



# Post-Communist Progress and Stagnation at 35

---

The Case of Romania

---

*Edited by*  
Lavinia Stan · Diane Vancea

palgrave  
macmillan

## Post-Communist Progress and Stagnation at 35

Lavinia Stan · Diane Vancea  
Editors


Post-Communist  
Progress  
and Stagnation at 35

The Case of Romania

palgrave  
macmillan

*Editors*

Lavinia Stan   
Department of Political Science  
St Francis Xavier University  
Antigonish, NS, Canada

Diane Vancea   
Department of Economics  
Ovidius University  
Constanta, Romania

ISBN 978-3-031-55749-1      ISBN 978-3-031-55750-7 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-55750-7>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer  
Nature Switzerland AG 2024

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: © Alex Linch shutterstock.com

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG  
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Paper in this product is recyclable.

*This book is dedicated to our remarkable generation, the last one educated under communism but the first one called to shoulder the post-communist transition. Our dreams, hopes and mistakes are reflected in Romania's trajectory since 1989.*

## FOREWORD

I am grateful to the editors of this timely and insightful volume for having invited me to write a preface. It is an even greater honor to find myself in the company of such highly regarded scholars as Dennis Deletant and Tom Gallagher, among others. Throughout the years, I have benefited from their deep understanding of Romania's history, politics, society, and culture. My points delineated here are far from exhausting a multifaceted and often confusing reality. Ten theses sum up my views:

Thesis 1. In 1989, Romania was the only East European (ex-Soviet Bloc) country to experience a violent break with the old regime. The 1987 Brasov workers' rebellion showed fissures in dynastic socialism. The dramatic changes in Moscow, Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost, and Nicolae Ceausescu's obstruction of reforms and obstinacy in preserving an obsolete political and economic system exacerbated social and political tensions. The rampant personality cult surrounding Ceausescu and his wife Elena added insult to the humiliations of everyday life that Romanians had to endure.

Thesis 2. The mammoth-like Communist Party had no real internal life. The 14<sup>th</sup> Congress of 1989 confirmed Ceausescu's alienation on the international scene. Romania was the odd man out and its leader, once acclaimed as a maverick, was a pariah in both East and West. The economy was a shambles, resources were shrinking, and there was no light at the end of the tunnel.

Thesis 3. Dissent and civil society, decisive components and catalysts of democratic transitions elsewhere were under enormous pressure in Romania and could not serve as alternatives to the despot. The sense of despondency was not crystalized in programmatic documents similar to Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia. In March 1989, a letter addressed by six party veterans to Ceausescu called for an end to the country's disastrous course. The regime isolated the authors and kept them under house arrest. While a symptom of political decay, the protracted revolt of the Old Guard failed to acknowledge the systemic failure of the one-party system. Romania needed in-depth, structural changes, not neo-Bolshevik palliatives.

Thesis 4. In December 1989, Romania experienced a revolutionary situation. It had become clear to members of Ceausescu's entourage, army commanders, and Securitate (secret police) potentates that the Old Regime was dying and that the dictator had lost his sense of reality. There was real intraparty opposition, but a few retired military cadres and disgruntled apparatchiks were not powerful enough to defy the leader. One dissatisfied apparatchik was Ion Iliescu, a member of the Party's Central Committee until 1989. In the 1950s, Iliescu had studied at the "Molotov" Institute of Energetics in Moscow, where he met the young Chinese fellow student Li Peng. In the 1990s, Iliescu became increasingly convinced that world socialism in general, and the Romanian form of socialism, in particular, needed a substantial overhaul. He discussed these ideas with a few friends, primarily Silviu Brucan and Petre Roman. Important details regarding Iliescu's mindset in the late 1980s can be found in the book of conversations I conducted with Iliescu in mid-2003, before the end of his last presidential mandate.

Thesis 5. A spontaneous revolt started in Timisoara on 15 December 1989 as a protest against the persecution of a Hungarian Protestant pastor. The local authorities cooperated with military envoys from Bucharest and opened fire against the protesters. In a few hours, the protest became an anti-regime revolution. "Down with Ceausescu" became "Down with Communism!" Ceausescu believed that the revolt was fomented by foreign agents on the payroll of both Western and Eastern intelligence. He exploited nationalist slogans to mobilize the Romanians against the "enemies of socialism." Combining ideological fanaticism and tactical ineptitude, Ceausescu organized a huge rally which rapidly became an anti-regime mass protest. On 22 December 1989, Ceausescu, his wife, and a few loyalists, left Bucharest by helicopter. The

helicopter was forced to land and the couple was arrested and executed, following a mock trial, on 25 December. The new regime started with the downfall and execution of the former leader. The Praetorian Guard had betrayed him. Over 1,000 people were massacred during Ceausescu's last night in power and the subsequent three days. Responsibility for the post-Ceausescu carnage is still discussed.

Thesis 6: Iliescu emerged as the new leader fast and with little opposition. A new formation claimed to represent the revolutionary forces but included old communists. Iliescu maintained that the National Salvation Front had been born spontaneously, as an “emanation” of the revolutionary tumult. In fact, it was the result of a planned takeover by forces interested in prolonging the economic and political hegemony of the communist nomenklatura. In this respect, Iliescu and his comrades spoke as revolutionaries but protected the old elites, now in new political garb. In February 1990, I published an article in “The New Republic” titled “New Mask, Old Faces” in which I examined the composition of the new leading team. Behind the revolutionary façade one could identify former Communist Party ideologues and Securitate officers.

Thesis 7. In Romania, the post-1989 political landscape included the return of the old (“historical”) political parties. Two prominent politicians emerged as vocal proponents of the center-right, outspokenly pro-Western and anti-communist National Peasant Christian and Democratic Party. One was former political prisoner Corneliu Coposu; the other was prominent émigré politician Ion Ratiu. Their commitment to pluralism represented the opposite of seasoned ideological apparatchik Iliescu's world view. Control over electronic media allowed the Front to portray the democratic opposition as non-patriotic, ready to sell out the country's resources to the voracious West. The Liberals and the Social Democrats criticized the Front's monopolization of power. In April–May 1990, students demonstrated against the Iliescu regime on University Square in Bucharest. In June, Iliescu (elected president a month earlier) ordered the violent disbanding of the protesters. This extralegal resort to violence deepened the regime's legitimacy crisis. At that point, Romania was an authoritarian quasi-democracy.

Thesis 8. Personalities have played a critical role in the democratic transition. Between 1990 and 1996, Iliescu embodied the interests and aspirations of the former communist elites who found in his leadership style and ideological choices a protector. In turn, Iliescu insisted on the



need for stability and accused his opponents, grouped in the Democratic Convention, of seditious intentions. The Front changed its name to the Party of Social Democracy and claimed to be a party of the Left. This did not prevent Iliescu from including rabid nationalists into the government. Iliescu and his supporters resisted all efforts to allow former King Michael to return to Romania. With Coposu's death in 1995, the democratic forces lost their most inspiring leader. Yet, the Democratic Convention won the presidential election in 1996 with a pro-Western and pluralist program. Accepting the results, Iliescu also accepted the end of the once all-powerful post-Ceausescu bureaucracy. The new president, geology professor Emil Constantinescu, was a bona fide intellectual. He was committed to pursuing Romania's NATO membership but domestically endless factious bickering plus pressures fomented by the Iliescu-run opposition led to a dramatic decline in his popularity. In 2000, Iliescu was reelected president. The Peasant Party faded away and the Social Democrats could continue to defy the rule of law.

Thesis 9. Former sea captain and mayor of Bucharest Traian Basescu served as president between 2004 and 2014. He won the presidency in a fierce struggle with the Social Democratic leader, Iliescu's Prime Minister Adrian Nastase. Basescu's priority was the anti-corruption struggle and the consolidation of accountability institutions such as the National Anti-corruption Directorate. Media moguls and politicians were arrested, tried, and sentenced—among them, Dan Voiculescu, Sorin Ovidiu Vantu, and Adrian Nastase. In March 2004, responding to the growing mobilization of civil society, Basescu formed the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania. On 16 December 2006, he presented the Commission's conclusions to Parliament and declared the communist dictatorship to have been "illegitimate and criminal." This was a climactic moment in Romania's post-communist political and moral landscape. In January 2007, Romania joined the EU. Five years later, anti-Basescu forces, grouped in the Social Liberal Union (uniting the Social Democrats and the Liberals), removed Basescu from office. However, a referendum brought him back, but his anti-corruption drive stalled. The system prevailed over a political figure who had tried to overhaul its most obnoxious features. Social Democrat leader Victor Ponta became Prime Minister, even after the public found out that he had plagiarized his doctoral thesis supervised by his protector Adrian Nastase.

Thesis 10. Former mayor of Transylvanian city of Sibiu, Klaus Iohannis, defeated Social Democrat PSD presidential candidates twice. Most Romanian citizens saw him as different from the strident, corrupt, and often irresponsible paragons of the political class, but he has been interested only in his tranquility. He saw no tensions and ignored successive waves of civic discontent. This led to a widespread disappointment in Iohannis and his proteges. A party-movement emerged in 2020 voicing intense nationalism, nostalgia for the Fascist Iron Guard, and populist attacks on “globalist institutions.” The Romanian political system seems strong enough to weather this new challenge. Since 24 February 2022, Romania has been actively involved in the NATO and EU assistance to Ukraine. The history of Romanian–Russian relations is instructive enough to make responsible policy makers, military strategists, and informed commentators aware of Putin’s propaganda war.

Washington, DC

Vladimir Tismaneanu

**Vladimir Tismaneanu** is Professor of Political Science at the University of Maryland, College Park. Well-known for his studies on Central and Eastern Europe, especially Romania, his birth country, his most recent publication is *Putin’s Totalitarian Democracy: Ideology, Myth, and Violence in the Twenty-First Century* (Springer, 2020), co-authored with Kate C. Langdon, as well as dozens of other books, chapters, and articles that discuss Cold War history, communist regimes, post-communist democratization, ideology, and nationalism.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 2015, we gathered a group of Romanian Studies experts for a book dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the collapse of the communist regime. That book was very well received, but we considered that younger scholars should be given a chance to contribute to a volume marking the 30th anniversary. To our surprise, that celebration got almost no attention among Romanian Studies scholars. This is the very reason why we decided on the present book, calling on reputed experts to mark the 35th anniversary.

Our heartfelt thanks to the contributors who wrote chapters for this book. Their enthusiasm for this project, and patience in discussing with us numerous iterations of their chapters are much appreciated. We thank Dennis Deletant, Tom Gallagher, and Vladimir Tismaneanu for their willingness to join this project late and to work with very tight deadlines. We thank Sabrina P. Ramet for careful copyediting, and Palgrave Macmillan and its staff for bringing this project to the public. Warm thanks to Aurelian Craiutu, James Kapalo, and Sabrina P. Ramet for enthusiastically endorsing this anniversary book.

Above all, this book is the result of a 40-year-long friendship that has withstood the test of time, the distance in space, and the many tribulations that life placed ahead of us. We are very much pleased to see this project brought to completion—the first time we talked seriously about it was in Carovigno, Italy in autumn 2021.

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
	Dennis Deletant	
<b>Part I Institutions and Elites</b>		
<b>2</b>	<b>Institutional Choices and Weaknesses After 1989</b>	<b>13</b>
	Florin Anghel	
<b>3</b>	<b>An Overview of Cabinet Demographics</b>	<b>33</b>
	Alexandra Horobet, Claudia Ogorean, Dana Alexandru, and Robert Oprescu	
<b>4</b>	<b>The Eroding Force of Informal Rules: Romania Between Democracy and Europeanization</b>	<b>57</b>
	Clara Volintiru and Edit Zgut-Przybylska	
<b>5</b>	<b>Are We There Yet? Romania's Semi-Peripheral Rule of Law</b>	<b>83</b>
	Mihaela Șerban	
<b>6</b>	<b>Protracted Transition: The Civilian Control Over the Military and Intelligence</b>	<b>107</b>
	Marius Ghincea and Marian Zulean	

**Part II Civil Society and Its Values**

- 7 Romanian Parties and Post-Communist Democracy** 133  
Sorina Soare and Mattia Collini
- 8 The Challenges of Political Protest and Democratic Representation** 159  
Radu Cinpoes
- 9 Political Anachronism and Elite Political Culture: The Lacunae Theory** 181  
Delia Popescu

**Part III Change and Continuity in Areas of Life**

- 10 Riding the Waves of Democratization: The Interminable Sea Sickness of Romania's Media** 211  
Peter Gross
- 11 Change and Continuity in the Higher Education System** 233  
Razvan Zaharia, Rodica Milena Zaharia, and Tudor Edu
- 12 Health and Citizenship in Post-Socialist Romania** 253  
Gerard Weber and Sabina Stan
- 13 Wild Capitalism with Political Clout** 273  
Lavinia Stan and Diane Vancea

**Part IV Conclusion**

- 14 Conclusion** 293  
Tom Gallagher

- Index** 301

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Dana Alexandru** is an Associate Professor of Administrative Law at the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania. Alexandru is a practitioner and public law theorist interested in how public law governs the exercise of powers and duties by central and local government. She is the author of *Comparative Study of Local Competences in Europe. Local electoral system in Romania: A Case Study* (Wolters Kluwer Romania Press, 2015) and works on decentralization, land policy, and property rights. Her work on planning law and property rights resulted in a chapter published by Boom Eleven International Publishing, The Hague.

**Florin Anghel** is Professor of History at Ovidius University in Constanta, Romania. His research interests revolve around the politics of Central Europe and international relations in Central and South-East Europe during the twentieth century. He is author of *Construirea sistemului cordon sanitaire. Relații româno-polone, 1919-1926* (Cetatea de Scaun, 2008) and of articles and book chapters on Romanian-Polish and Romanian-Baltic relations, memorials, memory and international relations, Polish refugees in Romania, and politics in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Bulgaria before 1945.

**Radu Cinpoes** is Associate Professor in Politics, Human Rights and International Relations at the University of Greenwich, England. Growing out of his interest in nationalism and the politics of exclusion, his research has recently focused on migration, mobility, and refugee issues, on the one

hand, and discrimination and intolerance, on the other. He has published on the extreme right, nationalism, European identity, and Romanian politics. His current research project investigates agential reflexive mediation of structural conditionings and the role of social networks in the context of transnational mobility.

**Mattia Collini** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Political Studies, Charles University in Prague, the Czech Republic, where he conducts comparative research on populism, parties, and party systems in Eastern and Southern Europe. He defended his PhD in Political Science at the Scuola Normale Superiore and was a research fellow at the University of Florence, where he participated in the SIRIUS project on labor market integration of migrants and refugees in the European Union. His research focuses on party competition and electoral volatility.

**Dennis Deletant** is a Public Policy Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC. He served as Visiting Ion Rațiu Professor at Georgetown University, Washington DC in 2011–2020, and also taught at University College, London in 1969–2011 and at the University of Amsterdam in 2003–2010. He was awarded the “Order of Merit” with the rank of commander for services to Romanian democracy, in 2000 by President Emil Constantinescu and “The Star of Romania,” Romania’s highest civilian honor, by President Klaus Iohannis in 2016 for his efforts to promote Romanian history, language, and culture.

**Tudor Edu** is Professor of Marketing and Vice-President for Research, Innovation and Internationalization at the Romanian-American University in Bucharest, Romania. He holds a PhD in Marketing from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies and has over twenty years of practical experience in strategic marketing. His research covers marketing strategies, consumer behavior, as well as market segmentation and positioning. He is a member of the Romanian Distribution Committee.

**Tom Gallagher** is a Professor Emeritus of Political Science, who taught at the University of Bradford until 2011, and is now an Emeritus Professor at that university. One of the foremost experts on Romania, Gallagher is the author of several books, book chapters, and refereed articles recognized in the field. His *The Theft of a Nation: Romania since Communism*, published with Hurst in 2005, won the best book prize from the Society for Romanian Studies. During the 2010s, Gallagher wrote weekly editorials for the well-respected Romanian newspaper *Romania Libera*.

**Marius Ghincea** is a PhD student in Political and Social Sciences at the European University Institute and a lecturer at Syracuse University in Florence, where he teaches international relations. The recipient of several prestigious scholarships, Ghincea is conducting research on consensus in foreign and security policy, as well as the domestic politics of grand strategy and security policy, with a focus on the United States and Germany.

**Peter Gross** Professor Emeritus of the University of Tennessee and former Director of its School of Journalism and Media. He is also a member of the Media and Journalism Research Center, a European research group affiliated with the University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain. His scholarship and journalism focus on East Central European media, politics, culture, and societies. He has provided assessments for the U.S. Information Agency/U.S. Department of State and Voice of America, served as consultant to the International Media Fund, Freedom Forum, and Freedom House, and was a research fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C.

**Alexandra Horobet** is Professor at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. She has presented numerous papers at international conferences and published in reputed academic journals and edited volumes (Springer, Palgrave MacMillan, Edward Elgar). Her research interests focus mainly on business performance analysis, international finance, risk management, and regional analysis, but she has a keen interest in interdisciplinary research evidenced by her works on Environmental, Social and Governance principles. She is member of the Society for Romanian Studies, and Spanish Association of International Economics and Finance.

**Claudia Ogrean** is Professor of Management at the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania. She has published 70 articles in scholarly journals and participated in 40 conferences. She has co-authored chapters in edited books published with Palgrave Macmillan and Springer. She serves as co-editor-in-chief for the journal *Studies in Business and Economics*. Her current research agenda focuses on digital transformation and SMEs' competitiveness and their management, as well as EU's green and smart transition and its implications for industries and management.

**Robert Oprescu** is a PhD student in International Business and Economics at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Bucharest



and a master's degree in international financial risk management from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. His main research interests focus on digitalization, crypto-assets, decentralized networks, algorithmic governance policies, and digital skills development.

**Delia Popescu** is Professor of Political Science at Le Moyne College, in DeWitt, New York. Popescu is an applied political theorist with broad interests across social movement theory, deliberative democracy, resistance, totalitarianism, critical discourse analysis, memory construction, and dissident work in Eastern Europe. She is the author of *Political Action in Vaclav Havel's Thought: The Responsibility of Resistance* (Lexington Press, 2011) and has published work related to rhetorical constructions and institutional marginalization, nation branding and minority power relations, the Roma minority in Europe, and democratic deliberation. Her work on East European political thought resulted in a chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory*.

**Mihaela Șerban** is Professor of Law and Society at Ramapo College of New Jersey, Mahwah. Her teaching and publications touch on law and society, human rights, the rule of law, and Romanian Studies. Her most recent publications include “Legitimation Crisis, Memory, and United States Exceptionalism: Lessons from Post-Communist Eastern Europe” (*Memory Studies*, 2021), a special issue on Law, History and Justice in Romania published by the *Journal of Romanian Studies* in 2020 (with Monica Ciobanu), and the monograph *Subverting Communism in Romania: Law and Private Property: 1945-1965* (2019, Lexington Books, 2019).

**Sorina Soare** is Lecturer at the University of Florence, Italy. After defending her PhD in political science at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, she taught at the Université libre de Bruxelles, the Central European University, and the University of Bucharest. She is also involved in several international projects and research networks. Her research focuses on comparative politics, especially political parties and party systems, populism, migrants' political participation, the role of gender and women in politics, and affective polarization.

**Lavinia Stan** a Professor of Political Science at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, has published widely on post-communist democratization, transitional justice, and religion and politics. Stan is the

author or editor of 15 books, and numerous articles and book chapters, including *Post-Communist Romania at 25: Linking Past, Present and Future* (2015), and *Encyclopedia of Transitional Justice* (2013 and 2022). From 2014 to 2019, Stan was President of the Society for Romanian Studies, the premier scholarly association dedicated to the study of Romania, its minorities and diaspora. She is editor-in-chief of the peer-reviewed *Women's Studies International Studies*, and *East European Politics and Societies & Cultures*.

**Sabina Stan** teaches Sociology and Anthropology at the School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community Health at Dublin City University, Ireland. Her research interests revolve around Romania's transformations in work and exchange patterns in subsistence agriculture and access to health services, collective action in response to healthcare privatization, cross-border patient mobility between East and West, and the uneven European healthcare space. She has published with CNRS Editions (Paris), Routledge, Oxford, and Rowman & Littlefield, as well as a number of peer-reviewed journals. She is a Senior Social Scientist in an ERC-funded project looking at labor politics and the new European economic governance in healthcare.

**Diane Vancea** is Professor of Economic and International Affairs and President of the Senate of the University "Ovidius" in Constanta, Romania. She is author or co-author of more than 80 articles, books, and book chapters. Her research has focused primarily on issues of International Finance, but she has also been interested in post-communist democratization and its relationship to economics. Vancea has presented her work to numerous conferences inside and outside Romania. More importantly, she is co-editor (with Lavinia Stan) of *Post-Communist Romania at 25: Linking Past, Present and Future* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

**Clara Volintiru** is Associate Professor in International Business and Economics at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. Her work was published with Oxford University Press, Palgrave, Routledge, and Springer, as well as in *European Political Science Review*, *CESifo Economic Studies*, *Acta Politica*, *European Political Science*, *European Politics and Society*, *Eastern European Politics*, or *Research & Politics*. She has been

working for over a decade as a senior researcher for international organizations such as the World Bank, European Commission, Eurofound, or the Committee of Regions.

**Gerard Weber** is an Associate Professor in Sociology and Anthropology at the City University of New York, the United States. He has an almost two-decade-long research interest and fieldwork experience in Romania, most notably looking at the impact of post-socialist transformations on former socialist workers and aging with a focus on chronic stress from social and material circumstances, coping strategies and efforts to bring about structural change. He is the author of numerous scholarly publications. His more recent book manuscript examined the work and social lives of blue-collar workers in post-socialist Romania.

**Razvan Zaharia** is Professor of Marketing and Director of the Doctoral School of Marketing at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania. He serves as member of the Economics and Business Commission of the National Council for the Attesting of University Titles, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU), under the Romanian Ministry of Education. His main research interests focus on political and social marketing. Zaharia is a member of the American Marketing Association (USA), and the co-author of an annual report on political developments in Romania published by a prestigious political science journal.

**Rodica Milena Zaharia** is Professor of International Business and Economics and the Executive Director of the Research Center in International Business and Economics of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania. She serves as the editor-in-chief of the *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* and as member of the Editorial Boards of other peer-reviewed academic journals. Her research interests cover areas such as corporate social responsibility, business ethics, international business, and higher education.

**Edit Zgut-Przybylska** is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and a visiting fellow at the Central European University and the Foreign Service Institute of the United States State Department. Her research interests cover informality, populism, and the constraining role of the European Union. She held a re:constitution fellowship in 2022-2023 and another at the German Marshall Fund of the United States in 2020-2021. She is the Vice-Chair of Amnesty International Hungary.

**Marian Zulean** is a Professor at the University of Bucharest, Romania, where he teaches public policy and national security policy formulation. He is also co-director of the Black Sea Area Program at the same university. Previously he coordinated the social science department at the Institute for Advanced Research-University of Bucharest (ICUB), deputy dean for research at the Faculty of Public Administration and Business (2012–2016), and an adviser with the Office of the President (2001–2006).

# LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.1	Timeline of Romanian cabinets, 1989–2023	37
Fig. 3.2	Positions in Romanian cabinets (1989–2023) ( <i>Source</i> Official government websites, <a href="https://www.gov.ro/">https://www.gov.ro/</a> and <a href="http://old.gov.ro/">http://old.gov.ro/</a> )	38
Fig. 3.3	The birthplace of Romanian ministers (1989–2023)	46
Fig. 4.1	Vertical coordination in the Romanian institutions ( <i>Source</i> Volintiru and Nicola [2024])	74
Fig. 7.1	Evolution of ENEP and ENPP in Romania (1996–2000) ( <i>Source</i> Casal Bértoa [2023])	139
Fig. 7.2	Economic left–right and GAL-TAN Party positions (election year in parentheses) ( <i>Source</i> Chapel Hill Expert Survey)	152
Fig. 8.1	Percentages of Romanians showing no confidence at all in political institutions (WVS 2023)	164

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 7.1	The electoral results of the main Romanian political parties by blocs (1996–2020)	144
Table 7.2	Electoral volatility in Romania (2000–2020)	145
Table 7.3	Evolution of economic left–right party positions (2000–2016)	150
Table 7.4	Evolution of GAL-TAN party positions (2000–2016)	151
Table 8.1	Romania’s rankings in the Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International 2022)	163
Table 8.2	Romania—political action: attending lawful/peaceful protest (WVS 2023)	168



# Introduction

*Dennis Deletant*

It is logical that a volume that addresses developments in Romania over the last thirty-five years should use as its reference point the same editors' volume *Post-Communist Romania at Twenty-Five* (Lavinia Stan and Diane Vancea, eds., Lexington Books, 2015). As was the case with that set of analyses, the starting point from which to assess Romania's evolution since 1990 in this collection of studies is the nature of the collapse of communism there. The violent manner of Nicolae Ceaușescu's demise set Romania's experience of political change apart from that of the other East Central European states and was itself an indication that in Romania the peaceful overthrow of dictatorship was impossible. Whereas Ceaușescu succeeded in uniting Romanians in opposition to him, his fall threw them into confusion. The legacy of totalitarian rule in Romania was therefore markedly different from that elsewhere. In the words of one of the young "revolutionaries" wearing the tricolor armband of red, yellow, and blue whom I met guarding the entrance to a Bucharest metro station shortly after my arrival in Bucharest with the BBC in late December 1989, "we want real democracy, not Romanian democracy." The miners'

---

D. Deletant (✉)  
Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, DC, USA  
e-mail: [ddeletanmt@gmail.com](mailto:ddeletanmt@gmail.com)

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature  
Switzerland AG 2024

L. Stan and D. Vancea (eds.), *Post-Communist Progress and Stagnation*  
at 35, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-55750-7\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-55750-7_1)

incursions into Bucharest in 1990 and 1991 bore the hallmarks of the tactics used by the communists in Romania in 1945 and elsewhere in East Central Europe to subvert democratic order and bring themselves to power.

Yet the overthrow of Ceaușescu did lead to a political revolution: a single-party monopoly was removed; multi-party elections—albeit flawed in 1990—were held, the command economy was dismantled, and censorship abolished. Choice became possible, and options could be exercised. There was a democratic transfer of power in 1996 when the neo-communists suffered their first defeat at the ballot-box since 1990. At the personal level, possession of a passport became a right, not a privilege, in early 1990, and therefore restrictions on travel abroad by the state were removed, and the reviled abortion decree, introduced by Ceaușescu, was immediately rescinded. The rule of law was, nevertheless, fragile, and reform of the judicial system was sorely needed. The political will to bring senior politicians to court to face credible charges of corruption was lacking in the first two decades after the revolution.

In Romania, the impetus for reform and the adoption of democratic institutions came from outside rather than from within. The International Monetary Fund, the Council of Europe, and the European Union (EU) have been the major catalysts of reform, and the need to satisfy the requirements of these institutions in order to achieve integration into the so-called “Euro-Atlantic structures” spurred and guided the reform process in Romania. In joining NATO and the EU, Romania moved from uncertainty about its position and future in Europe to certainty. NATO and EU membership offered political and economic stability, providing an anchor for the reforms upon which Romania had embarked since the overthrow of communist rule. Romania’s admission to NATO on 29 March 2004 following the decision taken at the Prague Summit, in November 2002, and her adherence to the EU on 1 January 2007 were the most notable successes in terms of politics and economics registered by the country. As a further sign of its commitment to the NATO alliance, Romania signed an agreement with the United States on 13 September 2011 to station a ballistic missile defense system at the Deveselu air base near Caracal, some 150 km (90 miles) to the south-west of the capital, Bucharest. The base was commissioned on 10 October 2014 and forms part of the second phase of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA)—the US national contribution to a NATO missile defense architecture.



Romania, then, sits firmly within the strategic interests of NATO and the United States. The Dniester River is 80 kilometers from Odessa, the main port on the Black Sea for Ukraine. The Prut River is about 300 kilometers from Bucharest, the capital of Romania. That strategic interest is linked to the emphasis placed by the United States and the EU on the rule of law, one which is motivated by their concerns that NATO and EU members not abuse power in such a manner as to threaten their internal stability.

A major consequence of EU membership has been a tremendous upsurge in labor mobility, with almost three million Romanians estimated to be working in Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and France. Remittances to Romania from these workers represent a significant proportion of Romania's foreign currency earnings. The value of workers' remittances to Romania was estimated by the World Bank to represent 2.87% of the country's Gross Domestic Product in 2022. Other benefits of EU enlargement for Romania have been an increase in the competitiveness of domestic products under pressure from the single market, a higher level of consumer protection, and greater responsibility toward the environment. Another positive factor in the Romanian economy is the country's large domestic consumption base, with the largest consumer market in South-East Europe, and the fifth most populous country of all major East Central European states.

Corruption poses a challenge to the stability and security of the state. When they joined the European Union on 1 January 2007, Romania and Bulgaria still had progress to make in the fields of judicial reform and corruption. The EU decided to establish a special Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) to help both countries address these outstanding shortcomings. The conditionality in the satisfaction of the requirements for the lifting of the CVM in respect of Romania was only finally lifted by the European Commission in its report of 22 November 2022. In Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index for 2022, Romania ranked 46th out of 180 states (where 1 = the lowest level of corruption). It stands alongside Hungary (42) and Bulgaria (43) with the highest score for corruption of an EU member. Although significant steps have been taken over the last three years in the drive against corruption among members of the political and business elite, Romania has still some way to go.

Major obstacles in the path of Romania's progress toward economic development and bureaucratic efficiency proved to be a lack of administrative capacity and widespread incompetence in the public domain. In November 2012, the EU delivered stinging criticism of Romania's inability to access EU funds. The country took up little more than 12% of the 19.6 billion euros in EU Structural and Cohesion funds it was eligible to receive in the 2007–2013 budget cycle. In autumn 2012, the Romanian government suspended EU programs meant to modernize infrastructure, and the country permanently lost funding amounting to 200 million Euros for its inability to submit viable projects in time. This failure to take advantage of EU money obviously slowed down the implementation of measures required under the *acquis communautaire*.

Under the EU budget for 2014–2020, agreed in Brussels on 8 February 2013 and capped at 960 billion euros, Romania was set to receive 22.99 billion euros, some 2 billion euros more than it received in 2007–2013. The biggest share was allocated to environment and transport (over 20% each). Romania was also allocated 17.5 billion euros in funds for agriculture in 2014–2020 under the common agricultural policy, up from 13.8 billion euros in 2007–2013. However, Romania's absorption of European money under the 2014–2020 financial framework stood at only 50% by the end of 2020. This has raised concerns that Romania's capacity to disburse EU funds lingers over the influx of some 30 billion euros allocated to the country from the European Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), in addition to the 50 billion euros provided in the regular EU budget for Romania for 2021–2027. The RRF entered into force on 19 February 2021 and is designed to “mitigate the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic and make European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions.” Romania's ability to spend such sums remains problematic in respect of the RRF, which must be allocated rapidly and spent entirely by 2026.

Romania's current demographic trends have also generated long-term economic and political challenges. The population has been in decline since the fall of communism in 1989. The World Bank estimates that from a peak of 23.2 million in 1990, the population of Romania stands in 2022 at 19.65 million, largely as a result of emigration of the young to the West. This dynamic threatens to undermine long-term economic growth

and poses major challenges in the funding of pensions and healthcare as continuing decline will leave an ever smaller workforce.

There has been, in several respects, a failure of the Romanian political elite since the December 1989 revolution. Autocratic impulses and unpredictability have characterized the attitudes and actions of successive Romanian governments and the bureaucracy. This present volume seeks to highlight and address those factors that have continued to shape Romania's political and cultural transformation, in the broadest sense, during the thirty-five years after communism. The "Institutional Choices and Weaknesses After 1989" are presented and discussed by Florin Anghel. Essentially, the choice presented to the electorate was between a parliamentary, a presidential, or a semi-presidential system since the cards were seriously stacked against King Michael's return as king. He resided outside the country and had few opportunities to speak directly to the Romanian people, since Ion Iliescu and the National Salvation Front dominated the radio and television and the pro-monarchy press had limited circulation in rural areas. Michael, Anghel argues, provided no concrete plan for his return as head of state. Ultimately, Romania chose a French-inspired semi-presidential system that allowed the president to dominate the government structure as a powerful head of state, but which, according to Anghel, "continues to cripple the Romanian state structure, leading to several unintended consequences and dysfunctions that are detailed in other chapters of this book."

"An Overview of Cabinet Demographics," authored by Alexandra Horobet, Claudia Ogrean, Dana Alexandru and Robert Oprescu, describes the post-communist Romanian political elite and argues that the personal attributes and connections of cabinet ministers have impeded post-communist development. For each cabinet minister, the authors scrutinized their academic qualifications acquired before appointment to cabinet and the demands of their cabinet office. Their conclusions are that "on the one hand, Romania exhibited high cabinet instability, as evidenced by the large number of cabinets appointed from 1989 to 2023, the short average ministerial tenures, and frequent government reshuffles. Such instability suggests a lack of strategic foresight in governance and an inability to advance policy agendas. Even if presumably animated by best intentions, Romanian ministers were unable to hold onto their seats for long enough to enact meaningful policies and reforms." On the other hand, the authors contend, "the country showed a remarkable coherence at the elite level. Indeed, ministers were drawn from a very narrow elite

that included academics and state officials, but few businessmen. This was perhaps a legacy of the communist regime, which viewed entrepreneurs with apprehension, a result of the inappetence for politics of the Romanian business elite, or even a sign that academics are more preoccupied with the common good and therefore more eager to serve.” The authors also found that many cabinet ministers lacked the educational qualifications and professional backgrounds needed to fulfill the responsibilities included in their portfolios. While some ministers possessed qualifications directly related to their positions, nominations were influenced by group interests and political affiliations more than expertise in relevant domains. As they point out, “the persistent under-inclusion of women in cabinets showed the limited range of perspectives available to them and the disregard for their skills in a country that remains staunchly paternalistic in its outlook. With one exception, women were allowed to join the cabinet only a full decade after the collapse of the communist regime.”

The clash between formal and informal norms in post-communist Romania is explored by Clara Volintiru and Edit Zgut-Przbylska in their contribution entitled “The Eroding Force of Informal Rules: Romania Between Democracy and Europeanisation.” Their conclusion is that the prevalence of informal norms has eroded electoral and governance processes. Because informal linkages are stronger than formal ones, institutional coordination between state and non-state actors and among different government agencies and levels remains underdeveloped and this has impeded the country’s ability to absorb EU funding. During the past two decades, tensions have emerged within the Romanian public administration when mechanisms such as the Control and Verification Mechanism and the reporting, monitoring, or evaluation procedures required by the implementation of EU-funded projects tried to reinforce formal constraints that support rule of law. When financial incentives were strong and EU funds were available, Romanian public institutions aligned with formal procedures or legal requirements. In contrast, numerous strategic plans were not enforced, remaining credible only on paper.

For Mihaela Șerban, in the thirty-five years after the collapse of communism in Romania, there is a major gulf between word and deed in the application of the rule of law, as shown in her chapter entitled “Are We There Yet? Romania’s Semi-Peripheral Rule of Law.” The law is either not applied, or selectively applied. As she writes, “Romania’s struggle to create and sustain a rule of law culture has been channeled

in the direction of anti-corruption, itself the result of converging pressures—from above (the EU), and from below (popular dissatisfaction and push back).” Frequent legislative changes, the regular use of emergency ordinances, and the limited and non-transparent policy-making processes are perhaps the biggest obstacles to the rule of law, together with the limited attention paid to fundamental human rights. Yet there is reason for optimism, as indicated by what Șerban regards as a significant victory in the realm of justice reform for building a rule of law culture.

Marius Ghincea and Marian Zulean analyze “Protracted Transition: The Civilian Control over the Military and Intelligence,” which they consider to be unsatisfactory due to: the lack of complete internalization of democratic norms of horizontal control; the emergence of an aloof military distrustful of civilian leaders; the over-centralization of authority within the Supreme Council of National Defence (CSAT); and the absence of a civilian expert body providing guidance and technical support to the judiciary and the parliamentary standing committees in their oversight activities. The authors also suggest several policy pathways aimed at overcoming the current challenges and improving civilian control over the military and intelligence services. These policy recommendations are designed to enhance the democratic character and effectiveness of civilian control. They are made against the background of an erosion of trust in democratic institutions, and the security threats to Romania generated by Russia’s war against Ukraine, both of which pose significant challenges for civilian control over the services.

“Romanian Parties and Post-Communist Democracy” is the subject of the contribution by Sorina Soare and Mattia Collini. Their penetrating analysis shows how the major societal changes that have taken place in Romania since the revolution have impacted party politics. Since the earliest post-communist election organized in the early 1990s, the initial fragmentation diminished, with Romania achieving political consolidation like most countries in the region, although there was a slight increase in the number of effective parties in the last two elections (held in 2016 and 2020). This numerical stabilization is supported by a decrease in total volatility. Romania has a relatively closed and stable party system, but between elections the parliamentary dynamics show fragmentation and instability. As Soare and Collini note, “Romania’s post-communist party politics, like a pendulum, depends on the quality of its democracy. While for almost three decades the pendulum has swung towards the European values enshrined by Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, it is now

influenced by the appeal of a traditional social order that brings it back to the grey limbo of the early 1990s. Against this backdrop, the outcome of the 2024 elections remains uncertain, with the AUR becoming the second strongest party, according to the polls. This might prove dangerous, since local, European, legislative, and presidential elections are all due to be held in the same year for the first time since Romania joined the EU.”

Radu Cinpoes offers a detailed examination of the state of civil society mobilization in Romania, thirty-five years since the collapse of communism, in a chapter entitled “The Challenges of Political Protest and Democratic Representation.” He argues that disenchantment with electoral politics is manifested by a significant decline over time in voter turnout, and by the fact that trust in the main political institutions (parties, parliament, and government) is currently at an all-time low (and among the lowest in the EU). As Cinpoes writes, “given the very low level of civic participation in Romania, the risk here is that one set of actors that lack the legitimacy given by their democratic representation status (parties, parliament, government) is being challenged by a different set of actors suffering from the same shortcomings. Some political parties, including the AUR, are also occupying an overlapping space: being both part of the power structures (through their presence in parliament) and trying to undermine those structures, therefore blurring the representation issue even further. Moreover, the highly polarized positioning of these political adversaries renders any path for collective deliberation impossible.” Thus, what characterizes the Romanian political landscape thirty-five years after the demise of communism is, according to Cinpoes, a “dialogue of the deaf.” In other words, “reactive pressure via street protests results in minor short-term gains (changes of government, some concessions to demands) followed by elections, reconsolidation of power structure and back-tracking on decisions, with the main loser out of these engagements being democracy.”

The intersection of symbolic and political power in the case of the intellectual elites of post-communist Romania is addressed by Delia Popescu in “Political Anachronism and Elite Political Culture: The Lacunae Theory,” a chapter which sketches the discourses and assessments of the public sphere coming from several Romanian public intellectuals (Vintila Mihailescu, Lucian Boia, Sorin Adam Matei, Mona Momescu, H. R. Patapievici, and Liviu Andreescu) and articulates what she calls the *lacunae theory of the public sphere* in Romania. The theory is a consideration of how society understands its problems and conceives of their