

# Civil society against extremism

## Case study on 2000 Romanian General Elections

**Radu Nicolae,**

*3rd year, Political Science, Undergraduate studies*

**Horia Terpe,**

*3rd year, Political Science, Undergraduate studies*

*ASSP, Bucharest, Romania*

In this paperwork we will try to prove that, after the first round of the general elections in Romania, which took place on 26th of November 2000, the strong reaction of the civil society against the second candidate remained in the race for the Presidency of Romania, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, block the rise of his popularity and, consequently, to lowed his chances to become the President of Romania. We will assume that this reaction was effective. In addition, we will analyze the genesis and the ethical and political implications of this reaction.

Let us present the involved actors for some of the readers who may be less informed about the Romanian political life. After the first round of the general elections from 26th of November, two candidates remained in the race. The first one was Ion Iliescu-36, 35%, following the official counting, at that time the candidate and president of PDSR (The Party for Social-Democracy of Romania). Now, this party and another party -PSDR. (The Social Democrat Party of Romania) united and formed PSD (The Social Democrat Party.)

The second one was Corneliu Vadim Tudor-28, 34%-, the president of PRM (The Greater Romania Party). They will be more detailed presented later.

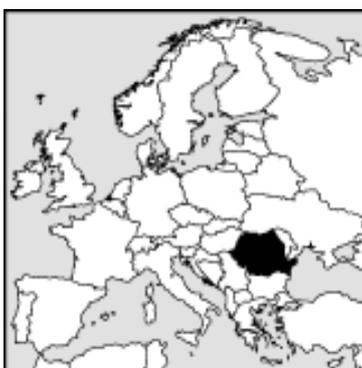
### *The Romanian society of the year 2000*

The social phenomena to which we relate ourselves is, of course, the Romanian Revolution from December 1989. This event meant the changing of the political regime and fundamental metamorphosis in all the areas of the public and private life: political, social, cultural and more painful economic (inflation and unemployment).

Dealing with our theme the peoples perception of the reality is maybe more important than the reality itself. So, this change is perceived as one from social protection and the safety of the job to economic insecurity, as one from order to chaos and corruption of the state (even if it is possible that the level of corruption to be almost the same "before" the fall of communism). The change was even broader Romanian society being forced to switch from determination in taking the decisions of state

(that means authoritarianism) to hesitations and contradictory decisions, taken with a lot of "democratic pain", from implicit independence, autarchy and military security to the dependence of the international financial organisms and military insecurity between the Russia (which we reject) and NATO (which rejects us). In a competition where we lost almost entire capacity to compete, foreign capital infusion and the status of market for foreign products (marketisation of the nations) completed the picture.

In this context it might be seen a phenomena of values dissolution. The clear old set of values dissolute itself into an ocean of values. Because of their diversity and contradictions, there is no more an easy eligible set of values. Romanian society deconstructed the old values but didn't to replace them. This generated a remarkable high level of the social anomie. The opinion polls constitute a clear prove: constantly, they are significant more people which answer to the question: "Do you consider that you live now better or worse as before 1989?" by "Worse" and rank very high mortal social fears (as poverty, war, illness). This matter of fact is extremely important for understanding the results of the 2000 vote.



### *The specificity of 2000 General Elections*

For the first time in the "post-revolutionary" history of Romania there was an exponential growing of the popularity of an party and candidate (with real chances to become the president of the country) in whose political and electoral message matched exactly those requests and frustrations we spoke about. The President of PRM promises were: order in the society, determinate fight against corruption and Mafia, protection the economy against the foreign capital, support for the Romanian traditional economic areas, granting social, economic and military security, determinate and radical decisions, support the national values and, generally, recovering the national pride (its lack is an essential part of values dissolution phenomena and social anomie). An important element of its message was the promise to over the revisionism of the Hungarian minority and its organizations, because of its possible intentions to reach the federalization and destabilization of the Romanian State. Against such a threat, special political actions are not only acceptable but necessary (authoritarianism and non constitutional actions). Those promises were presented in the past years in a violent language. This language and those declared intentions brought to Corneliu Vadim Tudor the label of extremist, nationalist and chauvinist.

Its opponent was Ion Iliescu, considered to be an enemy of the reform and the main culpable of its failure in the first years after 1989. His promises were: social protection, politics against unemployment, independence from the West, the slowing of the reform in order to ease the social costs. Even if in the case of the Romanian

political life the main cleavage is the rather classical left-right one (centered on the problem of the reform) during this election, the main debate was inside the left perspective.

### *The definition of the concepts*

From the beginning, we have to make clear the fundamental concepts that give resistance to the hole work. The title, first, compel us to detail some contradictory aspects. So the civil society concept in Romanian rise plenty of legitimate questions regarding as much its existence as its elements. Before we try a definition, it seems necessary a discussion about the roots of civil society post 1989 which must take in account the communist period as well. In the context of the 80's in Eastern Europe, Romania is different. The civil society failed to become as powerful as the civil societies in the rest of the communist camp. The civil society of the 80's in Eastern Europe brings together the independent, nongovernmental groups, associations, institutions which represent obstacles for the totalitarian ambition of complete domination over society. The Hungarian samizdat, the Polish KOR, the Czechoslovak 77 chart are attempts to banish the ideology from the public life, to pull the public life out of the pseudo-political manipulation which prevented the free exercise of the fundamental individual rights. Therefore, the civil society meant the first step in the process reinventing politics outside the official borders of politics. This process did not become reality in Romania or it had no relevance what so ever. The few dissidents either were forced to leave the country as the writer Paul Goma, the historian Vlad Georgescu, the poet Dorin Tudoran, the mathematician Mihai Botez, or they were on strict surveillance (Mircea Dinescu, Dan Petrescu, Doina Cornea) The agreement between the labors and the intellectuals was mist in 77 (the miners strike) and in 87 (the strike from Brasov). Therefore the Ceausescu regime succeeded to keep under control the attempts of free association, of building a civil society and this was one of the causes of its bloody collapse.

The true rebirth of Romanian civil society began late, after the year 1989 and the lack of tradition and political experience was felt a great deal.

The fight against the new communism sustained by FSN (National Salvation Front) represented one of the main directions of the Romanian civil society. Romanian civil society meant in the 90's a way of mobilization hinting the accomplishment of political objectives; it had an intellectual and cultural dimension. Nowadays, we see a revisiting of the conceptualization of the civil society in terms of élites who play professional roles. To conclude, Romanian civil society seems to contradict a dictionary definition, structuring in complex ways and sometimes behaving contradictory.

This short history was necessary in order to give legiti-

macy to a broader definition of civil society. Semnificant for this essay are the << intermediate structures >> between individuals and state (political power, politicians); structures that pretend talking on behalf of the citizens and in the same time structures that are sources from which people extract their political and civic beliefs. The structures not only that express the wishes, the beliefs and the expectations of the society but sometimes they shape these wishes, beliefs. In many cases do not matter the reality as the image about that reality (it is accepted the role of mass media in the political changes in 1996 and 2000). The way press uses it influence undermines the trust in the democratic institutions empowering the opinions the only solution is the authoritarianism. The language press uses is apodictus, splitting on criteria like personal interests and dislikes, the public sphere in good and bad guys, worshipping the good guys and diabolising the bad. The tints, the fair expression of the achievements and the failures, the fair presentation of the facts and statements are replaced with the emotional presentation of the corrupt people or those thought to be corrupt.

Therefore, these structures present interest to us and its reaction had a powerful impact on citizens. Obviously, we exclude from the beginning the political parties due to their purposes: the competition for the political power. Therefore the definition of civil society structures on three levels: NGO level, intellectuality level and independent mass-media level. This definition includes the

journalists also because they have a contribution in forming the political and civic options of the citizens.

The second concept in our analyses is the one of reaction. We assume as a premise that the civil society defined above, had a reaction more or less coherent to the results of the first round of general election of 2000. The reaction consisted in sending a message and realizing some actions (conferences, debates, seminars, and meetings) and suggesting actions. Our analysis will concentrate on the reaction, which will be analyzed in a communicational as well as in a political value perspective.



*Iliescu at the vote*

### *Hypothesis: the motivations of vote*

Why such an important part of the electorate voted Corneliu Vadim Tudor and its party? We will evoke a number of possible causes, specifying that they acted in several combinations, but all on the ground of the generally value dissolution phenomena and social anomie.

One of them is what we call "the tiredness of the transition": the wear of people's disposability to accept another sacrifices presented as necessary from each government after 1989 in order to attain national goals which become sacred, taboos: the integration in EU and NATO, capitalist free market economy, welfare state, stopping the inflation and lowering the unemployment level. Because

no significant, visible result appeared after making them, people largely voted Corneliu Vadim Tudor, which had the courage to reevaluate those "non-questionable" objectives. Such a result, well presented, could have had a curative effect on people, showing that the sacrifices were not useless. However, nothing happened in this direction. Very tide linked to this perspective, another two motivations appear.

The first of them is the disappointing of the West. Romanian society behaved as it expected too long at the Occident's doors. The west was the hopeful example in the Revolution' period: the reach and free alternative to the socialist system. But, because of the too long waiting, its perception changed from the trustful wait for its decisive help to its considering as something far, prohibited and with a touch of superiority. So, there is an important (still!) minority, which perceive the West as hostile, stupid or brutal (especially after Kosovo war). The political leader of this current is Corneliu Vadim Tudor.

In the same direction, another possible motivation is the need of national pride and international recognition: coming back to a global foreign politic, recovering the Romanian oriental and African traditional selling-markets, which were left for the European market.

Related to the "tiredness of transition" another possible vote motivation could be the blaming of the whole Romanian

political class for those failures. The explication is mainly referred to disposability of the electorate in accepting undemocratic, extra parliamentary and over the Constitution policies and ways of acting. That means, people were ready to sacrifice the democratic and representative character of the state's decisions in order to assure their efficiency.

We can also discuss about a vote due to crises of trust in the system. The trust in the democratic system disappeared because it was accused of not being able to solve the social problems. This thing could also explain a vote given to a threat to this system: the cvasi democratic solutions.

Following our opinion, the most important cause of this vote was the failure of the governing 1996-2000. In 1996, CDR (The Romanian Democratic Convention) was thought to be an alternative to the social-democrat governing of the years 1990-1996, which proved its incapacity in making the desired reforms. All the hopes were than

invested in CDR, its team, and its candidate, Emil Constantinescu. But its failure was almost total: the vote from the 26th of November, 2000 came as a severe sanction and a refuse to return to the 1990-1996 period by choosing the third option: Corneliu Vadim Tudor.

### *The genesis of the reaction*

The reaction against Corneliu Vadim Tudor was two folded: first, there was a blockade of the transmission of its message: his access on the media was limited as more as possible. Second, the quantity of messages against Vadim registered grows with 482,5% only in the written media, following our measurement.

It existed several conditions that made possible such a reaction. First, it existed an elite who become more active and: 1. realised its responsibility in such a situation and 2.

was in the possession of the middles to react: control of the media. It existed a common sense, more or less conscious of its role in those political events.

Second, as a very important factor was the negative signals of the occidental political circles on the address of the rise of the extremist ideas. The Romanian civil society is always very careful to those signals, because of the "non questionable"

European and Euro Atlantic integration.

However, the releasing condition was the extreme rate of the growing of his popularity in the opinion polls. This was a shocking alarm. If the rate was not so big, people could get used with the situation and many the civil society's members would have define the situation as "normal".

This reaction was a compromise for the civil society, marking its symbolical defeat: This one was needed to support Ion Iliescu, the enemy which enabled it to form during the 1990-1996 period. It was a nasty situation for many to choose between Iliescu and Vadim, but some of them have their share of responsibility for the situation.

Between the two rounds there was a widely manipulation of the public opinion media bombardment and a prohibition against the Vadim's message had their effect in the vote given in the second round of the elections. The winner of this round was Ion Iliescu, and he was saw as a saver near Corneliu Vadim Tudor.



*Waiting for the results*

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Tismăneanu, V.* (1999) Reinventing Politics, Polirom, Iasi, Romania, 1999.

*Vlăsceanu, L.* (1982) The Methodology of Social Research, Ed. Enciclopedica, Bucharest.

*Van Cuilenburg, J.J, Scholten O, Noomen G.W.* (2000) – The Science of Communication, Humanitas, Bucharest, Romania,

*Vlăsceanu, L. and Zamfir, C.* (1998) Dictionary of Sociology, Babel, Bucharest, Romania.

*Volkoff, V.* (1998) Treatise about Dezinformation, Nemira, Bucharest, Romania

*Miroiu, M. & Blebea-Nicolae, G.* (in printing) Introduction to ethics, Ed. Trei, Bucharest, Romania

*Romanian Institute for Marketing and Opinion Polls*-Research reports, 2000