

that the EU and the US Embassy had exerted heavy pressure to bring about this agreement, the only alternatives apparently being a continued limbo or fresh elections. Observers were unenthusiastic, commenting that the willingness of the two largest parties to divide the spoils of office, after having criticised each other so bitterly during the election campaign, would do little to enhance the prestige of the political process. This impression was reinforced when the government (which also included the Serb List) was announced on 9 December: it had 21 cabinet ministers and no fewer than 50 deputy ministers.

There were doubts as to how durable this government would be. A potentially divisive issue looms: that of establishing a special court to deal with crimes perpetrated in the aftermath of the war in 1999, including the killing of several LDK party officials, examining allegations against specific members of the former KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) from which the PDK had emerged.

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The 2014 election outcome demonstrated relative stability in electoral support for parties, and the fraught process of government formation that followed showed the increasing role of the Constitutional Court (a phenomenon observable in other post-communist countries). Government formation proved difficult and protracted, but the peaceful nature of the campaign and the transparency of the election process mean that the elections could be seen as marking a further step in the consolidation of democracy in Kosovo.

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The Romanian presidential election, November 2014



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In November 2014, Romanian citizens elected their head of state for the seventh time in the post-communist period. The presidential election, held on 2 and 16 November, was the third unsuccessful attempt of an incumbent Prime Minister to occupy the highest public position in the country, after the failures in 2000 and 2004. The election produced an unexpected result: the social democratic Prime Minister Victor Ponta was defeated in a runoff election by the liberal Klaus Iohannis, the mayor of a medium sized Transylvanian city. He became the first elected president in Romania belonging to a national minority.

1. Background

The Romanian President is elected in a two-round system in which the candidate who obtains a majority of votes of all registered voters is declared the winner. In case no candidate has obtained such a majority, a run-off (second ballot) is held between “the first two candidates highest in the order of the number of votes cast for them in the first ballot” (Art. 81, 2003 Constitution). In the second round, the candidate who obtains the greatest number of votes is declared the winner. The election took place at the end of the second term of outgoing President Traian Basescu who could not run again due to the constitutional provisions limiting the number of terms in office to two. Since his first election in 2004, Basescu’s time in office has been controversial and highly conflictual. He survived two impeachment referendums in 2007 and 2012, when he was accused of violation of constitution, intrusion in state institutions’

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activities and abandonment of his mediation role in state and society (Gherghina and Miscoiu, 2013). In relation to this point, he got engaged in institutional conflicts with the Cabinet and the legislative during all periods of cohabitation and had numerous public clashes with Prime Ministers (Muntean et al., 2010). Furthermore, although the constitution does not allow the president to have a partisan affiliation, Basescu remained the de facto leader (Chiru and Gherghina, 2014) of the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL, formerly Democratic Party) and actively supported its participation in coalition governments in 2004, 2008, and 2009.

The political role of the Romanian president is important since he is expected to guard the functioning of public authorities and to be “a mediator between Powers in the State, as well as between the State and society” (Art. 80, 2003 Constitution). His powers are fairly limited and lie in the realm of foreign policy, national defense, and checks and balances system with state institutions. The foreign policy prerogatives include the representation of the country, conclusion of international treaties negotiated by the Cabinet, and accreditation and recall of diplomatic envoys following the Government’s proposals. National defense powers refer to his position as Commander-in-Chief of the army and president of the Supreme Council of National Defense. Regarding the relation with state institutions, the president has the right to designate a candidate for the office of Prime Minister who has to seek, within ten days of his designation, the vote of confidence of Parliament. The president can also dismiss and appoint ministers on the proposal of the Prime Minister, and appoint the Government following the Parliament’s vote of confidence. If no vote of confidence is obtained by a Government within 60 days and after at least two requests for investiture are rejected, the president may also dissolve Parliament after consultation with the speakers of the two Chambers and leaders of the parliamentary groups. In issues of national interest the president may also, after consultation with the legislature, call popular referendums.

President Basescu used many of these powers to the limit (Muntean et al., 2010; Gherghina and Miscoiu, 2013) and pushed in 2011 for an extension of presidential powers through a constitutional revision backed by the PDL, the party leading the government coalition. The proposed amendment had its roots in the consultative referendum called by the President the same day with the first round of the 2009 presidential election. Leaving aside the electoral strategic role of that referendum (Muntean et al., 2010), the questions answered by the public referred to parliamentary reform: the size (decrease from approximately 450 to

maximum 300 parliamentarians) and the structure (unicameral instead of bicameral). In addition to these issues, the 2011 proposal for revision also included increased powers for the President and a bigger role for the Constitutional Court in the decision-making process. Constitutional Court ruled some articles in the proposal unconstitutional (Decision No. 799/2011) and its decision was sent to Parliament where the amendment was rejected in 2013.

Despite being a lame duck, the outgoing President had an impact on the electoral competition for the 2014 presidential election. He favored the split of the PDL and the formation of a new party – People’s Movement Party (PMP) – gathering his loyal supporters. Following poor results in the 2012 legislative election (King and Marian, 2014), the PDL held an extraordinary congress to elect a new party leadership. The party leader Vasile Blaga was re-elected in a competition against Elena Udrea (loyal to Basescu). The President announced his separation from the PDL and encouraged the faction around Udrea to form another political party. This plan was implemented and the PMP was created in July 2013; the party congress held in June 2014 elected Udrea as president of the party. After gaining 6.2% of the votes in the 2014 European elections and securing two (out of 32) parliamentary seats (Central Electoral Bureau, 2014), the PMP supported Udrea as a candidate in the presidential race.

Partly related to the split and emergence of the PMP, the PDL joined forces with the National Liberal Party (PNL) in the summer of 2014. The PNL was part of the Social Liberal Union (USL, see Table 1), the electoral alliance that comfortably won the 2012 legislative election with approximately 60% of the votes and 70% of the seats in both Chambers (King and Marian, 2014). Following disputes with the Social Democratic Party (PSD), starting in the fall of 2013 over various policies and ministerial appointments, the PNL left the alliance and the government in February 2014. The USL continued without the Liberals and nominated the PSD president Victor Ponta as their candidate in the presidential election. The PNL leader, Crin Antonescu, the artisan of the alliance with the PSD, resigned after his party gained only 15% in the European election. The extraordinary congress in June 2014 elected Klaus Iohannis as party leader and his short-term project was to finalize the alliance with the PDL that had been on the agenda for several weeks, with himself as single candidate for presidential election. This idea took shape in July 2014 when the two parties agreed to have an alliance in the first phase (Christian Liberal Alliance, ACL) and a merger at a later stage.

Table 1

Electoral alliances in Romania (2011–2014).

Political Party	Party president	Month and year	Alliance
Social Democratic Party (PSD)	Victor Ponta	February 2011	Social Liberal Union (USL)
National Liberal Party (PNL)	Crin Antonescu	February 2011	
Conservative Party (PC)	Daniel Constantin	February 2011	
National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR)	Gabriel Oprea	September 2012	
National Liberal Party (PNL)	Klaus Iohannis	July 2014	Christian Liberal Alliance (ACL)
Democratic Liberal Party (PDL)	Vasile Blaga	July 2014	

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