

# The 2000 Romanian Presidential Elections – between Populism and Europeanism<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** In November 2000, ten years after the fall of the communist regime and the organization of the first free elections, the Romanian population was called to decide on the future president of the country. This was the first poll that took place after the transition between power and opposition, which took place in 1996, but also in the context of a serious economic crisis with considerable effects on living conditions, which marked the activity and political destiny of PNȚCD. The elections, especially the second round, proved to be representative not so much from the perspective of political options, but especially regarding the future of the country: open to Euro-Atlantic structures or isolated, oriented towards the former Soviet space. These visions were personalized by the two candidates, Ion Iliescu and Corneliu Vadim Tudor, and the present article analyses the electoral mechanisms the two tried to use in order to promote their platforms within a Romanian society marked by the economic recession, but also by a major moral and identity crisis.

**Keywords:** Elections, Electorate, Presidentialism, Europeanism, Populism, Crisis

**Rezumat:** În noiembrie 2000, la zece ani distanță de la căderea regimului comunist și de la organizarea primelor alegeri libere, populația din România a fost chemată să decidă cu privire la viitorul președinte al țării. Acesta a fost primul scrutin care a avut loc după tranziția între putere și opoziție, care s-a petrecut în 1996, dar și în contextul unei grave crize economice cu efecte considerabile asupra condițiilor de viață, care a marcat activitatea și destinul politic al PNȚCD. Alegerile, mai ales al doilea tur de scrutin, s-au dovedit a fi reprezentative nu atât din perspectiva opțiunilor politice, dar mai ales în ceea ce privește viitorul țării: deschis pentru structurile euro-atlantice sau izolat, orientat înspre spațiul ex-sovietic. Aceste viziuni au fost personalizate de cei doi candidați, Ion Iliescu și Corneliu Vadim Tudor, iar articolul de față analizează mecanismele electorale prin care cei doi au încercat să își

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promoveze platformele în cadrul unei societăți românești marcate de recesiunea economică, dar și de o importantă criză morală și identitară.

**Cuvinte cheie:** alegeri, electorat, prezidențialism, europenism, populism, criză

### **The context of the 2000 elections**

After the success of the opposition parties in 1996, when Emil Constantinescu became the President of Romania and the Democratic Convention won, which meant that Ion Iliescu's political party<sup>2</sup> was defeated for the first time since the 1989 Romanian Revolution which led to the fall of communism, four years of political instability followed within the government coalition formed by the Democratic Convention,<sup>3</sup> the Social Democrat Union,<sup>4</sup> and the Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania. To this situation, also contributed the economic crisis, as well as the unsuccessful Romanian foreign policy. The strategy of the parties in power was to apply a shock therapy to the economy, something that was never tried in Romania, and which meant fully liberalizing energy and food prices.<sup>5</sup> The unsatisfactory results of these policies began to be visible during 1997, by a 6.1% decrease in GDP, then by 4.78% in 1998. Inflation reached a new peak, reaching 154.8%, unemployment rose gradually to 11.8% in 1999, representing the highest level since the Revolution. The situation was aggravated by the increase in the number of retirees, through early retirement, so that in one year after the elections, the number of employees was exceeded by those who left the activity. This accumulation of indicators has led to a new economic crisis, felt more strongly than the one between 1990 and 1992.<sup>6</sup> The three governments that came into office – Victor Ciorbea, Radu Vasile and Mugur Isărescu – amplified even more the sensation of profound crisis in Romanian society, as the economic problems were boosted by the political ones.

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<sup>2</sup> Considered the successor of The Communist Party, after 1989 it was known as FSN – The National Salvation Front (1990-1992), FDSN – The National Salvation Democratic Front (1992-1996), PDSR – The Party of Socialist Democracy in Romania (since 1996).

<sup>3</sup> The main opposition coalition of parties, led by The Peasants National Party (PNȚCD).

<sup>4</sup> This was a coalition formed by FSN, which meanwhile became The Democratic Party (PSD) and The Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSDR). In the protocol signed by the leaders of the parties, Petre Roman and Sergiu Cunesco, it was mentioned that the two parties will have same candidates for both the local elections and the parliamentary ones, as well as a common candidate for the presidency.

<sup>5</sup> Florin Abraham, *Romania since the Second World War. A Political, Social and Economic History* (Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 162-163.

<sup>6</sup> Corneliu Iașu, *Atlasul electoral al României: 1990-2009* [Electoral atlas of Romania: 1990-2009] (Iași: Editura Universității Al. I. Cuza, 2013), p. 275.

Even the major foreign policy objective wasn't accomplished. During the Victor Ciorbea<sup>7</sup> Government, accession to NATO was presented by both the media and the authorities as a solution to all the problems of Romania, stating even the fact that the fate of the country was linked to the fulfilment of this goal. Because of the opposition from Germany, United Kingdom and the United States of America regarding the extension of the borders of the organisation to Eastern Europe, during the Madrid Summit of 1997, only the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were invited to join NATO.

On November 8th 2000, the European Commission presented to the public a favourable report about the Romanian Governments between 1996 and 2000 where both the successes and failures of this period were revealed. Among the highlighted issues there were the government's political commitment to addressing the problem of institutionalized children, the fulfilment of short-term priorities assumed in the Accession Partnership in 1999, while still not enough efforts were made to facilitate access to education of the Roma population, also regarding police demilitarization or the fight against corruption. From an economic point of view, the Commission referred to the decrease of the GDP in 1999 for the third consecutive year, to the fragility of the macroeconomic stabilization, the lack of attractiveness of the economic environment, the fact that despite the liberalization of prices, there have been cases in which the local government and regulatory agencies have maintained control over prices in areas such as services or utilities.<sup>8</sup> Also, according to another report, this time belonging to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Romania was the country with the least progress in reforms in Central and Eastern Europe. The analysis was based on problems such as frequent government changes and the discretionary application of various regulations, the lack of a unitary vision of ownership, the closure of some mines and the state's investments in non-profit enterprises and the slow rate of privatization.<sup>9</sup>

From the political point of view, during these four years, there were no special changes in the political archive. The main political formations were The Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR), CDR – which was beginning to lose its support due to the failure of the governments and eventually it dissolved, its place being taken over by CDR 2000, a coalition of The Christian And Democratic National Peasant Party (PNȚCD) and a few

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<sup>7</sup> Even though Victor Ciorbea was voted the Mayor of Bucharest earlier that year, he was appointed, surprisingly, as the Prime-Minister by President Emil Constantinescu. He held this position between 1996 and 1998.

<sup>8</sup> 'Raportul Europei asupra României', *Adevărul*, nr. 3240, November 8, 2000, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> 'România – țara cu cele mai mici progrese în reformă din Europa Centrală și de Est', *Adevărul*, nr. 3247, november 16, 2000, p. 1.

irrelevant parties, the Democratic Party (PD) – which rose in the polls, taking over the population dissatisfied with the Convention, The Great Romania Party (PRM) – which asserted itself as an important party due to the image of its leader, Corneliu Vadim Tudor and against the background of a general dissatisfaction of the population, the Alliance for Romania (ApR) – a party created by Iosif Boda and Teodor Melescanu who, after the 1996 elections, left the PDSR, adopting a social-liberal orientation. The main political event was represented by President Emil Constantinescu's announcement regarding his decision not to run for a new term, invoking his wish to continue the anti-corruption fight without the pressure of an electoral race. Along with the failure of the mandate, he also mentioned the most important success: „gaining the confidence of Europe and the world”.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the fact that each candidate had to obtain over 300,000 signatures in order to register for the presidential race, no less than 16 candidates were present at the start of the race: Th. Stolojan (PNL), Ion Iliescu (PDSR), T. Meleşcanu (ApR), Mugur Isărescu (independent, supported by CDR 2000), Petre Roman (PD), György Frunda (UDMR), C.V. Tudor (PRM), Nicolae Cervenii (Liberal Democratic Party of Romania), Paul Philippe de Hohenzollern (National Renaissance Party), Ion Sasu (Labor Socialist Party), Elena Grația Bârlă (independent), Eduard Gh. Manole (independent).<sup>11</sup>

The result of the vote of November 26, 2000 was surprising, because the candidates who came in the second round were Ion Iliescu, a favourite of the elections and positioned likewise in the opinion polls, and Corneliu Vadim Tudor, who experienced an ascent during the election campaign, managing to surpass the candidates of the ruling coalition. Thus, the PDSR leader obtained 36.35% of the total number of votes, while the PRM leader received 28.34%. The significance of this result was particularly marked by referring to the image of Romania abroad, the elections being seen as an essential step for the country's integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures.

### **The campaigns of Ion Iliescu and Corneliu Vadim Tudor**

During the campaign for the first round, the leader of the PRM promoted the restoration of a social and political order as points of his program which could only take place through the establishment of an authoritarian regime, which would have to be achieved through state institutions, such as the army, or the police. In this context, an episode highlighting the candidate's relations with the outside political personalities

<sup>10</sup> Emil Constantinescu, *Timpul dăruimării, timpul zidirii*, Vol. III, *Lumea în care trăim*, (Bucureșt: Editura Universalia, 2002), pp. 869-872.

<sup>11</sup> M. D., 'S-au terminat înscrierile la BEC: 13 pentru Cotroceni', *Adevărul*, nr. 3230, October 27, 2000, p. 3.

is meaningful: a moment that drew attention to the political developments was his approach towards Jean-Marie Le Pen. The French politician laid the foundations of the European nationalist association EURONAT, to which the PRM also joined. Corneliu Vadim Tudor was also accused of relations with Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan leader at the time, as Vadim Tudor was his guest in Tripoli, on the occasion of the „International Youth Congress”, which was said to have been a meeting of supporters of „Mathaba”, a terrorist organization with anti-American and anti-Jewish views. In fact, the meetings between the two were acknowledged by the candidate himself.<sup>12</sup> The media was also concerned about the PRM members, some of them being members of the former Communist “Securitate” forces and others being even named „criminals”.<sup>13</sup>

The possibility of a success of C.V. Tudor in the second round, perceived as a candidate with extremist speech, as we have shown above, determined the reaction of the international press, as well as the solidarity of Romanian politicians and public opinion against his project.

In this respect, the titles of articles published in the foreign press shortly after the results were announced are relevant. The German newspapers referred to the failure of the transition and the danger of the country's chances of integration into the European Union: „Die Welt” – *Romania's chances of integration into the EU and NATO are nearing to zero*. In the French newspapers the result was presented as a concern because of both candidates who reached the second round: „Liberation” – *The vote given to the neo-communists and the extreme right shows the failure of the transition*, „Le Nouveau Observateur” – *Romania's chances to enter the EU and NATO risks to move away*, „France Presse” – *Corneliu Vadim Tudor – Corneliu Zelea Codreanu*.<sup>14</sup> „France Presse” described Vadim Tudor's speech as „a boast with messianic

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., ‘Președintele PRM este un pericol major pentru țară și democrație IV’, *Ziua*, nr. 1961, November 23, 2000, available at <http://www.ziua.net/display.php?data=2000-11-23&id=53946>, accessed at 30.10.2017.

<sup>13</sup> A few of the names and their positions: Dumitru Badea (Senator in the Neamț County), former Securitate colonel; Sever Meșca, spokesman of PRM, former Securitate colonel; Toma Năstase, former deputy in the Botoșani County (deceased), former Securitate colonel; Constantin Bucur, former Securitate captain; Ion Duțu (deputy in the Bacău County), former activist of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, close to Elena Ceaușescu; Ilie Neacșu (deputy in the Hunedoara County), former communist activist; Nicolae Gavrilescu (member of the Communist Party's Director Committee), former first-secretary of the Communist Party and former ambassador to China. Also, as for the convicted ones: Miron Cozma, sentenced because of the violence of the miners during the 1990s, and Valeriu Cotolan, convicted for drugs trafficking in 1994 and influence trafficking in 2000.

<sup>14</sup> ‘O cortină de fier între România și UE? Comentarii după alegerile din România’, *Adevărul*, nr. 3257, November 28, 2000, p. 9.

accents”, continuing with the fact that „he was inspired by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu's anti-Semitic fascism, which led the legionary movement in the 1920s and won the general elections in 1937, establishing terror and organizing pogroms and that Vadim Tudor is also the product of the communist dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu”.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the press, international organizations and European leaders have expressed their concerns. Thus, at the OSCE meeting in Vienna, the participants' attention was directed to the elections, given that its presidency was to be taken by Romania from January 1, 2001.<sup>16</sup> In the process of Romania's accession to the European Union, France was one of the most important supporters. President Jacques Chirac expressed confidence that Vadim Tudor will not win the election, considering the assumption to be unrealistic.<sup>17</sup> The European parliamentarians, in the statements made after the elections, referred to the possibility of interrupting the negotiations between Romania and the European Union. Iannis Sakellariou, a representative of the Socialists in Germany, said that „there is the possibility of immediate suspension of negotiations with Romania” and „Europe reserves the right to take a stand for the defence of human rights and minorities”. Hannes Swoboda, vice-president of the European Socialist Party, said that „Vadim's victory would have serious consequences for Romania and for Europe as well”, while Ioannis Souladakis, a Greek socialist, said that „if Vadim Tudor wins the presidential elections, relations with Europe could be cut off”, and if „this party comes to government and puts xenophobia into practice, then everything becomes a European problem”.<sup>18</sup>

The Romanian media was concerned to explain the causes of Tudor's success, by presenting interviews with the people who voted for him and with various political analysts. The sociological studies conducted on the day of the vote showed that Vadim Tudor was elected by 29% of those who voted Constantinescu in 1996, by 23% of Iliescu voters in 1996 and by 36% of those who did not vote in 1996. This last information is important because the PRM candidate managed to mobilize an important part of those who, four years earlier, for various reasons, chose not to participate in the elections. Another

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<sup>15</sup> C.M., 'AFP întrevide consecințele ascensiunii lui Vadim: «O cortină de fier între România și Europa»', in *Evenimentul zilei*, Anul VIII, Nr. 2570, November 28, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Andreea Bratosin, 'OSCE - îngrijorată de ascensiunea extremei drepte în România', *Adevărul*, nr. 3258, November 29, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 'Președintele Franței, Jaques Chirac: «Ipoteza ca Vadim Tudor să devină președinte este nerealistă»', *Adevărul*, nr. 3265, December 8, 2000, p. 1; Daniel Roux, 'Ascensiunea extremiștilor din România, considerată de UE o «derivă condamnabilă»', *Evenimentul zilei*, Anul VIII, Nr. 2578, December 8, 2000, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Bogdan Chireac, '«Nu vom deveni ostacii lui C.V. Tudor» - afirmă parlamentari europeni de la Bruxelles', *Adevărul*, nr. 3264, December 7, 2000, p. 1.

statistic shows how he was supported by those who voted for the Parliament: thus, besides the PRM voters, Vadim Tudor was also voted by 11% of the PDSR voters, 6% of CDR, 9% of PNL, 3% of UDMR, 16% of PD and 27% of ApR, which, according to the study, shows that more ApR voters opted for Tudor than for Meleşcanu, their own candidate.<sup>19</sup>

From the political analysts, the views of Dorel Şandor, from the Center for Political Studies and Comparative Analysis, Stelian Tanase and Alina Mungiu were requested. Şandor identified the causes of Vadim Tudor's ascension in marginalizing a part of the electorate during the last four years, which found a solution in his symbolic, vigilante message. At the same time, there has been a decline in the authority of the state institutions through the wear of the government and the political instability in the coalition. In the campaign, indirectly, Iliescu and PDSR were Vadim's electoral agents, due to the negative campaign and the presentation of a catastrophic image.<sup>20</sup> Stelian Tanase has argued that the rise of the PRM leader was possible because he managed to take over the electorate of The Party of the Romanian Nation's Unity and relied on televised benefits, where he promoted two themes: „I was never in government” and the attack on corruption and the mafia, doubled by a redemptive speech.<sup>21</sup> Alina Mungiu emphasized the existence of a paradox in the votes received by Vadim Tudor, because, unlike previous elections, nationalism was not a major topic of debate, as it did not exist in the speeches of other candidates. Another cause of his success was, in her opinion, the lack of reaction of the political class, which only towards the end of the campaign mobilized, starting to criticize the discourse of Vadim Tudor.<sup>22</sup>

Beyond the disputes initiated by C.V. Tudor, he was an important part of the speeches of the most important candidates and of the negative campaigns of some parties. Most of these examples happened in the last days of the campaign. Adrian Năstase criticized the aggressive themes of the PRM candidate, recalling that a governance program must also have an economic component not only a vigilante one.<sup>23</sup> Mugur Isărescu called him an "illusions seller", considering that his ascension was due to the division of the right-wing

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<sup>19</sup> 'Cei mai mulți dintre votanții din '96 ai lui Constantinescu au votat acum cu liderul PRM', *Adevărul*, nr. 3257, November 28, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Narcisa Iorga, 'Dorel Şandor - Centrul pentru Studii Politice și Analiză Comparativă: «S-a produs impresia că la preşedinție e nevoie de un arhanghel de cartier»', *Evenimentul zilei*, Anul VIII, Nr. 2569, November 27, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Teodora Georgescu, 'Stelian Tănase: «Când lumea e săracă, un astfel de discurs e seducător»', *Evenimentul zilei*, Anul VIII, Nr. 2569, November 27, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Cristian Oprea, 'Alina Mungiu: «Lui Vadim i s-a răspuns prost și târziu»', *Evenimentul zilei*, Anul VIII, Nr. 2569, November 27, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> C. Drăgotescu, 'Într-un gest de curaj rar întâlnit în PDSR, Adrian Năstase dezvăluie găunoşenia candidatului C.V. Tudor și a PRM', *Adevărul*, nr. 3252, November 22, 2000, p. 1.

parties and the corruption in Romania, determined by the "deficit of democracy", a concept which Isărescu opposed to the "deficit of authority" promoted by Tudor.<sup>24</sup> An event that took place in Dolj County provoked similar reactions of the PD and PNL, as the deputy president of the youth organization of the Democratic Party from Dolj was stabbed by a supporter of PRM. Radu Berceanu, the vice president of the party, called Tudor guilty for encouraging such attitudes, through the violent speech used in his campaign, while also issuing a warning about the danger to the country if it would be ruled in this manner.<sup>25</sup> Liberals have adopted the same vision, considering that aggression towards those who do not share the same political ideas or views were the result of following the 2000 campaign and Tudor's harsh speeches. Moreover, in this statement, the PNL Press Office warned that the PRM leader's campaign statements were not a word play, but a concrete vision on running the country.<sup>26</sup>

In an analysis made in 1998, Peter Banyai found that the popularity of C.V. Tudor has been stable over the years and superior to that of his own party. However, in the period 1995-1997, amid the scandal of the Hungarian university, his popularity decreased from 29% to 24%.<sup>27</sup> This leads us to believe that it was not so much the extremist discourse that propelled C.V. Tudor among the favourites to access in the second round, but the fact that he represented a distinct and unique model of a politician, with another type of discourse, which was able to capture the dissatisfaction with the Emil Constantinescu regime.

Corneliu Vadim-Tudor cleverly speculated on the attitude of Romanians towards the parties that came to power in the first post-communist decade. He highlighted the internal crises, the lack of achievements, and the general state of crisis. He opposed to all of them an alternative, placed under the justice idea, promoted by a candidate being subjected to a media blockade.

The controversial statements made by the PRM candidate, together with the warnings transmitted by Western leaders through official channels

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<sup>24</sup> I.U., 'Mugur Isărescu îl socotește pe C.V Tudor «vânzător de iluzii»', *Adevărul*, nr. 3249, November 18-19, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Ioana Țiganescu, 'Când Vadim spune ca folosește mitraliera, tinerii PRM dau cu cuțitul', *Ziua*, nr. 1962, November 24, 2000, available at <http://www.ziua.ro/display.php?data=2000-11-24&id=54017>, accessed in 31.10.2017.

<sup>26</sup> 'Liberalii avertizează că amenințările liderului PRM nu sunt un simplu joc de cuvinte', *Ziua*, nr. 1962, November 24, 2000, available at <http://www.ziua.ro/display.php?data=2000-11-24&id=54015>, accessed in 31.10.2017.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Banyai, 'Din vară până în toamnă. Ultimele sondaje - iunie - octombrie 1998', *Sfera Politicii*, Anul VI, Nr. 63/1998, p. 46.



or the press, have led to a coalition of the main Romanian political parties and civic organizations against Corneliu Vadim Tudor, campaigning for the election of Ion Iliescu just because of the contrast between them. The first to react were the PD and PNL leaders. The two parties rejected the memorandum proposed by Adrian Năstase, but decided to urge the electorate of their parties to vote for Ion Iliescu. A meeting took place between Valeriu Stoica and Traian Băsescu, the vice-presidents of the two parties, when they adopted a common position, trying to discourage their supporters on voting for C.V. Tudor.<sup>28</sup> Th. Stolojan also intervened, and he urged Romanians to vote against extremism and advised E. Constantinescu to ask the electorate to vote for I. Iliescu, being guilty for "the electoral ordeal produced after Mugur Isărescu's entry into the Cotroceni race".<sup>29</sup> A similar appeal was also made by P. Roman, from whose perspective Tudor's project should not be promoted because his ideas were "extremist, chauvinistic, xenophobic and racist".<sup>30</sup>

Since the early 1990s, one of the organizations that expressed its opposition to Ion Iliescu and his party was the Civic Alliance. The special conditions of the year 2000 made it launch a call to people in order to vote for the PDSR candidate, and not with Tudor, who was called "a demagogue".

The trade union organizations were positioned on the same side of the barricade. On one hand, Cartel Alfa, which at that time represented about one million employees, asked them in the second round "not to vote for the representative of a political force that permanently promotes extremist, racist and xenophobic ideas".

The church, through its representatives, became involved in the 2000 campaign, more than in any other after 1989. The leader of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch Teoctist, on the occasion of December 1<sup>st</sup>, spoke about the model of the leaders that the country needed: balanced, not extremist; that would show openness towards closer ties with Europe.<sup>31</sup>

During the elections of the first post-communist decade, there were several situations when the Romanian intellectuals coalesced and launched various appeals, either criticizing Ion Iliescu or expressing their support for an

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<sup>28</sup> Cristina Sofronie, 'PD și PNL îl susțin pe gratis pe Ion Iliescu', *Evenimentul zilei*, Anul VIII, Nr. 2572, November 30, 2000, p. 6; R.C., 'PNL și PD îl sprijină necondiționat pe Ion Iliescu', *Adevărul*, nr. 3259, November 30, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 'Stolojan așteaptă ca Emil Constantinescu să ceară populației să-l voteze pe Ion Iliescu', *Evenimentul zilei*, Anul VIII, Nr. 2577, December 7, 2000, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> A. Bogdan, 'Democrației lui Roman cheamă alegătorii la urne pentru a respinge extremismul lui C.V. Tudor', *Adevărul*, nr. 3265, December 8, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> 'În predica de după Te Deum-ul de la 1 Decembrie, Patriarhul Teoctist s-a exprimat ferm: «Țara noastră să fie condusă de către cei care au dovedit echilibru, nu de către extremiști»', *Adevărul*, nr. 3261, December 2, 2000, p. 1.

opposition candidate. Among those who made public their option to vote for Iliescu in 2000 were Zoe Petre, Dorin Marian, Constantin Bălăceanu-Stolnici, Valerian Stan, Nicolae Manolescu, Doina Cornea, Andrei Pleșu.<sup>32</sup>

Both candidates continued their campaigns for the second round in similar grades as in the first round. In the statements offered after the appearance of the first official data, C.V. Tudor said he would try to appeal to the PDSR public through his justice and national message. Its purpose was to participate in the televised debates with Ion Iliescu, in which to make references to Moscow, the former offices held by Iliescu during the Communist regime and the seven years of government. At the same time, he declared himself a "friend of the Hungarians".<sup>33</sup> On the other side, Iliescu appealed to the discernment of the voters in the second round; he warned that the solutions to the problems of the Romanian state cannot be identified in extremism and xenophobia, and constitutional means had to be used to punish those responsible for illegalities. The negotiations with UDMR were not denied, but the idea of a Hungarian university was excluded by Iliescu.<sup>34</sup> He also warned about the danger that C.V. Tudor and PRM represented for Romanian democracy, pointing out that the appeal to patriotism, he was also prone to use in his campaign to justify certain positions was not to be understood as nationalism, xenophobia and hostile attitude towards minorities.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, the PRM candidate continued his attacks started in the first round of elections. In an interview for Radio Romania Actualități, Tudor expressed the idea that the PDSR betrayed its electorate when it asked for the support of the parties it had criticized during the last four years (which formed the Government coalition). At the same time, he said that the accusations regarding his extremism were invented by the "political and mass-media mafia". About the statement regarding him governing with a machine-gun, Vadim considered that his speech was cut off; dating back to 1997, this was the following, according to Tudor: "It is obvious that the disaster has become so terrible that Romania can only be run with the machine gun."<sup>36</sup> In the pages of

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<sup>32</sup> Mădălina Șișu, Cristina Sofronie, Teodora Georgescu, 'Intelectuali, monarhiști și adversari de moarte ai PDSR îl vor vota pe Iliescu. «De astă dată avem de ales între cancer și SIDA»', *Evenimentul zilei*, Anul VIII, Nr. 2572, November 30, 2000, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Adrian Cercelescu, 'La sediul PRM, montaj literar-artistic cu Vodă Tudor în jeep', *Adevărul*, nr. 3257, November 28, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Lucian Purcăreanu, 'Iliescu a început bătălia cu Vadim', *Evenimentul zilei*, Anul VIII, Nr. 2569, November 27, 2000, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Corina Drăgotescu, 'Ion Iliescu: «PRM și C.V. Tudor sunt un pericol pentru democrație, pentru soarta României»', *Adevărul*, nr. 3258, November 29, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> 'Iartă-i, Doamne, că nu știu ce fac...', *România Mare. Săptămânal absolut independent*, nr. 543, Anul XI, December 7, 2000, p. 1.

"Greater Romania", Iliescu was accused of protecting the Horthyst criminals. The accusation stems from the idea that György Frunda was the lawyer of some people from Târgu-Secuiesc accused of killing Aurel Agache in 1989.<sup>37</sup> It was assumed that if Iliescu came to power, he would pardon him.<sup>38</sup> The candidate of the PDSR was also accused that before 1989 he was close to Ceaușescu and after his attitude during the 1989 Romanian Revolution it was clear that he would not give up power, that it would be a "communist-kaghebit, gypsy scheme", that under his presidency the country has lost 4-5 billion dollars and the reserves of industrial production, that he intends to start a civil war of Romanians against Romanians, that he offended the Romanian people when they accused Tudor of anti-Semitism and genocide.<sup>39</sup>

Ion Iliescu, taking over the wave of support that emerged after the November 26 elections and based on opinion polls, had an electoral strategy meant not to allow Corneliu Vadim Tudor sufficient increase in people's preferences. Initially, he announced that he did not want to participate in a TV show with the PRM candidate, claiming that he offended him when he publicly stated that he had cancer: "if that means a political debate, then I refuse to participate."<sup>40</sup> Through the electoral publicity, the political program of the PDSR candidate was summarized in several points: combating poverty, addressing the realities of Romania through the prism of social-democratic values, strengthening the authority of the state and its institutions, good governance based on an efficient and functional state, worthy integration in the European Union and NATO.<sup>41</sup> Trying to present himself as the opposite of Tudor's image, Iliescu referred directly to the topics on which his counter-candidate was criticized. In another example of electoral publicity, Ion Iliescu was present in a photograph with people, whose outline was the map of Romania. The image, accompanied by the subtitles "The spirit of the Great Union" and "More justice means more democracy", brought to the fore the idea of national unity. In the same context, he said that the dictatorship was not the solution to the problems, but the firm application of the Constitution and the laws of the country.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Aurel Agache, a Major in the Communist Militia, was killed on December 22, 1989, at Târgu-Secuiesc. One of those convicted in this case was pardoned by President Iliescu.

<sup>38</sup> Aurel Dionisie Agache, 'Ion Iliescu - protectorul unor criminali horthyști', *România Mare. Săptămânal absolut independent*, nr. 543, Anul XI, December 7, 2000, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Gh. Glodeanu, 'Iliescu vrea să dea foc României', *România Mare. Săptămânal absolut independent*, nr. 543, Anul XI, December 7, 2000, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Anca Grădinaru, 'Ion Iliescu nu va participa la nicio emisiune televizată alături de C.V. Tudor', *Adevărul*, nr. 3260, December 1, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> 'Aproape de oameni, împreună cu ei', *Adevărul*, nr. 3263, December 6, 2000, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> 'Mesaj electoral Ion Iliescu - Aproape de oameni, împreună cu ei', *Adevărul*, nr. 3261, December 2, 2000, p. 2.

Because Ion Iliescu refused to participate in a debate with C.V. Tudor, the Romanian Television had scheduled separate meetings with the two, joined under the title "Election studio". Tudor presented his message in a speech-monologue, without other interventions. It began by criticizing Iliescu's supporters, accusing politicians of "collective chameleonism." The moderation in the reference to the West could be observed, assuming its commitment to integrate Romania into the Euro-Atlantic structures, at the same time motivating that he was the only candidate capable of fighting against corruption. The call for violence, for which he was also criticized, had disappeared from the speech, stating clearly that he "will not imprison politicians and journalists", and "will not make public executions." He changed his mind about his reluctance towards foreign investors, talking about invitations he intended to launch to large industrial concerns. In order to raise the standard of living and to solve immediate financial problems, he proposed increasing the minimum wage and pension, compensating those who invested in the FNI, granting employment facilities for the graduates of faculties, cultivating the entire agricultural area of Romania. In the last part of the speech he addressed directly to the Romanian people in front of whom he wanted to appear as humble, designing a self-portrait dominated by rhetorical figures such as "I do not even explain why it hurts so much the suffering of others, people and animals, but an everlasting love fills my chest, and then I jump to their aid."<sup>43</sup> He ended with a call for the presence of minorities and all Romanians to vote. This speech was intensely criticized by the main newspapers. One of the reasons is the fact that he read a section of his newspaper, instead of sending a message to the people. Indeed, many of the elements were also read on Radio Romania Actualități, and the respective speech was published in full in "Great Romania" newspaper. Vadim Tudor also stated that "today an IMAS survey was broadcasted through Radio Romania, which credits me with 56%, and my counter-candidate with 44%, and the difference will increase significantly".<sup>44</sup> The reaction came from the director of IMAS, Alin Teodorescu, who denied the existence of such a study. Also, the RRA, where Vadim says that the poll was made public, reacted by stating that the station did not make public opinion polls during the first three days of the respective week.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Rosemarie Haineș, *Televiziunea și reconfigurarea politicului: studii de caz: alegerile prezidențiale din România din anii 1996 și 2000* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), pp. 149-154.

<sup>44</sup> A. Ursu, 'Minciunile lui Vadim Tudor au picioare scurte', *Adevărul*, nr. 3265, December 8, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Lucian Purcăreanu, Cristian Oprea, 'Liderul PRM a mințit la TVR', *Evenimentul zilei*, Anul VIII, Nr. 2578, December 8, 2000, p. 6.

On the other hand, Ion Iliescu's speech had two components: the decrease of the support for C.V. Tudor and his motivation for refusing to participate in televised debates with him. Unlike his counter-candidate, the show he participated in was organized differently: in addition to his monologue, Iliescu also received previously recorded questions from journalists such as Cornel Nistorescu, Ion Cristoiu and Emil Hurezeanu.<sup>46</sup> His speech was structured in four parts, resuming themes formulated in the first round: at first he referred to the 1996-2000 government, talking about the precarious economic situation and the fact that the progress expected in December 1989 were not achieved, moreover, the idea of democracy was in danger. Secondly, he was a critic of totalitarianism, idea associated by a part of the public opinion with C.V. Tudor, whom he called "extremist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic." At the same time, he reaffirmed his attachment to the values of democracy. Thirdly, he spoke about his goals, the fight against corruption and poverty, in parallel with the pursuit of a European destiny for the country. Last but not least, he appealed to voters to fight through the vote against "hatred, embarrassment, thirst for revenge and wrongdoing."<sup>47</sup>

The December 10 election was won by Ion Iliescu, who obtained 66.83% of the votes, ie 6.6 million, as opposed to C.V. Tudor, who received only 33.17% of the votes, ie 3.3 million.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusions

To explain the result of the 2000 elections and the evolution of the election campaign, a comparison with the previous presidential ballot is required. Thus, we can see a strong fragmentation compared to 1996, because at that time, political life was dominated by two blocks, CDR and PDSR, while after four years only the latter managed to maintain its dominant position. Also, in 2000 the political affiliation was emphasized, while in 1996 the candidates for the Presidency counted mainly the reflection in the campaign referring almost exclusively to the presidential race. The differences can also be noticed regarding the pre-election governance, in 1996 there was a government that functioned for 4 years, while between 1996 and 2000, three successive governments followed one another. In the previous elections, Ion Iliescu was the only candidate representing the ruling party. This time, as it can be seen, the coalition parties have appointed four candidates: Mugur Isărescu, Petre Roman – the two were also part of the government, Theodor Stolojan and György Frunda. The differences can also be highlighted by an

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<sup>46</sup> Rosemarie Haineş, *Televiziunea și reconfigurarea politicului*, p. 154.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>48</sup> 'Dataset: Romania: Presidential Election 2000 – Round 2', available at <https://goo.gl/TVS2jv>, accessed in 05.12.2017.

analysis of the debated topics: themes like the discussions on communism, the monarchy, the problem of nationalized houses disappeared, and their place was taken, according to the candidates, by topics such as corruption and the fight against it – phenomenon associated with the politicians in power, but also with the inability of the authorities to fight it –, the loss of the president's authority and the need to restore it – put in context with the economic problems and tensions within the ruling coalition –, xenophobia – especially in relation to Vadim Tudor, who remained constant in anti-Magyar and anti-Western discourse. All this caused a general dissatisfaction among the people regarding the direction of the country and the increase of the number of those who considered the lack of authority a problem.

Corneliu Vadim Tudor was the candidate who, through his speech, tried to highlight his individuality among other candidates: he argued that he was the only one who was not in power, the only one who cared about people's problems, the only one capable of fighting corruption. In the second round, however, the contrast between him and Ion Iliescu also highlighted the possibility of Romania becoming an isolated state, which meant losing the progress it made until then in international politics. The former president was the one who offered predictability and experience. Therefore, another important and determining factor in the elections was the behaviour of the elites. If in 1990, 1992, 1996 Ion Iliescu was criticized by the intellectuals for his communist past, the reluctance to reform and the measures adopted in the first months after the 1989 Revolution, this group revised its value system according to the reality provided by the vote on November 26th. Cultural factors also counted, because Romania had adhered throughout its modern and contemporary history to European aspirations, so the warnings issued by the Western press, political leaders or institutions, regarding the danger of choosing C.V. Tudor, could be almost entirely assimilated to an extremist vision, did not remain unheeded.

In 2000, the concerns within Romanian society varied, as the issues regarding the inheritance of communism, the restoration of the monarchy or the situation of nationalized houses were replaced by the fight against corruption, the redefinition of the president's duties, the economic recovery, while Romania's evolution abroad became equivalent to the Euro-Atlantic course. Over time, times of crisis have favoured the assertion of some politicians, who have taken on an extremist, demagogic discourse, which has sought to deepen societal cleavages and to emphasize its saving role. Such was the situation of Italy immediately after the end of the First World War, or of Germany during the Great Economic Crisis. The ingredients of an approach of this kind were to be found in the rhetoric of Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the leader of a party with radical visions on the idea of authority in

the state, based on anti-Westernism, anti-Magyarism and appreciation for a Ceaușescu-type communism. The danger was felt by the population, which developed the necessary antibodies, driven even by intellectuals and politicians, most of them being Ion Iliescu's challengers for ten years, who, in the face of the danger of Romania's isolation, preferred to vote "the lesser evil". Moreover, this structure has become a common feature in everyday life, as the evolution of the political system and the poor performances of the elected officials have led to the transformation of "politics" into a concept often used in a pejorative sense.

