



Weekly Briefing

Romania Political briefing:
A new political party is about to appear
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A new political party is about to appear. The opposition launched two censorship motions for the Ministers of Culture and European Funds

The establishment of a new political party, named the Movement Romania Together, was announced at the end of March, in a critical moment for the Romanian political arena, given the following two years when several rounds of elections will take place. The party is meant to represent a strong opponent of the actual main governing party and to attract the interest of the ones who are not yet involved in politics. In the meantime, the actual opposition parties have submitted in Parliament two simple motions of censorship for the Ministers of Culture and European Funds. Still, these are not expected to be approved and to led to the resignation of the two Ministers due to the low representativeness of these parties in the Parliament as compared to the Government coalition.

One year to the European Parliament and presidential election in 2019, a new political party was created in Romania, named “The Movement Romania together”. The leader of the party is Dacian Ciolos, the former technocrat Prime Minister of Romania between 2015-2017 and the previous Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development at the European Commission, during the presidency of Jose Manuel Durao Barosso, where he was known for the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. The nine founders of the party are almost all members of the former Cabinet of the Prime Minister Ciolos: the ex-ministries of Finance, Health, Labour, Interior and some other councillors.

The launch of the party was previously rumoured, but it is only now, at the end of March, that the documents for its establishment were submitted at the Bucharest Court. The Party refuses to assume a classical ideology and promotes moral and integrity values on the public stage. Besides, it seems that the political

model followed by this new party is the *En Marche!* Movement, founded by the French President Emmanuel Macron.

Still, the Party's manifesto indicates that the political formation has all the elements of a centre-left formation and the founding members even define, in a clear manner, that their intentions are to target a pool of voters which was monopolized in the last 25 years by the actual main governing party, the Social Democrat Party (SDP). Therefore, the emphasis of the party's activity is on the disadvantaged and socially excluded people, while encouraging the fair distribution of public resources. In addition, the interest of the party is to respect the rule of law, to continue the fight against corruption, but also to enhance equality of opportunity and human rights. Regarding the vision related to the economic development, although it indicates that free market is a solution for ensuring competitiveness, the new party considers that this lacks fairness and the opportunities for the disadvantaged people. Therefore, the collective action and cooperation are seen as better ways in ensuring a free and fair society. The fact that the Movement Romania Together focuses on problems of minorities and disadvantaged citizens, and not on entrepreneurs' problems or burdening bureaucracy, indicates a conscious choice of the direction of action and of the target audience.

The party is approaching the vision of the other left-wing parties in Western Europe as regards the concern for proportional representation on criteria that are not directly related to value or power, such as gender, ethnicity or territorial belonging. In fact, the inclinations towards the left-wing principles of the party were also reflected by the first actions of Dacian Ciolos as Prime-Minister, when he targeted the disadvantaged or discriminated categories, through the anti-poverty strategy and the strategy for small farmers. Still, among the founders are persons that were previously associated with right-wing values; therefore, potential conflicts among the members of the party risk to endanger its efficiency, as Romania already has an example of a relatively new party – the Union Save Romania – where a similar situation led to the need for a doctrinal

redefinition, the loss of some members in the Parliament and the breaking of a party faction.

The consistency of the political program is based on the activity of people who know the realities on the ground; due to their activity, the party will be able to extract many ideas for building its projects. The party manifesto identifies the EU and NATO as guaranteeing the welfare and security of Romania and points to a total adherence to the values of the rule of law and the need to reduce corruption.

At the same time, the assumed priority of the party is to attract people that were not involved in politics before, but who are able to use their experience for Romania's development. There are three common criteria which will be applied to all the members: moral and professional integrity; proven competence in any professional field; the unconditional assumption of the values and objectives set together.

The emergence of this new party is taking place in a moment quite delicate for the Romanian political scene. In the next two years, Romania will pass through four rows of elections: the European Parliament in the summer of next year, the presidential elections in the winter of 2019, and the local and general (or Parliamentary) elections in 2020. While the party is intended to be a redoubtable challenger of the actual governing party at the elections, it seems that it also raises some uncertainty for the actual opposition parties. First of all, the greatest risk from now on is the fragmentation of the right-wing opposition and the design of the image of parties that fail to understand each other to make a common front against the left-parties. Therefore, if an effective agreement with the actual right-wing parties fails, the Movement Romania Together will be accused of dissipating the opposition and indirectly helping SDP. In fact, the founders of the new formed party announced their intentions of forming electoral alliances, but without effectively nominating with which parties; they will work with those formations that share the same values, like honour and honesty. Second of all, it could challenge the position of the candidate for the

presidential elections for the right-wing parties, Klaus Iohannis, who was envisaged as the most appropriate candidate, without alternative, for these parties.

According to an opinion pool related to political parties in Romania, 40% of the questioned people declare that they would vote for a new party. In this respect, the supporters of the Movement Romania Together could attract a large pool of new voters, especially those that would not vote for the actual right-wing parties (the National Liberal Party – NLP and the Union Save Romania – USR). This is, in fact, the main argument in favour of a new party: it has the ability to gather votes that PNL or USR can no longer take. This assumption proved to be right given that, in the first 48 hours from the announcement regarding the submission of the documents for the creation of the new party, nearly 30,000 signed up for the Movement Romania Together. Of these, almost 17,000 declared their desire to be members as soon as the party receives the registration confirmation from the Bucharest Tribunal. In addition, USR already expressed its contentment related to the apparition of the Movement Romania Together and considers that the road of the new party is common with its own direction. It rests to identify together the moment and the most inspired solutions for collaboration.

The political arena is still disrupted by conflicts between the opposition and the government parties. The NLP launched a simple motion against the Minister of Culture related to the serious situation of the culture domain only a few months before the celebration of the Centenary of the Great Union in 1918. The opposition members of the Parliament consider that a public debate is needed on the issue of finding solutions to reconsider a national plan for the Centenary. They consider that the actions and statements of the Minister of Culture have demonstrated the incoherence of the act of governance on the Centenary and accuse the lack of transparency of the ministry, the institutional blockade, the lack of dialogue with the Parliament and the development strategy. In the text of the motion it is recalled that Minister of Culture did not attend any invitation to

participate at the discussions in the Culture Committee of the Chamber of Deputies. The simple motion calls for a vote of mistrust over the current Minister of Culture. The motion is debated in the plenum of the Chamber of Deputies and the Minister is invited to express his opinion related to the accusations in the motion. After that, the deputies will vote for the acceptance or the rejection of the motion. If it is accepted, the Minister has to resign.

Another simple motion was submitted to the Senate, this time against the Minister of European Funds. The Minister is accused of a weak absorption of the European funds, given that the absorption rate for the 2014-2020 budget programming reached only 10.1% at the end of 2017, most of the Operational Programs managing the European Structural and Investment Funds registering extremely weak results. In addition, in terms of public investment, the evolution for 2017 is poor. Out of the 32.9 billion euro allocated from European funds, only small sums have been spent and, in most cases, the start of the projects has been called off. The Minister is reproached that, although projects have been submitted since the end of 2016 for funding schools with European money, the actual funding contracts have not been signed yet, although co-financing is only 2%. The motion states that the actual Government is charged of the guilt of not attracting investments and funds. The opposition parties also draw attention to the risk of disengagement and the loss of more than 500 million euros from the European Regional Development Fund. The initiators of the motion consider that the mechanisms of the Romanian society are affected by the failure to provide public infrastructure, excessive bureaucracy and lack of interest in accelerating the absorption of European funds and ask for the resignation of the Minister of European Funds.

The two motions are going to be debated in the Parliament, but there are no fears that will produce any change to the actual structure of the ministers, due to the fact that the number of votes required for approval of the two motions is not expected to be met, given that SDP has the majority in the Parliament.