to voters without a vast experience or a mature European conception, and which was used by candidates to emphasize their superiority in matters of European expertise, there were proposals and issues resulting from PSD's position of ruling party: reviving agriculture through European funds; supporting small and medium enterprises; constructing housing facilities and so on.

As a main ruling party, the Democratic Liberal Party (PD-L) has set its strategic target to win the European elections as a first step for Traian Băsescu to win a new mandate as president. The PD-L list of candidates has emphasized the rapid and artificial growth of the party, because the quality of its human resources remains problematic. While the main leaders of the party can be found either in the central or local administration, the list of candidates includes relatively unknown people without a national, much less European, political experience. PD-L's electoral programme was not built upon the current or future competences the EP shall have if the Lisbon Treaty enters into action, but according to issues considered to be priorities in the Romanian population's perception of the European Union (for example, "improving the justice system", "adopting the Euro").

The central message of the National Liberal Party's (PNL) campaign ("PNL. Money for Romanians. European Money.") tried to combine a fundamental need in moments of crisis ("money") with the idea of a party with European values (the formula "Europe is liberal" was used). The electoral programme was not built around the real responsibilities of the EP, but according to the expectations projected by the party's voters. During the campaign, PNL has used a combination of negative campaign, with attacks against the PD-L-PSD government, and positive campaign (but still with an inside echo), centred around the problem of money (cancelling the flat-rate tax, 10% flat tax and 15% VAT, reducing by 10% the contribution to social security and so on).

The European elections equation was solved by the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) even before the start of the campaign, because the main danger would have been missing the electoral threshold of 5% if the Hungarian electorate were to split like in 2007. The agreement



between the Union and Laszlo Tokes, through which the former received the first position on the list, has extinguished the potential sources of public tension. The second position was taken by a representative of the moderate wing, Iuliu Winkler.

The Greater Romania Party (PRM) was, at the beginning of 2009, a political actor lacking vitality, with no electoral and, also, financial support with an ever diminishing basis of militants, most of them middle-aged or older. In the month of April, however, the controversial arrest of George Becali, president of the New Generation Party and owner of Steaua Bucharest Football Club, became headline. This way, PRM has recaptured the public's attention.

Two independent candidates have been able to join this electoral race: Elena Băsescu and Pavel Abraham. President Traian Băsescu's daughter was only formally an independent candidate, because of her announcement after her resignation that she will immediately rejoin the presidential party after the elections. The second independent candidate, General Pavel Abraham, ex-chief of staff in the Romanian Police, has participated in the competition without any real chances, lacking the logistic and financial resources necessary for a national campaign.

The European elections on 7 June 2009 have marked a novelty in the electoral history of Romania since 1989. The first observation was that the number of voters registered fell from 18,464,274, on 30 November 2008, to 18,197,316, on 7 June 2009, which is a decrease of 266,958 voters in seven months. Taking into account the mortality rate in Romania for 2008, 11.84 to 1000 inhabitants, the decrease in voting population is quite significant.

In just two years (May 2007-June 2009) the Romanian citizens were called to cast their ballots five times, this frequency of popular consultation being also a novelty in the recent Romanian history. In Romania, the electoral turnout was 27.67%, compared to 2004, when the first Romanian MEPs were elected. If we analyse the Romanian electoral turnout dynamic between 1990 and 2009, we can notice that the trend of the Romanians' electoral turnout was descending, irrespective of the type of ballot. The constant shrinking in the electoral turnout creates the premises of over-representation of some minority currents in the Romanian society, often of a national-populist orientation.

The number of voters on additional lists was fairly high: no less than 668,217 citizens chose to vote this way. This number represents 13.27% of all valid votes. For the European elections of 2007, the number of voters on the additional lists was 604,706, 11.26% of the total valid votes. This fact suggests that the existing framework is favourable for electoral tourism.

The litigations regarded the activity of certain members from polling stations, the offering of electoral bribes, electoral materials near the polling stations, candidates' access to the polling stations and introducing additional votes into the ballots. The Central Electoral Bureau has considered that these questions have not influenced the general results of the elections and has dismissed all the litigations.

Following the European elections, the following results occurred at national level: the PSD+PC Alliance took first place with 31.07% of the votes, getting 11 seats. It is followed by PD-L, with 29.71% of the vote and 10 seats, PNL with 14.52% and 5 seats, UDMR with 8.92% and 3 seats, PRM with 8.65% and 3 seats and Elena Băsescu with 4.22% of the votes, just enough for winning a seat.

The EP ballot indicated the fact that the PSD and the PD-L are almost at the same level of mobilization concerning their electoral cores, but the tendency indicated by the last elections is a quantitative reduction of them. The main sanction that a part

of the PSD and PD-L sympathizers conveyed to the present ruling parties for the formation of the grand coalition cabinet did not consist of abandoning their values but of absenteeism.

If we analyse the European level, elections for the European Parliament were not anymore a confrontation between the left-wing vision concerning Europe, proposed by the Party of European Socialists, and the right-wing vision, mainly supported by the European People's Party; instead, voters of the 27 Member States had to choose according to the particular situation in each country, according to the relations between the government and the opposition. Significantly, one of the most important missions of the new European Parliament, voting the new Commission, has no longer been an issue of conflict as it was thought previously, because the acting president, Jose Barroso, had already received the backing of his party (EPP-ED) and other important left-wing national parties (e.g. the German social-democrats, the Spanish socialists, as well as the British Labour) during the campaign. Consequently, the Party of European Socialists' effort to transform the European elections into a race between left and right was not received enthusiastically at the national level.

All over the European Union, general issues concerning the future of Europe, from an institutional perspective, were secondary themes, the main subject being the economic crisis, its consequence, as well as the measures to counter its effects. This was especially noticed in the electoral turnout, which was the lowest ever at European level. The loss of the citizens' confidence is a widespread phenomenon all over Europe, but in post-communist countries its magnitude is higher, if we only look at the electoral turnouts.

The 4-7 June elections for the European Parliament have provided more than 375 million voters with the opportunity or the requirement (Belgium and Greece) to vote for the 736 politicians who will represent their countries in the European Parliament. The 7 June elections in Romania have also been a barometer for the political state of the Romanian nation during the economic crisis.

The winners of these European elections are the European People's Party (EPP), which will continue to be the largest group in the European Parliament, and the Socialist Group, which was placed second as number of MEPs. The first reactions after finding the results were different: EPP considers that it has won the elections, while the socialists declared they are disappointed. But, no matter of the political orientation, leaders agreed that the new power distribution in the EP needs a new consolidated form of collaboration.

In 2009, European electoral turnout was with 1.55% smaller than in 2004. In spite of that, in some countries turnout was better than five years ago. The best participation was witnessed in Luxembourg (91%), Belgium (90.39%) – in both countries voting is compulsory – and Malta (78.81%). A decrease of the turnout took place in “older” Member States: United Kingdom (from 38.52% in 2004 to 34.27% in 2009) and Italy (from 71.72% in 2004 to 66.46% in 2009).

In the second part a discussion took place concerning the data mentioned in the first part. Participants had the occasion to express their own opinions concerning the European elections.

3. Adrian Severin – “Political tendencies within the European Union”

During the first part, a series of considerations were made concerning the European elections. The latter have highlighted some worrying evolutions. The first of them is euro-apathy. Europeans are less and less present at the polls. Among the several possible explanations, the main one is the crisis of confidence in democracy. As the social contract, as any contract, is based on confidence, a crisis of confidence is tantamount to a crisis of democracy.

Democracy implies informed participation. The apathy thus comes from lack of information. But, how could the common man understand the European institutions, procedures and policies when the elites only understand a national type of language? The idea of European unity was born from the fear of hunger and from the fear of war. It was proved that nation-states cannot escape either of them and the citizens feel that.

Their leaders do not want, though, to admit it and do everything to hide the fact that the EU is already a federation of nations upon whose evolution people’s lives depend more than upon national states. Settling competences and the cooperation between Member States and the Union should have been at the centre of the electoral debate. Candidates should have explained, among others, how the benefits of the European institutions’ activity are not reflected in the plates of ordinary European citizens by the fault of national governments.

How can you, though, pronounce such a speech as long as political actors –



– competing parties – are only parties making up the government and the opposition at national level?

Until when the European elections will not be the place of competition between

European parties, but only between national parties, these elections will not be perceived as

having any meaning, as the candidates will not be able to convey but confuse and incomplete messages.

A second tendency concerns the increasing confidence in far-right and national-populist parties, as well as in the non-ideological ones (greens, pirates). This is another aspect of the crisis of democracy: although it has claimed victory, the European right did not win, in fact. It even had a little loss. The victory belongs to populism and technocracy. Populism has found an echo in those in which marginalization and vulnerability have generated fear of strangers, fear of the other. In order to escape this

imaginary threat, people accept to give up their freedom. Technocracy, that is government without ideology, has raised the enthusiasm of those who are not happy enough about their status in order to fear change. They are looking for managers and not for leaders, for technocrats and not for politicians. Some are rich enough to be interested only in the solutions that can sustain their welfare. Others are needy, but not so much in order to risk changing the status-quo.

It was not ideological consistency that promoted the Greens, but the ideological deficit. The quasi-ideology of the Greens and the pseudo-ideology of national-populists are two sides of the same roving. They could never be countered but by re-establishing the ideological clarity and constancy of the main democratic political currents.

Finally, the third tendency is a paradox: while, in the context of the global economic crisis, the ideas of the left are winning, the parties of the left are losing. Because the left is the great loser of the European elections. It has come to be so little credible that it could not profit even from the governmental wearing down of some of the right's parties. The only explanation of this paradox can be found in communication or, more precisely, in the vectors of communication – the political leaders. Their life and language do not coincide with the values they claim. They are too opportunistic, too egoistic, too hypocrite and too arrogant in order to be able to inspire authenticity and solidarity. It was not the democratic left that lost the elections, but the “caviar left”. Wherever the left was authentic through its candidates, it has won. Coming back to the authentic values of the left and to the life according to them is, therefore, the condition for the electoral resuscitation of the left-wing parties.

During the second part, the participants entered into dialogue with the guest speaker and expressed their opinions concerning the ideas exposed in the first part.

4. Cristian Pârvulescu – “The unfolding of the elections for the European Parliament in Romania. European perspectives”

During this debate, in the first part the lecturer analysed the results of the exit-poll regarding Romanians' perception about the fairness of elections. The exit-poll was carried out by the *Sociological and Branding Research Company* (CCSB), between 24 and 27 May 2009. The exit-poll shows that the perpetuations of irregularities during the electoral processes during the last 19 years made 52% of Romanians to consider that the elections are generally marked by fraud. And 56% of those who believe that elections were marked by fraud don't go to vote, while 47% of those who believe that elections weren't marked by fraud go to vote. 39% of the voters consider that the most common way to make the elections unfair is the distribution of benefits by the city halls, before the elections. In the same context, 39% of citizens believe that elections can be rigged by directly buying votes, and 35% consider that electoral touring, which means the candidates organise transportation for people to vote in other towns, is highly used. Another 31% of citizens believe that the elections can be rigged by changing the result of the vote in the polling stations.

The exit-poll shows that 56% of voters with lower education, 52% of voters with average education, and 44% of voters with higher education are having doubts about the fairness of elections. 52% of male voters and 51% of female voters have the same opinion. The idea of the elections' unfairness is shared by 57% of respondents

between 18-29 years old, 42% of respondents between 30-44 years old, 50% of respondents between 44-59 years old, and 57% of respondents over 60 years old.

As for the voting turnout, it was continuously dropping starting from 1990. Thus, if voting turnout to general elections was 86% in 1990, in 1992 and 1996 it decreased to 76%, and in 2000 it reached 65%, in 2004 it reached 58%; in 2007, on the first European elections the voting turnout was 29%, and in 2008 a few over one third of Romanians went to vote. The weak vote presence indicates a weak representation of politicians, who, year by year, are trusted by fewer Romanians.

There is a paradox: even though fewer Romanians are going to vote, ever more Romanians want compulsory voting. The exit-poll shows that 51% of Romanians support compulsory voting and 45% don't want it. They are thinking that compulsory voting will make the elections fair and will force the citizens to be informed, to educate themselves, and in this way the politicians will spend their resources on real debates. In Greece and in Cyprus, for example, countries resembling culturally with Romania, we can't talk about the unfairness of elections. However, with a high voting turnout (around 80%) fraud becomes insignificant, but with a 30% voting turnout, fraud is important.

For Romanian voters, Europe, beyond the 2007 integration, remains a vision.

Romanian public is not so interested in the European themes if they don't affect it directly. If Europe doesn't bring money, it seems rather bizarre and abstract. And the political discourse about the incapacity to absorb structural funds



strengthened this image. Although structural funds don't exceed 5% of GDP, cumulative until 2012, the idea of a "giving Europe" was assessed. Above all, the economic crises also occurred.

In the second part, the lecturer presented some general political tendencies at European level, in the last 30 years. Thus, it was noticed that there was a notable rise of the popular group after 1999, when British conservatives joined the group. Until 1999, EPP was dominated by Christian-democrats, a group which stood at the foundation of the European Union, promoting communitarian (catholic) ideas, social market economy, federalism. Instead, British conservatives are characterized by

supporting national sovereignty. European socialists were the main promoters of the European Union in the 80s, when they supported measures for strengthening European integration. After 1990, as a result of the fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, socialists were confronted with a small drop. At the same time, after 1995 we could notice the influence of neo-liberalism, especially through the wave promoted by Tony Blair and the New Labour, which led to the ideological inconstancy of European social democracy.

The liberals' development was mainly due to Central and East European parties, but the growth was only numerical and very inconsistent. In Western Europe the liberals are centre-left, while in Central and Eastern Europe they are centre-right. In Romania, for example, the National Liberal Party is, in fact, a conservative party. Instead, in Great Britain, the liberal-democrats' score was higher exactly because they were more on the left than Labour.

The Greens grew constantly during the last European elections, because of the spread of debates regarding the climate change problems, but only in the western states. Environmental themes are the result of a post-modernist existence, which characterizes Western Europe and only a small part of the elite in Eastern Europe. Electoral success of the Greens in France (especially in the urban areas) was crucial for the good score at European level.

The communists have known a constant decrease of their ranks after the fall of totalitarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989. The expansion of the European Union emphasized this tendency, so, presently they represent a marginal group in the European Parliament.

In conclusion, it wasn't a victory of the right wing, but a relative majority of the EPP. It was an important rise for the extreme-right wing. As for Romania, in real terms, PD-L lost, PSD+PC Alliance won, and the others kept up. It was proved, once again, that the wings that participate with separate lists obtain a better score than usually.

5. Alexandru Radu – “The Impact of the Romanian Electoral System over the Political System”

For this lecture an analysis was presented regarding the new electoral system used in November 2008 for the Romanian Parliament elections, with its novelty element, the uninominal vote, considered as being the first step towards the reform of the electoral system and, consequently, of the political class as a whole.

The electoral system used for the election of deputies and senators in the 2008 elections was in fact a proportional system, which uses the d'Hondt method to distribute mandates, a method which favours large parties. Immediately after the results were announced, the uninominal vote was criticised because of the way the mandates were distributed in relation to the hierarchy within the electoral colleges. Public opinion did not understand how the winner (with a relative majority of the votes) from a college did not gain the contested mandate. What was not explained to the public was the fact that this new electoral formula has increased the proportionality of the entire system, generating the most balanced votes/mandates ratio since 1990. As such, the existing stakes around the so-called uninominal vote has created a public expectation level which was disproportionate in relation to the significance, role and

purpose of the electoral system. This is why the explanations regarding the new vote were necessary.

First, it was noticed that a confusion appeared, especially in mass media, between the electoral system and the type of vote or, more specifically, between the



magnitude of the college and the rule for turning votes into mandates. Also, it was emphasized, even through some political statements, that the type of vote, the uninominal vote, has the effect of renewing the political class. Turning from closed lists to the

uninominal vote was considered the solution for the best representation of the relation between voters and those elected. It must be understood, however, that this goal cannot be achieved only through the electoral system because the latter's purpose is not to reform parties or renew the political class. The electoral legislation does not make politicians more responsible and citizens more active.

Consequently, the two categories of electoral systems, the majority system and proportional system, have the following effects: the first produces strong majorities in parliament and, as such, strong governments. It is the classic case of Great Britain, where the government has never fallen because of a no confidence vote. The proportional system ensures a correct representation of the citizens.

The majority system produces stable government, but has the flaw of a disproportionate representation of the voters. The second system, the proportional one, has the advantage of mirroring the result of the vote, but it does not lead to a stable government. There are authors who demonstrate that the proportional system corresponds to a consensual political life, because there is the need for a consensus in order to govern coalition majorities and, on the other hand, a majority system produces a conflicting political scene. Conflicts represent a certain behaviour of politicians and not a manner of functioning of society.

There is also a mixed electoral system, which attempts to diminish the effects of the majority system. One example is Germany, where the results are very close to proportionality. A party which wins 50% of the votes has roughly 50% of the mandates. It is of utmost importance, though, what the political leaders wish and especially those members of the party organising the elections. In Romania, the

electoral legislation has always been adopted in the same year as the elections, according to the political circumstances of the moment.

Following the 2008 elections, the number of parties ratio is 3.2, lower by 0.6 compared to 2004 and by 0.1 compared to 2000. With the exception of the Greater Romania Party (PRM), which did not succeed in passing the electoral threshold, the resulting parliament has the same political make-up as it had four years before. As a result, the number of parties has reduced, but the politicians have remained the same.

On the occasion of the elections for the European Parliament of this year, citizens have elected their representatives at European and not at national level. The latter will act within existing political groups. This is why, in this case, the proportional system is the best suited. There are also a series of variations of the proportional system: for example in France and Italy regional lists are used, and in Ireland and Malta the single transferable vote system is applied.

For the second part of the lecture the participants discussed freely about the electoral system and the information received in the first part. The conclusion was that the electoral system does influence the functioning of the political system, but it is only one of the factors acting in this direction. Electoral psychology also has an important role, but a change must produce in the voter's psychology when voting for a person and not a list. The uninominal vote is not an obstacle against political migration, on the contrary. It also conflicts, on principle, with a few parts of the Constitution. The solution could be, in fact, returning to the active role of political parties and to the purely proportional vote.

6. Evaluation of questionnaires

The questions addressed aimed at evaluating each lecturer, taking into account the criteria of informational content, novelty, interactivity and efficiency (on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest level and 5 the highest), the organization of the third seminar – compared to the first two, interaction between participants, between participants and lecturers and recommendations for future editions.

The organization of the third seminar was deemed superior and above average – most participants gave appreciations such as “Very good” and “Better”. In what concerns interactions between participants and between participants and lecturers, most participants considered they were very good in both cases.

Recommendations of participants aim at the following aspects: more interactive seminars, inviting more women lecturers, inviting more politicians and prestigious journalists and organizing a lecture in the field of foreign affairs.