

Institutional structures and political actors in transitional Romania: governance strategies towards EU integration

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Abstract

In the pages of this work I intend to approach one of the most important events that occurred on the political stage in post-communist Romania: the integration into the European structures. The integration agenda had dominated the politics of our country for many years and, as a result, had determined a wide range of changes, indifferent we speak about politics, institutions or lines of thought. This is the main reason why I find this subject extremely important and why I believe that a review of the Romanian integration policies back at the beginnings of our transition is necessary.

Key Words: *integration, politics, European Union, institutions.*

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The communist regime meant for Romania half a century of domination and the destruction of the democratic principles that the Romanian people had tried to adopt for centuries. After such a long time of terror and infringement of the democratic rules and human rights, Romania turned back towards democracy in December 1989. After encountering almost every form of political regime - constitutional monarchy, military regime and communism- it became obvious for the Romanian society that „democracy has become the only game in town”(Linz, Stepan, 1996: 5).

The collapse of the communist regimes in the entire Eastern Europe had forever changed the lines of thought that lead the international life and had opened new dimensions in regard of cooperation and conflict on the international stage. But for the people of Romania this historical event meant the beginning of transition towards a new era. In the new international context generated by the political changes, the concept of transition is nothing else but the update of an old concept, the “critical period” (Fischella, 2007: 115). More precisely, this “critical period” or transition meant, in addition to all the social, cultural and economical issues a political issue. Romania was facing a dilemma at the beginning of the 90’, as the transition from communism to democracy proved out to be a long term effort that will involve many sacrifices.

But in spite of all the bewilderment, panic and hesitations of the moment, the Romanians have found the strength they needed by fixing a new objective: following the consolidated democracies of the West and integration into the European Union. The challenge of transition and the fear of failure were countervailed by the E.U. integration prospect and by the widely spread desire of building a pro-Western society. Moreover, the political actors showed unity in regard of their actions towards the general frame of the country`s development which supported the new national agenda: E.U. integration.

The difficult process of adhering begun in June 1995, when Romania made it's intension official. This moment meant not only the fact that Romania has expressed the desire of becoming a member, but also the fact that Romania has agreed to the adhering criteria and has engaged to fulfill these criteria.

This package of criteria had been decided by the European Council in June 1993 in Copenhagen and compelled Romania to adopt measures towards three major lines. The first line referred to the institutional stability and the functionality of the democracy, the second line implied a functional market economy and the third line referred to Romania`s ability to meet the duties that emerge from the membership status. One of the most important of these duties refers to the ability to implement the community acquis. This concept refers to all the juridical measures that conduct the activity of the European institutions and the development of the European policies.

The Romanian process of pre-adhering benefited from support and counseling from the European structures, and also from financial and technical support given by experts of the European structures. The whole process had been incorporated in the E.U. Adhering Partnership. A Council for E.U.-Romania Association was active in Brussels in order to help the Romanian side meet all the adhering criteria. The Partnership included three financial instruments of pre-adhering: Phare, Sapard and Ispa that were meant to help the Romanian authorities.

The European institutions emphasized the need to intensify economic reforms, mainly regarding the process of privatization and reconstruction of companies, juridical reforms and rebuilding the administration.

The Romanian Government had to find solutions for the problem of racial discrimination (regarding the Romani minority), for placing abandoned children in proper care institutions, to continue the fight against the widely spread corruption and to tackle the need for reforms in the juridical system. The European

structures offered Romania help and counseling but the effort had to be done at the national level.

The Romania Government adopted in June 2001 the National Program for E.U. Integration. This was an extremely important document that was meant to be implemented in the period of 2001- 2004 and had two volume and that showed the progress done by our country and the conclusions of the European meeting regarding our integration. The first volume was about the actions that needed to be implemented in order to fulfill the adhering criteria and the economic measures that will be taken in the economic area. The second volume had two parts. The first part contained the Program of Legislative Harmonization (measures that were meant to turn the Romanian judicial system into a European one) and the second part consisted of the Program that was in charge with financing the objectives of the Program (Programul Național de Aderare la Uniunea Europeană, 2001).

The fall of 2001 was reserved for discussing the progress that Romania had done towards E.U. integration. In September, Baroness Emma Nicholson, the official supervisor for Romania declared in the European Parliament that *"Romania had done lots of steps forward but a lot of work still remains to be done"* (Programul Național de Aderare la Uniunea Europeană, 2001). She also appreciated the progress that had been done in areas such as social care or children rights. The report encouraged the Romania authorities to continue the processes that had been started.

The European Commission handed out to the European Parliament the Country Report for Romania in November. The document showed the progress done by our country in regard to the political criteria (increasing legislative efficiency, tackling the problem of abandoned children and designing a strategy for minorities) and the economical criteria (economic growth and macroeconomics policies).

The 2002 Country Report showed that amongst the 13 candidate countries, Romania was the only country that had not

managed to fulfill the economic criterion of a functional market economy. The Commission considered that the next priorities of Romania should be: fighting against corruption, improving the legislative process, reforming Administration and Justice.

Given the fact that the last Country Report showed problems in the economy, new policies have been implemented and in 2001 and 2002 Romania registered a growth of 5% and managed to improve the economic partnership with Germany. Moreover, Germany expressed through the voice of the representative of the Brandenburg land, Matthias Platzeck the obvious interest towards the joining of Romania (România in contextul extinderii Uniunii Europene. Dezbaterile organizate de Institutul European din România în 2003, 2004: 97- 98).

Meantime, the authorities focused upon the Constitutional reform. The Parliament adopted in 2003 the law of revisal of the Constitution. Most of the changes aimed to correlate the internal legislation with the European one and one of the most important articles from this point of view is the one that stipulates the principle according to which Romanian and European citizens have the same rights.

For the socio-economic area the Romanian Government adopted in December 2003 the National Plan for Development. This document regarded to the period of 2004 until 2006. The objective of this plan was represented by the need to reduce the discrepancies between Romania and other member states. The main way to fulfill this objective was considered to be the stimulation of competitiveness and encouraging social and economic solidarity (Guvernul României. Planul Național de Dezvoltare pentru perioada 2004 - 2006, 2004). The progress done by the Plan would be supervised by tracking the number of new jobs created and the number of disadvantaged people involved in the work force.

In March 2004 the European Parliament examined a new report of Emma Nicholson. The adhering of Romania to the E.U. was conditioned again in the next terms: fighting corruption,

ensuring the independence of justice, suppressing the abuses committed by the police, restructuring economical areas such as energy, mining and transportation, establishing a mechanism to calculate the price of gaze, implementing the legislation that has been adopted in areas such as the free circulation of people and assets, agriculture, fishing or tax system. The Parliament adopted this report that conditioned the adhering of Romania in 2007 as showed.

In October 2004 the European Commission presented a new Country Report as an intermediary step towards the integration of 2007.

In this context the European Council announced the closure of the negotiations with Romania. E.U. will continue to supervise the adhering preparations and decided to give Romania an important financial support.

The Country Reports from before 2005 were replaced by the Monitoring Reports and in January 2007 Romania became a full member of the European Union.

The first of January 2007 is an extremely important date, as it meant the end of a very difficult journey and at the same time the beginning of another. This first part consisted of developing at national level the measures and strategies that are required during the adhering process. But the next process that Romania had to experience was the integration process. This complicated process refers to switching from the formal integration to the real life integration by implementing all the measures designed in the Governmental plans and strategies and is meant to begin with 2007.

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