

Romanian System in Transition

Oana-Diana Răducu *

Abstract

The aim of this paperwork is to illustrate the evolution of the Eastern European countries that transited from a communist regime to a democratic one. The methodology was one of comparison. The main country that was analyzed was Romania. Starting from there, the comparison with other former communist countries, illustrated much clearer how can each country's evolution, even if it has the same goal to attain, can be so different. The conclusion is that the democratic transition has been a hard and long process that affected every aspect of a Nation.

Key Words: *nationalism, political current, ideology, evolution.*

* University of Craiova, Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, BA International Relations and European Studies Specialization, e-mail: raducu_diana@yahoo.com.

Along with the fall of the Communist regimes in the Eastern Europe, has also come the changing of paradigms in the stage of international relations which led to a new set of collaborations in the political area, including Romania.

Romania was noted for having one of the most controlled and centralized economies in the area. When the revolution of transformations began in Central and Eastern Europe, Romania was not yet ready because of its highly questionable politics implemented by the dictatorial regime during the final years of its existence. If at first, the dictatorial regime gained popularity and the approval of the Western World by its independent foreign policy and by challenging the authority of the Soviet Union, shortly after things changed drastically. The only ruling power was the one of the head-state, Nicolae Ceausescu both in institutions and in the political area as the two of them are intertwined. Political actors from the opposition were non-existent or more specifically, existing in prisons, tortured, beaten and living in nonhuman conditions. There was only one political party, PCR, which controlled every political aspect of the country and managed to censor everything outside, thus traumatizing the population by suffocating the freedom of thought and choice.

The economy and its institutions were centralized, thus cutting out the idea of enterprise; and the most damaging aspect of the communism both in political and institutional structures was the restricted freedom of thought, speech and action of its population, thus, resulting in the despise of the general population for politics, institution, Government and everything that has to do with leading a country.

In the present days, the situation has changed and can be viewed quite optimistically. There has been stability in politics, and along with the integration in UE and NATO we have reserved ourselves a notable place in the stage of international relations, where there was once little or no contact at all. Along the journey for evolution, though, there have been encountered

many obstacles, most of them coming from the general population.

Firstly, there was an entire social class that benefited from communism, having material or psychological privileges and they were not prepared to give them up without a fight. Secondly, there was an even more serious obstacle, coming from the oppressed ones during the regime that wanted to replace the communist totalitarian system with its exact opposite. *”Thirdly, after the initial wave of enthusiasm that clamored for the need for reforms and changes, it was noted that from an individual point of view, such changes often ran the risk of being interpreted as a form of aggression, and reform (an inevitably gradual process, characterized by errors and recaptulations, with results barely visible in the medium term), which was declared and sustained in general terms by means of public discourse, was suddenly faced with an opposition in which a deep-seated desire to disrupt went hand in hand with inertia”* (Roman P., 2002: 20).

So, we can clearly deduce that the trust of the general population in institutions and political actors was not gained by the new system either, thus making it hard to evolve as a new born society. Nevertheless, even if Romania’s evolution to democracy has been a slow and hard one, changes did not fail to appear. After the revolution, in 1989, the first political group to come to power was the National Salvation Front which was the establishment of democracy, the guaranteeing of political freedom and the protection of civil rights. The second party was the Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR) that was a regional, nationalist party that opposed the nationalism of the Hungarians, the Magyars living in Transylvania. The third party that appeared was PRM or Greater Romania Party that involved charismatic personalities of the “Romania Mare” from the Ceausescu regime: the poet Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the writer Eugen Babu, and a couple of historians like Mircea Musat. The party also had a magazine that tended to be *”a blend of rumors and straightforward slander, spiced up occasionally with a touch of humor that can be described as best as foul and coarse. Some of the “denunciations” printed were based on*

incredible assertions and the caricatures and jokes were totally crude" (Veiga F.: 33). It was a party of soft left-wing nostalgia. They never said that Ceausescu was a great leader but it is clear that the Ceausescu years were not such a bad time for them either. However, there was a notable rise in the influence of the Greater Romania Party that can be explained solely through an analysis of the personalities behind it. *"Vadim Tudor is certainly very demagogic but there are three million or more Romanians who voted for his party. That indicates that there is a sociological background to the phenomenon, an undercurrent of favorable sentiments and a social symptomatology that must be taken into account in order to understand why people voted en masse for this peculiar type of political message"*. Comments made by Mr. Petre Roman: - what was the message during the election campaign? It was a very simple one: *"Down with the Mafia, long live the homeland!"* A message that could be viewed as a message hidden behind ethnic cleansing or purification policies. (Veiga, F.: 34).

It seems that democracy has not been what Romanians expected. It was not the salvation they expected. There were fratricidal confrontations between the center-right parties, internal ruptures and a certain amount of back-stabbing that disappointed Romanian society. *"At the time of the elections, a lot of Romanians wondered: "Well, now we are going to vote for something bad but at least it is something we know and that is Iliescu, although, voting for what we have already had may not be worthwhile anymore and voting for something new just might be". People were getting tired of what they were already familiar with and were keen to seek something new but there was not much to choose from. This is not a particularly Rumanian phenomenon either because the same thing happened in Bulgaria with King Simeon in summer 2001. Bulgarians thought about voting for a new political alternative that was perhaps not very structured because it was really just a man heading the so-called Simeon movement but at least it was something new and it did not mean going back to what they had already had"* (Veiga, F.: 34).

Even in the present days it is still a familiar situation where the population does not feel that democracy has sustained

its goal, where we still feel like sitting in a line waiting for goods. All in all, changes were still made regarding institutions and the system, even though politicians seemed to be the same in the eyes of the population. Economical reforms were made by introducing drastic changes, national institutions were being involved in a democratization process and there has been a notable change in the implementation of a program of liberalization, stabilization and restructuring. The economical program of evolution based itself on: *”political cohesion in the face of pressure from anti-reformist groups, faith in its strategy, communication with members and the social groups responsible for covering the costs of the reform, decentralization hand in hand with the consolidation of democracy, and finally, the improvement of the legal system in general and of contractual laws in particular”* (Roman P., 2002: 18). Among the many structural changes made, the first and most important was the transformation of state companies into commercial organizations. Even if with small steps, Romania, as a nation has clearly evolved. Along with the NATO and UE integration we managed to preserve a seat for ourselves in the international stage.

In the international context though, Romania was not the only one faced with this struggle: the transition. In the beginning of the 1990s, Russia had to deal with this challenge too. It had to move from the command system to a capitalist market economy and from a relatively closed economy it had to move towards integrating in the globalizing world economy. The reason why Russia’s transition was so difficult was that the Russian political-institutional system was characterized by the dominance of executive power and a weakly-developed civil society. Russia had to deal with a number of unique obstacles during the post-Soviet transition. These obstacles left Russia in a far more difficult situation than other former Communist states that were also going through economical and political transitions, such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, which have evolved far better since the collapse of the Eastern bloc between 1989 and 1991. The major problem that Russia had to face was its

commitment to the Cold War; the former communist block devoted enormous resources for the military sector where one of every five adults was employed. The end of the communism and of the Cold War turned into a big crisis as there have been major cutbacks in the military spending, thus leaving an enormous body of experience and qualified specialists unemployed; or they had to switch from making hi-tech military utensils to day-to-day jobs, such as making kitchen utensils. Another major problem Russia had to face was the decentralization process it had to face. In the Soviet Union, there were economical regions that were “mono-industrial” and so the local governments were dependent on the economical stability of a single employer. And when the Soviet Union collapsed, the production dropped by more than fifty percent and so leading to enormous unemployment. Another problem that Russia had to face was that the Soviet Union had a system of state social security and welfare but with the collapse of the communism, this responsibility passed on to the large industrial firms that were not capable of sustaining all the needs of their employers. Finally, there was a problem regarding the human capital. The people were not necessarily uneducated, but they had no experience with decision making which is so vital in a market economy” (Bugeuli, N. G., 1997: 74).

A different type of transition could be exemplified through Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland. They took over external models, for example: The Hapsburg Empire that became a permanent constraint, politicizing every aspect of society. The Polish and Hungarian transitions were dominated by negotiations between the communist government and the oppositionist forces, while the East German, Czechoslovakian, and Bulgarian transitions were typified by nonviolent, mass mobilization. Only the Romanian transition was sparked by violence. The year of 1988 brought important changes to Hungarian politics by the appearance of the political organization: “The Free Democrats”. The party continued its existence under the new Government and it was joined by the Hungarian’s People Party and the “Publicity Club”.

The Parliament began to function simultaneously with the executive organ of the old regime and so, the country proceeded towards transition. . On September 10, the frontiers were opened to the East-German refugees, promoting German national unity. On October 23, 1989, the Hungarian Republic was proclaimed. Hungary's transition between 1987 and 1990 differs greatly from the transformation which occurred in the Central-Eastern European countries. The revolutionary changes were accomplished in a peaceful and orderly manner and were reached by negotiations that preserved the governing ability of the central power. Unlike East Germany and Romania, in Hungary, no one destroyed the state machinery or the institutional political power. The state machinery did not become completely paralyzed either as it happened in Poland and Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian transition preceded smoothly, without political annihilation or chaos. (Chervonnaya, S. 1992: 232-235).

After the post-Communist transition and the instauration of democracy, much of the euphoria and illusions have gone. People have realized this historical endeavor has been a very complex and complicated affair. This state of transition compels one to scrutinize the process of change more carefully, to go beyond stereotypes, myths and oversimplifications.

References:

Bugeuli, N. G. (1997). *Russia in Transition: Left, Right Or Center?*, New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Roman, Petre (2002). Peculiarities of the transition in Romania, in *Democratic transition in Romania*, Madrid: Fride.

Svetlana A. Chervonnaya (1992). Critical Choices of Russia's Democracy, in *Mary Bill Rts. J.* 227/1992, <http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmborj/vol1/iss2/5>.

Veiga, Francisco (2002.) *2001-2002 Governance and nationalist parties in Romania*.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported and financed by the Center of Post-Communist Political Studies - CEPOS STUDENT GRANT 2014 awarded within the Fourth International Conference After Communism. East and West under Scrutiny, 4-5 April 2014, Craiova, Romania.