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From Amateur Revolutionaries to Professional Politicians

The Transformation of the Romanian Political Elite, 1990–2004

ABSTRACT: *Focusing on the social characteristics and personal biographies of the members of the Romanian Parliament, this article examines the reconstitution of the Romanian political elite, and its change alongside and in interaction with changes throughout the social, political, and economic system. An analysis of longitudinal data covering all Romanian Parliaments from 1990 to 2004 reveals a transformation of the profile and strategies of parties and their representatives toward professionalization of their political performance and a more coherent intertwining of their economic interests with the political game.*

The dismantling of the communist system in Eastern Europe in 1989 gave way to a large-scale social experiment: six countries of the Soviet Union's external empire and fifteen union republics, many of which putatively belonged geographically and culturally to Europe, including the Russian Federation, were in a position to redefine the political bases of their (old or new) states. While almost all of these countries chose the strategy of state building as (ethnic) nation building (Culic 2003), there was also a unanimous urge, if not wish or commitment, to adopt

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democratic institutions. A pool of choices was available, as the West presented several successful political models of democracy to the states of the former communist bloc. Moreover, the choice of political and economic institutions was attentively guided through certain political and economic mechanisms of incentive, regulation, and constraint, in the form of supranational or international political and economic organizations and associated legislation.

Institutional mimicry and the efforts to accommodate to Western democratic ways, however, did not immediately, or even later, produce functional democracies or the perspective that such a goal would be achieved. Many studies using the "path dependency" and "political capitalism" approaches have shown the importance of previous regime structures in the transition, and introduced new names and concepts for the resulting hybrid political or economic forms (Burawoy and Krotov 1992; Burawoy, Krotov, and Lytkina 2000; Eyal, Townsley, and Szelényi 1997, 1998; Hankiss 1990; Róna-Tas 1994, 1998; Staniszkis 1991; Stark 1990, 1992, 1996; Stark and Bruszt 1998; Verdery 1996, 2003). Stark captured the lasting influence of communist structures in two suggestive phrases, declaring that capitalism is built "not *on the ruins* but *with the ruins* of communism" (Stark 1996: 95) and that postsocialist transition was not a transition from plan to market but from plan to clan (Stark 1990).

The latter phrase indicates the crucial role played by the (former) political elite in the process of democratization and transition to a market economy. While it is common sense that political leaders count most in a country with respect to building its institutions, few studies have focused systematically and comprehensively on the composition and transformation of political elites (Culic 2002, 2005a; Körösényi 1999; Tudor and Gavrilescu 2002). The present study provides such an analysis for the postcommunist Romanian political elite. While focusing on the social characteristics and personal biographies of members of the elite, the article analyzes the reconstitution of the Romanian political elite, and its change alongside and in interaction with the transformation of the entire social, political, and economic system.

The Context of the Transition and the Political Elite

The fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe was a direct result of the loss of legitimacy of the leaderships, along with the ideological and economic bankruptcy of the various forms of communism. In their efforts to reset the grounds of the state frameworks, the new political elites tried to dissociate themselves from the former leadership, ideology, and political structures, while struggling to preserve some legal continuity of their states (and of themselves). The major strategy for accomplishing the former was to look for scapegoats, appealing to a rhetoric that radicalized a favorable national understanding of the communist takeover: communism, the result of foreign invasions, was imposed on the respective nation; the local communists were recruited massively from the national minorities (e.g.,

the case of Jews and Hungarians in Romania, alongside Russian foreigners). The nation was thus victimized and absolved of any responsibility or guilt. The internal elements of legitimization appealed to past independence and perceived prosperity of the country, for many, the period between the wars, or an earlier "Golden Era" in the nation's popular history and historiography. Efforts were made to establish continuity between the ethos and practices of that period and the present, often materialized in nationalizing policies (such as citizenship, linguistic, or minority policies). The process of constitution writing set the legal and symbolic grounds of the democratizing and newly independent states. It defined the organization and character of the state, in most cases explicitly and adamantly unitary, indivisible, independent, and sovereign.

The Cold War did not challenge the legitimacy of the communist rule or the international order. Its purpose was to legitimize certain political and economic ideologies. It allowed the expansion of the Soviet state at the price of several nationalities' statehood, as well as its domination by force over its external empire (best objectified in the Brezhnev doctrine). The end of the Cold War was brought about by discontent with realpolitik (inviolability of states) and its consequences: abuses of populations by their governments, internal colonialism/imperialism. Border changes and concessions toward greater autonomy of domestic ethnic groups came to be seen as acceptable, normal, and even desirable. In this respect, the changed security environment accounts as much for this as does the loss of the (perceived) legitimacy of the respective states (to their populations and to the international community).

The international context in which the states of Central and Eastern Europe started the transition to democracy was defined by two seemingly conflicting principles: an *ideological convergence where democratic ideas had no competitor* and the *acceptance of national sovereignty as the source of legitimacy for state authority.*

The democratization of a political system requires the organization and carrying out of free and competitive elections (Schumpeter 1961). However, transitions to democracy that are begun may never be completed. Behaviorally, a consolidated democracy is achieved in a political space where, no significant political, social, or economic groups seriously attempt to overthrow the democratic regime or secede from the state; in terms of attitude, the overwhelming majority of the population believes that any further political change must obey democratic procedures and formulas, irrespective of the political and economic situation, and that these are the most appropriate to governing collective life in their society; constitutionally, all political actors become accustomed to resolving political conflict according to the established laws, procedures, and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process (Linz and Stepan 1996: 5–6). For a modern political democracy to exist, "control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials" (Dahl 1982: 11). Institutionally, this means that there are no other bodies in the society enjoying formal political decision-making

prerogatives (e.g., the military) or that unelected officials may act independently of or veto decisions made by the people's representatives (e.g., civil servants, state managers) (Schmitter and Karl 1991). A transition is not complete until the democratically elected government is de jure and de facto sovereign.

The process of institutional design and institution building entailed by a democratic transition affects the chances of a previously nondemocratic regime to complete democratization and to consolidate democracy. This refers to the structure of the legislating and governing bodies (Linz 1990; Linz and Stepan 1996; Linz and Valenzuela 1994; O'Donnell 1993; Stepan and Skach 1993), to the electoral system (Duverger 1951; Rae 1971; Shugart and Carey 1992; Taagepera and Shugart 1989), to the form of the state (unitary or federal, national or multinational), and to the constitution-making process.[1] The transition to democracy may be hindered by a lack of consensus at the elite level over the institutions that produce democratic government and that govern. As I have shown elsewhere, the first Romanian Parliament elected in May 1990, which had also acted as Constitutional Assembly, was characterized by disagreement over (at least) two fundamental state institutions: the form of the state and the type of government (Culic 2002: 79–116).[2]

This brings us to the importance of the structure of social values, attitudes, and interests of the political elite in the process of democratic transition and consolidation. Acquiring and getting used to democratic practices is crucially important in making democratic institutions work. The progress of learning is painful, and often fails.[3] The social structure of the ruling elite may affect this process dramatically. A unified elite, in terms of commitment to democratic values and practices, and an integrated elite, in terms of social homogeneity and communication networks, may facilitate the consolidation of democracy (Burton and Higley 1987a, 1987b; Burton, Gunther, and Higley 1992; Higley, Pakulski, and Weselowski 1998). A disunified and nonintegrated parliament explains, among other factors, the lack of efficiency and coherence of the Romanian political class (Culic 2002, 2005a).

The Reconstitution of the Political Elite in Romania, 1990–1992

I define the political elite in institutional and organizational terms, as *persons who influence societal decision making regularly and substantially, due to their positions in powerful organizations.* Therefore, the elite includes individuals whose decisions affect the everyday life of important segments of the polity, and whose views and stances are likely to be taken into account by other influential social actors in the political process in such a way that the political outcome is significantly altered by their intervention. The operationalization of this definition can take several forms. My choice was determined by both theoretical and practical factors. In this study the Romanian political elite comprises the members of the Romanian parliament—members of the Senate and of the Chamber of Deputies. The basic assumption of the methodology, known as "positional analysis," is that the formal institutions of government provide a useful map of power relations.

Membership in key political organizations is a significant indicator of elite positions, less because they confer power themselves than because membership is mostly confined to persons who derive power from other sources.

As the legislative body, the parliament significantly affects the lives of all Romanians on a regular basis. The members of the parliament are influential in other ways too, partly as a consequence of the Romanian electoral system. Following the principle of proportional representation, the seats are allocated to candidates according to the number of votes won by their party in the respective constituency and their position on the party-list hierarchy. Therefore, the process of party-list nominations is crucially important and thus strongly contested; personal influence or influence in other fields such as the economy and the workers' union are decisive. The level of competition is accounted for in particular by the privileges and rewards—social and economic—associated with the position of member of parliament (MP).

The elections of May 20, 1990, validated the dominant position of President Ion Iliescu, who was elected by 85 percent of the votes. They also confirmed the strength and popularity of his party, Frontul Salvării Naţionale (FSN—National Salvation Front), which earned an impressive majority in both the Chamber of Deputies (66.42 percent of votes, 263 seats) and the Senate (76.48 percent of votes, 91 seats). Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România (UDMR—Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania), Partidul Naţional Liberal (PNL—National Liberal Party), and Partidul Naţional Ţărănesc-Creştin şi Democrat (PNŢ-CD—National Peasants Party-Christian and Democratic) constituted the main opposition forces, having cumulated 93 parliamentarian seats. The data use in this study to analyze the Romanian political elite of the first postcommunist legislature are taken from Tibil 1995 (see Table 1).[4]

The heading "previous path" refers to elite members' careers before December 1989. The group "nomenklatura" refers to positions of power and decision at the macro level within the former communist state. The group "technocracy" is made up of experts and researchers in political, economic, and social academic institutions as well as members of the central administrative apparatus of planning and control. The group "civil servants" comprises the medium- and lower-rank members of the administration—workers in the local administration and managers of state enterprises and agricultural cooperatives (mainly execution, as opposed to command, positions). The group "intellectuals" denotes individuals in liberal professions (lawyers, medical doctors, university professors, artists, etc.), who were politically uninvolved during the communist years. The category of "opponents" includes the Ceauşescu regime dissidents and marginalized people of the communist period, such as members of the leadership of the political parties of the interwar period or political prisoners (Tibil 1995: 105).

It is symptomatic for a political organization such as the FSN—which began as a popular revolutionary movement, but with a far shorter history than its Polish sister Solidarity, and with different startup goals and composition—that the

Table 1

The Romanian Political Elite, 1990–1992

	Power			Opposition				
	FDSN[a]	FSN[a]	Government[b]	PNŢ-CD[a]	UDMR[a]	PNL[a]	PDAR[a]	PUNR[a]
Total	148	143	52	12	35	49	12	11
Mean age in 1990 (years)	47.2	42.9	49.2	69.4	47.7	57.5	50.8	47.9
Education (%)								
No higher education	3	4	—	—	—	—	—	
Technical studies	53	49	39	8	28	18	50	27
Economics	15	13	21	—	14	10	25	18
Legal studies	14	13	19	50	26	39	8	18
Humanist studies	15	21	21	42	32	33	17	37
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Previous path (%)								
Nomenklatura	5	2	4	—	3	—	8	—
Technocracy	10	18	46	—	14	6	33	18
Civil servants	60	53	26	—	26	6	42	37
Intellectuals	25	27	24	42	57	63	17	45
Opponents	—	—	—	58	—	25	—	—
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: George Tibil, "Conflictul elitelor şi instabilitatea politică în evoluţia modernă şi contemporană a României" [Elite Conflict and Political Instability in Modern and Present-Day Romania], *Polis* 3 (1995): 103–6.

[a] Parliamentarians ($N = 410$)

[b] Governmental officials ($N = 52$)

Notes: FDSN refers to Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naţionale (Democratic National Salvation Front), a splinter of the FSN after disagreements between Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman wings. The former and his followers left the party and set up a new political organization. PNŢ-CD refers to Partidul National Ţărănesc-Creştin şi Democrat (National Peasants Party-Christian and Democratic). UDMR refers to Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania). PNL refers to Partidul Naţional Liberal (National Liberal Party). PDAR refers to Partidul Democrat Agrar din România (Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania), and PUNR refers to Partidul Unităţii Naţionale a Românilor (Party of Romanian National Unity), a nationalist party based in Transylvania.

transformation into a genuine political party brought to light colliding interests and political strategies.

Using the metaphor of "the war of the roses," alluding to the electoral sign of the party—the rose—the press heralded serious division within the party after the fall of government in September 1991, between the supporters of President Ion Iliescu and Prime Minister Petre Roman. This was, however, the result of earlier and more substantial tensions. Immediately after the May 20, 1990, general elections, several political streams took shape within the FSN. This is not surprising, considering the Front's original basis and its metamorphosis into a political party. Attempts to define a clear political profile of the party caused animosity, which was followed by several desertions. After the party convention in March 1991, the faction led by Velicu Radina, former propaganda secretary of the FSN, set up a new party, Frontul Salvării Naţionale Social Democrat (Social Democratic National Salvation Front) subsequently renamed Partidul Social Democrat (Social Democratic Party), despite the protests of the historical party Partidul Social Democrat Român (Romanian Social Democratic Party—PSDR). On the same occasion, a number of deputies decided to leave the FSN parliamentarian group and form their own group called FSN-20 Mai (the name was intended to suggest fidelity to the social platform that brought electoral victory to the FSN the previous year). This group opposed the economic reforms initiated by the premier's team, deploring the excessive social costs (subsequently named Partidul Social Liberal—Social Liberal Party). Afterward, another FSN faction registered as a political party with the name of FSN-20 Mai, expressing support for President Ion Iliescu (Ionescu 1992). Despite their names, the respective parties had little in common with Western social democracy or liberalism and were often labeled by the independent press as conservative or crypto-communist. Other deputies also left the FSN, and went toward the PNL or PRM (Greater Romania Party) (Ionescu 1992: 25).

But the most important fissure followed the resignation of Prime Minister Petre Roman and his government, marking the beginning of the public dispute between Petre Roman and Ion Iliescu. The conflict concerned the ideological redefinition of the party, Ion Iliescu's attachment to leftist ideas, the content and rhythm of economic reform, and the Serviciul Român de Informaţii (SRI—Romanian Intelligence Service) denounced communist practices and hindrance to democracy. At the party's March 1992 convention, discussions over the new party platform and Ion Iliescu's candidacy in the upcoming autumn general elections resulted in a schism within the party. The conservative faction, loyal to Ion Iliescu, left the party to form a new political organization Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naţionale (FDSN—Democratic Front of National Salvation), while the FSN remained under Petre Roman's control.[5] Despite massive popular support and the advantage of having the parliamentary majority and control of the government, internal divisions over ideological and economic issues as well as internal power struggles resulted in populist and short-term policies rather than effective, solid, and long-term ones.

The data in Table 1 summarize the social characteristics of the members of the first postcommunist Parliament. The figures indicate significant divisions among parties. First of all, there is a sharp age difference. It is no coincidence that the MPs who remained loyal to President Ion Iliescu, generally former communists and party activists, are on average older than the FSN MPs supporting Premier Petre Roman. More important, however, is the age difference between the members of the parties in power and the opposition. The opposition of 1990 comprised primarily the two historical parties, PNŢ-CD and PNL, the two parties that most dominated interwar political life. The mean age recorded for the PNŢ-CD in 1990 is extremely old—almost seventy; these MPs are on average double the age of their fellow colleagues in the FSN and FDSN, representing basically the generation of their parents. This difference is significant historically and socially in terms of early political socialization and experience, ideological affinities and idiosyncrasies, potential and careers followed, experience of the communist period, and so on. But the age difference also represents a “natural” obstacle in communication, negotiation, and interaction, incorporating all the adversities of old age. The PNL, the other historical party to obtain significant results in the 1990 poll, was resuscitated by former interwar members and supporters, and in urban areas it managed to attract a substantial number of young people to work in its electoral campaign. However, young people’s access to high positions in the party or electoral lists remained extremely limited. The mean age of PNL MPs is also relatively high (around fifty-seven), significantly higher than the average age of senators and deputies of the party in power.

The *educational background* of the members of Parliament constitutes another significant division at the level of the first postcommunist political elite. Technical training is dominant among the MPs in power, indicating a disposition toward a pragmatic approach to politics and a less discursive worldview. They were educated during the communist regime, which emphasized technical studies in its effort to modernize and industrialize Romania, and the structure of the Romanian higher education system changed as a result of the political demand for specialists in construction, the steel industry, mechanical engineering, and so on.

Most of the opposition MPs (PNŢ-CD and PNL) were trained in the legal and humanist professions. This difference is accounted for largely by the age gap between the two groups, as well as the level of development of the educational system in Romania and educational practices (such as study abroad) of the periods during which the respective groups reached maturity. Law was one of the main careers between the wars, ensuring easy upward social mobility. Law is generally the closest profession to politics, as it provides a familiarity with lawmaking, the ability to effectively plead the causes of interested clients, and a knowledge of the constitutional bases of the state. Contrary to other professions where interruption usually means career regression, the legal profession may be practiced intermittently: a lawyer or jurist may easily return to his private activity once the term in public office is completed. Humanist training has analytical, discursive, and ethical

dispositions, approaches involving a relatively high level of abstraction, some radicalism, and a relative lack of pragmatism. All of these elements combined with strong emotions produced a discourse in fierce conflict with those in power, in both form and content.

Analysis of the symbolic and political capital of the members of the Romanian political elite also reveals a profound division between the power and the opposition. While the FSN (and FDSN) sent to Parliament a considerable number of former members of the nomenklatura and party technocracy as well as workers in the communist administration, none of the PNŢ-CD MPs belong in any of these categories. The opposition was composed mainly of intellectuals, dissidents, or marginalized people of the former regime. If we attach names to the cases in the analysis, the power–opposition division makes even more sense. Parliament was the setting where the PNŢ-CD leaders Corneliu Coposu, Valentin Gabrielescu, Ion Diaconescu, all of whom had spent more than ten years in communist prisons, confronted the powerful of the day, Ion Iliescu, Alexandru Bârlădeanu, Dan Marţian, former bosses of the previous regime, or high ranking officers of the Securitate.

Within the opposition, the ethnic Hungarian party is unique, in that it attracted both members of the former communist apparatus and intellectuals and professionals who were not involved in the administration of the previous regime. The UDMR also comprised a relatively equal number of individuals trained in the technical, economic, legal, and humanist disciplines.

Thus, the data reveal significant social divides within the the first postcommunist elected Romanian parliament. They are exemplified in three important moments in the trajectory of its members:

1. The communist experience and the type of political capital acquired as a result of the trajectory during the communist period. At one end of the axis are the opponents of an open-regime, and at the other end are those holding power positions within the system. The first trajectory brought fragile but potentially large symbolic capital to be exploited immediately after the fall of the regime during the rapid process of power reconstitution—the "returns" of years spent in communist prisons. The latter yielded the social capital of the communist networks and control over their institutionalized forms. Naturally, the different trajectories also meant different socializing institutions and experiences, different ideological loyalties, different patterns of political recruitment, and their consequences, different governing practices. The communist experience also structured postrevolutionary discourse and the consequent alignments of the population. While the radicalism of the intellectual democratic opposition turned the masses away, the populist, reconciliatory discourse of those in power gained them sustainable sympathy.

2. The moment of the revolution. Active participation in the revolutionary events in Bucharest, December 22–25, 1989, produced enormous symbolic capital for the participants. Obviously, the degree to which they managed to convert it into sound political capital depended on abilities and experience, as well as on access to state or other institutional resources. The apparatchiks of the former regime

were undoubtedly much better prepared to understand and use the context of power reconstitution. Thus, recycled communists were the ones who managed to dominate the process of redefinition of political rules and institutions.

3. The institutionalization process. Open to full reconstruction, the political field became a space for power struggle. With the fall and birth of regimes providing the most opportune times for upward mobility, at stake were the institutions and their form, positions within these institutions, type and magnitude of power attached to them, and so on. At the time, both those in power and the opposition were divided, with each trying to secure as much power for their positions as possible, and the resulting institutions bear the mark of these divisions.

The Professionalization of the Political Elite: Merging Political and Economic Interests, 1992–2004

Democratization and consolidation include *the change of the party (or coalition) in power* as a result of free and competitive democratic elections. This indicates that the institutions *function* and are *substantial.*

The change of those in power was salient in the case of Romania, as many political analysts—identifying a certain continuity of ideology, persons, and institutions with the former communist regime—believed that the country did not undergo real political change, equating the results of the first democratic elections with a communist restoration. The first change in power as a result of free and competitive elections took place in the autumn of 1996.

The 1992 general elections confirmed the ascent of the democratic opposition, already signaled by the local elections held in the spring of the same year, with its victory in the major cities, including the capital, Bucharest. Although the results were less than they expected, the coalition of parties led by the PNŢ-CD named Convenţia Democrată din România (CDR—Romanian Democratic Convention) obtained a quarter of the seats in Parliament, and together with Partidul Democrat (PD—Democratic Party) gained more seats than the winner PDSR. The introduction of an electoral threshold cleared the political field by keeping parties that did not manage to obtain 3 percent of the votes out of Parliament. The 1992 elections also marked the rise of the nationalist and populist extreme right parties to Partidul România Mare (PRM—Greater Romania Party) and Partidul Unităţii Naţionale a Românilor (PUNR—Party of National Unity of Romanians), soon co-opted into government.

The CDR, whose electoral campaign was based on several ideas and concepts convenient to the time and context, won the 1996 elections. These concepts included the following: the truth regarding the December 1989 revolution, the fight against corruption, access to the former Securitate files, the acceleration of economic reform (and implicitly of privatization), and the restoration of property. All signified and gave a name to the desire for radical *change*, in contrast to the procrastination of the PDSR government.

However, the desired change did not occur, and in a short time the center-right

coalition bitterly acknowledged its failure to introduce the necessary economic and politic reforms, having been divided internally and harassed by the PDSR and its enduring administrative structures. Its tormented government ended with the winter 2000 elections when the PDSR comfortably won 45 percent of the seats in the parliament, while Ion Iliescu disputed the second round of the presidential contest with the populist-nationalist leader of the Greater Romania Party (PRM), Corneliu Vadim Tudor. This marked the worst defeat of the intellectual liberal right, as prominent intellectuals rallied during the presidential rounds to summon their electorate to vote for Ion Iliescu. The main party of the former government coalition, the PNŢ-CD, did not make it into the Parliament and further disintegrated, divided by internal fights.

The 2000–2004 legislature was marked by the consensual goal of meeting the requirements set by the European Union for Romania after the opening of accession negotiations in 1999. However, while the West contented itself to negotiate with Năstase's party and accommodated its strategy to the style of government of the PDSR (which later became the PSD—Partidul Social Democrat, Social Democrat Party, after the absorption of the PSDR— Social Democratic Party in Romania), internally the routinization of corruption and abuse of power of local potentates (county governors, mayors of large cities, and influential businessmen attached to the PSD) and the strife between the president and the prime minister eroded the image of and support for this party. By the end of the PSD government, the phrase "local baron" was part of the common language and public discourse, indicating the institutionalization of a system of patrimonial rule, based on the barons' local "fiefs."

In the following I will focus on the transformation of the social structure of the Romanian parliament and relate it to the changes in the Romanian political and economic field. The data in Tables 2, 3, and 4 summarize the social characteristics of the Romanian MPs for the 1992–96, 1996–2000, and 2000–2004 legislatures, by party. The data were collected from the official Web sites of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, as well as from printed and electronic documents issued by the parties, and from the mass media. The official Web sites of the two chambers of the parliament reproduce the curricula vitae provided by the MPs themselves when the parliament was initiated, with a special focus on their political careers. While most of them were relatively complete, quite a few were missing data. These belonged mainly to members of the Greater Romania Party and to somewhat obscure newly elected MPs. I supplemented these data with information taken from the Web sites and various documents issued by the different parties concerning their candidates and MPs. Additional information regarding the professional and political trajectory of the MPs was taken from established newspapers.

The analysis includes the most important parliamentarian parties of the respective legislatures, representing the power and the opposition, and excludes the smaller parties that squeezed into the parliament before the introduction of the electoral threshold, and the eighteen representatives of the national minorities. The data represent the situation at the inauguration of the parliament, and ignore subsequent

Table 2

The Romanian Political Elite, 1992–1996

	Power			Opposition		
	PDSR	PUNR	PRM	PNŢ-CD	PD	UDMR
Total (*N*)	165	44	22	61	60	39
Mean age in 1992 (years)	48.2	48.3	53.6	57.0	44.5	45.4
(Standard deviation)	(8.95)	(7.66)	(8.89)	(12.78)	(8.59)	(10.03)
Education (%)						
No higher education	3.6	—	2.3	1.6	5	2.6
Sciences, technical	37.6	38.6	27.3	36.1	48.3	28.2
Humanities	4.8	6.8	13.6	6.6	3.3	7.7
Social sciences	12.7	20.5	22.7	9.8	3.3	10.3
Economics	13.9	6.8	9.1	3.3	13.3	12.8
Legal studies	7.3	9.8	4.5	26.2	13.3	25.6
Agricultural	9.7	4.9	9.1	4.9	3.3	5.1
Other	6.6	7.3	9.1	6.6	8.3	5.1
Total*	96.2	94.7	97.7	95.1	98.1	97.4

Source: Author's database. Data for 361 (out of 483) members of parliament representing the main political parties that obtained seats in the 1992 general elections. The information was taken from the parliament's official publications, party documents, and the press.
*Totals are less than 100 percent because of missing data.
Notes: PDSR refers to Partidul Democraţiei Sociale din România (Party of Social Democracy in Romania), former FDSN. PRM refers to Partidul România Mare (Greater Romania Party), led by Corneliu Vadim Tudor. PD is Partidul Democrat (Democratic Party), ex-FSN, successor of the reformist splinter faction of the original FSN, led by ex-prime minister Petre Roman. For names of the other parties, see Table 1.

alterations resulting from death, resignation, and replacement, and desertion (many deputies and senators left their parties, declared themselves independent, and often joined another party).[6]

The first notable change from the 1990 legislature is a constant decline in the average age of the MPs of all parties. The average age of PNŢ-CD representatives decreased from 69.4 in 1990 to 57 in 1992 and to 53.2 in 1996. The PNL presence was rejuvenated, as the average age of PNL MPs decreased from 57.5 in 1990 to 49.2 in 1996 and 50.2 in 2000. This "renewal" of the main parties of the 1996–2000 government flattened the age difference within the parliament, situating them in the same generation as the other party in government, the PD, and the opposition parties. At first sight, an external observer might interpret this as a generation change. In reality, the seniors of the party (in both senses of the word) preserved their

Table 3

The Romanian Political Elite, 1996–2000

	Power				Opposition		
	PNŢ-CD	PD	PNL	UDMR	PDSR	PRM	PUNR
Total (N)	*90*	*64*	*43*	*36*	*127*	*27*	*24*
Mean age in 1996 (years)	53.2	47.7	49.2	45.9	50.8	53.7	50.3
(Standard deviation)	(13.3)	(6.8)	(12.4)	(9.8)	(8.6)	(9.8)	(7.4)
Education (%)							
No higher education	4.4	3.2	—	5.6	1.6	—	—
Sciences, technical	45.6	46.9	37.2	19.4	35.4	37.0	33.3
Humanities	6.7	—	2.3	5.6	1.6	11.1	8.3
Social sciences	8.9	7.8	9.3	2.8	7.9	18.5	33.3
Economics	—	10.9	7.0	8.3	15.7	7.4	4.2
Legal studies	11.1	9.4	18.6	33.3	9.4	7.4	4.2
Agricultural	1.1	4.7	—	5.6	7.1	—	8.3
Other	12.2	7.9	11.6	11.1	10.3	7.4	—
Total*	90.0	90.8	86.0	91.7	89.0	88.8	91.6

Source: Author's database. Data for 411 members of parliament (out of 485) representing the main political parties that obtained seats in the 1996 general elections. Information collected from the parliament's official publications, party documents and press.
*The totals are less than 100 percent because of missing data.
Note: For names of parties, see Tables 1 and 2.

Table 4

The Romanian Political Elite, 2000–2004

	Power		Opposition			
	PSD	UDMR	PD	PNL	PRM	PUR
Total (N)	213	40	42	41	121	10
Mean age in 1996 (years)	54.3	46.7	48	50.2	52.1	49.3
(Standard deviation)	61.5	8.1	7.6	10.1	9.5	13.2
Education (%)						
No higher education	0.9	—	4.8	2.4	2.5	—
Sciences, technical	41.3	25.0	52.4	36.6	32.3	40
Humanities	2.3	7.5	—	2.4	9.1	—
Social sciences	9.4	15.0	7.1	4.9	11.6	—
Economics	13.1	15.0	16.7	17.1	9.9	30
Legal studies	15.0	27.5	11.9	19.5	11.6	10
Agricultural	8.0	5.0	4.8	—	3.3	—
Other	7.5	5.0	2.4	12.2	14.0	20
Total*	97.6	100	100	95.1	94.2	100

Source: Author's database. Data for 467 members of Parliament (out of 485) representing the main political parties that obtained seats in the 2000 general elections. Information collected from the Parliament's official publications, party documents and press.
*The totals are less than 100 percent because of missing data.
Notes: PUR is Partidul Umanist Român (Humanist Romanian Party). For names of the other parties, see Tables 1 and 2.

position, while the better electoral performance of these two parties also allowed a number of younger persons access to Parliament. Thus, the average age of the thirty-eight PNŢ-CD MPs of the 1996–2000 legislature who preserved their seats (i.e., took part in at least one other legislature) was 57.3, and the average age of those who took part in all post-1989 legislatures was 68.3. This held true for the PNL as well because, in 1996, those who participated in at least one other legislature were on average 59.6 years old. The high standard deviations for the age variable, 13.3 for the PNŢ-CD and 12.4 for the PNL, which are almost double the figure for the PD (6.8) or PDSR (8.6), also indicate the large generation gap within the parties.

The average age of members of other parties increased progressively after 1990, as the same people grew older. Table 5 provides a better understanding of the continuity and change of the composition of the parliament by presenting the rate of reproduction of the parliamentarian positions.

The case of the UDMR best illustrates the phenomenon. As the party with the

Table 5

Reproduction of Parliamentarian Positions: 2000–2004 Members of Parliament (MPs) Who Held Seats in at Least One Previous Legislature

Party		Number and percentage of MPs of the respective parties		
		1990–1992	1992–1996	1996–2000
PSD	(no.)	16	30	72
	(%)	7.5	14.1	33.8
UDMR	(no.)	10	18	26
	(%)	25.0	45.0	65.0
PD	(no.)	9	10	19
	(%)	21.4	23.8	54.2
PNL	(no.)	4	5	20
	(%)	9.8	12.2	48.8
PRM	(no.)	2	10	21
	(%)	1.7	8.3	17.4

Source: Author's database. For names of parties, see Tables 1 and 2.

most stable electorate, comprising the ethnic Hungarian population from Romania, it has relatively constant representation in Parliament and therefore provides the best indicator of the rate of parliamentarian seat reproduction. If the electoral success of the party, measured in percentage of parliamentarian seats is controlled, the rate of parliamentarian seat reproduction from one legislature to the next is on average about two-thirds of the MPs.

With respect to the educational profile of MPs of the parties in power, a shift from the humanist and juridical sciences to technical sciences is noticeable. This correlates with the process of renewal of the party representatives in Parliament. Thus, the dominance of technical specialization reflects the structure of the Romanian higher education system at the end of the 1960s, beginning of the 1970s, when most of the newcomers pursued their studies.

A significant proportion of PUNR and PRM MPs are social sciences graduates, which explains their type of discourse and worldview. The ideologization of social science studies during the communist period is well known. One aim of departments of history and philosophy, indeed their main goal, was to produce "ideologues" to maintain the ongoing needs of the system's superstructure (see also Culic 2005b). Most of the PUNR and PRM MPs take a discursive, demagogic, and charismatic approach to politics; their speech and behavior are laden with emotionally powerful (ethnonational) symbols and representations. In most cases they lack familiarity with economic, juridical, and technical notions, and are remote

Table 6

Profile of Voters for Greater Romania Party (PRM), 2000 (%)

	PRM voters (*N* = 254)	Romanian electorate without PRM voters (*N* = 1,827)
Respondents not at all satisfied with the life they live	34.3	28.3
Respondents believe that now life is worse than it was in the previous year	58.7	54.7
"You cannot trust most of the people"	65.4	63.4
Membership in a nonprofit organization	4.7	10.5
"The state should be involved in political party activity"	47.7	31.5
Respondents express trust in courts of justice	42.1	50.1

Source: Public Opinion Barometer, Foundation for an Open Society Romania, 2000 (May and November).

from concrete policies and problem solving.[7] Their discourse identifies enemies and dangers that they pledge to defeat. Their target population consists of individuals whose social situation involves a specific dimension of insecurity and uncertainty. Among their voters are the uprooted (rural migrants into cities), Romanians who feel threatened by the "Hungarian danger," people longing for an authoritarian, providing, controlling, paternal state, who are insecure about their jobs, people who suffer from what I call the "syndrome of acquired helplessness." Table 6 briefly illustrates how the voters of PUNR and PRM differ from the average population of voters in terms of variables that operationalize insecurity.

There is a sharp distinction between UDMR and the other parties in the parliament in terms of professional profile of its MPs. In all legislatures, the proportion of UDMR representatives holding a degree in law was significantly higher than that of all other parties. This clearly indicates the practical recruitment strategy of the UDMR, which pairs this approach with cooperation with whatever party is in government. This is well reflected in the discourse and parliamentarian activity of this party, which is always characterized by a precise line of argumentation and demand. Moreover, it has always had in the parliament three or four Hungarian language newspaper journalists/editors who are acquainted with the local and national social, economic, and political issues of the day.

While still counterbalanced by the PUNR, and following the exit of this party from the political scene, UDMR politics at all times bore a regional trait; even

when it was a full member of the coalition in government, UDMR did not express a vision that encompassed the whole political community. Neither the Hungarian politicians from Romania nor the Romanian politicians were able to reformulate the topic of the Hungarian minority other than in the old bipolar terms of integration/assimilation versus autonomy/separation. Hungarians were unable to convince the Romanian population that they see the Romanian state as their state, and share the interests of the political community of this state. They no longer managed to shape a plausible formula for the institutional form desired by and for the Hungarian community in Romania.

Considering the pressure for economic reform and the need to introduce related legislation, the weak representation of graduates in legal and economic studies in the 1990–2004 legislatures is remarkable. It is astonishing that the main party in the government coalition of 1996–2000, PNŢ-CD, had no representative in Parliament who was specialized in economics.

However, there is a trend for the political class to become professionalized, as politicians understand the need to become acquainted with the space of politics and economics. Approximately one-tenth of the MPs in the 2000–2004 parliament attended university courses to supplement their first degree. Of these some attended the National Defense College, the successor of the Academy Ştefan Gheorghiu—the supplier of party ideologues during communist times, now turned into an elitist producer of state administrators under the label of "national security" studies (see also Tudor and Gavrilescu: 160–64) or other short-term postgraduate specialization courses. Most of them obtained full university degrees, mainly in three disciplines: approximately half in economics (management, international economic relations, business administration), a third in political science, and about 15 percent in law. This trend was facilitated by the development of Romanian higher social science education, especially political science, international relations, and public administration, which provided the institutional framework to produce professionals in politics and administration.

The longitudinal study of the political elite also reveals another type of "professionalization" that links the political space with the interests in the economic sphere. A close knowledge and understanding of the Romanian communist system suggests that the "political capitalism" thesis best explains Romanian postsocialist pathways to capitalism. Former cadres had an advantage in entrepreneurial ventures due to their organizational experience and network resources, as well as their access to higher education. In his study on entrepreneurship in postcommunist Romania, Stoica (2004: 274) identifies a hybrid entrepreneurial strategy. The "part-time entrepreneurs" are incumbents in the state bureaucracy or managers of state enterprises, for which part-time entrepreneurship is a rent-seeking, predatory form of economic activity that may hinder the development of entrepreneurial classes and economic growth. Quite a few high-profile cases of corruption related to big business were highlighted in the mass media, and became the subject of European Union reprimand and sharp action. Not only is

Table 7

The Pattern of Recruitment into the Romanian Parliament, 1992–2004

	1992–1996 (*N* = 483)	1996–2000 (*N* = 485)	2000–2004 (*N* = 485)
Administration	11.4	6.4	12.4
Unions	—	—	2.3
Government	1.4	2.7	5.8
Directors/managers	16.4	14.0	24.5
Other	70	65.8	52.6
Total	99.2	97.5	97.5

Source: Author's database. See Tables 2–4.

parliamentary immunity a way to enter the gray spaces of the Romanian economy, but the parliament is also a level playing field for promoting successful business. The position of MP has become a routine strategy for big money to protect and enhance its influence. In fact, two dominant avenues to a seat in parliament reveal the mutual relation between the political and the economic fields: the political recruitment of significant economic actors is needed to maintain local electoral support and to finance national electoral campaigns, and the self-recruitment of economic actors into the political field is a means to support their private business.

Data on the occupational trajectory of MPs demonstrates a clear trend showing the heavy penetration of economic interests in Parliament. Table 7 shows the transformation of recruitment patterns during three legislatures in 1992–2004.

The category "administration" refers to people who have worked in local or governmental administration. Its main representatives are former mayors and vice-mayors, former members of local councils, or workers in the Bucharest administration. "Unions" denotes leaders of industrial/worker unions who were co-opted to support the electoral race of one party or another. The category "government" contains former members of governments. Finally, the most interesting category, "directors/managers" consists of general directors and other directors, presidents, and general managers of economic enterprises or state apparatuses (the most prominent of which are SIDEX Galaţi, TEPRO Iaşi, SAFI Invest, FPP II Moldova, ARO Plant, BCR Arad, and Elvila). The last category, "others," consists mainly of professionals such as medical doctors, lawyers, teachers and university professors, economists, and engineers, and retired persons. The most distinctive mode of recruitment belongs to the PRM, whose 2000–2004 parliamentarians included two lyric artists, one priest, one choreographer, one political prisoner in Transnistria, one poetess from the Republic of Moldova, the bizarre daughter of a Romanian classical poet, and many former Securitate

officers and retired army generals, demonstrating, on one hand, the essentially hard-line communist-permeated nature of the party, and, on the other hand, its populist opportunistic strategy of candidate recruitment and electoral appeal. In fact, the co-option of prominent public people is a popular choice of candidates: the PDSR chose Romanian's best tennis player as a candidate for general mayor of the capital in the local elections of 1996, and the PNL asked former Romanian king Mihai I to be its presidential candidate in the general elections of 1992.

The penetration of the economic category into Parliament is signaled by its increased proportion—up to one-quarter of the MPs—during 1992–2000, and indicates the close relationship between economic and political interests. This noticeable trend led to institutional modifications, for example, legislation concerning status incompatibility for members of the state administration, regulating the relationship between various interest positions in society (Law 161/2003), or legislation requiring the disclosure of personal and family wealth for dignitaries, magistrates, public servants, and leaders of state institutions (Law 115/1996, amended as Law 157/2005).

As expected, the proportion of the political categories "administration" and "government" also increased, as the members of local administrations made their way to national political bodies, and former members of government settled within the Parliament. Both of these trends are symptoms of "professionalization" of the field of politics, as experienced people from the economy and administration enter the legislating body.

The distribution of these categories by party produces more refined types of parliamentarian careers: rent-seeking entrepreneurs, acquisition classes in the Weberian sense, routinized administrators, involved intellectuals/professionals, and rentiers (see Table 8).

Despite this rich mix of MPs, the noticeable professionalization of the political space indicates a certain settlement of the political game in Romania. While still stained by accusations of fraud in the 2004 local and general elections and colored with unprincipled public language, now there are institutionalized rules of behavior within the political space recognizable by party leaders, candidates, and voters. Even the opportunistic candidates learn the language and behavior of politics and how to intertwine their private interests with the political interests the larger party and the rules of the game. One example involves the case of the lyric artist member of the PRM whose poor mass media image built during the previous legislature, so troubled the party leader that the letter tried to get rid of her by placing her on party list in a district where the PRM had the least support. Making use of all her "cultural" capital resources and pursuing an energetic electoral campaign in that district, she managed to get herself elected senator. Parties' recurrent attempts to renew their doctrines and strategies also signify that the political space has become institutionalized and that parties need to work hard to survive in a contested environment, where voters are becoming increasingly competent.

Table 8

Distribution of Recruitment Categories by Party, the 2000–2004 Parliament

	PSD	UDMR	PD	PNL	PRM
Administration	14.6	7.5	23.8	14.6	8.3
Unions	3.8	—	—	—	1.7
Government	6.6	5.0	14.3	12.2	0.8
Directors/managers	33.8	7.5	11.9	36.6	16.5
Other	38.0	80.0	47.6	36.6	69.4
Total*	96.7	100	97.6	100	100

Source: Author's database. See Tables 2–4.
*Totals are less than 100 percent because of missing data.
For names of parties, see Tables 1 and 2, and 4.

Conclusion

The sociological and political science literature on transition to democracy is rich in works that conceptualize and predict change in the social structure of postcommunist societies and analyze the political and economic transformations entailed by such processes. These have principally concerned "winners" of the transition or the big/elite entrepreneurs, to identify the class that would act as the new "capitalists" in forming the market economy. In these conceptualizations, communist political capital and all its determinations are seen either as an advantage by nature of its capacity to be converted into economic capital, or as a liability, when not accompanied by forms of cultural capital (management know-how, technical skills, etc.).

To test these theories, most of the studies have used a cross-sectional approach, sampling the pool of big entrepreneurs or holders of local, regional, and national positions of authority (the elite), analyzing their communist and postcommunist trajectories. The present study employs a different methodological approach, focusing on a clearly defined state decision-making body, the Romanian Parliament, operationalized as the political elite, and examines its transformation over the first decade of postcommunist adjustment to democratic rules and the transition to a market economy. This approach is useful in that it emphasizes several political trends that can be juxtaposed with processes of change in other social fields.

Analysis of Romanian data indicates the following trends. First, a homogenization of the legislating body in terms of social characteristics such as age (generation, socialization experiences) and specialization has affected the form and quality of legislative activity. Second, the political elite has become professionalized as the proportion of MPs with a background in economy and legal studies has in-

creased, while an important proportion of the rest specialized or completed full degree courses in economics, international relations, and political science. Another dimension of the professionalization process is seen in the overall increase in the number of former leaders of local administration and members of government that have entered the parliament. Third, there is a more precise articulation between economic interests and political representation, which has increasingly become the subject of institutional regulation. These trends correlate with changes in many dimensions of Romanian social and economic life, and constitute both the causes and results of several institutional adjustments.

Notes

1. In Romania, for example, the parliament consists of two bodies—the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies—that had identical prerogatives up to the 2003 constitutional revision. Bills must be approved by both chambers, and in the case of disagreement there is a fairly complicated procedure of mediation. As a consequence, the whole legislative process is difficult, tedious, long, and ineffective. The constitutional revision of 2003 differentiates the authority prerogatives of the two chambers. The timing of the constitution-making process is crucial in terms of legitimacy and distribution of power.

2. In contrast, in the case of Poland, the compromise resulting from the Round Table talks opened only 35 percent of the seats in the Sejm to free competition. The party soldiers proposed a strong office of the presidency, with an indirectly elected president, a proposal refused by Solidarity. As a trade-off, the Round Table created the Senate, to be freely elected, and a presidency, with the president to be elected by a simple majority of the Sejm and the Senate, and with special powers in the areas of internal security, defense, and foreign relations. On the complications entailed by the constitution-making process in Poland, see Linz and Stepan (1996: 280–83).

3. Most new democracies in Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union witnessed the intermittent victory of nondemocratic practices, whether authoritarian, antipolitics, populist, or other, at the level of individuals (e.g., Ion Iliescu in Romania, Lech Wałęsa in Poland, or Alexander Lukashenka in Belarus), parties (e.g., the Greater Romania Party in Romania), or entire systems (e.g., Moldova or Belarus).

4. Data on 462 people occupying positions of power in May 20, 1990–September 27, 1992, are as follows: 148 FDSN members of parliament, 143 FSN members of parliament, 52 high-ranking officials of the executive apparatus (ministers, secretaries of state and ambassadors—all part of the Petre Roman government), 96 PNL, PNŢ-CD, UDMR members of parliament and presidents, vice presidents, or secretary generals of these parties, 12 PDAR members of parliament, and 11 PUNR members of parliament (Tibil 1995: 103–6, 112).

5. For a detailed account see RFE/RL Research Reports, 1: 4, 14, 16, and 33 (1992).

6. By the end of their mandate in 2000 and 2004, respectively, approximately 10 percent of the MPs were in this situation. This was mainly the result of an overt strategy of the PDSR to strengthen its hold by recruiting representatives from other parliamentarian parties. A 2001 study showed that one year after the local elections in 2000 the rate of migration among mayors was 22 percent. Out of 2,957 mayors elected in June 2000, 651 had changed party affiliation by June 2001, of which 535 migrated from other parties to the PDSR (Institutul de Politici Publice 2001: 11–13).

7. In the 2000 electoral campaign Corneliu Vadim Tudor promised to rule with a machinegun to stop corruption, and to nationalize all large fortunes to correct social injustice.

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