

# The fall of 'Dracula politics' in Romania

And the raise of conservatism on steroids.

Wednesday 13 January 2021, by [CERNAT Maria](#) (Date first published: 9 December 2020).

**On December 6, Romanians elected their members of parliament. The elections were held despite the fact that there were record numbers of Covid cases during the last month with more than 5,500 cases on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December and 148 people dead. This is the last chapter in a catastrophic management of the Covid crisis that resulted in very poor score for the governing party, the National Liberals. These are also the elections where only 31.85% of Romanians voted. This is a record low since 41.72% of Romanians voted in 2012 and 39.67% voted in 2008. The results were predictable, but, there is one major surprise.**

The Social Democrats won 29.69% of parliamentary seats. They were followed by the current governing party the National Liberals. Save Romania Union got 14.75% of the votes and, here comes the surprise, a party that was formed last year, Alliance for the Unity of Romanians got an incredible 8.69% of the votes! It was followed by the Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania — an ethnic party mainly formed by the Hungarian minority. There were two political parties, The Party of the Popular Movement, managed by the former president Traian Băsescu and the Pro România party that were not able to pass the threshold of 5% necessary to enter the parliament.

These are the numbers but, of course, there is a story behind those numbers. For many political commentators the comeback of the Social Democrats as a major political force was not surprising. They are a big political party and they took advantage of the fact that the National Liberals were not able to manage the Corona crisis.

Before discussing the actual electoral outcome we should take a closer look at the current political parties and their platforms.

## **The Social Democrats are caught in continuous opportunism.**

Their political program is based on raising salaries and pensions, but they want to do that by attracting more funds from the European Union. They do not talk about an equitable raise of salaries, and this is very important in a country like Romania. That is because there are huge disparities between the ones at the top and the ones at the bottom of the hierarchy, even in public institutions. You may have, in the same university for example, somebody who earns 400 euros and a Rector that earns 4,000 euros. A 10% raise will result in 400 euros for the rector and 40 euros for the ones at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Another problem with the Social Democrat's economic program is that they do not challenge the current mechanism of fund redistribution in the European Union. Instead, they want to take the money from the European Union and build a Strategic Investment Fund in order to be able to direct the money towards key economic sectors. The Social Democrats do not talk about progressive taxation or tax justice. They are the party that has no clear direction and wants to do well by the workers and their employers. In terms of cultural values, the Social Democrats have given up some of the nationalist and Orthodox discourses that made them famous in recent years.

The National Liberals want to divert as many funds as possible towards small and medium businesses (SMB). If the social democrats are not socialist at all because they do not want progressive taxation and equity in the raise of the salaries,

the liberals are not very keen to obey their self-proclaimed ideological doctrine either. They are what we might call

### **liberals for the citizens and socialist for the businesses.**

If one takes a look at their governing program, they would be very surprised to see how many social aids the liberals are willing to pay to the SMB. They want to put a halt to the payment of interest rates till the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2021 and they want to reschedule the payment of taxes for 12 months. At the same time, and here is the interesting part, their program aims to offer state guarantees of 30m lei (6.25bn euros) for loans offered through IMM Invest and Eximbank (it is not very clear why exactly they chose these two private banks.) They want to offer other important financial aids and irredeemable financing of 1.3bn euros for SMB. Their political program has 16 measures of support for the SMB for cultural entrepreneurship, tourism companies and restaurants.

So, the liberals want to pour billions of euros into the hands of small and medium business. At the same time, they boast about raising the median wage — not the minimum wage — and about raising the median pension to 416 euros. The cynicism of such measures speaks for itself — they talk about the average wage like the statistician that drowned in a river with an average depth of one meter. The median wage is completely irrelevant since 42% of contracts are below the average wage and only 13% are above the average wage.

### **The political program of Save Romania Union is one of the most extreme.**

They want to reduce the number of parliamentary seats to 300. The Romanian Parliament has two chambers: the Senate (136 seats) and the Chamber of Deputies (329 seats). Save Romania Union has a radical populist agenda. Given the title you might have thought that they are running for the DA's office, not parliament. The literal translation of their political program would be "A Romania without theft." Their idea of a good plan for Romania is anti-corruption and privatization! They speak about the "right to choose healthcare and education" meaning that they want to support through public funds private hospitals and schools. We already have a law in Romania that allows private schools to take the money the state offers for a child's education and to also collect money from the parent through taxes. Now they want to do the same for the healthcare system. They also want to abolish the school inspectorate — a very important institution in the Romanian educational system.

Now the absolute surprise for political commentators and politicians is AUR.

### **"Aur" means "gold"**

in Romanian. Catchy title for a political party that was formed last year! Now, this is the most extreme of the political parties in Romania. Its program has, according to their statements, four fundamental elements: the family, the country, faith and liberty.

A simple reading of their political program makes your hair stand on end because it feels like the thirties are ahead of us. But not the 2030s, the 1930s and their right-wing extremism.

The party got almost 9% of votes and everybody is talking about it. Romania has had this type of political party. It was called the Greater Romania Party and was founded and managed by Corneliu Vadim Tudor, a very vocal and histrionic political leader. He died some years ago and its voters moved towards the social democrats and the national liberals. Now, they have a new voice. This

party is very interesting. Its voters are mainly men aged 18 to 30 from rural and urban backgrounds. They were mostly voted for in the historical province of Moldova and in the region of Dobruja.

Their rhetoric is simple and fanatical: "The country is the land of the father, if we listen to the etymology of the word, the native language is the language your mother (...) The family is the basic cell of any viable society. The AUR's doctrine considers gender 'ideology' a theoretical aberration that descends from the dark chambers of the neo-Marxist activists (...) Marriage cannot have as its primordial formula anything other than the pair formed by a man and a woman. Any other option of bringing the sexes together has nothing to do with the authentic sense of this formula. This is why, in the vision of AUR, the family is a non-negotiable theme; it is not a problem to be solved. It was solved long before we appeared, the generation whose indignation led to the current formation of AUR".

The principles of AUR are life — that begins, needless to say, at conception, and the sacrosanct principles of: "private property," "market economy," "meritocracy" and "sacrifice" (whatever it is supposed to mean.) In terms of health care, AUR wants to introduce "complementary private health insurance in a context that would prevent ethical problems." AUR would also encourage part time and remote working, especially for mothers! This along with lowering taxes for investors and deregulation are enough for us to see how a conservative neoliberal party would look like.

No rights for women or the LGBT community and the encouragement of entrepreneurship!

The leaders of this political party are very interesting. Mr George Simion is a former leader of football supporters that founded the association Honor et Patria and United Under the Flag. In 2015 Mr Simion was expelled from Moldova. He was apprehended by the Moldovan Security and Intelligence Service. Apparently, George Simion was planning a march in Chișinău for the union of Moldova and Romania. The actions of supporters attracted more fines and sanctions from the international football associations due to their xenophobic comments.

He is also responsible for a very disturbing event that took place in 2019 in the western part of Romania in Valea Uzunului when a group of football supporters went to enter the cemetery in order to "celebrate Romanian heroes." The leader of the parliamentary group of the Hungarian political party in Romania, Korodi Attila, declared that "it was something that can hardly be described in words, hundreds of Romanians came, some of them were football supporters and the riot police fought back. They entered through another place in the cemetery. They jumped on crosses. They threw mud and stones at the Hungarian people attending the ceremony." Apparently, the fight started because in the international cemetery of victims of WWII some Orthodox priests erected Romanian crosses and the Hungarians allegedly put black bags on those crosses.

Another co-chairman of AUR is Mr Claudiu Richard Târziu, a fierce defender of the family involved in the 2018 referendum on the definition of the family as the union between a man and a woman. He is the only one that, at least so far, has not yet been involved in any major scandal.

The third leader of AUR is Mr Sorin Lavric. I met Mr Lavric while studying philosophy at the University of Bucharest. He was the teaching assistant of a very prominent professor and right wing public intellectual Gabriel Liiceanu who is also the manager of one of the most important publishing houses in Romanian, Humanitas. In 2019 Sorin Lavric published a book *The Essence of a Woman* that is basically filled with blatant misogynistic remarks, the violence of which can only be surpassed by their stupidity: "No man searches for in a woman the intelligence, the depth of the spirit, or the reason. Those who want philosophy they would not find it in a woman's head, but they will find the chance of immersing in the athanor of the labia [probably meaning vagina — MC]."

AUR claims it adheres to the sacrosanct “principle of meritocracy.” But they are also adhering to the “principle of the family.” This could be the only explanation why journalists found out that there are 27 cases where candidates of AUR were members of the same family. They even discovered a case where candidates were husband, wife and the mother of the husband. They are really taking the sacrosanct principles of meritocracy and family to the next level!

### **There are more interesting things to say about AUR.**

The leader of the Bihor section of the party, a district in the western part of Romania was convicted for beating up the boyfriend of his ex-girlfriend and is currently being investigated for organizing a crime group that was stealing from ATMs! AUR is filled with anti-vaxxers, Covid conspiracists and people with interesting relations with the secret services and retired military personnel.

General Mircea Chelaru is such a figure. Completely delirious, general Chelaru spreads theories about the noble origins of the Romanian people. These theories are quite successful in Romania. They began being concocted in 1971, once a special number of the Romanian famous magazine *Secolul XX* (The XXth Century) published a special issue on [protochronism](#). It was the time when Ceaușescu wanted to distance himself from the Soviet Union and had to push the pedal of nationalism. A self-gratifying history was concocted. According to this ludicrous theory that even has a name, “dacio-pathology”, it would appear our ancestors are a noble tribe, Dacians, that is basically responsible for spreading civilization across the whole world, even Japan being at some point colonized by our noble ancestors!

In terms of external influences, it is important to note that AUR is a very toxic combination of veterans that think Russia thrives because Vladimir Putin is a ‘true man’ and the LGBT community there has no rights; football supporters, and neo-protestant militant groups.

There are many reasons why such an incredible political force that is so absurd in its message it is humorous, was able to gather the most toxic elements from Romanian society and gain almost 9% of parliamentary seats.

Let us not forget that the Romanian diaspora, that is people that were forced to work abroad because they could not find a job in Romania, voted massively for this party. The poverty, the catastrophic management of the Covid crisis and the fact that the Orthodox Church has powerful influence at the social and political level, all these elements and probably many more led to this political surprise.

Now, why do I say we are witnessing the

### **death of ‘Dracula politics?’**

Because the National Liberals used the Social Democrats as some sort of vampire, the great evil that they must protect us, the citizens, from. It looks like this strategy is finally losing its appeal. But, on the other hand, we should not be very optimistic since the success of AUR is definitely not a golden path to prosperity and progress for Romania.

The strategy the National Liberals used was the narrative of the big evil that we must vote out. It started to fail. Now what brought AUR to power was a different technique. They used the social networks of Orthodox priests, neo-protestant leaders and veterans to boost their message. Their tremendous success in terms of political communication is a result of a combination of a clever use of social media and of those social networks that brought faithful disciplined voters to elect them.

---

**Maria Cernat** is a graduate of the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences (FJSC) (2001) and the Faculty of Philosophy (2004) at the University of Bucharest. She obtained an MA from FJSC in 2002 and in 2008 she got her PhD in Philosophy. She is currently a PhD Lecturer in the Department for Communication and Public Relations at Titu Maiorescu University and at the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations, SNSPA. Since 2011 she has published articles on Romanian websites for political debates (CriticAtac, Cealaltă Agendă, România Curată, Gazeta de Artă Politică, etc.).

*[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and or French. You will receive one email every Monday containing links to all articles published in the last 7 days.*

---

**P.S.**

The Barricade

<https://thebarricade.online/the-fall-of-dracula-politics-in-romania/>