

## **ANALYSIS OF PRIMATIAL VOTE FOR POLITICAL PARTIES AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS HELD IN ROMANIA IN 2007**

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**Abstract:** The elections for the European Parliament held on the 25th of November, 2007 represented an absolute novelty for Romania. Although there were 13 political parties and an independent candidate (László Tőkés) who took part in the elections (a significantly great number of participants for the political stage of such a country as Romania), the analysis of the primatial vote (the ratio between the percentages of the votes obtained by the first and second political groups) points out certain spatial configurations and hierarchies by areas (urban and rural) that are different from those characteristic to other previous elections. The accession to the European Parliament of only 5 parties (by exceeding the 5% threshold (DP, SDP, NLP, LDP and DUHR) and of independent László Tőkés proves that it is difficult for just one party to create a political majority at the parliamentary elections which are to come; on the other hand, the Romanian political stage seems to experience a process of sedimentation by the decrease of the number of political parties and structures which will rise up to the minimal electoral threshold at the future elections.

**Key words:** vote, election, Romania, European Parliament

### **Introduction**

The first elections (on November 25th, 2007) after Romania's integration in the EU (on January 1st, 2007) took place at the same time with a referendum<sup>1</sup> on the change of the electoral system of the Romanian Parliament elections (endorsement of the uninominal vote). Although the two events might have perturbed each other, it seems that the key role was played by president Traian Băsescu and his strong influence on the electorate, as long as the political parties supported by him (DP and LDP) got a good result at the elections for the European Parliament.

In this rather complicated political context it gets interesting to study the relationships between the votes obtained by the first two political parties in the final hierarchy at the county level and by areas (urban and rural). The population electoral behaviour and the multitude of factors that have an impact upon it induced different national hierarchies by counties and areas, proving that the Europarliamentary elections showed not only the existence of certain political circumstances but also the intense manifestation of absenteeism, which might have finally influenced the hierarchy of the two political parties. Instead the credibility of the political class after 18 years of democracy was largely

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<sup>1</sup> In May, 2007 the Romanian people decided by referendum to invalidate the decision of the Parliament to suspend president Traian Băsescu.

affected, being at its lowest level after 1990 (also due to its ideological “game” and sometimes to its ideological ambiguity).

The elections under discussion involved 13 political parties and one independent candidate (László Tőkés).

### Spatial distribution of primatial vote

The spatial analysis of the primatial vote<sup>2</sup> at the Europarliamentary elections held in Romania in 2007 points out the existence of certain variations and different hierarchies from one county to another. The value of the primatial vote depends on a series of factors, among which we can mention: the notoriety of the two parties; the political force of the other parties; the presence of one or more parties in the government; the notoriety of certain political persons who take part in the elections etc.

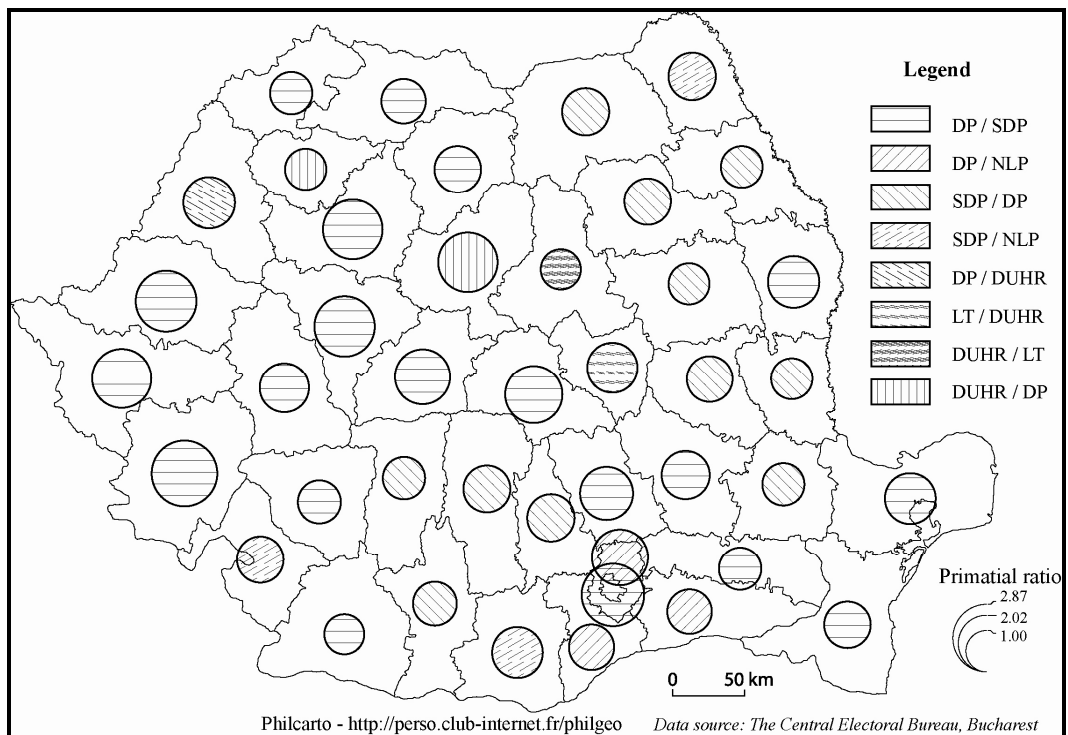


Fig. 1 Territorial distribution of primatial vote and primatial ratios at the EP elections in Romania

One can notice, on the one hand, the largest frequency of the primatial vote only with a few parties in the hierarchy and their spatial allotment, and on the other hand the variation between parties and their territorial distribution. The specificities of certain regions (high percentage of the Hungarian minority in Harghita and Covasna counties and important share in Mureș, Satu Mare, Bihor counties etc) obviously reveal, among other things, the ethnic vote. At the Europarliamentary elections under discussion, these multiethnic counties

<sup>2</sup> The primatial vote represents the ratio between the percentages of the votes obtained by the first and second political groups).

faced an interesting situation: the presence of the independent candidate László Tőkés who competed against the ethnic party of the Hungarians living in Romania (DUHR) (the party he had formerly belonged to and with which he had a conflict at that time). Consequently, the score got by DUHR could not be as good as that obtained at the previous elections as long as the votes of the Hungarian minority were divided between them, allowing independent László Tőkés to accede to the European Parliament. This situation was facilitated both by the high absenteeism and significant participation in the elections of the Hungarians, a generally disciplined electorate.

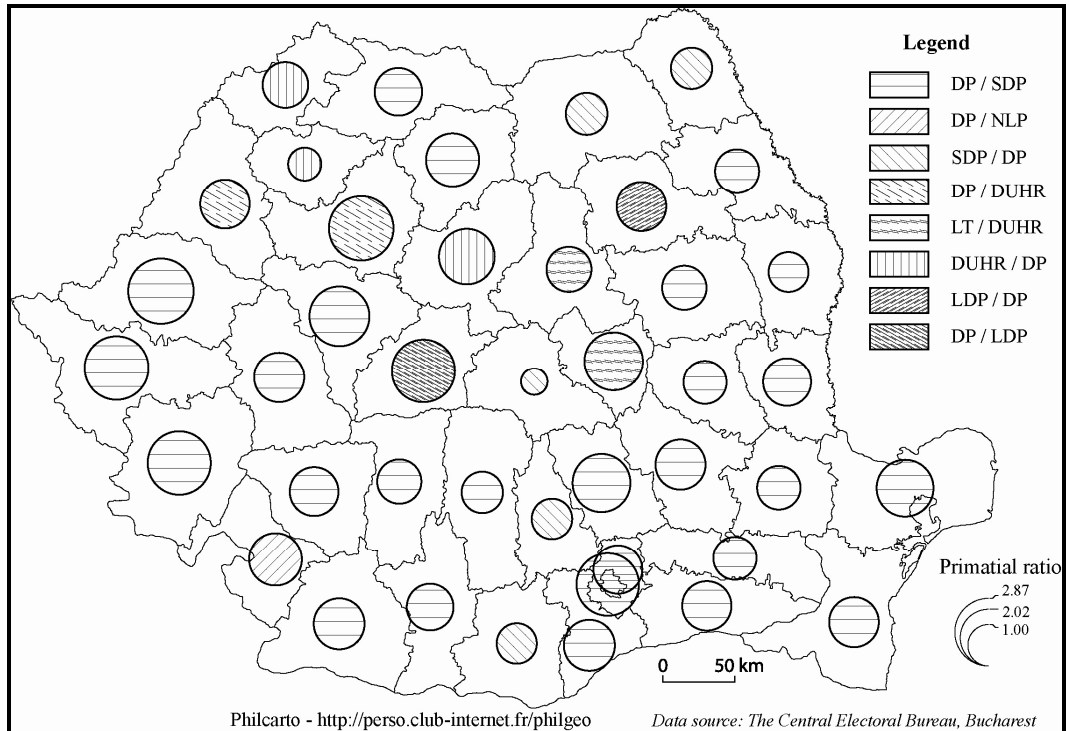


Fig. 2 Territorial distribution of primatial vote and primatial ratios at the EP elections in the Romanian urban environment

Out of the 42 average administrative units (41 counties and the capital of the country) of Romania, nearly half of them (20 counties) had DP and SDP as main protagonist political parties, in hierarchical order (figure 1). The second position was occupied by the same parties but in a completely inverted order: SDP/DP (11 counties). The third position was typical for two types of hierarchies, each being represented in 3 counties: SDP/NLP and DP/NLP. Even though Hungarians don't represent the majority in Mureş and Sălaj counties, the party representing them managed to hold the first hierarchical position, being followed by DP. The paradox of this situation is the fact that, immediately after 1990, the two main parties belonged to NSF<sup>3</sup>. NLP, the government party (after DP's withdrawal from the government) bore the consequences of the "halo" effect induced by president Traian Băsescu, who had often criticized the

<sup>3</sup> The National Salvation Front

performance of the government and particularly that of prime minister Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, whom he could not forgive for the stubbornness of keeping his function after 2004. The president's express desire was to bring in this leading position his friend, Theodor Stolojan (a fact which was confirmed by his expressed intention of proposing Stolojan, the leader of DLP at that time for the function of prime minister in case of winning the parliamentary elections in November, 2008).

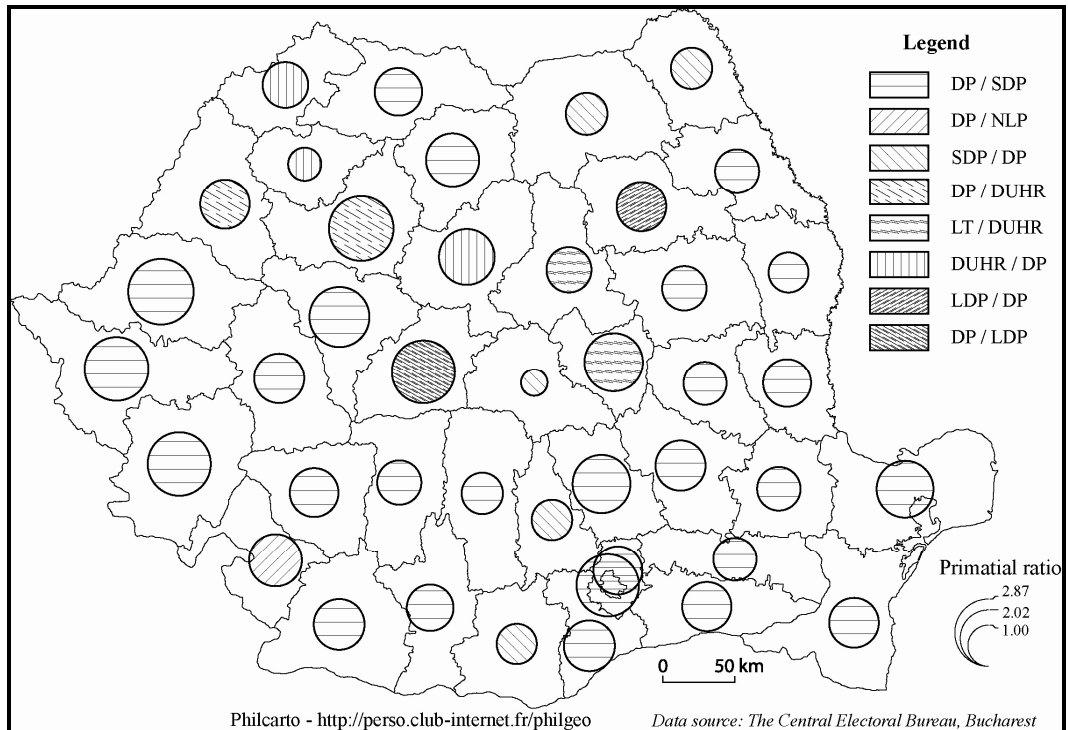


Fig. 3 Territorial distribution of primatial vote and primatial ratios at the EP elections in the Romanian rural environment

In the *urban environment*, the electoral behaviour changes, the distribution of the primatial vote is different: one can notice the distinct prevalence of the primatial couple DP/SDP (27 counties). The inverted combination (SDP/DP) was typical only for 5 counties; the third position was occupied by the couple DUHR/DP, which could be found in the case of three counties (Mureș, Sălaj, Satu Mare), which paradoxically don't have a majority of Hungarian population, which is however well represented. It is significant to emphasize that the two predominantly Hungarian counties (Harghita and Covasna) scored a hierarchy in which independent László Tőkés held the first position, DUHR coming on the second hierarchical place. This was a unique case: an independent candidate to manage to defeat a party. These are the first manifestations of "indiscipline" on behalf of this electorate on the background of the greater credibility László Tőkés enjoys among the Hungarian population and it should probably be a point of concern for DUHR in respect of its political performance.

In the *rural environment* (figure 3) the prevailing primatial vote is represented by the couple SDP/DP (14 counties), followed by the reversed

combination (DP/SDP: 11 counties). The third position highlights a couple that was not fruitful either at the national or urban level: DP/NLP (8 counties). Actually, the fact that the two political parties (DP and NLP) formed part of the government at the beginning of the legislative period definitely had an influence on their electoral results, NLP being the clear loser and DP the winner. NLP was the second political force in only 3 counties dominated by SDP (Botoșani, Vâlcea and Teleorman).

*The urban/rural cleavage* (characteristic to previous elections) was a reality of these elections too, becoming even more clearly defined when we analyze the primatial vote. Urban areas (27 counties) were obviously dominated by DP/SDP primatial hierarchy, while the protagonists of the rural environment were the same two parties but in a reversed hierarchy : SDP/DP (15 counties). This definitely leads us to the conclusion that the urban environment played a decisive role in the victory of DP at the national level. There is no surprise that DSP got most of its votes in an already aged rural environment.

The primatial vote analysis also indicates the existence of a spatial cleavage. While Transylvania experienced a fairly clear DP/SDP hierarchy, the East of the country (Moldavia) and the centre of Muntenia were monopolized by the DSP/DP hierarchy (former DSP areas) but the primatial ratios at the county level were much smaller than in Transylvania (DP/DSP).

It is difficult to induce the electorate some clear ideological reference points able to get into the voters' consciousness. Depending on their interests, the Romanian political parties have slid either to the left or to the right or they have deliberately promoted a certain ideological ambiguity. The inflation of parties after 1990 has favoured this ideological ambiguity, the "niche" declared by each party being difficult to find on a political "market" which is rather volatile but marked by the enthusiasm of the new post communist democracy. Under these circumstances, the elector can hardly find his way and can even be puzzled by the ideological "pitch" of the political parties and this rather often makes him change his preference for a certain political group. This fact proves that the Romanian political class has not come to maturity yet and the relationship political class-voters is not fair from the ideological point of view.

### **Statistics of hierarchy ranks**

In order to have a complete image on the European Parliament elections, we have made graphs with the first two hierarchical positions obtained in the 42 administrative units (figures 4, 5 and 6). While in the two environments on the whole 4 political parties and independent László Tőkés held the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> hierarchical ranks, the two environments taken separately faced new situations; the urban environment registered the presence of LDP, due to the engine effect played by the mayor of Piatra Neamț municipality in Neamț county. On the other hand, NLP (the party that governed the country for four years although it was in the minority in the Parliament) had no 1<sup>st</sup> rank in rural areas (just like at the national level). The performances of this party were however more visible in the rural environment (12 2<sup>nd</sup> ranks). The effect of the increase of pensions just before the elections may have played an important part among the rural population.

At the national level, on the whole, the 1<sup>st</sup> rank champion was DP (24 1<sup>st</sup> ranks), while in the case of the 2<sup>nd</sup> rank the first position was held by DSP (20 positions). In most counties the two political parties disputed the first two

hierarchies, DP being finally favoured by the open support of the country president, while DSP continued to be the victim of some disputes linked with some possible acts of corruption dating back to the time when it formed part of the government (2000-2004). However, being in the opposition and having a left-wing orientation, it finally occupied a comfortable place in the hierarchy.

The urban environment clearly made the difference at these elections: DP won the elections in 31 counties (in some of them the victory being definite) and SDP stood out by means of the 27 counties in which it managed to hold the 2nd position. Although starting from optimistic premises, NLP won in only one county and held the 2nd position in only one county, too (an alarm signal in the perspective of the elections to come and a proof that its electoral strategy had to be subject to changes).

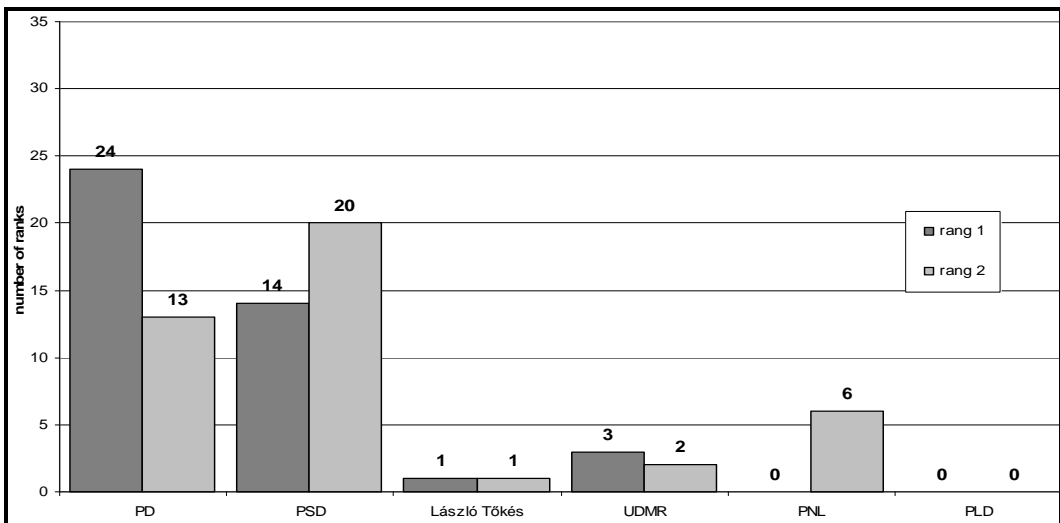


Fig. 4 Number of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> hierarchical ranks obtained at the EP elections in Romania

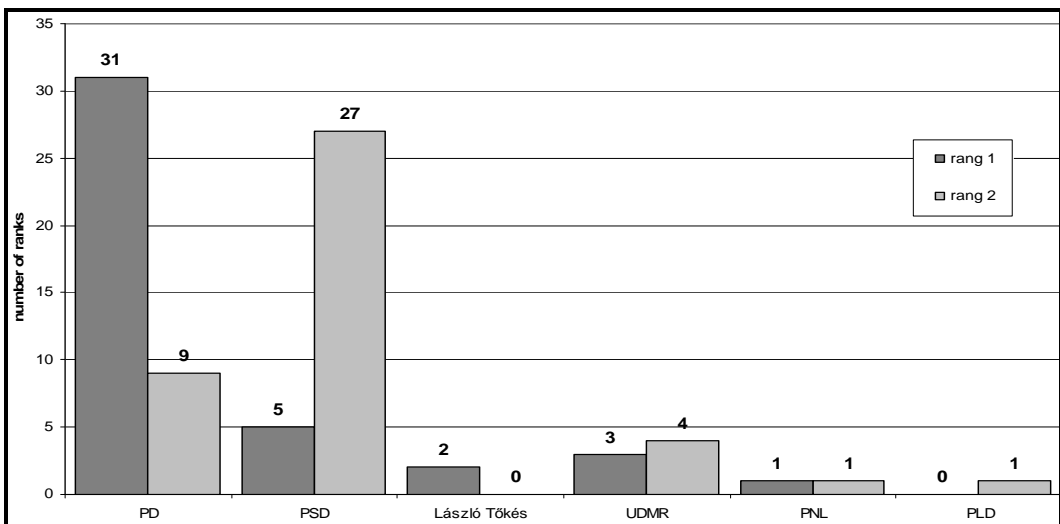


Fig. 5 Urban environment - Number of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> hierarchical ranks obtained at the EP elections in Romania

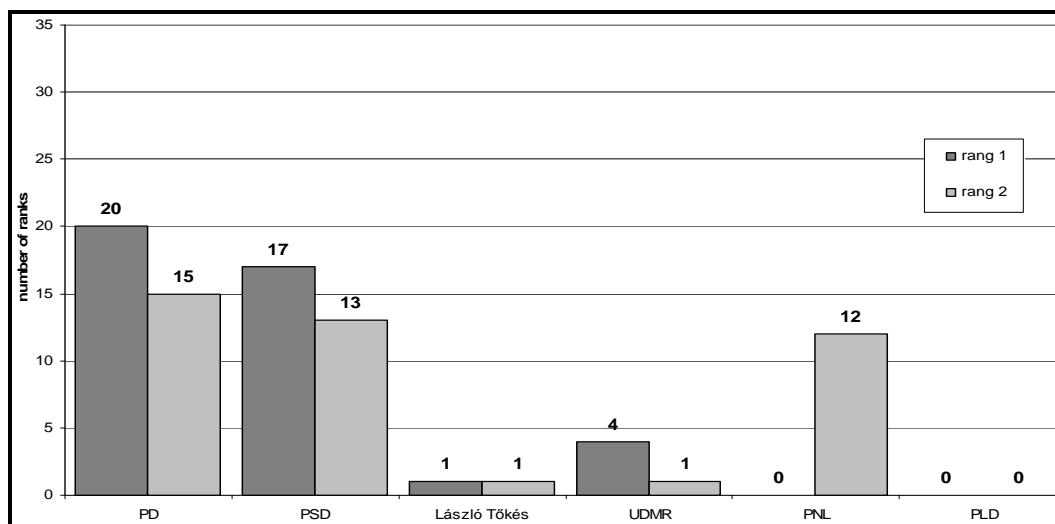


Fig. 6 Rural environment - Number of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> hierarchical ranks obtained at the EP elections in Romania

DUHR and László Tőkés can be considered the great winners as a consequence of the atomization of votes and high absenteeism, as long as they also adjudged counties in which the Hungarian population did not prevail. Under these circumstances, it is easy to understand why a party like DUHR is not the advocate of the uninominal vote, which would weaken its action force at the territorial level, as long as uninominal colleges do not allow the slides provided by list ballots.

### Conclusions

The analysis of the primatial vote enables us to grasp both the variations between the first two political parties in respect of the number of votes and the political “fight” that is going on between certain political structures as long as not all administrative units provide the same hierarchy. There are important factors that have a strong impact on the final results, such as: the credibility of candidates and political parties, the special circumstances that can come out before elections, the more or less populist measures that can be taken by the government party or power coalition, the promoting force and publicity made etc.

The elections for the European Parliament proved that the first electoral campaign was weakly anchored to the European problems and this was probably one of the reasons that caused absenteeism. The topics under discussion were primarily internal and great part of the electorate could not really grasp and understand the European Union and its problems.

Another aspect that can explain the weak interest of the electorate deals with hesitation of some famous politicians who refused to take part in the elections, as long as a 4-year stay at Brussels practically brings about a removal from the internal political stage and an inevitable loss of notoriety. Some other well-known nominees got in the fight, played the part of an engine for the parties they belonged to, but after they were elected they preferred to withdraw and this also worsened the image of the political class.

At these elections, it was not only the “image” of the party that weighed in the eyes of the electors; the personal image of each candidate was also of great

importance. Certain parties had to face a dilemma when some of their political leaders refused to candidate and this compelled them to appeal to not very well known names, including young politicians.

President Traian Băsescu ran the risk of such a strategy when he involved most of the DP leaders in the local elections. They won the mayoralties of more important towns and this victory would later have positive repercussions on the party's notoriety. This time, president Băsescu's political group had Sorin Frunzăverde (the former minister of National Defense) at the top of the list, but it is not certain whether it was he who really played the engine role (being somehow overshadowed by "engine" Băsescu).

Finally, the fact that only 5 parties managed to exceed the 5% electoral threshold (DP, SDP, NLP, LDP, DUHR and the independent candidate László Tőkés) proves that it is difficult for just one party to form a political majority at the national elections which are to take place in 2008; on the other hand, in the case in which the same 5 parties will get in the parliament, there are two probable ways of political grouping: DLP<sup>4</sup> (derived from the association between DP and LDP) with DUHR and NLP with SDP. It is questionable whether NGP<sup>5</sup> and GRP<sup>6</sup> will manage to accede to the parliament, although they have demonstrated so far that they can be allies of DLP, which would increase its chances of forming the government.

The final hierarchy of the European Parliament elections marked a change in Romanians' political preferences, the influence of president Băsescu being decisive in this hierarchy. We can even talk of a "Băsescu vote" on behalf of the electorate. The breaking off of the alliance made in 2004 between DP and NLP and the constant attacks of president Traian Băsescu and DLP against prime minister Tăriceanu and the party he represents (NLP) have created a certain voting aura around the present DLP, which however does not provide a political majority (as pre-electoral public opinion polls show).

### Abbreviations

DP – The Democratic Party

SDP – The Social Democratic Party

NLP – The National Liberal Party

LDP – The Liberal Democratic Party

DUHR – The Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania

LT - László Tőkés

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<sup>4</sup> DLP – The Democratic Liberal Party

<sup>5</sup> NGP – The New Generation Party

<sup>6</sup> GRP – The Greater Romania Party