

Political profiles of the presidential pre-campaign

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Abstract: *The purpose of this material is to analyze the public image of the three main candidates for the Romanian presidency. The candidates' image profiles will be quantified through several parameters, such as: political status, political behavior, achievements etc. In order to better categorize each image profile, we chose to describe the current political climate, considering that this is a pre-campaign period.*

1. Introduction

The most important domestic political event of 2009 in Romania is certainly represented by the presidential elections. As expected, all domestic political factions will support their own candidate, so as to ensure as high a chance for success as possible in the upcoming elections. From our standpoint, there are three parties whose candidates actually have a chance of occupying the position of Romanian President: the Liberal Democratic Party (PD-L), the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the National Liberal Party (PNL). Beside these factions, the run of independent candidate Sorin Oprescu might prove to be a successful one, although he is undecided about his candidacy. For this paper we chose an analytical and descriptive approach, relying on instruments such as: observation and content analysis. We examined the

profiles of the three main presidential candidates, as they are portrayed throughout all types of media.

1.1. Analysis of the current social and political context

Before describing and analyzing the profiles of the main candidates to the presidential elections, we would like to provide a brief evaluation of the current social and political context, so as to better comprehend the background of each candidate. As of September 2009, the political environment was as follows:

I. Government: after the parliamentary elections of 2008, Romania had a government made up by the two main political factions of the country: the Liberal Democratic Party and the Political Alliance formed of the Social Democratic Party and the Conservative Party (PSD+PC). This is a major coalition, which covers about 70% of the votes in the Parliament and which consists of a center-right-wing party (PD-L) and of a center-left-wing alliance (PSD+PC), as part of the “Partnership for Romania”, signed by the presidents of the two factions, Emil Boc and Mircea Geoană on December 14, 2008 [13]. Running the government together would not have been possible at all without that specific agreement, due to the long lasting notorious animosity between the two parties. Few political analysts gave this alliance a chance of survival, but it turned out to last longer than expected, as it was still working in September 2009. This is how PD-L and PSD representatives are able to cohabit within the government, more or less smoothly. As for the governing power, PD-L has an advantage through its representative, Emil Boc, who is Prime Minister. Even so, being a Prime Minister in a crisis period does not portray a very good image for the party which the head of government represents, as unpopular measures are usually required in such situations.

In what the makeup of the new government is concerned, we would like to stress upon the fact that PD-L invited PNL to join them in running the government, but their offer was turned down. From our standpoint, it appears that this decision was made based on the ongoing polemics between former PM Călin Popescu Tăriceanu (PNL) and President Traian Băsescu (PD).

II. Parliament: after the November 2008 elections, a new parliamentary structure was formed between the following factions: PD-L, the PSD+PC Alliance, PNL, UDMR (the Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania) and representatives of national minorities, other than the Hungarian one [5], [6]. The power in the new government was divided between PD-L and PSD+PC on one side and PNL and UDMR on the other side. Also, it is important to note that PRM (Great Romania Party), a faction worth mentioning, did not obtain the mandatory 5% of the votes, preventing it from reaching the current Parliament; so was the case for PNGCD (New Generation Christian Democratic Party), run by Mr. Gigi Becali. As for the image and overall public behavior of parliamentary representatives, we must make the following observations:

- PD-L acted as the governing party, trying to create and promote a set of its own policies, on both local and central levels;

- Although one of the governing parties, PSD harshly criticized the Government's measures, acting more like a party of the opposition;
- PNL represented the opposition and acted as such;
- UDMR represented the opposition and acted as such.

III. Territorial structures: this is another parameter which we would like to ponder. The readers of this material might ask themselves what can be so important about territorial structures. Well, this is what we will try to clarify in the next paragraphs. 50% of the population in Romania lives in rural areas, which are usually less informed than urban ones. Political parties who are represented through mayors in such areas may use them as electoral agents in their campaign. Thus, the more mayors a party delegates throughout rural areas, the more likely it is they will obtain good results in the elections. If mayors actively participate in campaigns, they can usually ensure that 40-50% of the population in their area will vote for the candidate they promote. Even in large cities, mayors have a fundamental role in parliamentary or presidential elections, but they must have a different approach from that used in smaller settlements. In cities, they can have the role of public image for a candidate in their party. City Council representatives may as well pursue voters to support their party's candidate.

Another category of local public figures, with a very important role within parliamentary and presidential elections, is represented by the presidents of County Councils. When they become popular because of their public policies, County Council presidents can influence people who support them to feel just as sympathetic and lean towards a candidate in their party in the elections. County counselors may as well have a noteworthy influence in the choice the public will make. In conclusion, we wish to stress that territorial structures are extremely important and that the more powerful these structures are, the more chances the party who controls them has to obtain a better score for its candidates in the elections. As few people actually go and vote in Romania, the importance of these structures is even greater here. For a 30-40% attendance rate in the elections, territorial structures have a quintessential role in determining who the president is going to be. This reality represents a disadvantage for independent candidates, who do not get any support in rural areas, as opposed to their adversaries who belong to a political faction. For the upcoming presidential elections, we anticipate a great advantage from territorial structures for two of the candidates: the PD-L and the PSD+PC one.

IV. Economic and social environment: a good living standard makes the population happy. Needless to say that a bad one engenders contempt within the various social categories. According to the National Prognosis Commission, Romania will have 685,000 unemployed people at the end of 2009 (69.8% more than 2008) [7]. The worldwide economic crisis has struck Romania on all fronts. In situations like this, the Government is forced to take anti-crisis measures which are unpopular and thus blemish the public image of the PM. Lately, most discussions between unions and the Government have been related to Government's wish to take responsibility for

the laws regarding salaries and education. In doing so, their actions caused a lot of contempt among unions, which might take action themselves, and even go on general strike – especially within the public sector, according to union leaders. This frustration among various categories of employees might result in low interest toward the elections and thus fewer voters. This is an overall description of the social and political environment in the period before the presidential elections.

V. Romanian foreign affairs: now, after seeing the internal ambience in Romania, it is important to get a grip on its foreign affairs. Romania is following European policies, as it is, as of January 1, 2007, a member of the European Union. As we mentioned in other papers and conferences as well, Romania's entry in the EU was only the first step in achieving European standards [3]. We believe that true integration takes time, especially as there are several discrepancies between realities in our country and those in more developed countries within the Union. Also, it seems to us that the material or financial standards will not be among the hardest to achieve, as it is mentality that takes the longest to change. As of July 15, 2009, Romania has 33 representatives in the European Parliament (MEPs), members of PD-L, PSD+PC, PNL, PRM and UDMR [14], [9]. Relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova need a closer look. During the last few years, diplomatic relations between the two countries became ever staler, due to the former communist-based Government of Moldova. More recently, however, this year's election in Moldova brought a democratic coalition to the surface, whose agenda is oriented towards the Occident and the European Union. It appears only natural that relations between the two countries improve in the near future, as they share many common goals. Last, but not least, we must mention that once Angela Merkel was elected in Germany, it became clear that center-right-wing policies are going to continue thriving there, as in France. That makes it safe to assume that the same center-right values within European states are going to be welcomed in Romania and they will influence the upcoming presidential elections.

2. Pre-campaign for the presidential elections

The pre-campaign of the presidential elections is a period in which all factions and their candidates prepare for the upcoming events. Political PR activity scrambles during this time, as political figures become more active themselves [Rus, 2006, p.25]. The pre-election period is “characterized by public polls. It is a time of selections and elections of future candidates” [Rus, 2006, p.25]. As mentioned before, candidates who have large parties to support them have a strong advantage. Although not all candidates have been officially presented, parties probably already know exactly who they are going to support for the presidential run. Also, we are certain that they each contacted PR agencies months ago, in order to get political PR specialists to create the best electoral strategies they can for their candidates, both for the elections themselves, and for the period prior to that event. Numerous meetings are taking place in this period, involving all territorial structures in each county, so as to ensure that

everything will go smoothly once the presidential campaign begins. As we are talking about a national campaign, each party must have to separate strategies:

- a) general national strategy that each county organization must be familiar with, in order to have an overall nation-wide view on the flow of events;
- b) different strategy for each county, adapted to the needs of each particular area, which may be integrated in the general national program.

During pre-campaign, logistics are also put into place, along with all necessary staff for the actual campaign. These preparations must be made in time, as they have the convergent purpose of ensuring a functional system with an optimal output starting from day one of the campaign. We realize that the stake of the presidential elections is huge, and that is why we are absolutely convinced that each political party (especially parliamentary) is doing everything in their power to support their candidates in the run for presidency. As for the planning of the presidential elections, we wish to pinpoint a few facts about the activity of the Government. Whereas factions are in charge of their own preparations on a political strategy level, the Government is in charge of the elections administratively speaking. In Romania, to be more precise, the law states that the Ministry of Administration and Interior has the most important role in these matters. According to the Government's Decision HG 985/2009, presidential elections in Romania will take place on November 22, 2009 [16].

2.1. Political conflicts

As mentioned above, the idea of a political alliance between PSD and PD-L (even as a pact for Romania) was difficult for people to grasp. Even though they had cohabitated within the Government for 10 months, the relations between the two factions were not exactly smooth, making it clear that their standpoints related to measures of government were diverging. The most recent conflict between the two parties formed because Dan Nica (PSD), head of the Ministry of Administration and Interior, could be reshuffled. It appears that the Prime Minister ordered this because of certain statements made by Mr. Nica, and asked the PSD to name another person as head of the Ministry [11]. PM Emil Boc demands that another PSD representative be named Minister of Administration and Interior, but the faction still strongly supports Dan Nica, uttering that they are going to renounce their governing position, should he be reshuffled. Regardless of what happens further in the matter, it seems that underneath this rather trivial conflict, both factions wish to break protocol and cease working together. Perhaps the experience of cohabitation actually confirmed the fact that these factions have different doctrines, showing their leaders that their purposes cannot converge. Therefore, in our opinion, the most stringent issue in this case is not the breach of protocol, but the means by which it is broken. In other words, each party is interested in finding a way out of the coalition, should they find no common grounds. Judging by the way things are going, and by how inveterately they both behave, the protocol will be broken, as will the governing coalition.

3. Public image of the main prospective candidates

In what follows, we will try to describe the main prospective candidates to the position of President of Romania. To be able to compare them, we will use the following criteria: a) position, faction and political ascent; b) personality; c) political behavior and public appearances; d) political speech; e) non-verbal communication; f) accomplishments; g) strengths; h) weaknesses.

3.1. Traian Băsescu

a) Position, faction and political ascent

Traian Băsescu is the current President of Romania. He is traditionally a PD member, adhering to its doctrine ever since it was created by the division of Mr. Petre Roman's National Salvation Front (FSN), from Mr. Ion Iliescu's faction. For about 15 years, PD was part of the international socialist faction, thus being a center-left wing party. As a member of the PD, it makes perfect sense that Mr. Băsescu adopted left-wing beliefs. Presently, the president's party is PD-L, a center-right wing faction, which fully supports his representative in his position of head of state. We can observe that over time Traian Băsescu went through ideological changes, accepting the hold of a center-right wing party. Switching to a different doctrine was also other parties' main political weapon, within and outside the elections. Along the years, Mr. Băsescu had various positions within his faction and the Romanian Government, some of which are mentioned as follows: Minister of Transports (1991-1992), Romanian Parliament Deputy (1992-1996), General Mayor of Bucharest (2000-2004), PD President and President of Romania (December 20, 2004 – present day) [10]. Traian Băsescu stood out as Minister of Transports, as that position served as foundation for all his subsequent terms of office. Traian Băsescu is an intelligent politician, who evolved rapidly to presidency. We believe that the position of general Mayor of Bucharest was a key-element of his ascent, for the notoriety it brought both locally and on a national level.

b) Personality

Traian Băsescu is a very energetic man, used to being in command. This is due to another former position he occupied, which is that of Shipmaster. As for his temperament, we would place him in the sanguine-choleric category. If we considered K. Lewin's model [1] we could say that President Băsescu is a democratic leader with blunt, even authoritarian tendencies. He is a strong leader who can impose his authority. However, Mr. Băsescu is a charismatic man, giving out the vibe of a nice person, which makes him a sort of a mixture between a strong character and an open-minded, jovial one. These traits are probably the key elements which make him agreeable to people. From what his former collaborators declared so far, it appears that he is not an easy man to work with, which means that only few people managed sticking around.

c) Political behavior and public appearances

Traian Băsescu has a contrasting behavior. He displays rather different sides of his personality, appearing as a man with a plan for the country's internal affairs, and also as a loving father who is protective of his daughter, Elena. He gathers huge crowds to every event he attends, showing that he is open for discussions and popular among the people. By contrast, the conferences and briefings of the Cotroceni Palace show a fearless fighter against a "corrupted system" and against its representatives. He often attacks his political adversaries on TV, without ever criticizing members of the PD. His public appearances make it obvious that Mr. Băsescu wishes to be a versatile and adaptable President. As we see it, Traian Băsescu would have performed much better in the position of Prime Minister in Romania, or of President in a presidential republic, as opposed to a semi-presidential one.

d) Political speech

Traian Băsescu is a good public speaker, with a good grip on the Romanian language. He delivers logical speeches which are coherent and full of arguments to support his point of view. The language used is for everyone to understand, as he avoids doctrinarian talk and prefers a catch-all vocabulary. Along with informative elements, his speeches contain strong persuasive factors, which determine his listeners to trust what he says. President Băsescu uses a large range of keywords, out of which the following are said more frequently: I believe, I am considering, correct, absolutely yes etc.

e) Non-verbal communication

Mr. Băsescu's non-verbal communication is in concordance with his facies. He rarely uses sunglasses and his eyes never indicate that he is unsure of what to say. A fixed look "shows awareness of one's own strength, influence and authority" [Ghilezan, 2000, 151]. He has an easy-to-read facial expression and he often smiles. His upright standing positions reminds of a military man. He is notorious for raising and pointing his right-hand index finger when trying to stress and idea in his speech. Usually he wears suits of neutral colors, often going for more casual attires when he addresses masses of people.

f) Accomplishments

It is very difficult to quantify the work of a President, because of the boundaries set specifically by the Constitution in regards to the presidential duties. On a domestic level, Mr. Băsescu relied on his image to win conflicts with his political opponents. He was very adamant in his run against PM Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, and as President he travelled all over the country. One of his main priorities is to rid Romania of corruption, but this prerogative only helped his image rather than reaching the actual purpose. His intervention in the case of the hostages in Iraq was much appreciated, as it led to their release. His policy toward the military allies of our country was a constant and coherent one. There are no noteworthy accomplishments in his foreign policy, although he made a few attempts to strengthen bilateral relations with neighboring

countries. From our point of view, there hasn't been a palpable improvement in the links between Romania and the powerful countries of the world, at least not during President Băsescu's term, as these relations are now neutral-positive.

g) Strengths

First, Traian Băsescu's main advantage to the upcoming presidential elections is his current position, showing as favorite in all the polls. Then, Mr. Băsescu is unyielding as politician, having already proven that he can get what he wants. He is a redoubtable adversary for the other candidates, not so much due to his position as to his qualities. Further, the current European realities work to his benefit, as the more powerful EU members are run by Christian democrats, which will definitely have a say in the upcoming events in Romania. And last, but not least, Traian Băsescu has the support of one of the most powerful political parties in the country, PD-L, which is also represented by the current PM in the Government and runs impressive territorial structures that are able to make a difference in the upcoming elections.

h) Weaknesses

There are many things for which one could criticize Traian Băsescu, especially in regards to the internal affairs and to the arbitration of domestic factions in order to reach a state of balance between them. Unfortunately, Mr. Băsescu showed he was too close to his own faction and too quick to criticize the others. He sometimes failed to keep his promise: "As it is a political decision, we have to make sure that it is thoroughly followed, which means that if the Parliament votes against me in spite of the notice issued by the Constitutional Court, I will automatically resign my position (...)" [10]. Although a blazing fighter against corruption, he failed to realize that the Constitution prevents the President from taking direct action in that matter. Moreover, the doubtful results in this area make him vulnerable to his opponents. As for his foreign affairs policy, the lack of any noteworthy accomplishment on that level in the past five years also threatens to weaken his position

3.2. Mircea Geoană

a) Position, faction and political ascent

Mircea Geoană the head of the PSD and one of the main adversaries of Traian Băsescu in the run for the Romanian presidency. In his case too there is a small inadvertence related to his political background. He currently declares to be a social democrat, but between 1996 and 2000 he was Romania's extraordinary ambassador plenipotentiary in the US, supported by the Christian Democratic National Party (PNTCD). His most important former positions are: President of Romanian Senate Senator of Dolj County (2004 to present), Minister of Foreign Affairs (2000-2004), OSCE President (2001) [12]. Mircea Geoană had a very fast political ascent: in 2005 he became the president of the PSD, which he still runs today. During his term of office in PSD, the party obtained pretty good electoral scores, which makes Mr. Geoană Traian Băsescu's principal opponent.

b) Personality

Mircea Geoană is an elegant politician, very refined, with a clearly diplomatic structure. He tends to show a mixture of sanguine and melancholic temperaments, wisely expressing and supporting his statements, without necessarily being an authoritarian. In our opinion, his main trait as politician is common sense. Despite Mr. Iliescu's comments regarding Mr. Geoană, we believe that he is a valuable politician, yet failing to be a typical factor of social democrats, as he shows such elegance and respect. Unlike Traian Băsescu, Mircea Geoană always avoids conflicts.

c) Political behavior and public appearances

The behavior Mircea Geoană displays is usually defensive, acting to counter-argument opposing factions, especially the PD-L and the President. His political demeanor is thus not a steep one, but rather smooth and diplomatic. His public appearances have shown that he is an atypical left-wing zealot, always keeping calm, even in open conflicts with his adversaries. His political attacks are rather personal thoughts regarding certain situations created by his opponents, to which he tries to bring social democratic solutions. He only rarely appears by the side of his family, but enough to show that he is a loving father and an equally elegant and loving husband.

d) Political speech

The speeches Mircea Geoană delivers are coherent, logical and full of supportive arguments, although sometimes people might think his vocabulary is too pretentious. As opposed to Traian Băsescu's speeches, his are rather doctrine-oriented, depicting the social democratic ideology. Despite the fact that his speeches are not very appealing to the masses, he uses a calm and agreeable voice, which makes him look as a good man. His political vocabulary is more complex than that of Mr. Băsescu, but this advantage does not make people trust him more.

e) Non-verbal communication

Mr. Geoană's facies and facial expressions portray a sensitive person who is trying to be strong. His facial expressions are often in accordance with his statements. Besides his sobriety, the non-verbal elements in Mr. Geoană's demeanor show a great deal of involvement in the matters discussed and especially in the projects he brings forth. His speech is unfortunately not sufficiently supported by his non-verbal messages. He usually has an upright position, sometimes more loose, and his overall body gestures seem more like that of overseas politicians.

f) Accomplishments

As stated above, the PSD obtained satisfactory electoral scores under Mircea Geoană's management. In spite of the fact that this faction openly displayed a dual behavior towards opponent parties, both in relation to the PNL in the former Government and to the PD-L in the current one, and despite the criticism of the media, this demeanor helped strengthen its territorial influence, becoming the most powerful political

party in Romania. We believe that one of his most noteworthy achievements was the modernization of the PSD. Although there still are members in the faction that support conservative archaic ideologies, there is a great difference between the image of the party today and that of a few years back. Even though he did not manage to bring a full reform to the PSD, he definitely succeeded in improving it.

g) Strengths

His main advantage for the upcoming campaign is that he is supported by one of the most powerful political parties in Romania. Another advantage is that Mircea Geoană did not any position in the current Government, and thus he cannot be directly accused for its failures. His elegance and balance are also strong assets of the politician.

h) Weaknesses

The masses often misinterpret Mircea Geoană's demeanor. His elegance and common sense is unfairly labeled as weakness or lack of strength and determination. He has an obvious disadvantage to Traian Băsescu, as the latter is currently President of Romania.

3.3. Crin Antonescu

a) Position, faction and political ascent

Crin Antonescu is, in our point of view, the third candidate that might actually stand a chance to win the presidential elections. He is currently the President of the PNL, as well as Senator. Crin Antonescu is an authentic liberal, adhering to liberal ideology all throughout his political career. He had a normal-paced political ascent, becoming President of the PNL on March 20, 2009. Among the most important positions he had in his career are: Deputy between 1992 and 2008, Minister of Youth and Sports between 1997 and 2000, Senator (2008 to present) [15].

b) Personality

He is a poignant and straightforward man with precise aims for his life. His temperament is sanguine and melancholic, and he has an open personality which makes it easier for him to get through to youngsters. He is a very valuable person within the PNL, being characterized as elegant and intelligent.

c) Political behavior and public appearances

Crin Antonescu had far fewer appearances on the political stage than the two candidates described above (Traian Băsescu and Mircea Geoană), perhaps due to his former positions, which were less public than those of his opponents in the upcoming elections. He came closer to the limelight after becoming President of the PNL. He is not a rough politician, but he is rather poignant when in conflict with his adversaries. In what his political demeanor is concerned, he places somewhere between Mr. Geoană's diplomacy and Mr. Băsescu's straightforwardness. Crin Antonescu has the ability to strongly support his statements, maintaining a suitable balance at the same time. His

public appearances portray him as a wholehearted person who is able to maintain a professional distance.

d) Political speech

Crin Antonescu delivers impeccable speeches, as he is an excellent public speaker. From our standpoint, his speeches are the most valuable element of his public image. He is man governed by logics, coherence and a remarkable verbal fluence. The easy by which he expresses his beliefs represents an important aspect of his political speech, always making relevant analogies to explain his options. In spite of the complex vocabulary he uses, people can easily comprehend his message.

e) Non-verbal communication

Compared to his opponents in the run for presidency, Crin Antonescu's most valuable advantage is not necessarily non-verbal communication, but rather his political speech. He does not show very ample facial expressions. His upright position shows dignity. The movement of his hands is minimal during his speeches, but he manages to support his statements by the movement of his head.

f) Accomplishments

There are no noteworthy accomplishments of Crin Antonescu on the political stage, as the positions he had so far simply did not present that opportunity. However, it is remarkable that he became President of the PNL, the only historical parliamentary party after the 1989 Revolution in Romania. Mr. Crin Antonescu managed to maintain liberal unity after the 2008 elections, at the expense of many territorial structures, although that meant the PNL was losing its advantage to the PD-L and the PSD+PC.

g) Strengths

Crin Antonescu's greatest strength in the upcoming presidential elections is the fact the the party which supports him was not part of the current Government, thus being immune to all political attacks form any of his opponents. Also, he obtained the support of the third largest parliamentary party. And last, but not least, his political speeches are flawless, as we already mentioned above.

h) Weaknesses

The PNL does not have as many territorial structures at the PD-L or the PSD+PC, and these structures will be very important in the upcoming presidential campaign. Compared to his main two opponents, Crin Antonescu came on the political map only after becoming President of his faction. People generally believe that "the left wing favors the many and poor, and the right wing favors the few and rich".

4. Conclusions

We believe that one of the three candidates we presented above will most likely win the presidential elections, but we must mention that there are two more prospective

candidates who might have a few advantages for themselves if they decide to enter the run: Corneliu Vadim Tudor and Sorin Oprescu. However, as they do not have the support of territorial structures the other candidates have, they might not have a chance to actually win, although they may get a good electoral score.

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