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**REPORT ON THE PARLIAMENTARY  
AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS  
IN ROMANIA**

Bucharest, Bacau and Harghita *Judets*, Timisoara

Prepared by the Staff of the  
U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

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This report is based on the findings of a Helsinki Commission staff delegation to Bucharest, Bacau and Harghita *judets* (counties), and Timisoara, Romania, from May 16 to May 25. In Romania, Helsinki Commission staff met with a wide variety of electoral officials, political party representatives and representatives of "non-political" action groups such as the Group for Social Dialogue, the *Fratia* free trade union confederation and the Alliance for the Proclamation of Timisoara, as well as with candidates, journalists, voters and other observers of the Romanian political scene. The Commission wishes to express its gratitude to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems for including its staff on the IFES delegation.

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## I. HIGHLIGHTS

- Romania's first free elections in over 40 years were marred by a variety of irregularities, from the campaign through the course of the elections themselves, which cast significant doubt on their fairness.
- The Front for National Salvation (FSN), which took over power in Romania following the December revolution, won the elections with an overwhelming margin. FSN Presidential candidate Ion Iliescu won 85.07 percent of the votes, while the FSN gained 66.31 of the votes for the Chamber of Deputies and 67.01 percent for the Senate.
- The contestants to the election were competing on an uneven field, with unequal access both to resources and to the most far-reaching mass medium, television. FSN candidates enjoyed decided advantages in these areas.
- Inconsistent and faulty application of electoral procedures on election day, together with the absence in some polling places of opposition party representatives, likewise shifted the advantage to the Front.
- Absent these irregularities, the election results might well not have differed much; President Ion Iliescu and the ruling National Salvation Front appear to enjoy fervent support among the Romanian people. Many Romanians feel grateful to them for the improvement in food and fuel supplies and the wage increases they have seen since the December revolution.
- Yet the irregularities will have reverberations into the future. The Front faces an increasingly radicalized opposition which refuses to enter into a coalition with a partner it alleges has engaged in dirty electoral tricks.
- And they will continue to raise troubling questions about the extent to which the freedom most essential for a democracy, freedom of expression, has a secure place in Romania.
- The violence of the electoral campaign, including physical attacks on candidates, as well as anonymous death threats against them, prevented the opposition from effectively delivering its message to the people. The climate of fear which predominated in many regions, especially in rural areas, during the campaign significantly inhibited voter access to ideas other than those espoused by the Front for National Salvation.

- The Front's reluctance until the very end of the campaign to suggest that it would not tolerate the violence further shook the confidence of the Romanian people, as did the passive response of the police.
- The electoral commissions and other government officials involved with elections had a narrow mandate which confined them mostly to overseeing the technical side of elections. Viewed by and large as politically neutral bodies, they would have been in the best position to establish neutral fora in which candidates could address one another and the voters in a peaceful climate. Responsibility for establishing a stable atmosphere conducive to a fair electoral campaign thus fell between the cracks.
- Voter education, too, proved severely lacking. Beyond the lack of familiarity with the programs of even the major parties, voters demonstrated little knowledge of voting procedures. This opened up wide opportunities for party and electoral officials to influence voters in their choice of parties and candidates.

## II. THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

### **The Issues**

Three days before Romania's first free elections in over forty years, thousands of cheering Romanian citizens gathered in the late afternoon sun in Bucharest's Aviators' Square for the last mass rally for candidates of the ruling Front for National Salvation. President Ion Iliescu and Prime Minister Petre Roman, both of whom were expected to win hands-down in their presidential and Senate races, respectively, addressed the enthusiastic crowd. The audience answered with rhythmic chants, clapping and waving red roses, the symbol of choice for the Front. At the end of the rally, the crowd broke up, with the most avid members setting off purposefully down the long boulevard toward Front headquarters and, a few blocks further on, University Square.

In that square, anti-Front demonstrators were cheering on the rows of students marching down the boulevard in tight formation, and fell silent as the marchers sat quietly in the street to extend the "neo-Communist free zone" established by protestors in mid-April. The marchers rose and poured into the square minutes before the first shouts of the advancing Front supporters could be heard, and manned the barricades for a confrontation.

Two lines of police formed up at two-block intervals to prevent a clash, and Front officials and protest leaders implored the respective crowds to avoid violence. A tense hour followed, perfectly capturing the tenor of the Romanian electoral campaign: the escalating, explosive tension between the Front, for whom the political process seemed tailor-made, and the protestors, who felt that their only hope lay outside of party politics.

The biggest issue in the campaign was the legitimacy of the Front itself, and the most vital questions focussed on the value of an electoral process in which the Front enjoyed significant advantages. Electoral platforms with their promises for the future were far less relevant to most voters than what the Front had delivered to date.

### **The Milestones**

Many of the most significant political battles in post-revolutionary Romania took place outside the confines of the campaign. While these had a forceful effect on the course of the campaign and the outcome of the elections, their impact on Romania's future political life is potentially more far-reaching than the elections themselves.

*December 1989 - January 28, 1990: The Brief Honeymoon Comes to an End*

By the advent of the May 20 elections, Romanians in the major cities rarely used the word "revolution" to describe the events surrounding and following Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu's ouster. Instead, they talked candidly of a genuine revolutionary movement in Timisoara. The streets of Bucharest had been shadowed by a coup d'etat in which a fraction in the Communist Party jettisoned the most loathsome features of the Ceausescu regime and merely modified some of its most effective tools, including an improved secret police force.

For a few weeks after demonstrators drove Ceausescu, his wife Elena and their close associates to flight, the Front for National Salvation enjoyed and exercised a revolutionary mandate. It included broad representation from Communist Party members, cultural figures and human rights advocates such as Doina Cornea and Rev. Laszlo Tokes. On December 28, it set out its program, including pledges to abandon the leading role of a single party and establish a pluralist, democratic system of government; to organize free elections in April (subsequently postponed until May 20); to separate legislative, executive and judicial power; to restructure the economy on the basis of profitability and efficiency; to halt the notorious "systematization" program of village destruction; to provide for freedom of the press, radio and television and their transfer into people's hands; to observe minority rights; to provide for freedom of religion; to end food exports; and to honor international commitments, including those under the Helsinki Accords.

Romanians used their newfound freedom of expression to hold political demonstrations throughout January; the Front responded by attempting to limit the legal venues for protests. Disillusioned Romanians pointed to two events in particular which they say showed the Front's true colors for the first time. One of these was the Front's decision, announced on January 23, to field candidates in the parliamentary elections after President Iliescu's promise that it would not become an overtly political party. The second, more unsettling event was the pro-Front workers' demonstration of January 29 which occurred simultaneously with the coordinated, violent attacks against Peasants and Liberal Party headquarters in dozens of localities. These attacks set the stage for the electoral campaign ahead.

*March 11: The Proclamation of Timisoara*

They also primed the instigators of the revolution to try to reclaim their stolen legacy. On March 11, 10 groups in Timisoara issued a Proclamation based on the thesis that "Things that have been happening in Romania, particularly after January 28, 1990, contradict the ideals of the Timisoara revolution." "This proclamation is addressed first of all," they wrote, "to those who received the revolution as a gift and are now wondering why

we are unhappy even though the dictator has fallen, some bad laws have been abrogated and there are a few more goods in the shops... . (T)his was not the ideal of the Timisoara revolution."

The Proclamation set out a thirteen-point action program, which included demands for:

- a return to the values of European democracy;
- unity in the face of "the typically communist method" of setting social classes against one another;
- tolerance and mutual respect among the majority and minority populations;
- the right to free expression and honest competition for public support of political views;
- recognition that the Communist Party members asking for the people's support now were silent 10 years ago, when they might have made a difference;
- a ban for three successive parliamentary terms on all former Communist activists and Securitate officers, a permanent ban on former Communist activists running for President ("Their presence in the country's political life is the main source of tensions and suspicion which is affecting Romanian society today.") and a reduction in presidential powers;
- investments and production increases, rather than strikes over wages, to curb inflation;
- privatization, to be refereed by independent commissions to audit Communist financial holdings;
- administrative and economic decentralization;
- replacement of December 22 (proclaimed by the Front to commemorate its assumption of power) with December 16, the date of the outbreak of the revolution in Timisoara, as Romania's new national day.

The Proclamation concluded with the challenge, "We, the authors of this Proclamation, who took part in the events in Timisoara between December 16 and 22, do not consider that the revolution is over. We shall continue it peacefully but firmly."

The "apolitical" and party opposition rallied around the Timisoara Proclamation, particularly Article Eight, its call for a temporary ban on the participation of ex-Communist activists in Romanian political life. As of May, about three and a half million people signalled their support by signing onto the Proclamation. In addition, 51 trade unions and free trade union federations, 29 independent professional and cultural associations, 154 collectives from enterprises and institutions, and 24 political parties had declared support for the Proclamation.

The authors were determined to move further in their demands to correct continuing abuses by the ruling Front. One month after issuing the Proclamation, they announced that they would hold daily demonstrations in the birthplace of the revolution, Timisoara's Opera Square, until the Government had met their demands. These included: dismissal of the Interior Minister, Mihai Chitac, who they alleged participated in attempts to repress the revolution in Timisoara; publication of the exact number of those arrested and under investigation for their part in repressing the revolution, and real action taken to bring them to trial and punishment; handing over all Securitate dossiers to the citizens ("We will not have the impression that we have really left the Ceausescu era behind unless each of us is in possession of his own file from the Securitate."); and publication in the press of a list of Securitate informers and collaborators. ("We want to know them, to judge them morally, to forgive them, to offer them the opportunity to rehabilitate themselves. Only thus will the atmosphere of tension and suspicion within the working collectives disappear completely.") In the following weeks, demonstrators in Bucharest and other cities took up the demands of the Timisoarans.

#### *March 19-20: Tirgu Mures*

A little over a week after the Timisoara Proclamation called for a return to the inter-ethnic tolerance and respect displayed during the December revolution, an angry Romanian crowd armed with farm implements, clubs and other weapons attacked the headquarters of the Hungarian Democratic Union in Tirgu Mures, severely injuring a number of Union members. Like the miners who "came to the defense" of the Front on January 29 in Bucharest, many of the Romanians arrived in Tirgu Mures on buses from surrounding villages, suggesting somewhat more organization than a spontaneous protest would usually display. 5 persons were killed in the street fighting that continued for two days, until after repeated Hungarian calls for police and army protection the Government finally reestablished order. The Tirgu Mures events were the culmination of steadily accelerating tensions in Transylvania over minority rights, particularly Hungarian-language schooling.

In its initial program, the Front for National Salvation clearly stated its intention to respect minority rights, which the Ceausescu regime had flagrantly violated by steadily decreasing the opportunities for minority members to maintain and nurture their languages and cultures. The Front incorporated Hungarian representatives into its power structures, naming one a Vice President, and expressed willingness to permit the Hungarians and other minorities to regain their schools and other cultural and social institutions. Yet the Government did not move forward with a program to restore minority-language schooling. The changes which did take place were local in nature, with ethnic Romanian teachers leaving Hungarian settlements and being replaced by Hungarians. Romanians claim that their children were not permitted to remain in the revived Hungarian schools; Hungarians, in turn, chafed at the Government's hesitation over the issue, which they consider the center-piece of any minority rights restoration.

Independent observers have offered a number of reasons for the locality and timing of the outbreak of violence. First, Tirgu Mures is in a region that was, until recently, heavily Hungarian. The Romanians who have been moved in over the past few decades do not have deep roots in the region, and consequently may be more susceptible to insecurity over their future if Hungarians regain their rights. It was also the site of a strike since early March among Hungarian medical students and medical institute teachers seeking Hungarian-language instruction and affiliation with the Hungarian Bolyai University they hope will be reestablished in Cluj.

A nationalist organization emerged in Transylvania in January to represent ethnic Romanian interests and offer a political counterweight to the influential Hungarian Democratic Union. Called *Vatra Romaneasca*, ("Romanian Hearth") the organization contests the right of Hungarians to enjoy "privileges" such as Hungarian-language schools. Many see in the *Vatra* a revival of Ceausescu's assimilationist policies; a number of its members, in fact, are reportedly members of the old Communist *nomenklatura*. *Vatra Romaneasca* has instigated a number of demonstrations in Transylvania, and was widely reported to have incited and coordinated the violence in Tirgu Mures.

As to the timing, Government officials drew a connection between the March 15 commemorations in Transylvania of the 1848 Hungarian revolution against Austrian rule and the violence. Romanian officials claim that Hungarians offended Romanian sensibilities by displaying Hungarian flags; they claim furthermore that visitors from Hungary provoked inter-ethnic tensions.

Independent observers see a more sinister explanation for the timing. First, they suggest that the Government was panicked over the potentially destabilizing popularity of the Proclamation of Timisoara and its call for a united opposition against the Front.

Second, some claim that the wages for the Securitate officers who had been laid off in January came to an end in mid-March. Prime Minister Petre Roman did tell a Helsinki Commission delegation in early April that the Tirgu Mures events demonstrated a continuing need for an efficient intelligence service. Many opposition members have concluded that the events were an orchestrated provocation designed to divide the ethnic communities in Romania.

Whatever the cause of the disturbances, the Romanian Government has not actively pursued an investigation. A special parliamentary commission was established to look into the events, and its report was ready as of April 28, yet the report has not yet been released. Most Hungarians have concluded that the Front will not be a strong advocate for minority rights; their bloc vote against President Iliescu and the Front reflected this conviction. Tirgu Mures consolidated the Hungarians as a political force.

#### *April 21-Present: The University Square Demonstration*

The most direct challenge to the Front has come from a group of students, workers and other oppositionists who have occupied the most centrally-located and visible square in Bucharest, University Square, since April 21. A number have been on hunger strike to underline their commitment to the anti-Front cause. Their demands have included: President Iliescu's immediate resignation; independence for Romanian television; assistance to the victims of the December revolution; dismissal of Interior Minister Mihai Chitac and Chief of Police Constantin Diamandescu, and the appointment of a civilian as Interior Minister; the granting of trade union rights in accordance with international conventions and the dismantling of former communist trade union structures; a ban on the appointment to decisionmaking positions of former salaried activists of the Communist Party, the Union of Communist Youth, the Pioneers' organization and their equivalents in the Securitate; and the inclusion in the electoral law of Article Eight of the Timisoara Proclamation.

Police cleared the square early on the morning of [April 24], but demonstrators returned almost immediately. In spite of repeated threats from Prime Minister Roman and other Government figures, protestors were permitted to maintain their vigil through the elections.

Each night leading up to the elections, the square swelled with thousands of supporters of the Proclamation of Timisoara. While they did not call for a boycott of the elections, they made clear that their only hope lay outside the electoral process in what they termed an "apolitical" approach. Their watchword was, as respected poet Ana Blandiana pointed out to the crowd three nights before the election, "the struggle for liberty, not for power."

## **The Players**

73 of Romania's 82 political parties and minority organizations fielded parliamentary candidates in the May 20 elections. Of these, the most visible during the campaign were the Front for National Salvation, the National Liberal Party, the National Peasants Party, the Social Democratic party, the Romanian Ecological Movement and the Hungarian Democratic Union. Three of these -- the Front, the National Liberal Party and the National Peasants Party -- ran presidential candidates.

*The Front for National Salvation (FSN)* ran on the platform announced on December 28, 1989, as the program of the new provisional Romanian Government and set out above. In the economic sphere, the Front called additionally for a gradual passage of the Romanian economy to a decentralized and diversified economy based on market mechanisms while controlling inflation and unemployment and "preserving the country's socio-political stability"; encouraging private and collective initiative; diversifying the forms of ownership; and giving the peasants land for their use (not necessarily for ownership). In addition, FSN candidates stressed the achievements of the Front-led Government, especially in such areas as improvements in the food supply, large increases in pensions, and the provision of expanded agricultural plots to agricultural workers for their private use.

*The National Peasants Party, Christian and Democratic (PNT-CD)*, which won an estimated 70 percent of the vote in the stolen elections of 1946 and was outlawed in 1947, reemerged on December 26, 1989, with prominent pre-war activist and ex-political prisoner Corneliu Coposu as its President. Its program included the return to peasants of land taken from them over the past four decades of Communist rule and dissolution of the collective farms; an economic system which can ensure employment for all; a market economy; redirection of investments to the countryside, long neglected under Ceausescu; reestablishing religious studies in schools and universities; and the promotion of traditional moral and Christian values in society. The Peasants Party was the most vociferous in calling for postponement of the elections to allow the opposition parties adequate time to inform voters of their programs.

*The National Liberal Party (PNL)*, led by ex-political prisoner and recently returned emigre Radu Campeanu, was a major political force in Romania from the mid-nineteenth century until 1946, and it was forcibly disbanded in 1948. The PNL was reestablished on December 31, 1989, and formally registered in early January 1990. Its platform called for the recognition of private property rights; the encouragement of private initiative in farming, industry and commerce; the creation of favorable conditions for foreign investment in Romania; legal and institutional guarantees for the observance of human rights; restraints on state power; complete freedom of conscience; equality of rights for all minorities; continued membership in the Warsaw Pact; and a reintegration of Romania into Europe.

The PNL's base lies largely with the intelligentsia, and it is decidedly more secular in organization than its major pre-war and contemporary rival, the National Peasants Party.

*The Social Democratic Party (PSD)*, a small but well-known pre-war party in Romania, was reestablished on December 24, 1989, with Sergei Cunesco as its President. With their traditional base in trade unions and their focus on the defense of economic and social rights, the Social Democrats called for free trade union rights, the right to strike, the creation of market-based joint ventures with foreign partners in Romania and adherence to the Socialist International.

*The Romanian Ecological Movement*, which emerged almost immediately after the revolution, ran on a platform of cleaning up Romania's physical and spiritual environment, reforming Romanian industry gradually to make it more environmentally responsible, and returning to traditional values of human decency and individual rights. Observers differed widely on how independent the movement was; upon its inception on December 27, it declared support for the FSN's initial post-revolutionary program (as did many who would subsequently become disillusioned with the Front). Like a number of other political groupings, the Romanian Ecological Movement suffered a severe identity problem as it competed with splinter parties with practically identical names such as the Romanian Ecological Party.

*The Hungarian Democratic Union (RMDSZ)* was one of the first independent political formations to organize in post-revolutionary Romania. Led by Kriterion minority languages publishing house editor Geza Domokos, the RMDSZ pledged to work for the restitution of rights taken away under the Ceausescu regime, including the right of Hungarians to run their own schools and universities, radio, television and written media; the official acceptance by administrative bodies of Hungarian alongside Romanian in regions with a Hungarian minority; and the return of Hungarian-language names of villages and towns, whose Hungarian names were changed to revert to old appellation. The RMDSZ categorically ruled out any claims of territorial autonomy for the Hungarians.

Three self-described apolitical organizations played an important role in the campaign, and are poised to have a continuing, leading role outside government structures. The first, the Romanian Students League, was the powerhouse behind demonstrations in Bucharest from January through the University Square demonstrations of April and May. It was the first to stake out a consistently anti-Communist position, and has remained uncompromising on the inacceptability of continued Communist or ex-Communist participation in Romanian political life. For many Romanians, the Students League members represent a moral measure; they are untainted by past actions or associations. Their platform quickly expanded from one which called for far-reaching reforms in Romanian education with the aim of making it more democratic to a broader defense of fundamental human rights.

The second significant apolitical group, the Group for Social Dialogue (GSD), has sought to play the role of arbiter and mediator in a society torn by political, ethnic and social divisions. Composed of over 50 prominent intellectuals who had been dissidents under the Ceausescu regime, the Group can draw from a deep reservoir of public respect. It has offered prominent support to the Proclamation of Timisoara and the University Square demonstrations, and has pledged its commitment to continuing civic education as the most basic necessity in Romania today.

The third group, the *Fratia* ("Brotherhood") independent trade union confederation, was formed immediately after the revolution to represent the interests Romania's approximately eleven million workers. With about one million members at present, its goals are a decentralized economy, autonomy for all enterprises, privatization and the establishment of unemployment compensation for the ten percent of the working population which *Fratia* estimates is unemployed. *Fratia* President Mitra Miron and representative Simion Gheorghe noted in an interview with Helsinki Commission staff that in the eyes of the independent confederation, no party was looking out for the workers' interests. *Fratia's* battles would not be fought in Parliament, but rather in competition with the trade unions still organized in the old Communist structures.

### III. THE ELECTION LAW AND CAMPAIGNING

On March 14, the Provisional Council of National Unity (the provisional Parliament), which includes representation from the Front and all the political parties and minority groups, passed the law to govern the May 20 elections with one vote against and two abstentions. The law provides for a bicameral legislature consisting of an Assembly of Deputies and a Senate. It divides the country into 41 electoral districts (one for each of the 40 *judets*, or counties, and one for Bucharest), with each district entitled to parliamentary seats in proportion to its population. Most party representatives interviewed found little in the law that was objectionable; they were concerned less about the provisions of the law, which they generally favored, than its implementation and enforcement.

#### **The Right to Vote and to Run as a Candidate**

The law grants the right to vote to all citizens over 18 or who will reach the age of 18 in 1990. Those ineligible to vote include the mentally ill who have been placed under interdiction and persons deprived of voting rights during a period established by a legal procedure.

The election law requires that the mayor's office in each electoral precinct post the list of eligible voters at least 30 days in advance of the election. Representatives of numerous parties complained that the lists were posted very late, raising concerns that voters would not have adequate time to verify that they were listed or appeal their exclusion. (By law, authorities must respond within 3 days to voters' appeals.) Originally, voters who had moved or would not be in their voting district on election day were required to obtain an affidavit from local authorities attesting to their residence and voting eligibility; this requirement was changed two days before the election, allowing voters to present only their official identification papers (which record their residence) or, failing that, a birth certificate.

Candidates must be 21 years or older to compete for places in the House of Representatives, and 30 years old or older to run for the Senate and Presidency. Parliamentary candidates are put forward on party lists for each electoral district. Independent parliamentary candidates need to have at least 251 signatures to qualify for the election, while presidential candidates running either independently or on behalf of a party must present 100,000 signatures. All candidacies must be announced no later than 30 days before the date of elections.

Candidates may be prevented from running in the elections for the same reasons as voters can be barred. In addition, the law prohibits candidacies of people who have committed abuses in political, judicial and administrative functions, or have infringed upon fundamental human rights, organized or participated in repression while employed in the security forces, former police or militia forces.

### **Parliamentary Structure and Mandate**

The new Romanian Parliament will consist of two chambers: a Chamber of Deputies and a Senate. The Chamber of Deputies will have 387 members from the 41 electoral districts, plus a representative for each minority which did not succeed in electing one of its number in the elections. The Senate will include 119 seats, with each *judet* represented in proportion to its population (two senators for districts with a population of up to 500,000; three senators for districts with a population of 500,000 to 750,000; four senators for districts with over 750,000; fourteen for the municipality of Bucharest).

The new Parliament, required by law to convene on June 9, is charged with writing a new Constitution for Romania. When the new Constitution has been promulgated, the Parliament must call new elections within one year at most. The Parliament will be dissolved automatically if it has not completed the Constitution within 18 months. The Parliament will also set the date for local elections, which will be critical in determining the course of Romania's progress towards democratization.

## **The Presidential Mandate**

In the months leading up to the elections, Romanians paid significantly more attention to the presidential election than to the parliamentary ones. In part this interest stemmed from the national publicity given the presidential candidates. Equally important, however, was the strong mandate which the electoral law accords to the presidency, and uncertainty about the extent to which Parliament will be able to check the President's powers.

The President appoints the Prime Minister from the party which wins a majority of seats in the Parliament, and appoints Supreme Court officials. The President can mobilize the army and declare a state of emergency; the Parliament has five days to approve the decision. Most importantly, the President can dissolve the Parliament if it has not drafted the new Constitution within nine months. The Parliament can suspend the President, but he can be impeached only by a referendum.

## **Reaching Out to the Voters**

Parties and candidates had a short time and few means with which to familiarize voters with their programs. But the greatest obstacle to getting their message across to voters was the violence and intimidation that dominated the Romanian electoral campaign from its inception. Both the Peasants Party and Liberal Party presidential candidates were physically attacked by mobs; opposition party headquarters were vandalized continually; campaign workers were beaten, resulting in two deaths, and chased out of villages and towns; opposition candidates received written and telephoned death threats.

Some of the violence, which has been amply documented by Helsinki Watch and the International Human Rights Law Group, among others, was spontaneous. In other cases, such as the January 29 coordinated attacks on party offices, it was clearly organized. Whether all of it can be attributed to the Front, or the Securitate, or both, is unclear. But until the very last moment, Front representatives did not seek to distance themselves from the violence or suggest that it would not be tolerated. The attacks only escalated.

The passive police response confirmed that the Front would indeed accept violence in the electoral campaign. So did the official reluctance to prosecute the perpetrators. Opposition representatives were discouraged by the small number of people who had been brought up on charges of attacking the parties, and the light punishment they had received. According to Government spokespeople, over 115 campaign-related violent incidents were investigated and in 85 cases, the perpetrators received fines.

Such statistics provided little comfort to opposition party supporters, who claimed to see many more incidents go uninvestigated and only light sanctions meted out. In one case, a person who had attacked a Liberal Party headquarters in Bacau *judet* twice in February reportedly was charged a small fine of 2,000 lei (equivalent to about one-half month's wage for a worker, or approximately \$95 at the official exchange rate). As one Bacau Liberal Party supporter put it, such light punishment sends a clear message that the authorities will ignore campaign-related violence.

The local electoral commissions also took a passive stance. Had the commissions provided neutral fora for candidates to address voters, they might have prevented some of the incidents. Instead, candidates could either address rallies -- which do not naturally calm emotions -- or they could be absent. Many candidates chose the latter option; residents of many villags in Bacau *judet* confirmed that only the Front candidates had paid a visit. According to some party representatives, the opposition candidates were too scared.

The opposition parties were helpless. Some opposition representatives reported that they had filed complaints in Bucharest, but got no response. Few had any faith that such complaints would be handled in a serious or timely way. On May 11, the three Peasants Party members sitting in the Provisional National Unity Council pulled out of the provisional parliament to protest the continuing violent intimidation of opposition leaders.

### **Access to the Media**

Next to the campaign violence, opposition parties objected most to the Front's domination of the media, particularly television. FSN representatives have stressed repeatedly that Romania's 80 parties theoretically have had equal access to television, with the opportunity to place three-minute videos about their respective programs. A number of parties have complained that for most of the campaign, they were given only late-night slots.

The opposition parties' major concern regarding television focused more on the editorial slant of campaign coverage than on the availability of advertising time. After the first heady days of Free Romanian Television, itself a hero of the revolution, the medium that brought Ceausescu into the nation's living rooms every night now was perceived to be offering unduly extensive and uncritical coverage of the Front. Its reports on other parties and opposition activities were far more tendentious, confirming that it spoke less for Romania than for the FSN.

Large strikes beginning at the end of January and swelling in February forced the resignation of writer Aurel Dragos Munteanu, who had been named head of Free Romanian Television during the revolution. (Originally, he was simultaneously the spokesperson for the Front; he resigned from that position after a few weeks.) Historian Razvan Teodorescu was placed at the helm in early February, but complaints about biased television coverage continued to pour in.

A Civic Committee for the Independence of Romanian Radio and Television was established in March on the initiative of the Group for Social Dialogue. The Civic Committee called for the television to be placed under its custodianship and the supervision of a parliamentary commission. The Government was unyielding. The freeing of Romanian television from control of the Front became one of the central demands of demonstrators in Bucharest, Timisoara and other cities throughout April. Only in the last weeks of the electoral campaign did television viewers note more balanced coverage. In early May, the television was placed under the supervision of the Provisional National Unity Council Executive Committee.

Three nights before the election, Romanian television carried the single face-to-face debate between the three presidential candidates, the Front's Ion Iliescu, the Liberals' Radu Campeanu and the Peasant Party's Ion Ratiu. Voters were uniformly enthusiastic about the debate. Many observed that it was the first time they had seen representatives of various parties engage in rational discussion of campaign issues. The next day, Ratiu claimed that the debate represented the first time he had enjoyed unfettered access to voters through the airwaves.

Newspapers were another battleground for the parties. After the revolution, the Romanian press burgeoned to represent a range of uncensored views unheard of only a few months ago. Government representatives spoke proudly of the blossoming of 1,000 papers where 50 or 60 had existed before. Each party could put out its own paper, and a few parties published several.

Yet the Government maintained significant control over the press, and the Front could benefit from this control. The Front-appointed Minister of Culture directly controls the distribution of newsprint, and his permission is necessary to determine printing schedules. The party newspapers and the single most widely respected independent newspaper, *Romania Libera*, have been subject to severe limits on newsprint. While the Front has three newspapers with a combined circulation of 2.25 million, *Romania Libera*, the main opposition national daily, was cut back from a peak of 1.3 million copies to 900,000.

Access to printing equipment has also been problematic, with various publishers forced to share presses and undue delays imposed on attempted imports of printing equipment. Finally, the publishers had to depend on the government distribution monopoly to disseminate the newspapers. Party representatives and independent observers consistently reported that party papers and *Romania Libera* were delivered late if at all in provincial towns outside Bucharest, and that the distributors often returned such papers to Bucharest, claiming they could not sell them. A Peasants Party spokesperson alleged that one-half of the 400,000 copies of one of the PNT-CD papers were returned as unsellable.

### **Campaign Funding**

The electoral law establishes that parties competing in the elections will receive subsidies from the state budget. Each party was to receive an initial outlay to cover start-up costs, and then an additional sum in proportion to the number of candidates it would field. As of the date of the law's promulgation, parties are not permitted to use undisclosed funds from domestic or foreign sources. Many parties were assumed to have ignored this provision of the law.

Party representatives complained of getting too few funds too late. There were most concerned about the Front's ability to use the resources of the former Communist Party, which placed it at a tremendous advantage. These resources have yet to be audited and publicly accounted for.

## **IV. THE BALLOTING AND RESULTS**

Helsinki Commission staff observed voting in 11 urban and rural polling places in Bacau *judet* on election day, May 20, and observed the count at a voting precinct in the city of Bacau. The *judet* was widely recognized to be pro-Front, and opposition parties had suffered significant harassment and other obstacles in campaigning during the previous months. Bacau was the site of the murders of two National Peasants Party members in February.

The stations visited served from 850 to 3,300 voters each. The procedures followed at each precinct differed somewhat, reflecting not only varying degrees of understanding of the electoral law, but also attempts to cope with unexpected problems such as large crowds waiting for hours to cast their votes.

## **The Electoral Commissions**

Romania's elections were administered by three tiers of electoral commissions. The nationwide commission was composed of seven judges, and representatives of the 10 parties fielding the largest number of candidates in the parliamentary elections. The judet electoral offices were composed of three judges and up to six party representatives.

Local electoral commissions composed of four to nine members administered the elections in each precinct. Each commission was headed by a chair and vice-chair, both of whom were to be judges or jurists uninvolved in party politics and chosen by lot. In fact, electoral officials could not find enough judges and jurists to head up commissions in Romania's 12,380 polling places, so they drew from a variety of other professions. In some polling places, particularly in rural areas, the commissions were headed by people who had administered elections during the Ceausescu regime. ("At least we know how to organize," one reported proudly.). In others, the commission heads seemed to enjoy genuine respect among other members of the commission and among voters.

The balance of the local commissions was filled out by representatives of the parties. The Front had a representative at each polling site visited in Bacau, and the Peasants or Liberals had representatives at about half. In a number of polling places, the commission had expected opposition party representatives, but they did not show up. In some cases, they were too frightened to appear -- not only because of what might happen on election day, but afterwards, when the foreign observers and press were gone. In one polling site in a village, the commission chair explained that the Peasants Party representative who had been expected did not come even to cast his vote because of a "personal dispute" with other villagers. The representative had called in late December for the dissolution of the local collective farm; for this reason, the chair explained, the other villagers hated him. If only the Peasants Party had chosen more palatable representatives, the chair suggested, it might have enjoyed more of a presence in the countryside.

The absence of opposition party representatives throughout the voting day in many polling sites reduced voter confidence in the integrity of the electoral process. Most of the reports of electoral commission chairs and FSN representatives showing people exactly how to vote (for the Front) came from polling sites such as the one in Onesti, where Peasants Party and other opposition representatives had not shown up.

A Liberal Party representative explained that in one polling place in this city (previously called Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej after a previous Communist leader of Romania), only the Front was represented on the electoral Commission. Many other Front supporters who were not part of the Commission also were present during the voting. The police chief, who was the Mayor during the Ceausescu regime, showed voters how to place the stamp in the box marked for FSN presidential candidate Iliescu. The ballot boxes

were full by 5:00 p.m., although not all the registered voters had yet cast their ballots. The President of the Bacau *judet* Liberal Party, who was called to the scene by a Liberal Party supporter, was reported to have seen voters receiving more than one ballot for each race. By noon on the day after the elections, the commission still had not opened the boxes for the count.

The commissions were aided by "auxiliaries" who wore armbands in the Romanian national colors. It was unclear how these auxiliaries were chosen. In some regions, they were said to have been appointed by the mayor's office; in others, they had volunteered. Some voters suspected that they were members of the Securitate, and that their aim was to intimidate voters into voting for the Front. This seemed the case in one small town, where auxiliaries sported red roses, the symbol of the Front, on their armbands.

The auxiliaries fulfilled a variety of tasks, from maintaining order to aiding voters to cast their ballots. In the Bacau polling station where Helsinki Commission staff observed the counting, the auxiliaries (and military guards) helped to sort ballots. The auxiliaries' participation in the voting was not foreseen in the electoral law, and constituted one of the greatest potentials for intimidation on election day.

## **Procedures**

The polls opened at 6:00 a.m. on May 20, after the electoral commission had sealed the ballot boxes. The commissions had stamped the back of the ballots the previous evening to validate them. In every polling place visited, the commissions explained to people in groups or individually how to cast their ballot. Voters demonstrated little familiarity with voting procedures; most had not seen the ballots before they entered the polling place. (Ballots were posted publicly only sporadically in Bacau *judet*.)

Voters received an envelope, the three ballots -- for the presidential, Chamber of Deputies and Senate elections -- and a "Vote" stamp from the commission upon presentation of their identity book or birth certificate. They entered booths to mark the ballots, then emerged to put the ballots in the box. In some places, they were instructed to fold their ballots so that their vote could not be seen. (The ballot paper was fairly transparent; observers sitting several feet away could easily spy which presidential candidate people had voted for.) In others, commission representatives helped them fold their ballots. In almost all places, commission representatives helped them place the three ballots in the envelope, and watched them place the envelope in the box.

The voter then could pick up his or her identity papers, in which the commission would stamp "Voted." In some places, commissions failed to stamp identity papers, so that voters could theoretically cast ballots in more than one place.

Many voters entered the booths in twos. Commission representatives explained that they were family members, or that one of the pair required help in seeing or reading the ballot.

Every polling place visited had a line until about 6:00 in the evening; in some towns, voters had to wait for several hours to vote. In a precinct in the town of Livezi, the waiting crowd had grown so unruly that a window had been broken. In some cases, there were insufficient numbers of booths; in others, there were insufficient numbers of "Vote" stamps. In all cases, the voting process took at least several minutes as voters made their way through the multi-page ballots. (The Bacau ballots for the Chamber of Deputies were only seven pages long, while the comparable ballots in Bucharest included 34 pages.) Further delays were created by inaccurate electoral lists; in one Bacau city precinct, electoral commission workers reported that entire apartment buildings had been left off the electoral rolls, which then had to be corrected on the spot. Late in the afternoon, with waiting crowds still forming outside polling stations in some regions of the country, the Central Electoral Commission decreed that all polling stations should remain open at least until midnight, and later if necessary to accommodate voters.

The polling places were equipped with portable ballot boxes for ill and infirm voters. Some required written or telephoned requests; at others, the commissions "just knew" where the homebound voters were. At one polling place in the city of Bacau, commission representatives started on their rounds with the portable box at 11:15 p.m..

Each voting place had police and/or military guards technically under the supervision of the electoral commission chair. In some polling sites visited, the police stood inside; at others, they were deployed at the entrances or on the street.

The Liberal and Peasants Parties in Bacau catalogued a variety of irregularities in the *judet* on election day. These included pro-Front propaganda by commission presidents, three to four people in booths at one time, Front posters inside polling places, more than one ballot for each election being handed to voters, ballots missing the commission's stamp to prove that they were valid, voting outside the booths, and, in one instance, a commission official stationed inside a polling booth instructing people how to vote.

## **The Count**

Counting of the votes commenced soon after the polling places were closed. At the polling site where Commission staff observed the count, 2,200 voters were registered. The counting started at 12:30 a.m. and finished at 8:00 a.m. About a dozen people participated in the vote, including the seven commission members, a uniformed guard, two auxiliaries and one representative each for the Liberal and Front candidates.

The commission chair and vice-chair first opened the boxes and separated the ballots into separate piles for the presidential, Chamber of Deputies and Senate races. Then, in pairs, the commission members counted the votes cast for each candidate or party. After an hour or so, commission members worked singly, calling out the names of the candidates or parties gaining each vote. Other members of the commission recounted the ballots. The commission invalidated each ballot which was improperly stamped, and recorded all the information in a report which was to be signed by all the commission members present.

The reports and ballots were delivered to the *judet* electoral commission by car, under military guard, and to the *judet* courthouse the morning after the election. By law, parties were to have access to notarized copies of the reports. At the electoral commission, the results were entered into computers which were linked to the central electoral commission in Bucharest.

The computers performed the complex task of tallying up the coefficients which would determine how many votes were necessary for a party to gain one parliamentary seat in each *judet*. Votes cast for a party below or beyond the *judet* coefficient were tallied nationwide to add to that party's store of votes and gain it additional seats.

An FRG-organized exit poll formed the basis for the reports on early returns which the Romanian media broadcasted beginning on election day. These predicted a landslide victory for the Front. The final results were to be available only on Friday, May 25.

## Results

Over 86 percent of the registered voters turned out for the May 20 elections. The results were as follows:

<b>Presidential Election</b>	
(approximately 440,000 invalid votes)	
Ion Iliescu	85.07 percent
Radu Campeanu	10.64 percent
Ion Ratiu	4.29 percent

**Chamber of Deputies**  
(over 1,100,000 invalid votes)

Front for National Salvation	66.31 percent	(263 seats)
Hungarian Democratic Union	7.23 percent	(29 seats)
National Liberal Party	6.41 percent	(29 seats)
Romanian Ecological Movement	2.62 percent	(12 seats)
National Peasants Party	2.56 percent	(12 seats)
Alliance for the Unity of Romanians in Transylvania	2.12 percent	(9 seats)
Democratic Agrarian Party	1.83 percent	(9 seats)
Romanian Ecologist Party	1.69 percent	(8 seats)
Socialist Democratic Party	1.05 percent	(5 seats)
Social-Democratic Party	0.53 percent	(2 seats)
Democratic Center Bloc	0.48 percent	(2 seats)
Democratic Labor Party	0.38 percent	(1 seat)
"Free Change" Party	0.34 percent	(1 seat)
National Reconstruction Party	0.34 percent	(1 seat)
Free Democratic Youth	0.32 percent	(1 seat)
Democratic German Forum	0.28 percent	(1 seat)
"Bratianu" Liberal Union	0.27 percent	(1 seat)
Democratic Gypsy Union	0.21 percent	(1 seat)

**Senate**  
(over 886,000 invalid votes)

Front for National Salvation	67.02 percent	(92 seats)
Hungarian Democratic Union	7.20 percent	(12 seats)
National Liberal Party	7.06 percent	(9 seats)
National Peasants Party	2.50 percent	(1 seat)
Romanian Ecological Movement	2.45 percent	(1 seat)
Alliance for the Unity of Romanians in Transylvania	2.15 percent	(2 seats)
Democratic Agrarian Party	1.59 percent	----
Romanian Ecologist Party	1.38 percent	----
Socialist Democratic Party	1.10 percent	----
Social-Democratic Party	0.50 percent	----
Democratic Center Bloc	0.47 percent	----
National Reconstruction Party	0.38 percent	----
"Free Change" Party	0.33 percent	----
Democratic Labor Party	0.32 percent	----
"Bratianu" Liberal Union	0.26 percent	----
Free Democratic Youth	0.23 percent	----
Democratic German Forum	0.14 percent	----
Democratic Gypsy Union	0.14 percent	----

Allegations of fraud began well before the count was formally completed, and the National Election Commission received a number of written complaints which it pledged to investigate. National Liberal Party leader and presidential candidate Radu Campeanu announced that his party would contest the election. The Helsinki Commission has not received documentary evidence of systematic fraud as of this writing.

Iliescu and the Front were widely expected to win, but the wide margin over the other parties came as a great surprise to many opposition party representatives and supporters. Some charged that such a wide margin was impossible, and that only ballot-box stuffing and dirty tricks in counting could account for it. They suggested that such fraud could have added anywhere from 10 to 25 percent of votes to the Front's polling. Others thought the results were more or less accurate, and took the results as a reprimand to the opposition for not finding more effective ways to reach voters. As one member of the Liberal Party in Timisoara put it, "We intellectuals assumed that more people thought just like we do. Now we know we have to be more outspoken." The authors of the Proclamation of Timisoara interpreted the election results as additional evidence of the lack of civil society in Romania today, and the consequent propensity of people to vote for the currently ruling power out of fear or habit.

More surprising to many than the Front's strength was the weakness of the opposition parties, particularly the revived pre-war parties which were the flagship of the opposition. Many had expected that the 3.5 million signatures on the Proclamation of Timisoara represented a significant launching-point for the opposition parties, and a sign of a newfound unity. Instead the polling results pointed up the divisiveness of the opposition.

The most cohesive opposition voting bloc turned out to be the Hungarians, most of whom rallied behind the Hungarian Democratic Union and voted for Radu Campeanu, the Liberal Party presidential candidate. The narrow, minority rights-based platform of the Union, as well as the fear generated by the Tirgu Mures events, galvanized the Hungarians to act together. While the Union leadership never endorsed Campeanu, he was widely considered the least offensive to minority interests. Other minorities, however, did not rally to the Hungarian Union; instead, they reportedly voted for their own ethnically-based parties, for the Front, or not at all.

The Front for National Salvation now enjoys a strong mandate to rule, and the opposition will have little leverage in the Parliament to check it. Some Romanian observers have suggested that once installed in Parliament, the Front will display the same fissures as the opposition, and may not work as a bloc.

The scenario of a weak parliamentary opposition suggests that much of Romania's political life will continue to take place in the streets, in demonstrations and strikes. While an important step toward democracy, the elections did little to heal the scars of the Ceausescu era. They only exacerbated the polarization in Romanian society.

The Front-led Government will have to deal immediately with an economy in crisis and a tattered international reputation. Western Governments have indicated they are in no hurry to reward the Romanian Government for holding elections, characterized by fundamental flaws. Romania's partners in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe will carefully watch the Government's treatment of the opposition, which will be one litmus test of its commitment to democratizing Romanian society.